GURU NANAK
A LIGHT BRIGHTER THAN A THOUSAND SUNS:
THE SIKH TRADITION AND NARRATIVES OF CONVERSION
IN SOUTH ASIA

By

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This thesis is a preliminary excursion analyzing narrative modes in janamsakhi literature of the Sikh tradition as a putative site of proselytization. Using a semiological methodology in combination with the writings of theorists on communication and reception of texts, I argue that reception of the sakhi “The Massacre of Saidpur” as found in *Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev* (a critical edition of the B40 manuscript by Piar Singh) was meant to lead to emulatory orders of action. This sakhi depicts a meeting between the first Mughal ruler, Babar, and the first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak. The story ends with Babar becoming a follower of Guru Nanak. By contextualizing this sakhi during the period of its production in the eighteenth century, I argue that traditionally held distinctions between Khalsa and non-Khalsa Sikhs are overdetermined. Indeed, the existence of these categories may have enabled a process of conversion. Furthermore, I will examine the B40’s colophon for the cultural modes and meanings that it reveals in regards to the Sikh panth’s historical-cultural situation during the eighteenth century. Finally, I argue that the sakhi “The Massacre of Saidpur” has embedded within its narrative structure an implicit structure for the process of conversion that was placed there in order to signal to the audience the need for mimesis of Babar’s actions. In this manner the text functions as a site of rhetoric for conversion. It is my assertion that applying theories of reception and reading elaborates the historical and cultural situation of the Sikh panth during the eighteenth century. Such an endeavor enables the ‘writing-in’ of cultural meanings into the metanarrative of this time in Sikh history.
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Glossary of Terms

Ādi Granth
The sacred scripture of the Sikhs. This text was consecrated as Guru of the Sikhs by Guru Gobind Singh. Since that time it has been called Guru Granth Sāhib.

amīr
Chief or leader. Signifies wealth, position, and affluence.

bābā
Honorific for holy men.

baisākhi
Spring harvest festival held on the first day in the month of baisākh (mid-April).

bhagat
A person who practices bhakti or devotion. A devotee.

bhāī
Lit. ‘Brother.’ However, the term is applied as an honorific for Sikhs of learning and piety.

bhakti
A South Asian devotional movement that emphasizes the individual experience of the divine.

bhang
hashish

chākar
Lit. ‘Servant.’ In the eighteenth century described Sikhs who had not been initiated in to the Khālsā.

charan amrit
Ritual washing of a guru’s or idol’s feet to signify one’s devotion.

dal
An armed force or organized group.

darsan
Vision or sight; philosophy

dhanguru
Lit. ‘The Blessed Guru’

dhannirankār
Lit. ‘The Blessed Formless One’

dharmśālā
Place of worship; rest house for travelers

farmān
A royal edict.

faqīr
Recluse; beggar; holy man

gurbānī
A composition or utterance by the Guru

guru
Religious or spiritual preceptor; teacher

gurdarshan
Glimpse of the divine, or the Guru; the Guru’s philosophy

gurshabad
A composition or utterance by the Guru
**jagîr**  Granting of a tax-free estate by the Mughal government as a form of salary.

**janamsâkhi**  A form of exegesis whereby Guru Nanak’s hymns were discussed through ‘fictionalized’ events from his life.

**kathâ**  An oral religious discourse by a respected member of the panth, usually a Bhâi or a Sant

**kesdhârî**  Lit. “One who bears Hair.” Refers to a member of the Khâlsâ in contradistinction with sehajdhârî.

**khâlsâ**  Refers to the corporate identity of those Sikhs who have taken part in the khande kî pâhul ritual.

**khande kî pâhul**  Sikh initiation rite, involves the ingestion of water consecrated with a sword and with hymns from the Ādi Granth

**khatrî**  Warrior, business, and ruling class in the varna system.

**khudâ**  Epithet for God.

**kârtan**  Singing of hymns from the Ādi Granth with the accompaniment of music.

**masand**  Local representative of the Sikh Guru, generally a learned Sikh and well respected member of the community.

**mîr**  chieftain

**nakhas**  Open market for buying and selling.

**namâz**  Muslim prayer.

**nawâb**  Equivalent to Governor in the Mughal administration.

**pâdashâh**  Sovereign. (Can also be spelled patashâh or badashâh)

**panth**  Sikh community of believers.

**pathân**  Afghan. Also referred generally to member of the Muslim aristocracy or simply a Muslim; an outsider.

**qalandar**  Another term for a Muslim holy man; hermit or recluse.

**rabâb**  The rebeck instrument.

**râg**  Musical meter or measure; singing.
rahitnāmā  Prescriptive code of conduct for Sikhs who have taken khande kī pāhul and therefore are members of the Khālsā.

rāmgarhīāa  Mason or Craftsmen subcaste in varna system.

sabad  Lit ‘Word.’ In regards to the Sikh tradition refers to an utterance of the Guru.

sā-hridaya  Term from Indian aesthetic theory, meaning ‘with ones heart.’ Signifies the mental and emotional attempt of readers to unite with the author through their writings.

sākhī  A single story from the janamsākhī.

sangat  Congregation of Sikhs gathered for worship.

sant  Holy man

sanyasī  Recluse or hermit; one who has left the material life of a householder; recluse, hermit

sarovar  A sacred body of water that has been sanctified for religious use.

satgurprasād  Lit. ‘With the grace of the True Guru.’ Incantation at the beginning of a recitation from the Ādi Granth.

satnām  Lit. ‘The True Name.’ Integral part of the Sikh conception of divinity.

satsriakāl  Lit. ‘The Formless One is True.” Form of greeting used by Sikhs.

sehajdhāri  Refers to a Sikh who cuts his hair but otherwise believes in the message of the Sikh Gurus; a Sikh who is not a member of the Khālsā.

shāh  King, ruler, emperor.

sisya  Devotee, disciple, student.

takhat  Worldly seat of authority of which there are five in the Sikh tradition.

udāsī  Sect of learned Sikhs; one who is lonesome.

varna  Hierarchical social stratification of South Asian society whereby people are categorized and organized into particular strata by birth.

wāheguru  Lit. ‘Praise the Guru.’ Epithet for God.
Preface

In our family kitchen, on the wall above our dining table rests a print of a painting that relates one of my favorite sakhis: that of Bhai Lalo and Bhag Mal. Guru Nanak stands in the center, larger than life, gazing meditatively into the distance. To his left sits Bhag Mal, a khatri, adorned in finery. With his hands rubbing one another he appears to look on anxiously. In diametric opposition to Bhag Mal, on Guru Nanak’s right sits Bhai Lalo. Their demeanor and dress also reflect their spatial opposition. Bhai Lalo is a shudra. Dressed simply, Bhai Lalo sits on the floor with hands joined before him in submission. Gazing downward, there is only a rough piece of matting separating him from the floor. Bhag Mal’s head is raised and his gaze is direct, he sits with a cushion to support his back and what appears to be a takhat paush creating distance between him and the floor. Guru Nanak has one roti in either hand and blood drips from the one positioned above a plate of food prepared by Bhag Mal, while from the roti above Bhai Lalo’s plate drips milk.

The message is plain; those who live lives of extravagance and are fixated upon their own luxurious lifestyle will invariably sustain themselves upon the blood of the weak, who toil to provision the few with their exuberance. However, those who live in humility and meekness, in acquiescence to the divine will, are nourished by their own purity. The story enacts a reversal of the notions of ritual purity integral to the varna system; according to this schema a khatri is ritually more pure than a shudra. However, through his revelatory action Guru Nanak signals that it is actually Bhai Lalo, the shudra, who in reality is more pure than Bhag Mal.

The above-described print is itself inspired by a story that can be found in janamsakhis of the Bhai Bala tradition. My earliest childhood recollections of the Sikh gurus are through the medium of these ubiquitous narrative paintings that I encountered in
numerous Sikh homes, including my own. The presence of these paintings, mostly in the form of old calendars, my parents brought with them from Panjab, invariably compelled me to ask a series of questions regarding the events they depicted. My mother's prompt and enthusiastic answers would serve to form the nucleus of my moral education and help me develop and conceptualize my own identity as a Sikh. However, while from an early age I was cognizant of a number of these sakhis I would remain for a large part of my youth unable to access the narratives in their written form, as I could not read my mother language.

This inaccessibility to aspects of my heritage and latent components of my identity would become increasingly troubling as I progressed through my schooling. Being born and raised in a marginal Canadian Sikh Diaspora, I would continuously desire to read and learn more about my parent's values and worldview - increasingly I became aware that these aspects were rooted in a different cultural geography than my own. My parents acted as primary interlocutors to my innumerable queries. However, as my questions became more sophisticated their voices were quickly silenced, as they were no longer able to entertain my questions. Sakhis, like the one about Bhai Lalo, began to have both a personal and an intellectual resonance.

The subjectivity of converts has been often conceptualized as an ambiguous space, an in between space between two sets of identity. Converts are engaged in a process of transference, they are becoming an-other. I would not call myself a convert, nor have I had any predilections for conversion. However, I cannot help but feel that my own subjectivity as a product of one Canadian Sikh Diaspora, a largely isolated prairie community in Edmonton, has also been characterized by a tangential but similar notion of ambiguity. My own interest in the Sikh tradition, and more broadly in South Asia, stems from my own ambiguous and multifaceted identity. While completing a degree in Molecular Genetics at the University of Alberta, my interest in South Asia led me to begin studying Panjabi, Hindi,
and Urdu in my spare time. I was dismayed that this university had no course offerings related to the subcontinent. When I learned of the existence of an Asian Studies programme that included the study of not only South Asia, but specifically had courses related to Sikh history, I immediately resolved to embark on such studies once my BSc. degree was completed.

My interest in the B40 and in vernacular textual traditions such as the janamsakhi began with a paper I wrote for a Sikh history course. Through the course of reading for this paper I became increasingly concerned about the historical hegemony of a particular Sikh metanarrative. To the point of exclusion, I felt, this particular narrative was employed to inform most analyses of the past in both, what has become dichotomized as, “Western” and “Traditional” scholarship on the Sikh tradition. I was encouraged by my reading of, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*¹, which by exposing the historical development of such a narrative and its exclusion of so-called lesser narratives, I felt, provided a departure point that enabled re-examinations of the Sikh past with a host of cultural questions. In this manner, I am in firm agreement with its epigraph, taken from Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Conquest of America*, “I feel the need (and in this I see nothing individual, it is why I write it) to adhere to that narrative which proposes rather than imposes; to rediscover, within a single text, the complementarity of narrative discourse and systematic discourse; so that my ‘history’ perhaps bears more of a generic resemblance to Herodotus’s (all questions of genre and value aside) than to the ideal of many contemporary historians.”² It was in the spirit of reconsidering narratives of the past that brought me to consider conversion as a focus for study.

My completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of numerous individuals and at this juncture I would like to kindly acknowledge but a few of those people. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the debt of gratitude owed to my supervisor, Harjot Oberoi, for his keen interest, unwavering support in my abilities, and kind suggestions along the way; also, I would like to acknowledge Sadhu Binning for the long talks about Panjabi, the intricacies of the Sikh Diaspora, and my own subjectivity within this Diaspora. I cannot forget the kindness of Ehud Ben Zvi, from the University of Alberta, for his insights and advice regarding my thesis. I am further indebted to Ken Bryant for his time and interest, but foremost for reminding me to be aware of not just my ideas but how I build my arguments. I would also like to thank Ashok Aklujkar for his encouragement and advice, as well as for informing me that indeed South Asia has a long history of interest in conversion. Finally, I would like to thank Mandakranta Bose for always taking time to listen to my thoughts and queries. For someone such as myself who was crossing 'disciplinary' boundaries from 'the sciences' to 'the humanities,' the support I received from the South Asian faculty and staff has been overwhelming and, for this, I will look back on this juncture of my life warmly.

I would be sorely negligent if I didn’t recognize the contribution of my parents in every endeavor of my life. Their stalwart presence, and unceasing labor, has been a constant source of strength, inspiration, and quite often a corrective for my perceptions. My cousin, Anup, has also been a source of strength and quite often an outlet for my frustrations. Also to the rest of my family, I know that for the most part none of you understand what I do—or why for that matter—but I appreciate your support nonetheless (and yes Mary, that includes you). I would like to acknowledge the light that my daughter Kyrin has brought into my life; your love brightens the darkest of nights. Finally I am grateful for all the support, encouragement, and assistance of my fellow graduate students Tanya Boughtflower,
Kathleen Wyma, and Stephen Ney without whose kindness my last year at UBC would not have been possible.

The initial stumbling block in this study was my own bias regarding the Sikh tradition. If still in its formative stages, could the tradition have even had mechanisms for conversion in place? If in these formative stages identity was ambiguous, how could conversion occur when the term itself seems to connote the existence of two identifiable categories? These two questions remained troubling. However, as I continued to consider the historical events occurring during the eighteenth century, I was plagued by another equally persistent question. During this century, after all ten of the living gurus were deceased, Sikh numbers continued to increase despite their being aggressively persecuted by the Mughal government. How does one account for this? It would seem that people were being categorized and also self-categorizing themselves as Sikhs. This problematic led me to consider mechanisms for conversion in the eighteenth century. It is my sincerest hope that by confronting my own biases about the Sikh past, I am able to propose an analysis for a narrative that initially revealed itself as unsubmitive to my examinations.
In memory of those who die in these worlds of violence;
My nights will forever be haunted with your remembrance.
We shall be guided by the dissymmetry that occurs between historical narrative and fictional narrative when we consider their referential implications, along with the truth-claim made by each of these two great narrative modes. Only historical narrative claims to refer to a “real” past, that is, one that actually happened. Fiction, on the contrary, is characterized by a kind of referring and a truth claim close to those I explored in my *Rule of Metaphor*. This problem of relatedness to the real is unavoidable. History can no more forbid itself to inquire into its relationship to an actually occurring past than it can neglect considering, as was established in Part II of *Time and Narrative*, the relationship of explanation in history to history in narrative form...The advantage of an approach that pairs history and fiction to confront the aporias of temporality is that it leads us to reformulate the classical problem of referring to a past that was “real” as opposed to the “unreal” entities of fiction in terms of refiguration, and not vice versa.

-Paul Ricoeur
Chapter One

**Inside the Sikh Fold: Reading Texts, History, and Meanings**

Intuitively, the notion of religious conversion seems to assume the existence of reified categories of identity, whereas subcontinental historiography has consistently reduced South Asia’s prismatic religious environment to a series of rigidly compartmentalized and manageable categories. Therefore when acknowledging the polyvalency of South Asia’s religio-cultural milieu, how can one conceive the occurrence of intratraditional and transtraditional conversions within Indic faith traditions? In fact, is it at all possible to discuss the topic of South Asian religious conversion when dominant ideologies have discouraged both the popular dissemination of written scriptures as well as chronicling personal testimonies of religious experience? When faced with the unified gloss of perceptions on religious identity, how does one discuss conversion while remaining sensitive to the fluid construction of individual and corporate identities during the early the Sikh Tradition? Moreover, how does one historically situate a discussion on conversion within the context of eighteenth century Panjab?

The above series of rhetorical questions are meant to reflect the state of aporia experienced when I first considered embarking on a study that seeks to understand the conceptualization of religious conversion to the Sikh Tradition. It has been suggested that during the early period of Sikh history no meaningful conception of identity existed. It follows that conversions to this tradition could not have occurred in any constructive manner. Carrying this assumption through to its conclusion, then assimilation, resistance and transgression lacked

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2 The early period of Sikh history is defined in this paper as the period leading up to the annexation of the Panjab and the subsequent subjugation of the Sikhs by the British in 1849.
concrete expression. This thesis is a preliminary excursion exploring the notion of religious conversion in the Sikh Tradition. It seeks to affirm the occurrence of meaningful substantive shifts between different Indic faiths. For the purpose of my discussion, the construction of identity in Indic faiths will be considered as fluid. Furthermore the term will be defined as, any system of belief whose progenitor was of South Asian origin.

My project will look to a specific story found in the B40 janamsakhi, "गैरूण ए बदल्राम," in relation to religious conversion in the early Sikh Tradition. This story describes a meeting between the first Mughal Padshah Babar (1483-1530) and Baba Nanak (1469-1539), the Sikh's first guru. It is an emanation from a community of believers and displays the power Guru Nanak had in conveying the worth of his dharmic message and his ability of bringing people into the fold of dharma. The works of theorists Paul Ricoeur and Marshall Sahlins will inform my analysis. Sahlins's *Culture and Practical Reason* takes advantage of an epistemological gap between praxis and concept in order to comment on the inadequacy of material praxis. In this work, he productively challenges "historical materialism" to account for a cultural order. He argues, "no cultural form can ever be read from a set of 'material forces,' as if culture was the dependent variable of an inescapable practical logic." Culture is that unique product of humanity which resides in the material world and yet develops according to a meaningful scheme of its own devising. Culture stands in opposition to materialism and can never be singular or universal. While culture ascribes to material constraints, it does so in accordance with a definite symbolic framework. However, this symbolic framework is never the only possible one: culture constitutes the symbolic structure for material utility and is therefore, understanding the symbolic structure of any culture is of critical importance when considering

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any aspect of material utility.\textsuperscript{5} Sahlins’ concludes that an understanding of the meanings inherent in any “order of cultural unity” is prerequisite to approaching historical objects of analysis.

By emphasizing the importance of cultural meaning as analytical mode, Sahlins seeks to unify the division between sociological and materialistic methodologies.\textsuperscript{6} Following Sahlins’ rubric, we need consider the symbolic form of cultural systems as determined by their integration into a meaningful order so that we can efficaciously discuss the phenomenon of conversion.\textsuperscript{7} Privileging the Sikh Tradition’s cultural framework of symbolism and meaning can be done through analyses of cultural artifacts such as the janamsakhi. In this way the janamsakhi acts as one of the dominant sites for symbolic production in the Sikh imaginaire; or as Sahlins states, it supplies a major idiom for other relations and activities.\textsuperscript{8} A better understanding of such artifacts reverberates upon more mainstream modes of historical narrative and can in this manner shed new light on previously held historical assumptions.

Much like Sahlins, Ricoeur also comments on the problematic assumptions of overly materialistic historiography. In a three volume work called \textit{Time and Narrative}, Ricoeur describes the interrelatedness of historical time, or what he calls the “reality of the past,” and the time of fiction. He calls attention to commonly held perceptions that fictitious narrative is somehow less real than historical narrative since it is not a true reflection of reality. Through the force of his argument he inverts these perceptions suggesting that fictional time and historical time are both equally valid reflections of human experience. Ricoeur argues that history and fiction are both legitimate methods of human expression—they are orders of narrative. Therefore, fictional time is ultimately no different than historical time. His conflation of these two temporal frames of narrative is meant to posit the existence of a third temporal frame.

\textsuperscript{5} See discussion in \textit{Preface}. Ibid, pp. vii-x.  
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, p. 211.
Through mimesis, reading reconfigures our temporal experience by creating a cascade that transits orders of action into orders of life. The textual space invades and affects the space of our reality. It is through this state of flux that Ricoeur underscores the concept of human time. A distinct temporal frame opened by the interweaving of the past’s reality with the unreality of fiction. Ricoeur suggests that by employing the rubric of human time the phenomenological moment that is enshrined by the act of reading can be more appropriately conceptualized.\(^9\)

Sahlins’s privileging of symbolic modes of meaning intertwined with Ricoeur’s conceptualization of temporal frameworks allows me to consider the sakhi “सेहूल घर वटलभ” through an analysis of human time. This story can be found in many of the known janamsakhi traditions. However within the confines of this thesis, I will be approaching the question of conversion through examination of a specific version of this sakhi found in the manuscript MS Panj B40.\(^10\) My argument hinges on the conceptualization of conversion as an interpretive turn in one’s religiosity, a concept that will be explored through my reading of this sakhi. This particular manuscript lends itself rather persuasively to an overriding concern with proselytization and conversion. Therefore, my thesis considers it as a narrative seeking to attain new adherents through oral presentations as well as through facilitated readings of individual sakhis contained within it. Alongside a semiological textual analysis I will superimpose an analysis of the sakhi’s contexts, with the intent of contesting assertions that the early Sikh panth was lackadaisical in its pursuance of potential converts. Through a generative process both reader and author interact in the creation of meanings. This process facilitates the mimetic cascade that Ricoeur has discussed and through this cascade the phenomenological moment promulgates shifts towards greater belief. It is my hypothesis that the “Massacre of Saidpur”

narrative functions within the janamsakhi as a potential space for the occurrence of conversion or religious transformation.

The remaining sections of this chapter will attempt to establish a basis for my main discussion on narratives of conversion in the early Sikh Tradition. First, I will provide an approximate translation for the cultural meaning vested in the term “janamsakhi.” The next section will briefly describe the janamsakhi and the reason for my interest in this particular manuscript. Then I will briefly address the problematic silence on religious conversion from and to Indic religions, which will lead me into a brief discussion on janamsakhi scholarship. The chapter will close with some general remarks about the process of religious conversion in relation to the Sikh Tradition.

II. What is a Janamsakhi?

Janamsakhi, the term as used in this thesis has a bi-fold meaning. Firstly, it describes a tradition or genre of Sikh literature that was to be read, orated, and studied. Secondly, the janamsakhi describes a complete and singular manuscript, which consisted of a series of individual narratives, or sakhis, relating the spiritual mission of Guru Nanak, the first in a lineage of ten Sikh gurus. It is worth noting that in the Sikh Tradition this term is applied only to stories of Guru Nanak’s life and is not used in relation to stories concerning the episodes from the lives of the nine other Sikh gurus.

The earliest manuscript forms of the janamsakhi begin to appear in the mid-seventeenth century, although there seems to be some disagreement as to precise date of their origin.\(^\text{11}\) For

\(^{11}\) McLeod has dated the manuscript tradition to the mid-17\(^{th}\) century AD, whereas Surjit Hans, and also Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, date it to before the death of Guru Arjan Dev ji in 1606. Furthermore the Bhai Bala janamsakhi states that it was written by the express desire of Guru Angad, the second Guru, to retain for posterity the memory of Guru Nanak. See: Ibid p. 178, Surindar Singh Kohli, ed., Janamsakhi Bhai Bala (Chandigarh: Punjab University Publication Bureau, 1975), W. H. McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the janamsakhis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), W. H. McLeod, ed., Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), W.H. McLeod, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion (Oxford: Oxford University
instance when discussing the early janamsakhi tradition, Surjit Hans states that the janamsakhis appeared before the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, the fifth guru, in 1606.\textsuperscript{12} By this time there also existed written works such as Bhai Gurdas' \textit{Varan}, these together provide evidence that stories concerning Baba Nanak's life had been incorporated into exegetical traditions of \textit{Gurbani}.\textsuperscript{13} Such works suggest that individual sakhis enshrined within janamsakhi manuscripts were employed in dynamic contexts being used generally in sangats as a part of the \textit{katha} that followed the singing of hymns or \textit{kirtan}; \textit{katha} was likely used to contextualize the preceding \textit{kirtan}. The use of janamsakhi as \textit{katha} would have at the very least had a trifold purpose; firstly to bring people into the Sikh faith; secondly, to lead people towards deeper understandings of the Guru's words; thirdly, to give adherents better understanding of the tenets of the Sikh faith.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the effervescence of these manuscripts led to increasing amounts of variation in the telling of particular episodes. This expansion also led to conflicting chronologies, the inclusion of an ever-increasing variety of stories, and the expression of diverse interests through the numerous modes of narrating individual sakhis.\textsuperscript{14} This inconsistency between manuscript recensions has led scholars to delineate a textual tradition with five interrelated trajectories: the Puratan tradition, the Bala tradition, the Adi Sakhian, the Mahima Prakash, and the Miharban tradition.\textsuperscript{15}

Authoring of the janamsakhis would have been associated with centers of Sikh activity, like the \textit{dharmsalas}. While not all the authors were directly or intimately associated with the Gurus many authors, especially those from the early period, are considered 'orthodox'

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\textsuperscript{14} McLeod, ed., \textit{Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{15} For more on the development of these traditions see McLeod, \textit{Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janamsakhis}, Kirpal Singh, \textit{Janamsakhi Parampara} (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1969).
interpreters of the Sikh Tradition. Most janamsakhi manuscripts are organized chronologically, with the primary focus bifurcated into Nanak’s childhood and Nanak’s travels upon reaching maturity. Both prose and verse manuscripts are known to exist; in both these types of formulations the narratives are created to contextualize particular hymns, or a series of couplets, and may also contain additional exegetical statements discussing the hymn in detail—alternately the story itself may act as an extended allegory for a particular set of related hymns. While the janamsakhi has and continues to exert a significant influence on the lives and faith of believers, it is not and has never been considered scripture. It has been stated that the purpose of the janamsakhi is to establish the importance and uniqueness of Guru Nanak in terms of the personal beliefs and proclivities of their authors. Although it seems to follow quite naturally from the preceding statement, only Surjit Hans has been so bold as to indicate the possibility of the use of the janamsakhi for the, “task of conversion.”

Janamsakhi manuscripts were written in Panjabi using the Gurmukhi script; etymologically the term janamsakhi has been described as a composite of the words janam “birth” and sakhi “testimony or witness.” Indeed, one scholar has stated that the term janamsakhi means ‘testimonies to the birth [of Guru Nanak]’. However, by translating the title in such a manner the text-as-biography misrepresentation is still enabled. Today the term sakhi has come to express the meaning of “chapter” or “biography,” but as a composite term janamsakhi is still predominantly used in relation to Guru Nanak’s life. While all janamsakhi manuscripts generally contain individual sakhis recounting episodes from the Guru’s life, the narratives contained within each manuscript are by no means consistent. Intertextual variations

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16 The B40 manuscript has been categorized with the Adi Sakhian and the Puratan janamsakhi to form a body of texts that is representative of the early period in the Sikh Tradition. Hans, A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature, p. 178.
18 McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the janamsakhis.
19 Hans, A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature, p. 189.
20 McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the janamsakhi, p. 11.
exist in both the selection of the sakhis present as well as the actual narrating of sakhis. The janamsakhi’s thematic focus upon ‘retellings’ of Guru Nanak’s life has aggregated their miscategorization as biographical. I believe the title for these collections can be more applicably translated as ‘testimonies of belief [in Guru Nanak.]’ In opposition to functioning as a source for the ‘historical Nanak’, these sakhis give witness to the spiritual prowess of Guru Nanak’s message as enshrined in his hymns or bani in order to evoke belief.\(^{21}\) Janamsakhi is exegetical more so than biographical and it is important to downplay its misrepresentation, popular or scholarly, as biography.

I will be presenting select portions primarily from the B40, but other manuscript traditions will also be included, that signal the existence of a tradition whose participants included particularly promising converts or potential converts and which professed the directed reading of a janamsakhi under the tutelage of a learned and respected Sikh in the community.\(^{22}\) This tradition of intimate reading was meant to act as a continuator for exegeses of Gurbani and bound new or potential adherents more vehemently to the tenets of their chosen faith. The janamsakhi as an expression of bhakti is an emotive vehicle attempting to elicit a desire for an experience of the divine from its audience.\(^{23}\) The text recognizes that a purer form of belief in the transcendent than was previously experienced is desired and being actively sought out by potential converts. In it, religious conversion is a fluid and dynamic process of movement that entails either realignment or re-inscription of belief within one’s own tradition—which I have chosen to call *intratraditional shifts*. And yet, at the same time conversion also connotes a shift

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\(^{21}\) Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*, p. 189.

\(^{22}\) Most of the manuscript traditions are associated with learned and respected people in the early Sikh panth. For a discussion on the various traditions, their origins, and their associations see जनमसाक्षी भाई बाला, *Janamsakhi Parampara*, Singh, ed., *Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji*.

\(^{23}\) In consideration of the devotional aspects of the janamsakhi tradition, I believe that the categorization of it as myth is inapplicable. It would appear to me that the use of the term myth in contemporary scholarship still retains the notion of “lie” that Plato placed upon it and is deployed by scholar to create a cognitive distance from themselves and the work they are analyzing. In this manner, myth is imbricated in a process of othering that I believe is not conducive to the understanding of the meaning and function of the janamsakhi.
from one tradition to another—or transtraditional shifts. This search for increased or renewed religiosity drove religious conversion amongst Indic religions.

Individual sakhis in the B40 are constructed to appeal to adherents from a particular faith from amongst the assortment of differing theologies present during the period it was written. If taken as a whole, the B40 was meant to appeal and span an expansive number of Panjab’s kaleidoscope of faith rubrics. One caveat that needs to be introduced is that within the confines of my study Islam will be considered as an Indic religion. By the eighteenth century Panjabi Sufis were well established in region and through them Islam, especially in its Sufic rendering, appears to have become understood as (or at least philosophically in line with) indigenous traditions of this time. Furthermore, there had been a number of prominent figures that had contributed to a South Asian Sufi tradition. In consideration of the terminology used as well as the background of many of the story’s characters, “मैं तुम्हारे अंतर्गत” appears to be engaging in an exegetical discourse with audiences familiar with the phraseology significant to Islam and Sufi ideologies.

In terms of conversion, it is important to understand that a number of sakhis depict both intratraditional and transtraditional processes occurring in tandem. However while all manner of sectarian religious shifts may be depicted as desirable and acceptable, it is expressly shown that any such movement occurs firstly through the reception of Gurbani and, less significantly so, the personage of Guru Baba Nanak. The purposeful depiction of the Gurbani’s transcendence over

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24 This definition of conversion may also enable analyses of potential serial converts—people who continually involve themselves in new forms of worship thereby experiencing religiosity afresh. Such a perspective could be beneficial in the diverse cosmological world of South Asia. This desire for renewed religiosity may have been a driving force behind the continual religious innovations occurring in South Asia. With this definition could also help explore community formation and perpetuation.

and above that of Guru Nanak is a trope that occurs repeatedly throughout the B40 manuscript. Another frequently encountered trope is that of an individual’s submission after having heard Gurbani emanating from the mouth of Guru Baba Nanak. Considered in combination these two tropes acted as signposts for shifts in religiosity. Such issues would have been of paramount importance in a community of faith transmigrating from a focus upon the *person* as Guru to a focus on *text* as Guru, while concomitantly engrossed in a politico-militaristic battle with despotic irreligious rulers.  

III. **B40: Lineage and Description**

A manuscript bearing the library number *MS Panj B40* sits atop a shelf in the India Office Library; its accession date is 9th January 1907. This manuscript belongs to the Sikh Tradition’s janamsakhi literary genre. Only after W.H. McLeod’s published critical edition of the manuscript did it become known simply as the B40. Examining the manuscript catalogues and other scholarly literature the lineage of the B40 has been traced. Scholars cataloguing manuscripts before its arrival in London had mentioned the manuscript, under different names and in passing. Two of the manuscripts salient features can aid in the discovery of the manuscript’s cataloguing: it was dated to 1733 AD and it had an unusually large number of miniature illustrations. Furthermore, the manuscripts place of sale was from Lahore.

The B40 is associated with the ideologies representing the early period of ‘orthodox’ Sikh literature, a period that includes the writings of Bhai Gurdas as well as two other

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27 An excerpt from the library’s daybook provides critical information that can be used for connecting the places, dates, and persons, who have mentioned the existence of this particular manuscript:

*A Punjabi MS. offered for sale by H. Abdur Rahman. Price £ 10. A Life of Nanak (janamsakhi) with a large number (over 50) of miniatures: followed by a few leaves inscribed, in a later hand, with stories concerning the same teacher. Fol. 244 (2 blank): 8x6 in: in fair condition. Dated 1733. This MS. so illustrated must be regarded as a great rarity. (The owner is on his way back to India.) The work (by Bhai Sangu Mal?) is apparently unknown. McLeod, ed., The B40 Janam-Sakhi, p.1.*
janamsakhi traditions: the Adi Sakhian and the Puratan tradition. It was initially recognized as belonging to the Puratan tradition; in fact the first twenty folios of the manuscript follow the Puratan tradition closely as do many later sakhis. The first known documentation of the manuscript was by Gurmukh Singh from Oriental College, Lahore. In 1885, while cataloguing the extant janamsakhis manuscripts, he mentioned an illustrated manuscript for sale by a bookseller whose colophon was dated S. 1790 (1733 AD). Singh referred to it as: 'Lahore-vali', since he happened to view it at a Lahore bookseller's shop. Karam Singh author of Kattak ki Visakh also claimed to have personally seen an illustrated manuscript and mentions that this manuscript was dated 1733 AD. Since these two notes refer to the same salient manuscript features as noted by the India Office Librarian, we can reasonably assume that it is in fact one manuscript that is being described in all three instances.

Although such brief citings of the B40 are available, the manuscript remained in relative obscurity upon the shelves of the India Office Library until its uniqueness was discovered after closer scrutiny during the middle of the twentieth century. The B40 was again noticed in the late 1950s when G.B. Singh was in London cataloguing manuscripts; soon after learning of some of the unique feature of the manuscript, the historian Ganda Singh had a Photostat taken of it and transported to the library for the Panjabi Bhasha Vibhag in Patiala. After the Photostat's arrival in Patiala the manuscript received increasing amounts of attention and plans were made for the publishing of a critical Panjabi edition, a companion edition of the manuscript's illustrations, as well as an English translation.

28 Hans, A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature, p. 178.
29 Ibid., p. 2. For a more concise comparison between the individual sakhis that occur in the B40 and the Puratan, Adi Sakhian, and Mcharban traditions, see Appendix 2 in Singh, ed., Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, pp. 153-159.
30 This renewed interest in the janamsakhi tradition as well as the impetus for the publication of both B40 critical editions was in preparation for, and coincided with, the pentacentennial birth celebrations for Guru Nanak. McLeod, ed., The B40 Janam-Sakhi, Singh, ed., Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, pp. 1-3, Hans, ed., B-40 Janamsakhi Guru Baba Nanak Paintings.
Physically, the manuscript consisted originally of two hundred and forty folios, bound in thirty fascicles of eight folios each. Subsequently three fascicles of one folio each were added. The final total was two hundred and forty three folios, of which the five folios (numbers fifteen through to eighteen and twenty-nine) are presently missing. The manuscript bears two sets of numbers for pagination, the original Gurmukhi numbers that were added when the manuscript was first completed and a later set of European-style Arabic numerals—apparently added prior to the manuscript's arrival in London. The copyist's writing is clear and neat; errors are not common. The numbering as well as much of the text has been written in high quality black ink. However, a red ink—of poorer quality—was used to mark portions of the manuscript that required attention such as the termination of individual sakhis; the beginning of quotations from Baba Nanak’s sabads; and to occasionally highlight points of major importance like the dates of Guru Nanak’s birth and death.

The manuscript is unique in that it contains a total of fifty-seven painted miniatures. Of which thirty illustrations span a full page; sixteen occupy between two-thirds and three-quarters of the page; the remaining eleven are half-page. In a manner similar to the use of red ink to signal the end of one sakhi, the beginning of another sakhi appears to have been marked by the inclusion of a single illustration. The are two exceptions to this rule; the first being sakhi 24 where there is an extra illustration attached to the beginning of the sakhi; the second is sakhi 34 where three illustrations occur at intervals in a single sakhi.31 However judging by the inclusion of additional illustrations, these two sakhis were likely of greater importance and therefore warranted greater attention. The former sakhi relates Guru Nanak’s meeting with the second guru, Guru Angad, who at that time was known as Lahana. The latter sakhi contains a prolonged discourse with Raja Sivanabh, who may have been a well-known adherent and benefactor of the

early panth. However, aside from Surjit Hans’ brief, but interesting, analysis of the paintings there appears to have been little written about the B40’s paintings.\textsuperscript{32}

My initial interest in the B40 was, admittedly, sparked by the attributes of these miniatures for visual analysis. These illustrations are extremely interesting and deserve greater scholarly attention than they have currently received. A study of these paintings from the perspective of visual culture would prove very fruitful in helping understand the meaning of the text, but such a task is beyond the current scope of my argument. Apart from the illustrations, the B40 is also a valuable document in that it can be reliably dated to 1733 AD. It also records valuable information concerning its creation including: the author’s, the scribe’s and artist’s names, as well as information about the auspices of its creation. Bhai Sangu Mal is named as its author, while Daya Ram Abrol is its scribe and finally artist who created the B40’s illustrations is named as Alamchand Raj.\textsuperscript{33} It will be a contention of mine that in fact the author and voice of the B40 is Daya Ram Abrol’s and that Bhai Sangu provided the inspiration and infrastructure for the creation of the manuscript. The B40 also states that its production was begun at the behest of the local sangat. This combination of factors makes it an especially useful concrete text for historical analysis.\textsuperscript{34}

Although we are unable to precisely locate the B40 manuscript geographically, one can reasonably state that the manuscript was created somewhere in the Majha area of Panjab. Piar Singh has used other extant manuscripts, also penned by Daya Ram Abrol, in order to argue that the B40 was most likely created along the outskirts of Lahore. His reasoning is based primarily upon a 1766 copy of the 1733 original manuscript entitled \textit{Dhiau Bihangam Ka}. Daya wrote both manuscripts and in the latter he reveals his place of residence while writing was Sarakhpur,

\textsuperscript{32} Hans, ed., \textit{B-40 Janamsakhi Guru Baba Nanak Paintings}.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Bhai}, is an honorific applied to the elders or respected members of the community.
\textsuperscript{34} McLeod, ed., \textit{The B40 Janam-Sakhi}, Singh, ed., \textit{Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji}.
which Piar Singh associates with the village of Sarakpur on the western fringes of Lahore.\textsuperscript{35} This theory is given credence by the fact that in order to obtain the talent required for making a refined manuscript such as the B40, especially considering the delicacy of the scribe's penmanship and also the degree of quality of the paintings. The village's proximity to a center of culture, such as Lahore, would have made such skilled resources available. The village of Sarakpur is therefore the first putative location for the B40's origin.

A second theory suggests an origin for the manuscript in the area extending both sides of the river Rave, over a radius of fifteen or twenty miles, and surrounding the twin villages of Kartarpur and Pakho (or Dera Baba Nanak). This theory is based on the assumption that the language of particular narratives, sections 35-49 and 51, in the B40 manuscript is representative of an oral sakhi tradition from this area. Since persons hailing from or residing in that same area could only have known knowledge of these oral versions, it is reasoned that the B40 manuscript was written there. Another integral part of this theory is the unique place names that occur in some of the sakhis. For instance, in the sections supposedly representative of an oral tradition, the village Nebada in the pargana of Kalanaur is referenced and is immediately followed by a place called Dallai da Chak.\textsuperscript{36} The broadest area encapsulated by this theory is that of the Gujranwala and Gurdaspur districts, where prior to the 1947 partition there existed a large concentration of members of the Abrol and Raj sub-castes.\textsuperscript{37} Yet, both theories place the manuscript in an area where Sikhs were active and growing in numbers—the Majha region of Panjab. Therefore, I find there is no need for a prolonged engagement with this debate for the purposes of my discussion.

\textsuperscript{35} A more detailed discussion of this theory of the B40's origin can be found in McLeod, ed., \textit{The B40 Janam-Sakhi}., pp. 19-22 and Singh, ed., \textit{Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji}, pp. 18, 19.

\textsuperscript{36} References to these place names can be found in sakhi 43b.

\textsuperscript{37} See McLeod, ed., \textit{The B40 Janam-Sakhi}, pp. 22-25.
IV. Janamsakhi Scholarship:

The precarious subjectivity of religious scholars within secular academia is that of a person balancing sympathies for their topic of study with their desire for academic legitimacy. To a certain degree a reflection of this subjectivity can be seen in the aims and conclusions contained within existing janamsakhi scholarship, as well as within my own discussion. Early modern discourses examining the janamsakhi sought to contest the conception of these texts as biographical and therefore historical narratives of Guru Nanak’s life. Yet at the same time the janamsakhi was and has remained central amongst an exceedingly scant number of primary sources concerning the first guru’s life. Due to a conflicting desire to still deploy the janamsakhi as a primary source for Guru Nanak’s life, scholars maintained that through the proper skill and attention of trained academics the relevant information could be retrieved surgically by sifting and sorting through the material and excising its spurious portions. However, by simultaneously seeking to contest the legitimacy of the janamsakhi as biographical and yet continuing to use it to comment on the Guru’s life the scholars revealed an inconsistency in their approach whose root cause was the philosophical notion of suspending one’s disbelief in order to properly carry out one’s scholarly work. Thus, it was felt that distance must be maintained from the subject of one’s work by initially discrediting that body of literature. Once this was achieved they could then go about the work of recuperating that very same credibility. By doing so scholars sought

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38 I will develop this notion further in the following subsection. The original discussion of this notion can be found in Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, Other People’s Myths: The Cave of Echoes (The University of Chicago Press, 1988).
39 Usages of the janamsakhi as history remained an integral part of scholarship on the Sikh Tradition until W.H. McLeod’s book, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, questioned the ability of the janamsakhi to comment on the historical Guru Nanak. Thereafter, McLeod would repeatedly assert that while it was beneficial to try and ascertain who the historical Nanak was through the janamsakhi, it was better used as a historical source for the beliefs and values of the later panth evolving around the teachings of Guru Nanak. McLeod has reiterated this point on numerous occasions. See: McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the janamsakhis, McLeod, ed., The B40 Janamsakhi, McLeod, ed., Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism, McLeod, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, W.H. McLeod, “The Hagiography of the Sikhs,” in According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India, ed. Winand M. Callewaert and Rupert Snell (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1994).
to create a tautological historical narrative for Guru Nanak’s life in that they drew from the very source literature they desired to discredit.\footnote{While the name of Bhai Vir Singh must be preeminent amongst the long list of such scholars, others include: Max Macauliffe, \textit{The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings, and Authors} (Oxford: Oxford Claredon Press, 1963), Sohan Singh Seetal, \textit{Guru Nanak: A Brief Biography} (Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot, 1968), Singh, \textit{Janamsakhi Parampara}, Ernst Trump, ed., \textit{The Adi Granth: Or, the Holy Scripture of the Sikhs} (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989).}

More recently, the janamsakhi tradition has continued to be a focal point of study for some Sikh scholars. However while it usages have been varied, there is still very little in terms of a dedicated study of this genre. Taking inspiration from a comment made by Mark Juergensmeyer concerning the conspicuous absence of the janamsakhi from the study of religious literature, Nikki Guninder Kaur Singh embarked upon a literary analysis of the mythic elements from a narrative relating Baba Nanak’s disappearance into the River Beas. She identifies the importance of the janamsakhi in highlighting the uniqueness of Nanak in terms of the author’s personal beliefs and proclivities.\footnote{Singh, "The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsakhi and Sikh Tradition," p. 329-331}

Another scholar, Sabinderjit Singh Sagar, problematized methodological approaches to janamsakhi literature stating that since individual sakhis emanate from Baba Nanak’s bani they are therefore not historical but are rather fictive creations based on contextualizations arising from the author’s readings of Gurbani. He states that the predisposition for historico-biographical conceptualizations of the janamsakhi act as hurdles to understanding the work’s nature. He also views the janamsakhi as a literary work based on an interaction between the author, the bani, and the community. Interestingly this triptych also resonates with communication and reception theory categories of sender, message, and recipient, which I will discuss in greater detail in chapter three. Sagar’s words resonate with the notion of a tradition of
reading that was already referred to above when he states that the “predisposed reader receives the religious message instantly.”

The janamsakhi is an aesthetic creation meant for popular mass consumption; it is meant to unify its audience with the message of Guru Nanak. The interaction between author, bani, and community resolve an interest in attaining new adherents through the discourses found in janamsakhi manuscripts. Sagar's perspective on the janamsakhi considers the factual aspects of the narrative as mutable and dependent primarily upon the author’s doctrines. The facts were understood and expressed through scripture and tradition; they could therefore be subject to changes based upon how the scripture was being understood by the janamsakhi's author. A concern for easing people’s spiritual hunger led to the janamsakhi creations, the appeal of these stories was that a large portion of the populace couldn’t understand the intricacies of Gurbani but by hearing stylized anecdotes from Nanak’s life the audience could still achieve an ecstatic state of mind. The space occupied by the janamsakhi transmogrifies the world in such a manner as to assist audiences in connecting, or unifying with the divine light through an exegesis of Gurbani. Processes of unification have also been identified as important aspects of conversion, where a fundamental and persistent state of unhappiness and struggle predispose the consciousness for an interpretative shift in its manner of approaching life. The person of Guru Nanak becomes iconographic for religiosity—the ideal convert, whose purpose is to motivate the audience to establish union with the message of Baba Nanak. If any in the audience were

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43 This assertion is also corroborated by the existence of illustrated manuscripts. Such illustrations evidence the importance of an aesthetic that surrounded the janamsakhi tradition. It was meant to be viewed as much as it was meant to be read and orated.
44 [Guru Nanak's life] is filled with struggles and hardships. Despite these hardships, he continued to spread the message of unity and harmony, and his teachings continue to inspire people in different ways. Singh, ed., Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, p. 7.
‘predisposed’ to that particular exegetical discourse they may experience a phenomenological moment promulgating in conversion.

As such, janamsakhi manuscripts are the product of an early panth eager to engage with other more dominant soteriologies prevalent in northern South Asia. It was through the janamsakhi that author’s sought to creatively broach potential converts. As such the authors employ the idiom of ambiguous identity and devotional markers with the intention of gaining adherents from all communities. The idiom of ambiguity plays with the flux and flow of representations delimited by rigidified rubrics from the more established traditions of religious literature such as the Puranas, stories about prominent Sufi figures, and figures from the Nath tradition. Fluidity did not disavow difference but facilitated it via engagement and transformation; identity is creatively played with such that the convergences of meanings and representations in each specific category provide a type of utopic space from which new identities can emerge. The janamsakhi concomitantly constrains beliefs and identities by providing a portal through which they can be channeled to a realization of belief in Guru Nanak’s message. By examining the janamsakhi from such a perspective we can begin to comment on how conversion to the early Sikh Tradition was facilitated.

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46 See in Singh, Janamsakhi Parampara, p. i.
V. Disturbing Silences:

In contrast to Indic faiths, Abrahamic traditions have tended to privilege the personal documentation of religious experiences and conversions thus enabling scholars to find a wealth of written documentation through which to examine and problematize aspects of these phenomena. There appears to be a discursive silence regarding conversion both to and from South Asian religions, which seems erroneous given that the South Asian cosmological universe has in it a wealth and variety of religious beliefs and praxis. Fuelled in part by the idea that faiths within the subcontinent are traditionally and consistently nonproselytizing, conversion is a rarely studied phenomenon. Still, how does one make use of the archive in order to begin a geographically rooted and culturally bound engagement with conversion?

South Asia's historiography comprises a host of topics spanning political, economical, and sociological spectrums. It also bears the vestiges of imperial/colonial religious hegemony, hinging also the subcontinental legacies of Christianity and Islam to the problematic of this historiography. As the current regime of scholarship is itself a vestige of Empire—an empire which was, even if obtusely, indebted to Judeo-Christian religious traditions, it follows that scholars functioning in this cultural world are preconditioned to certain forms of analysis over others. Some unacknowledged affects of this are that the manner in which an archive assembled and understood becomes biased. Scholarly engagements dealing with South Asian religious conversion have tended to limit their analyses to the movement of believers from Indic religions to either Islam or Christianity. Furthermore, political and economic factors are most commonly presented as key motivating factors in religious conversion. Giving full credence to only materialist analyses lends itself particularly well to conclusions that coercive force is at the heart of religious conversion. However, such conclusions seem counterintuitive in that materialist analyses can only ever reflect the dint upon the surface of conversion. Political and economic factors do indeed pervade religious histories; however, so too do personal faith, belief, and
conviction. These also demand consideration and should be accorded due credence in academic discourse on conversion in South Asia. Their occlusion seems to obviate any emotional or visceral links new converts may have had to the prior faith from which they apostatize, as well to the newly chosen faith they affirm.

This obviation of faith can be linked to discomfort scholars feel when attempting to assess experiential aspects of belief. Discussing the relevance of the ancient South Asian tale *The Hunter and the Sage* for modernity, Wendy Doniger comments that scholar’s are apprehensive about considering experiential aspects of religiosity legitimately because it is felt that doing so would threaten the legitimacy of their own discourse. In secular academic institutions a significant amount of pressure is present so as to correct against tendencies scholars may have for positioning themselves too close to a religious phenomena being studied.\(^{47}\) In recognizing this problematic, how does one historically –and comfortably access and evaluate the meaning of conversion for converts moving between Indic religions?

We can begin to approach this question by using South Asian aesthetic theory to infer that historically a tradition of critical reading was established in the region prior to the advent of the janamsakhi tradition or the B40’s production. I will describe the sakhi “ਵੀਰਚਨਾ ਅਤੇ ਅਤਸਰਨ”, as found in the edited copy of the B40 janamsakhi manuscript by Piar Singh, using the notion of sahridaya.\(^{48}\) Wendy Doniger mentions the term *sa-hridaya* in relation to the subcontinent’s aesthetic theory in her discussion on the relevance of mythology to modernity.\(^{49}\) Traditional aesthetic theoreticians signal the emotional reception of texts using this term. *Sa-hridaya*, whereby the receiver’s heart reaches out and joins with the author’s heart, was meant to illicit an empathic union between receiver and sender. This was a mechanism for generating a text that

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\(^{47}\) Doniger states that, “to deny the experiential component is not merely elitist, it is to deny the essential humanitarian component in the study of religion.” O'Flaherty, *Other People’s Myths: The Cave of Echoes*, pp. 1-28.


\(^{49}\) O'Flaherty, *Other People's Myths: The Cave of Echoes*, p. 11.
was purposeful and premeditated, leading to a meaningful reception of that text's message(s). I believe this notion has some resonance with communication theories and that they can be used in conjunction in order to better understand textual reception. Religious stories impact the modes, meanings, and metaphors populating most human lives. They create and reiterate our identities through their expression, articulation, and interpretation. I feel that by deflagrating the problematic associated with imperial archives and by alternatively approaching these questions through sympathetic (with sa-hridaya) and situated readings of topical religious texts, stories, or narratives we can meaningfully discuss issues associated with the phenomenon of religious conversion.

The Sikh Tradition of the eighteenth century provides an interesting outpost from which to initiate our exploration of religious conversion in South Asia. Not only is it a relatively recent religious tradition but, also by this time all ten of the Sikh gurus were deceased and much of the faith's crucial formulative stages had transpired. Centers of pilgrimage existed, alongside a core philosophy enshrined with the canonized pages of the Adi Granth. There was ritualized ceremonial initiation into the faith, as well as prescribed forms of conduct for believers. In Sikh historiography, the eighteenth century is typically construed as a time of heroes—a time of violence and upheaval. Conjointly, from this juncture onward, there was an ever-increasing set of secondary literature, including epic tales of bravery as well as significant bodies of exegetical literature, appearing. This century witnessed the effervescence of an older form of Sikh literature that has become known in common parlance as the janamsakhi. My conceptualization of conversion in the early Sikh Tradition arises from a reading situated in this historically paradoxical period. The lacuna in studies of religious conversion from and to Indic religions may be reflective of a paucity of primary historical documents, or the result of scholarly bias.

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caused by the governing worldview, whatever the reasons questions of religious conversion between Indic religions have remained largely unexplored. In order to broaden the discourse on religion in South Asia one must consider both silences and registered voices within and beyond the accepted historical record.

VI. Conversion and the Sikh Tradition:

In this section I would like to discuss how conversion to the Sikh faith occurred during the eighteenth century. One can speculate about the similarities between initiation rites that existed during the Guru Period with the more ubiquitous rite of charan amrit.\(^{51}\) However, reports of the 1699 Baisakhi, from the court of Bahâdur Shâh suggest that prior to this Sikhs were converted through the mediation of the masands and that this conversion entailed making offerings to the masands.\(^{52}\) In the last decade of the seventeenth century the Sikh Tradition underwent a corporate reorganization and wholesale transformation, especially in regards to conversion. The creation of the Khalsa by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind, was meant to end the conversion of Sikhs by the masand and by doing so dissolve their hold on Sikhs. Guru Gobind had asked for the head of a truly devoted Sikh five times, in front of a large congregation that had gathered at the his behest for the Baisakhi harvest festival of 1699 AD. After making the same request five times the Khalsa was created. The five Sikh devotees underwent a rite, which is known as khande ki pahul, where through the use of a heavy double-edged sword and sanctified water they were brought in to the fold of the Khalsa. Mughal court chronicles relate how not all Sikhs felt comfortable being initiated into this new entity, many confined themselves

\(^{51}\) A rite of inclusion where one became an adherent through the act of dipping the guru’s toe into water and then subsequently drunk by a new convert. There is no evidence, written or otherwise of this actually occurring in the Sikh Tradition, but it is likely that this was and early form of Sikh initiation. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, pp. 59-61, J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Panjab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; reprint, 1998), pp. 76-78.

\(^{52}\) These chronicles also include speculation on the part of the Mughal reasoning that it was due to being grief stricken at the loss of his sons that the mourned them through keeping his hair long. The Khalsa also appropriated the act and vowed to forego any enjoyment until revenge was taken. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, eds., *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), pp. 107-114.
to belief in “Nanak Shah Darvesh.” The chronicles provide a separate category for those Sikhs who were not part of the Khalsa: chākar, or servant. The Khalsa was given a rahit, or code, by the Guru. It was obligatory for a Khalsa member to partake in daily recitation of prayers, retaining of unshorn body hair, and the wearing of arms. Therefore however one may choose to speculate about the initial manner of Sikh conversion, by 1699 we have the first concrete example of a Sikh initiation rite in relation to conversion.

Partaking in the khande ki pāhul rite one unambiguously became a convert and practitioner of a code of conduct that was uniquely Sikh. However, there continued to be other modes through which to become and ascribe to being Sikh. It is important for our discussion to recognize that Sikh identity, which can be formulated and defined via different sets of criteria, prior to the eighteenth century, had become subcategorized by distinctions such as Khālsa and chākar (which I will from hence forth define generically as nonKhalsa). These categories arose from sartorial distinctions, as well as differing ideological and political predilections of adherents. Thus, by the eighteenth century identifying a Sikh had a theological definition, which meant recognizing an adherent of a certain belief system circumscribed by a set of rituals, codes, and praxis. However, sociologically, there also remained a certain degree of ambiguity in terms of identifying a Sikh.

In their attempts to gain adherents, advocates for the Sikh faith would have thus had to mediate their way through Panjab’s “enchanted universe” of popular religious beliefs while arguing for a stable codified Sikh identity.

Guru Gobind is said to have stood on that Baisakhi day before the crowd and call for the head of one true devotee. Only after some time, and what would seem to be considerable deliberation, did someone answer this call. We know historically that not all Sikhs felt the need

53 The reason behind the reluctance of some Sikhs to take part in khande ki pāhul was thought to be due to the connections that some Sikhs had with Muslims.
to answer this call. Thus while the ritual of taking amrit and the creation of the Khalsa represents a mechanism of conversion to the Sikh Tradition, it has never been the only manner in which to become a Sikh. Why did only a few Sikhs answer the guru’s call? Anthropologist Simon Coleman, who studied a contemporary Protestant sect, states that in some cases ritualized calls for conversion are not meant to be answered but rather are either meant to present adherents with an idealized form of faith toward which one aspires or a revivalist space within which an identity of deviance can be ambivalently embraced.  

Using this assertion we can ascertain a relationship between the janamsakhi and conversion by positing that venues for recitation of these sakhis, primarily in sangats, represented such a space calling for idealized forms of faith. The sangat acted as a revivalist space; within which conversion may occur but need not necessarily occur. Accepting that the janamsakhi retained relevance for both Khalsa and nonKhalsa Sikhs, they may have crystallized the faith of both types of adherents and also functioned to bring in new conscripts. Belief in the khande ki pahul ceremony did not need to entail that individuals would partake in the ritual; one could maintain a belief in the ceremony and yet never actually participate in it. Presumably, this assumption would hold equally for the advocate-belivers themselves; not all were Khalsa members but nevertheless they were integral to these revivalist spheres. Whether conversions occurred through readings of the janamsakhi is unascertainable, what can comment upon is whether they signal a need to become more faithful and provide audiences with a mechanism through which this revival can occur: Gurbani and Guru Nanak.

In line with Sahlins’s privileging of cultural meaning over materialist historiography, it is the culture within which religious conversion occurs that defines its content and mechanisms.  

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However, in order to understand the culturally specific facilitation of conversions through the narratives contained within the B40 janamsakhi, I believe that a broader discussion regarding some general notions regarding the religious conversion will prove beneficial. The central meaning of conversion is change, and upon initial consideration the term religious conversion seems to refer to a singular moment where an individual switches religious affiliations. However, it should be stressed here that conversion is an extremely heterogeneous and diverse process, which through its enactment affects the totality of one’s corporate and personal being. Conversion, suggests a movement from one religious faith to another; therefore, it is inextricably associated with conceptualizations of identity. It is a moral change brought about theologically or experientially, and it draws on a symbolic rhetorical use of language.

Furthermore, the polarization of institutional change versus personal change belies the actual experience of most people. Conversion is mediated through people, institutions, texts, and communities. It destabilizes the self and offers the opportunity for multiple affiliations: a possibility of imagining more than one religious affiliation since a person can never be completely severed from their original religious identity. Religious conversion is a process that at its core is paradoxical; ideologically it demands a complete recreation of one’s identity, while in practice a convert generally attains a heterogeneous and ambiguous relationship between new and past religious affiliations.58

Generally, religious conversions arise in relation to expressions of rhetoric by advocates of the faith. This rhetoric enables outsiders to affiliate themselves with the group subscribing to the advocate’s particular religious philosophy. This rhetoric may prove nurturing or offer guidance to potential converts. It allows one to resolve inconsistencies in their identity

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providing a focus for loyalty and a framework for action. Through conversion one can engage in
mythic, ritual, or symbolic systems that make life ordered and meaningful.\(^5\) People also choose
to convert in order to revive their religiosity.\(^6\) Whatever the reasons may be for conversion, it
should be stressed that this movement is enabling and agentive since, generally speaking, it is the
individual who for myriad reasons chooses to convert.

My sympathetic reading of the narrative "The Massacre of Saidpur," or "The Massacre of
Saidpur," is prompted by two recent discussions concerning the Sikh Tradition and conversion.\(^6\)
In the first, Doris Jakobsh deals with the issue of conversion chronologically by creating a
tripartite division: Early period, Singh Sabha period, and Modern period. The majority of her
discussion deals with the modern period where she attempts to resolve a paradox between local
and universal in relation to conversion in the Sikh Tradition. While the modern Sikh Tradition
has become a global phenomenon, its framework remains essentially rooted in Panjab. The
tradition has not moved radically beyond its original cultural milieu. A corresponding paradox is
that while doctrinally the Sikh Tradition is inspired by universalistic ideals and tenets, these
ideals have they have not been translated into any major expression beyond its Panjabi
adherents. She concludes that, with the exception of Yogi Bhajan's conversion of a select group
of Caucasians, the Sikh Tradition remains one that is not known for its proselytizing activities.\(^6\)

While much more developed than Jakobsh's argument, Louis E. Fenech focuses
primarily on mechanisms of conversion in the early Sikh Tradition.\(^6\) Taking Oberoi's
discussions as an armature about popular religion and its relation to the Sikh Tradition and the

\(^6\) Coleman, "Continuous Conversion? The Rhetoric, Practice, and Rhetorical Practice of Charismatic Protestant
\(^6\) For discussions referred to see: Louis E. Fenech, "Conversion and the Sikh Tradition," in *Religious Conversion in
India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, ed. Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke (New Delhi: Oxford
University Press, 2003), Doris R. Jakobsh, "Conversion in the Sikh Tradition," in *Religious Conversion:
166-174.
\(^6\) Jakobsh, "Conversion in the Sikh Tradition."
\(^6\) The early Sikh Tradition is here defined as pre-1849 annexation of the Panjab by the British.
reification of Sikh identity during the Singh Sabha period, Fenech proceeds to discuss the lack of early mechanisms for conversion. The ritual khande ki pahul initiation, discussed above, receives only passing notice in Fenech’s conceptualization. His main assertion is that conversion primarily involved charan amrit, a ritual where a devotee accepted another individual as his guru via the symbolic gesture of washing the guru’s feet. This ritual would have occurred after some contact with either a normative or heterodox Sikh guru. The convert’s endeavors through charan amrit were thus meant to “incorporate into their person the coded substances of the guru.” After successfully completing the ritual a new convert would begin to venerate the Sikh gurus and listen to passages from both the Adi Granth and the janamsakhi. The convert would perhaps loosely follow some injunctions of a rahitnama, or occasionally visit a dharamsala.64 In Fenech’s paradigm, conversion occurs and is then followed by slow and gradual strivings on the part of the convert to learn or incorporate aspects from the teachings of the Sikh gurus.

Fundamental to both the above constructions of conversion is a preconceived understanding of how Sikhs identified themselves; there is little concern for the process of becoming Sikh that a term like conversion suggests. Fenech asserts that conversion paradigms “emerge out of the Semitic religious traditions but are also a product of modernity.”65 Fenech argues that neither stable categories nor fixed identities existed during the earlier period of Sikh history. Such notions are the purview of Semitic religions and modernity. However, they became cultural imports during the British Raj. Subsequently the Singh Sabha movement would take up these notions, and begin to disseminate them in order to reconstruct the Sikh Tradition according to their new sociopolitical situation.66 In contradistinction to the stable religious categories of Semitic religions, the early Sikh panth operated in a malleable and fluid world

65 Ibid, p. 149.
66 Fenech takes this idea of conversion being a cultural import to argue not only for the lack of its substantial occurrence in the early Sikh Tradition but also argues that it explains the modern ambivalence to pursuing transtraditional conversions. Ibid, p. 153.
where indicators of Sikh identity were present "yet the category Sikh was still flexible, problematic, and substantially empty". Viewing Sikh identity as substantially empty, he then defines it as essentially Hindu—an equally vacuous and substantially empty method to construct religious identity. This definition, or lack thereof, allows Fenech to construct a paradigm for conversion centering on initiation rituals already prevalent throughout the regions where Sikhs lived. From this view the idea of conversion is a recent phenomenon foreign to the Sikh Tradition's assumptions and underpinnings. However, while depictions of rituals like charan-amrit do occur in janamsakhi narratives, one should take caution in interpreting these literally as ways that conversion to the Sikh tradition occurred.

Jakobsh also envisions an ambiguous early Sikh identity, yet her claim falls short of Fenech's notion of a vacuous Sikh identity. Fenech's claims seem problematic given that they only seem to consider sociocultural histories and ignore the existence of a Sikh intelligentsia that indeed had notions of identity with which it went about the work of creating stable categories. Jakobsh maintains that the Sikh Tradition is not known for its proselytizing activities and this rubric is consistent with the passive tenets and ideologies of Singh Sabha scholarship, which sought to ameliorate itself from being conceived as a threat to the British Raj and retain the privileged position many Sikhs enjoyed in the colonial military and administration. Operating within such confines, the intelligentsia could hardly have been expected to risk losing its position in order to engage in proselytization. She also states that individuals were able to claim adherence to a varied religious cosmology through a fluid mechanism of religious, social, and cultural identity demarcation. Wide-boundaries and a fluid understanding of religious identity

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67 Fenech states that for many Sikhs and non-Sikhs initiation in the panth involved no formal change of identity at all. Ibid, p. 155.
68 Ibid, p. 150.
are essential in attempting to ferret out the meaning of conversion phenomena in the Sikh Tradition.69

An underlying assumption of both papers is the modern development of stable categories of identity in South Asia; it is assumed that modernity (via the British) demarcated different sets of identity. Both authors are embroiled in politics of denying historical difference in order to resolve problems that this essentialization of categories has had in recent history. Neither scholar mentions Muslims and possible methods of their incorporation into the Sikh panth— if it happened at all it concerns neither Fenech nor Jakobsh. Neither is the existence and substantive use of the categories of Hindu and Muslim to demarcate difference in janamsakhi narratives acknowledged. The categories ‘Hindu’ and ‘Sikh’ effectively dissolve in the utopic textual space of these discussions. In almost a revisionist manner, a Golden Age of harmony is created in diametric opposition to contemporary tensions and violence spawned by the reification of religious identity. Rather than deny difference, I propose that it is more instrumental to understand how advocate for and converts to a new religion embraced difference. For this purpose an analysis of janamsakhi narratives as allegorical/symbolic rhetoric of conversion as narrated by those who experienced it may prove fruitful. In an attempt to gain new adherents from the better-entrenched religious traditions, could markers of those other religious identities have been deployed subversively in order to contest or destabilize the very identities the narratives mimicked? What was the role of identity in conversion?

**Conclusion:**

This chapter was meant to outline my interest in the phenomena of conversions to the Sikh Tradition in the eighteenth century. I began with a series of rhetorical questions and voiced the state of aporia I felt when first considering a study of this sort. However, as I hope to have

made clear above, it is my belief that the janamsakhi tradition and especially the B40 manuscript provide an engaging portal into the process of conversion. By reading this manuscript through a cultural lens that is focused upon eking out the symbolic framework operative in the Sikh worldview I believe that we can not only discuss conversion but also comment about the societal fabric of the eighteenth century. In light of this the following chapters have been developed with the hope of building up to a discussion on conversion in the sakhi “ਫੈਲਾ ਲਗਤਾ ਲੱਕੁੰਦੇ.” I will begin with a discussion on the traditional historical metanarrative of the eighteenth century that attempts to explore moments of cohesion and commonality between the Khalsa and non-Khalsa Sikhs. By actively positioning segments from the B40 within this larger metanarrative I believe one is able to productively consider the occurrences of conversions during this century. Chapter three explores ways of reading the janamsakhi through theories of communication and reception. I will argue that based upon passages found in the B40’s colophon, as well as in other manuscripts, authors left traces of intended methods of receiving and understanding the function of the text. Furthermore, with the presumption that the janamsakhis are exegetical I assert that they are meant to be received in specific ways. Indeed, the amount of ‘interpretive drift’ that could occur was deliberately constrained by literary signs and mechanisms embedded within the manuscripts. Chapter Four presents my abbreviated translation of the sakhi “Saidpur da Katlam” and functions as the prelude to my further discussion on the rhetoric of conversion that is presented in Chapter Five. My final chapter will revisit my larger argument and present some concluding thoughts and avenues for further investigation. The janamsakhi is a rich text that warrants a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of the cultural complexity of the eighteenth century. Moreover, the janamsakhi’s uncontested ubiquity within the history of the Sikh Tradition raises significant questions about its larger social function and thereby demands further attention.
Chapter Two

Art in An Age of Persecution: Contexts for Eighteenth Century

Conversions to the Sikh Tradition

Simultaneously, as we believe that the semiotic analysis is impotent without a deep awareness of the historical context which surrounds each representation (and vice versa), every text, every story of conversion, will be constantly read in the framework of its particular historical milieu.

-Massimo Leone Religious Conversion and Identity

Hagiographies are reverential accounts depicting the lives of prominent religious figures written from the insular perspective of a specific religious tradition. Such accounts were circulating commonly during the eighteenth century throughout the South Asian subcontinent. These hagiographies generally develop around the devotional padas, or hymns, of prominent sants. Generally, the sant’s padas were written in a vernacular and were, thus, readily understood by larger audiences than religious writings in Sanskrit. The hagiographical tradition developed out of the greater accessibility that vernacular padas provided, and in an environment of heavy competition for devotees the authors of hagiography aimed at the hearts of their audiences through exegetical elocution. Despite the padas use of vernaculars their nature as literary expressions arising out of personal religious experience, or bhakti, made them polyvalent and equivocal, therefore they remained somewhat inaccessible. Exegetical authors were able to provide hagiographical scaffoldings for their works given the tendency of sants to use personalized signatures to conclude many of their hymns. For example, Baba Nanak’s name

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became a generalized epithet used by the Sikh gurus when writing sabads. Quite naturally the authors of sant hagiographies, in their efforts to provide a degree of clarity and contextualization for a sant’s hymns, developed their exegeses around historically fictionalized accounts of events from that sant’s life.

This chapter explores the historical usage of a common leitmotif in South Asian hagiographic literature by religious advocates within the Sikh Tradition, which depicts meetings or discourses between kings and sants. Methodological approaches to hagiography are as varied as the lives that they seek to chronicle. Michael Goodich’s, “A Note on Sainthood in the Hagiographical Prologue” is an example of one scholar’s approach to hagiography. Goodich notes that prologues to hagiographical texts function as indexes of not only the circumstances surrounding the work’s composition but also reveal its philosophical stance. I would like to suggest that a similar motif could be found in South Asian hagiography. However rather than occurring in the hagiographical prologue, the historical and philosophical contingencies are found in the text’s colophon. In keeping with this, examining the latter portions of the janamsakhi facilitates an engaging and productive point of departure. This chapter discusses the relationships between statements made in the colophons of janamsakhis in conjunction with normative eighteenth century historical metanarratives in the Sikh Tradition.

My analysis of the B40’s colophon is meant to act as a departure point for discussing the sakhi “Saidpur da Katlam” as one that advocates conversion to the Sikh faith. In the process of this analysis I hope to problematize some of the dichotomous categories that are commonly used to describe this time in Sikh history, such as Khalsa/nonKhalsa or sehajdhari/kesdharii. The

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footnote2: "Changing trends in medieval hagiography are most clearly expressed in the prologue or preface to the saint’s life, which affords the author an opportunity to explain the circumstances surrounding the work’s composition, outline the main themes or chapters, cite his chief sources, or state his philosophical stance." Michael Goodich, "A Note on Sainthood in the Hagiographical Prologue," History and Theory 20, no. 2 (1981), 168-174.

“myth of the Khalsa” and the “myth of Nanak” are generally understood as mutually exclusive spheres of experience. The janamsakhi was meant to support and facilitate intratraditional movements between these two spheres. Its author focuses on the power of belief in Guru Nanak thereby lessening religious ambivalence towards Khalsa Sikhs. I also suggest that the meeting between these two governing ideologies within the Sikh Tradition was not one of opposition or ideological conflict, but was interspersed with moments of fraternity and sympathetic understanding.

Through an analysis of human time, we can comment on how orders of text, action, and life are interrelated and subject to endless reverberation. “ਨਾਨਕ ਸੂਚਨਾ” narrates the meeting and subsequent discourse between Guru Baba Nanak and Mir Babar. By isolating this story as an exemplar I will argue that during the eighteenth century such narratives formed a space of negotiation between Sikh believers who advocate (advocate-believers) the faith and those who were either in the formative stages of their belief or were believers in a different tradition. During this period, the Mughal governors of Panjab actively persecuted Sikhs. In this context the sakhi of Baba Nanak and Mir Babar’s meeting evinces a rhetorical stance through which advocate-believers actively sought to attain meaningful shifts of belief and identity in a seeker. Or less vigorously, they sought to initiate a desire to question one’s current beliefs and identity. This sakhi indicates that conversion promulgates first by a realization of belief in Guru Nanak. By implication, this newfound belief also entails an embracing of the guru/sisya institutional paradigm. More importantly it signaled belief in Gurbani—the sabad, or sacred hymns of the Sikh gurus. By construing the notion of a Sikh believer in such general terms, the B40’s authorial voice attempts to confront the resistance of nonbelievers to the message of Guru

5 For a brief synopsis of his reasoning see “Introduction” in Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 3*.
The conversion depicted in “ਸਾਲਾਮ ਦੀ ਯਾਤਰਾ” illustrates a Muslim’s re-inscription to his faith. At the same time by describing Babar’s performance of salām and positioning Guru Nanak as one who enables such re-inscriptions of faith, the author suggests a capitulation to Baba Nanak’s bani with the hope of attaining a transtraditional conversion. Through this act the author signals his phenomenological intent and desire for the reader’s emulation of Babar’s submission.

II. Considering the Eighteenth Century Metanarrative:

Given the events that were occurring during the eighteenth century in Panjab, what kinds of meanings were current in the ਸਾਲਾਮ ਦੀ ਯਾਤਰਾ sakhi? Moreover, how does the text itself elucidate its historical context? Does the text tacitly underscore a prescribed manner in which readers should efficaciously approach it? We can begin to discuss these questions by looking at folio 230 (ਮ):

ਸਾਲਾਮ ਦੀ ਯਾਤਰਾ || ਮੀਹਟ ੧੭੯੦॥ ਭਿੱਤੀ ਸੂਤੀ ਅਦਵ ਮਹਤਵ॥

The janamsakhi is complete. The year is sammat 1790, dated Friday, on the third day of the light half of [the lunar month] Bhadon.

This is a unique feature that is not present in many of the other extant janamsakhis. The provision of a dated colophon provides scholars with a unique departure point for understanding the historical circumstances surrounding the B40 at the time of its production.

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6 The question of the B40’s authorship will be addressed later in third chapter of this thesis.
7 This line corresponds to folio 230a in McLeod’s translated edition of the B40.
8 There are twelve lunar months, each month ends on puranmashi or on the day of a full moon. There are two fortnights in a lunar month, which are divided by masya or the new moon. The fortnight corresponding to the waning moon is called badi while the light fortnight corresponding to a waxing moon is called sudi. Oberoi, The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition, pp. 182-183. In footnote 47 McLeod gives the corresponding date of Friday, 31 August, 1733 in the Christian calendar. McLeod, ed., The B40 Janam-Sakhi, p. 19.
The eighteenth century marked the waning of the Mughal Empire. However, Sikh historiography remembers this period as one where the Khalsa was severely persecuted. Despite this persecution history witnessed the clandestine rise of the Khalsa as a galvanized expression of social solidarity. The persecution occurred under the rule of two Mughal Nawabs: Abdus Samad Khan and his successor/son Zakariya Khan, more commonly known as Khan Bahadur. Their combined governorship lasted for thirty-two years from 1713 to 1745 AD. Abdus Samad Khan succeeded as Nawab based on his previous record of exploits. Reputed as a strongman, Abdus Samad Khan was given the task of quelling upstart rebel forces that were disturbing the peace in the northern regions of the Mughal Raj. A native of Samarqand, Abdus Samad Khan was the son of a Naqshbandi holy man named Abdullah Ahrar. In 1690, following the death of his father, Abdus was compelled to immigrate to India in search of employment. He distinguished himself in battle on 14th March 1712, where the battle’s tenor was set by his strategic moves and exemplary patience on the part of Abdus Samad Khan.

The result of this battle decided the succession to the Mughal throne in favor of Jahan Khan. However, his reign was cut short by his imprisonment and subsequent execution on 13th February 1713 by the order of Muhammad Farruksheer who became Shah in January 1713. One month later, Farruksheer appointed Abdus Sammad Khan as Nawab of Panjab, he also concurrently appointed Abdus’s son Zakariya as Nawab of Kashmir to deal with insurgents in that region. Zakariya was ordered to come to the aid of his father, if required, upon being given due notice. Farruksheer is characterized as timid, weak, and destitute of morals; however, he apparently had enough tact and intuition to realize that the situation in the North was spiraling downward rapidly and needed to be remedied. 9 Shah Muhammad Farruksheer desired that a

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man of extraordinary military skill would become Nawab of Panjab; this is one of the main reasons Abdus Samad Khan was chosen.

While Abdus Sammad Khan would have to deal in turn with several disparate rebel groups including the Kharals, the Bhattis, and the Dogras, his most immediate concern was crushing Banda Singh Bahadur’s rebellion. Tradition has it that Banda had been administered amrit by the hand of Guru Gobind Singh himself and had subsequently been instructed to exact revenge against the Mughal governor of Panjab for the deaths of the guru’s two youngest sons who upon refusing to adopt Islam were penned alive within the foundations of a building. Banda’s reputed charisma fuelled his success with gaining converts to the Khalsa creed; however, his revolt was more expansive than simply being limited to the Sikhs. Banda had returned to the Panjab where he gathered an army that was composed not exclusively of Khalsa Sikhs but also had conscripts from varying ‘Hindu’ and Muslim denominations. All those who had grievances with the Mughal government were encouraged to join. Banda’s nondenominational egalitarianism was likely a large component in the success of his rebellion. After numerous victories in battle Banda declared himself as ruler of the area by having coins struck in Guru Nanak’s name—a direct affront to the legitimacy of Mughal rule. In 1715, at the battle of Gurdas Nangal, Banda Singh Bahadur’s armies were defeated and Banda was captured. He was at the head of a procession of prisoners from Lahore to Delhi on 19th June 1716 when he along with twenty-six companions were executed.

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10 Guru Gobind’s two youngest sons, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh, were being entombed alive into the foundations of a newly constructed building. Eventually the foundations collapsed on the Gurus sons, killing them instantly.

11 During the Mughal period one of the manners to authenticate one’s authority to rule was by striking coins in the name of the caliph. Eventually coins came to be struck in the name of the present ruler. Thus, by striking coins in the name of Guru Nanak, Banda attempted to establish the gurus’s suzerainty. For a discussion on coinage in the Mughal period see John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, ed. Gordon Johnson, vol. I. 5, *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 71-74.

Following Banda’s execution, Farruksheer released a *farman* stating that any Sikh refusing to embrace Islam was to be put to the sword and the Emperor gave a monetary reward for the head of every Sikh. To ensure this campaign’s success (and avoid mistaken identities) people were instructed to sheer their hair, which a baptized member of the Khalsa would be reluctant to perform such an act. Mughal sources affirm the extent of the campaign’s success by stating that the name of a Sikh no longer existed anywhere in the Mughal dominion. Obviously, the statement was overly optimistic; Khalsa Sikhs survived by fleeing to the Sivalik Hills or in the jungles of Panjab. Eventually, the repression lessened and individuals thought to have been participants in the revolt were targeted specifically.\(^{13}\)

It was during this period of lessened vigilance that the Khalsa consolidated its factions under the leadership of Bhai Mani Singh; who moved the center of Sikh activity to the Majha district of Panjab. Bhai Mani Singh was a steadfast advocate of the Sikh gurus’ dharma and was influential in spreading the creed of the Khalsa; he administered amrit to many Sikhs, including the future Nawab, Kapur Singh, along with his brother and father. The unity and growth of the Khalsa were a source of apparent distress to the current and recently appointed Nawab Zakariya Khan; he quickly adopted a strict policy against the Khalsa and organized hunting parties to force them out of their jungle and hill retreats. However, this policy would prove to be a miscalculation. The wholesale arrests, tortures and beheadings carried out in the *nakhas* outside the Delhi gate in Lahore, coupled with the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, infuriated the Khalsa and brought them out of hiding. After suffering a serious defeat at Bhilowal in 1733, Zakariya suggested that the Delhi government adopt a conciliatory policy regarding the Khalsa. In recognition of the suggestion, a decision was made to grant a *jagir* to a prominent Sikh and the title of Nawab given to the Khalsa’s leader. The government allowed the Sikhs to gather to bath

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in the *sarовар* at Amritsar, where a decision was taken to elect a reluctant Kapur Singh as Nawab.\(^{14}\)

Contrary to the expectations of the Mughal rulers, this attempt of quelling the Khalsa's aspirations to depose the defunct Mughal Raj by legitimating its existence was unsuccessful. The Khalsa continued to grow and was divided into two *dals*; the first was composed of elders and was fittingly named *buddha dal*; the second was of the more recent and younger recruits, it was entitled *taruna dal*.\(^{15}\) While the former began to function at the Sikh pilgrimage centers and was therefore more sedentary, the latter group functioned in times of emergency as a mounted and mobile army. As it was never Zakiriya's intent to allow the Khalsa to gain in strength, he reverted to his earlier punitive stance and before the harvest of 1735 an army was sent to occupy Kapur Singh's jagir, driving the Buddha Dal towards Malwa.\(^{16}\) From this point onward Mughal authority was defunct, and the Khalsa's strength and aspirations became a significant political threat to the rulers. The Khalsa's history from this point until the rise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is characterized by infighting, political intrigues, and battles between rival factions to the throne of a now seriously weakened empire.

III. **Departing from Khalsa/NonKhalsa Disparity:**

Despite the years of warring and persecution, Guru Nanak’s panth also experienced large increases in the number of adherents—a point evinced by the continued need to persecute the recalcitrant Singhis. While the above narrative appears to describe a period of confusion and disorder, the fact that the B40 manuscript was prepared seems to speak contrary to the uniformity of such a historical reality. For such endeavors as the writing and illustrating of a work such as the janamsakhi, there must have been geographic islands that remained isolated

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from the maelstrom of war. The sangat that produced this manuscript must have been one such island. The manuscript’s completion date does coincide with the occurrence of a periodic truce between the Nawab’s forces and those of the Khalsa. However in order to be completed during this period of truce, the initiation of the undertaking must have occurred earlier during the period when a more severe policy against the Khalsa was in effect. If the situation were as tumultuous as popular memory understands it to have been, then the amount of labor and effort required to create an illustrated manuscript such as the B40 would hardly have been attempted. The creation of the manuscript during such a period of persecution belies the totality with which the campaign was enacted. It appears that the first half of the eighteenth century may not have been universally a time of tribulation for all Sikh sangats. Secondly, the continued waves of persecution would have demanded that the Khalsa be able to recuperate some of its losses by gaining new adherents through conversion.

How can one reconcile the disparity between the popular heroic narratives of eighteenth century Sikh history with aesthetic artifacts such as the B40? Where the former seems to demand an atmosphere of confusion and turbulence, the latter requires one of stability and peace. The existence of these two seemingly disparate trajectories in Sikh history bears resonance with the postulated dichotomy between Khalsa and nonKhalsa Sikhs. In fact, postulating such a dichotomy or rupture between these two factions, which are also conveniently labeled as Khalsa Panth and Nanak Panth is one method of dealing with this issue. Terms distinguishing between two groups of Sikhs were already in use during the eighteenth century and can be found in the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama.\(^\text{17}\) Therefore, I do not raise the issue of the existence of this dichotomy merely to contest it, but more importantly in order to make the point that the very appearance or existence of the apparent disparities between the goals of these two groups may have facilitated

the existence of islands of peace. These in turn would have been integral for recruitment of new adherents. What I seek to suggest is that the existence of this dichotomy has been somewhat overdetermined in heavily materialistic historical accounts.

There are several points which can be made that when considered together seem to refute the notion that the categories of Khalsa Panth and Nanak Panth were disparate and hermetically sealed entities. While the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama upholds the usage of terms such as Sehajdhari and Kesdhari, which were meant to delineate between two modes of praxis in Sikh sangats, it also minimalizes the concreteness of these categories.

\[\text{ज्वूँ ज्ञान से मिष्टि तिरुँ ब्रम्मणी भवत्व मैत्रणविनी}...^{18}\]

\textit{Whosoever is a Sikh of the Guru, Kesdharii or Sehajdhari...}

\[\text{ज्वूँ ज्ञान से मिष्टि ब्रम्म से तिरुँ ब्रम्म भवति मैत्रणविनी भवति}||\text{ब्रम्म स्वरूप भवति मैत्रणविनी भवति तिरुँ ब्रम्म स्वरूप भवति}...^{19}\]

\textit{A Sikh of the Guru should not lose the spirit of Sikhi by exhibiting pride in the maintenance of his/her hair. The hair is outward sign of Sikhi. Witness the Guru Granth Sahib.}

In the first line, we see the author making the distinction between Sehajdhari and Kesdhari; however, both are identified as the Guru’s Sikhs. In the second segment, the author warns Khalsa Sikhs who have unshorn hair not to think of themselves as better than others who have not kept their hair. Being proud of one’s hair is associated with losing the spirit of being a Sikh.

It would appear that even in Rahitnamas, which were prescriptive codes for Khalsa Sikhs, there were injunctions minimizing the distinction between these two segments of the panth.

One could argue that the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama reflects only the Khalsa’s ideology and therefore its statements about nonKhalsa Sikhs are representative of only that portion of the Sikh panth who were Khalsa initiates. We can also turn to the B40 manuscript itself for further

\(^{18}\) Ibid, p.57.

\(^{19}\) Ibid, p. 77.
evidence suggesting that the lines between Khalsa and non-Khalsa were fuzzier than commonly depicted. In the janamsakhi’s colophon, but also dispersed throughout the individual sakhis, the author repeatedly exhorts praise upon the guru. However, the term guru is used in at least two senses; one being that of महागुरु, the one true guru and the second sense is used in reference to the person of Nanak the words “Baba Nanak” or “Guru Baba Nanak” are employed. In this manner the difference between the supreme guru and the personal guru is being flagged for the audience. For Sikhs the human gurus are intimately close to the true guru, but there is a distinction. This distinction lies in that the notion of महागुरु functioned as an abstraction to describe the divine, whereas the human guru functioned as an epitome of a spiritual enlightened person. The difference being that an abstraction is unattainable, whereas the paradigmatic spiritual lives of the Sikh gurus were attainable and were worthy of emulation.

Such an understanding considers individuals as able to emulate and achieve the same divine state of being as was experienced by the Sikh gurus is very much in line with Udasi interpretations of the Sikh Tradition. As it has been shown that the difference between Udasi, sehajdhari, and Nanak panthi were negligible if they even existed. It is worthwhile to consider the category as a whole. The main differences between the Kesdhari and Sehajdhari Sikhs included sartorial markings and their understandings of salvation; it was precisely these differences that may have enabled the Sehajdhari Sikhs to continue with their activities while receiving little overt attention from the authorities. While Udasis have commonly been described as a heterodox branch of the Sikh Tradition, the fact that they were among the most heavily patronized segments among the Sehajdhari Sikhs seems to suggest that they were perhaps not as marginalized as contemporary scholarship insists. Some, however, have described the Udasis as an integral part of the Khalsa. It was the Udasi Sikhs that continued to develop an intellectual and theological tradition. While members of the Khalsa were in hiding or
alternately engaged in battle, these Sikhs lived reclusive lives where they learned and interpreted the scriptures. Thus they were engaged in popularizing the Sikh faith and this would have brought new adherents into the fold of the faith; putatively some of these may later have also taken amrit, thereby becoming members of the Khalsa.

As a non-Khalsa sangat, the producers of the B40 may or may not have appropriated the Khalsa’s physical appearance. Accordingly, they would have avoided persecution and been free to continue their worship, thereby further developing their faith, in relative peace and stability. At the same time the B40’s ideology is considered orthodox. As such, the sangat would have believed that upon Guru Gobind Singh’s death installing the Adi Granth as the final Sikh Guru terminated the Guru lineage. Since the B40 has been recognized as part of the orthodox line of exegetical interpretations of the Sikh Tradition, it is reasonable to assume those who were associated with its production also believed in the lineage of Gurus. As anthropologist Simon Coleman’s discussion entitled “Continuous Conversion? The Rhetoric, Practice, and Rhetorical Practice of Charismatic Protestant Conversion” indicates, while many Sikhs chose not to partake in the ritual of Khande ki Pāhul it does not necessitate a disassociation with the philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh and the institution of the Khalsa. However, the ability of nonKhalsa Sikhs to function routinely and go about unnoticed by the Mughal governors allowed for the creation of such manuscripts as the B40 and enabled them to act as advocates for the religion. Through encripting the Khalsa’s ideology in a number of signs, the recitation of the B40 could have facilitated the functioning of the sangat as a revivalist space.

22 Hans, A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature, p. 178.
23 As already discussed in the first chapter of my discussion, Coleman’s discussion discusses how ritualized calls for conversion function less to promulgate in actual conversion but facilitate a revivalist feeling in congregations where such calls occur. For more see Coleman, "Continuous Conversion? The Rhetoric, Practice, and Rhetorical Practice of Charismatic Protestant Conversion."
If the sangat consisted strictly of non-Khalsa Sikhs one would expect a reflection of their ideological stance within the B40 janamsakhi and indeed, throughout the janamsakhi there is little that could be construed as a direct reference to Khalsa ideals. However, upon examining the colophon of this janamsakhi we find two statements that bear concordance with Khalsa ideologies. The initial concordance is found in the statement:

And the sangat is the court of the true guru, it is the voice of the true guru, and only in you is the true guru manifest. As you had desired, so has it transpired.\(^{24}\)

The importance of this statement in regards to a concordance with the ideals of the Khalsa and by implication the ideals of Guru Gobind Singh is the notion of the true guru, the abstraction, being present and manifest in the institution and actions of the sangat. The gurus had believed that the divine form resided within their body and by extrapolation in the human form. They preached that man was only subject to the will of the divine. Furthermore, the sangat functioned as an institutional space within which people could interact in order to understand this will of the divine. The installation of the sangat as a royal court complete with its own administration, and in opposition to the Mughal court, was an ideology that began with the fifth guru, Guru Hargovind ji.

The full fruition of this ideology occurred with the creation of the Khalsa. Its creation and the canonization of the Adi Granth were meant to absolve the requirement of a physical guru. It is for this reason that Guru Gobind Singh is remembered by the refrain, “चरण चरण गुरु से भक्ति प्रसिद्ध भाग्य भाग्य न ढेला” – “Praise Gobind Singh, at once guru and disciple.” In creating the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh (the man), was privileging the sangat’s voice as an expression of the true

\(^{24}\) An alternate translation of the first portion of the sentence is: "And the sangat is the entrance (way) to the true guru"
The above section from the colophon is a reflection of this ideology of empowering the sangat. It states, “As you had desired, so it has occurred.” Given that this statement occurs following that segment where the janamsakhi’s date of completion is given, we can contextualize the sangat’s ‘desire’ as having been the creation of the manuscript and in compliance to this ‘desire’ the janamsakhi was created. This concordance is strengthened also by the fact that prior to its writing the notion of sangat and Khalsa were conflated; Gobind Singh stated that where there were five Khalsa members there too was the guru present.

The second concordance between ‘Khalsa’ and ‘nonKhalsa’ ideologies in this janamsakhi’s colophon is the repeated use of ‘waheguru’, praise to the guru, when invoking the formless one:

\[\text{Say waheguru. Verily, as one psyche, say waheguru. Verily, with your spirit engaged, in this manner say waheguru. Such that your voice carries to sachkhand, say waheguru. Whosoever says waheguru, to him will be given the flower of darsan.}\]

In keeping with the notion that the colophon acted as a space where the author could reveal his philosophical and ideological stance it would seem that by repeatedly imploring the sangat to repeat the phrase, “waheguru”, the author is covertly deploying a signifier of the Khalsa to reveal his ideological congruity what could be considered ‘Khalsa ideology’; the salutation ‘\text{srirup sri kirti}\’ was commonly used when Khalsa members greeted one another and is still common currency today.25 The refrain expresses an equation that encapsulates the divine inspiration for the Khalsa’s worldly aspirations of deposing the unjust rulers of Punjab. Translated, it states: “As the Khalsa is [an emanation] of waheguru, so will victory belong to

25 In reference to administration of pahul, Chaupa Singh states that upon completion of the ritual the person who administered pahul should do the following: \text{srirup sri kirti}\’. McLeod, The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama, p. 68.
waheguru.” It should be noted during the eighteenth century a host of different refrains were in circulation and would have employed in Sikh sangats; terms such as satnam or satgurprasad, dhanguru, dhannirankar, kartarkartar, satsriakaal when commonly used to recall the divine point of worship. Therefore, the use of waheguru is significant as it is the artifact of an explicit choice to employ a Khalsa signifier over the earlier refrains. It expresses an ideological and philosophical stance congruent with the Khalsa’s.

Furthermore, I wish to bring notice to the fact that the author repeats the waheguru refrain a total of five times in the above segment. The number five has a unique sacrality in the culture of Panjab; who’s very name “Five Rivers” reflects this cultural idiosyncrasy. However, the author’s quintuplet repetition of waheguru cannot be seen simply as a peculiarity of Panjabi culture; the number five had also taken on signification that was unique to the Khalsa. At the Baisakhi festival in 1699, when Guru Gobind administered amrit to five Sikhs, the Khalsa was created. These first five men became Singhs and were coined पाँच पित्राएं, the Guru’s Five Beloved. Part of the Khalsa’s rahit, or religious code, was to appropriate five bodily symbols – the five K’s. There are five seats of worldly authority, or takhats, for the Khalsa. The obligatory morning prayer contained five segments: japji, jāp sāhib, tavprasād savaye, chaupe sāhib, and anand sāhib. Thus, by repeating the refrain five times the author appears to be again employing a signifier with considerable links to the Khalsa to communicate his ideological stance.

The final point in this segment that I wish to make is in relation to the final line of the above portion of the colophon, “Whosoever says waheguru, to him will be given the flower of darsan.” Upon interrogation, this statement reveals the relationship between what I believe is a significant triangulation that was conjointly imbricated in the process of conversion: the advocate, the Khalsa, and the sangat such that it was in the space that their interaction created that enabled movement towards the faith of the Sikh gurus. What is the flower of darsan? How can it be had? In response to this query, I believe recalling Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh’s
discussion of darsan in the sakhi relating Guru Nanak's encounter with the divine in the Beas River useful:

*The hearing of the command, the holding of the cup, and savoring of the nectar of Its Name—these together, constitute the fullness of his vision of the Infinite One. Drinking the ambrosia signifies the sapiential quality of knowledge received from the Divine...He does not see any being at all and yet acquires insight into the very ground of Being...Guru Nanak has darsana (from the root drs—literally, 'to see') of Reality. This 'seeing' provides him with a spontaneous recognition of absolute knowledge. "Seeing" and "knowing" in the intrinsic sense are one, as darsana in Sanskrit denotes both seeing and philosophic speculation.*

Firstly, it needs to be stated that Guru Nanak's encounter with the divine is an instance of conversion; Guru Nanak sees nothing and yet experiences the divine; he drinks the ambrosia of the divine and as a result has experience of the divine. Darsan is the juxtaposition between sight and knowledge, experience and philosophy, the physical and the abstract; all of which the term implies. The flower of darsan is that ambrosial nectar with which Guru Nanak realizes its name. How can this flower be had? It can be had by reciting waheguru. Who recites waheguru? The advocate implies that a member of the sangat does so, one who desires to become a Khalsa Sikh, one that appropriates rallying cry of, ‘ਰਾਹੁਗੁਰੂ ਨੀ ਕਾ ਧਰਮ ਰਾਹੁਗੁਰੂ ਨੀ ਲੀ ਦੀਗਵਾ’ The taking of amrit becomes a reenactment of the moment of Guru Nanak's darsan of the divine name. By becoming a Khalsa Sikh, one converts to the faith of Guru Nanak in the hope of also having darsan.

**Conclusion:**

Many janamsakhi traditions have been described as having certain predilections and tendencies: the Bala tradition is thought to focus more on the miraculous acts done by Guru

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Nanak, the Miharban is said to have a heavy preoccupation with exegesis. One of the major tendencies of the B40 is the depth in which the author narrates the act of becoming a disciple of Guru Nanak, the importance of this becoming and also its benefits –both in terms of description and in terms of repetition. It is this tendency that initially signifies the usage of this janamsakhi as a rhetorical piece to help initiate the process of conversion.

In this chapter I began by describing the continued waves of persecution of Khalsa Sikhs by the authorities and the continued increase in the numbers of Khalsa initiates that makes up so much of what is known about the historical contexts in which the B40 manuscript was created I hoped to iterate the pressing need that would have existed for new disciples. Then by recognizing the dichotomy between Khalsa and nonKhalsa in both the popular historical narrative, as well as its presence in a contemporary Khalsa rahitnama, I sought to signal the overdeterminization of ‘Khalsa’/‘nonKhalsa’ dichotomy. Contrary to the staunch disparity of such a dichotomy, I believe that the subtle maintenance of this dichotomy in combination with expressions of ideological concordances facilitated conversion. Through a process, rather than an epiphany, a seeker would join Nanak’s panth and perhaps from there her/his commitment to the Sikh Tradition would lead to participation in Khande ki Pāhul. They would then ascribe to the tenets of the Khalsa.
Chapter Three

Warning – Do Not Read Alone: Problems of Reading and Interpretive Drift

By importing a Judeo-Christian and Islamic understanding of texts and scriptures into a discussion of Indian religions, we could end up establishing identities that do not exist beyond the scholar's imagination.

- Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*

In the introductory chapter, I mentioned a statement by the Sikh scholar Sarbinderjit Sagar that a predispositioned reader of the janamsakhi realizes its religious message almost immediately.1 Similar statements are made in discussions on reception and communication, where individuals acculturated within particular worldviews are thought to readily grasp, at the very least, the most essential modes of expression within that culture's literature. In the discussion that follows, I will have recourse to some of the more salient features of the B40 manuscript and the larger janamsakhi tradition. My analysis will be facilitated by the discussions of Paul Ricoeur and Umberto Eco regarding the reception of narratives in combination with Murray J. Leaf's “modified information theory.”

How, then, does one read a text historically? Given the spirit of interpretive drift, which of the many variant readings should one privilege when historically contextualizing a text? In relation to my own subjectivity, as an historian, I begin with the consideration that any act of agency on the part of readers is subsequent to their comprehension of extant 'popular' meanings of each lexical item is of particular importance. Any singular text has a multiplicity of cultural meanings. The number of meanings available for a historian covers a broad spectrum ranging from those most easily accessible to those readings that are complete aberrations of the original

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text's spirit. Depending on the historical situation, certain readings within this spectrum would have been more readily accessed than others. In light of these assumptions, this chapter engages the B40’s text with the hope of enabling an awareness of cultural significations or markers that reveal important historical information regarding the author's situation and concerns. Such an exercise can assist one in reconstructing the reception of meanings implicit in the sakhi “मैथुं रा वर्जयम” during the eighteenth century. This chapter thus forms an integral facet in allowing me to attempt to read the sakhi “मैथुं रा वर्जयम” with sa-hridaya to comment on its context.

II. **Communication and Reception:**

Meaning occurs through a generative process in which the role of a reader in conjunction with the role of the author engages the narrative universe so as to arrive at a meaning. While not wishing to impinge upon the active role of readers as interpreters of aesthetic texts, I wish to emphasize—as has Eco—the limits of such interpretations and in doing so privilege the voice of the text and its function in facilitating the creation of meaning. This voice is an emanation of the author and as such while we can never hope to discuss the author as manifest or present in the text, we are able to consider an implied author—one that is created in the mind of the reader. Eco conflates the mathematical sense of symbol with Goethe’s definition of allegory in order to reverse Goethe’s apposition of allegory and symbol. Where Goethe states that an allegory transforms experience into a concept and subsequently that concept in transformed into an image in such a manner that the concept is always defined and expressible by the image, Eco gives the sense of symbol as a signifier correlated to its meaning by a precise convention, or law. Once the signifier has acquired a given value, it cannot represent other values with the same context. Symbols are allegories. In regards to exegesis, there existed a profound need for a theory of allegorical senses, or an allegorical code, that would prevent the slippage into the modern
situation of interpretive theories of deconstruction. Constraining interpretation was integral to
the development of medieval European hermeneutic traditions where legitimated sacrosanct
interpreters of scripture sought to tame the symbolic nature of holy books by identifying the
symbolic mode with the allegorical one.\(^3\) Through the medium of the janamsakhi, Guru Nanak’s
life came to be transformed into a concept of the ideal devotee—the ideal manner in which to
live. An iconography became associated with the person of Guru Nanak and this iconography
functioned allegorically as a rigid framework within which to present the exegesis of his hymns.

Texts exist within contexts, which function to reduce the polysemy of symbols. In order
to delimit the “exaggerated fecundity of symbols” one should attempt to discern the rules that
allow for a contextual disambiguation.\(^4\) The task of the historian must, in part, be reconstructing
the circumstance within which reading occurred and in doing so delineate between more
acceptable readings and certain vagaries of interpretation. Texts are imbued with the power of
refiguration. It is through the very effort of thinking at work in every act of narrative
configuration that the reader refigures her/his temporal experience. Ricoeur understands this
refiguration as the final and last moment of mimesis that finds its expression in what he calls
“the order of life”, which is the last order in his mimetic cascade; the initial two orders being that
of the narrative and of action, respectively. According to him, the philosophical status of a
refiguration can be determined through the creative resources by which narrative activity
responds and corresponds to “aporetics of temporality.”\(^5\) It is this very power to refigure the
temporal experience of its reader that enables us to discuss conversion through an examination of
narratives contained within the janamsakhi. The recurrent theme of capitulation by numerous
spiritual, aristocratic, and lay people acts as a rejoinder expressing the spiritual dominance of
Guru Nanak. The repeated submissions function as signs that vie for a mimetic response through

\(^3\) Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indianapolis University Press, 1990), pp. 5-11.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 21.
\(^5\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 3*, p. 3.
the phenomenological act of reading. By referring to Ricoeur’s mimetic cascade, I believe that the janamsakhi’s “order of narrative” was meant to lead to an “order of life.” More precisely it was a rejoinder meant to comment on the prowess of the spiritual order, the order of Guru Nanak, and by doing so it sought to promulgate acts of conversion.

The janamsakhi has itself been described most simply as an interpretation based upon a particular understanding of a given array of circumstances. Guru Nanak’s life became a symbol or allegory of an ideal way to live in this world; the fecundity of interpretations is related to the variety of responses to the changing needs of the community that created the allegory. While there may exist many disparate and variant versions, the play is constrained by what is normative in a particular tradition. The communicative message of the text is created conjointly by the effort of the author and the reader. But how can one understand the readings of an eighteenth century sangat to which this work was originally being addressed? Does the text of the B40 janamsakhi, itself, tell us of the manner in which it was to be read? How does this enable a historical discussion of the texts meaning in eighteenth century Panjab? There seems to be agreement, at least on the part of these three theorists, that the meaning of a text is created through the engagement of the author and reader, sender and receiver. Therefore if we are to comment on the meaning of the sakhi “मैंपूर छिं बुमलम,” I believe it is necessary to make some comments upon those two integral aspects that function in creating the text’s meaning—the sender and receiver.

Janamsakhi narratives are edificacious and didactic. The aesthetic quality of the B40 janamsakhi indicates that it was meant for consumption and instruction in various ways that included reading, hearing, and viewing of the text. Upon an initial reading of a sakhi, it appears deceptively simple. This initial illusion of simplicity coupled with an engaging plot facilitated

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7 The B40 is not the only extant manuscript of a janamsakhi which contains illustrations. Many of these other manuscript illustrations, however, circulated separately from the text.
individual recollection of the story thereby encouraging more intimate engagements with the narrative. However, if one critically engages with the text this simplicity disintegrates rapidly. A large degree of equivocality and polysemy are revealed; however, these tendencies are constrained in a sakhi by symbols that are driven by their cultural-historical context. That said, we could purposefully analyze the janamsakhi by underscoring issues of reception alongside the intentions of the text. The author utilized these symbols in manner that reduced the number of possible variant readings. In recognizing this tendency, one should first excavate the rules that allow contextual disambiguation of text’s exaggerated symbolic fecundity.

Murray Leaf’s modified information theory is an adaptated mathematical theory describing information as a property of transmission from a “transmitter” via an inherently “noisy” channel to a receiver and finally to its destination. The communication being described by Weaver was only meant to be one way; Leaf’s modifications make the theory applicable to social situations of two-way communication. This social theory of communication is instrumental in understanding the range of meanings that various communicae can produce. Three concepts are operative in Leaf’s information theory; a message source, defined as a paradigm, or a picture of a key element of reality that results in an expected practical effect in the receiver; information, defined as the measure of one’s freedom of when constructing the message; this constructed message is called a communication, which is cyclical such that the initial message source that specific communications can also be seen as the ultimate reference point. The degree of randomness or freedom one has in constructing the message is reflected as a measure of entropy, such that low entropy message sources would have few options as to a message and therefore provide low level of information. When applied to interactions between

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8 Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, p. 21.
author and reader in generating a text's meaning, the theory reflects the author's agency in constructing a message source such that the number of possible messages a reader takes away is limited to a preconfigured set of options.

III. Sending and Receiving Texts: Intentions of the Text

Texts express the ability of refiguration; they are a communicative media that melds the world of an implied author with that of the listener or reader. As texts are meant to affect a mimesis in the order of life the text must be governed by rules of persuasion in that the orator had specific aims to achieve through the text's rhetoric. This strategy of persuasion entails the inclusion of an implied author. \(^\text{11}\) Considering the B40 janamsakhi in isolation as a rhetorical piece of exegesis, then the text's level of entropy should be sufficiently low so as to allow for as few variant readings as possible. This is not to say there is only one applicable reading of the entire janamsakhi tradition; the tropes were open to interpretive drift and have been employed varyingly. However, I believe that each rendering of the janamsakhi can be understood as being created out of certain needs of the panth that pertained to the period of its creation. Therefore each text would have been directed to a specific audience and as such it would have been a low entropy piece.

The ideological presence of the author in the B40's colophon, which I discussed in the previous chapter, attests to the necessity of ensuring the text's entropy was low. However, beyond being solely reliant upon this "rhetoric of fiction" the B40 exhibits three direct references to the circumstances surrounding its creation. These references also reveal important information concerning the author(s) that reverberates on the issue concerning entropy. The first reference is found on folio 84 (४५) where the copyist had left a blank space:

\(^{11}\) Ricoeur, Time and Narrative: Volume 3, p. 160.
Bhai Sangu, son of a dasvandhi and servant of the sangat, had this volume written. It was written by Daya, a Khatri, who is subject to [the will] of the sangat. The illustrations are drawn by Alam Chand Rāj, servant of the sangat.

The note is not written by the original scribe rather a different person added it later. One of the first things to notice in these lines is that there are three people who are directly associated with the B40’s creation. Each individual is associated with the sangat in a hierarchical manner such that it is the sangat, which is dominant, and the individual agent that is subservient to the sangat’s will. Given that each individual is painstakingly assigned this subservient role, we should not occlude the role of the sangat in creating the text. Although we can say nothing of when this addition is made, it does appear to have been included so as to give greater information concerning the document’s creators than was provided originally in the colophon.

Apart from their position in the sangat, Daya and Ālam Chand are also distinguished according to their position in the varna system’s social hierarchy. Daya is a Khatri – or merchant/warrior. This is the same caste that all ten of the Sikh gurus were from. Most members of this caste were educated in Sanskrit and were also familiar with the Gurmukhi script, which was used as a type of merchant shorthand. Thus, Daya’s learning may have enabled him to act as scribe in the creation of the B40. Ālamchand’s designation signals his belonging to the artisan caste. The Rāj subcaste contributed a modest number of converts to the Rāmgarhia Sikhs; Ālamchand Rāj may well have been a recent convert who chose to apply his artistic skills to illustrate the B40 as an expression of his devotion to the new cause. This small subsection has made a distinctive contribution to Sikh history as artists and decorators of gurdwaras.

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12 Singh, ed., Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, f. 84 (r).  
Bhai Sangu is the third person mentioned in the above passage. Through my remarks I wish to address a misconception regarding Bhai Sangu: that he was the patron of the B40. Apart from the honorific *bhai*, the text does not privilege Bhai Sangu in any manner. In fact he, along with Alamchand and Daya, are all accorded a subservient relation to the sangat. Patronage for the B40 can be sourced to the institution of the sangat and to the geographically particular sangat wherein these individuals functioned to some capacity. This point is poignantly stated in the passage, “And the sangat is the court of the true guru, it [the sangat] is the voice of the true guru, and only in the sangat is the true guru manifest. As you [the sangat] had desired, so has it transpired.” These lines follow directly after the B40’s date of completion. They express in uncategorical terms the desire of the sangat to have a janamsakhi issued. It also signifies that the sangat was the agentive force in this commission; it was the patron. During their lifetimes, the Sikh gurus were imbued with all final decision making powers. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, this was a period where the Khalsa’s ideology became predominant. It was during this same period that people like Bhai Mani Singh enshrined concepts such as the *Guru Granth Guru Panth*, which states that the spirit of the guru resides in both the Adi Granth and the community of Sikh believers. Since it was the guru manifest, it was able to corporately decide upon the B40’s commissioning.

The first clue to Bhai Sangu Mal’s role in the authoring of the B40 is the honorific title Bhai affixed to his name. In his book *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Sikh historian, Harjot Oberoi discusses some of the popular notions associated with the title Bhai. He identifies three types of holy men—*Bhais, Sants*, and *Babas*—which were ranked closely to members of the guru lineage in the sacred hierarchy of the Sikh community that developed after the death of the last physical guru. This hierarchy distinguished between guru lineage and holy men based on the manner in which holiness was accrued; the former inherits holiness whereas the latter attains

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14 Ibid, p. 20.
holiness through actions partaken during their lifetime. Discussing the role that the life stories of Bhais, Sants, and Babas played in instructing the peasantry of Panjab to the tenets of Sikhism Oberoi states that the peasant may not have undergone Sikh initiation, but learnt of the Sikh Tradition through the actions of these holy men that are enshrined in their biographies. To qualify for the title Bhai one generally would have to demonstrate the capacity to interpret the Adi Granth, communicate the wisdom of the gurus it enshrined and be publicly recognized for their piety. Oberoi’s statements have an obvious correlation with the biographies of Guru Nanak. The janamsakhi has often been discussed as being inspired by the hymns of the Adi Granth; in this vein sakhis are interpretations of those hymns and therefore are exegetical.

Bhai Sangu Mal may have earned his title by using his understanding of the Adi Granth to talk through the janamsakhi. Another janamsakhi known as Bhai Manna Singh Vāli also reveals some information about the auspices of its creation.

देत गिना लेज़ा डीढ़ उन सभी मुख़ल ब्रैडी देखी है जुमा विखरा वर वे रिम द टीवर
विस्मय रहु वर वर देखे ने गिनी हं मुट वे मलवा हुइम्ह"

Then the Sikhs said, “Truly, he has memorized the sakhī; if you would be so kind as to prepare an exegesis on it, with elaborations, so that it will create faith for the Sikhs who hear it.

Here again we see the pivotal influence of the sangat’s will in the creation of janamsakhi manuscripts. Furthermore, there is an echo of relation to the B40 in that here too we find two people directly involved with the writing of the text; one person has learned the sakhis and committed them to memory and a second person will function as scribe, inking the manuscript and elaborating upon it through exegesis. As far as the B40 is concerned we already know that Daya is the scribe, this would then leave the role of a gnostic for Bhai Sangu; a role befitting his title. Bhai Sangu Mal’s role was likely also related to his personal example of and inspiration for

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religiosity. His knowledge of individual sakhis about Guru Nanak and his use of them in the sangat as instruction would have facilitated conversion.

In line with this supposition of Bhai Sangu Mal as an advocate-believer of the person and praxis associated with belief in Guru Nanak, the other two references to the author(s) provide clues to the relationship between Daya Rām Abrol and Bhai Sangu Mal. These references inform the hypothesis of Bhai Sangu as a converter of people to Guru Nanak’s panth and at least in regard to Daya his aspiration to follow the Bhai’s example. If Bhai Sangu’s knowledge of the janamsakhi can be understood as the voice for the individual sakhis, I believe that the exegetical passages and expansions spring from the voice of Daya Rām Abrol. The first piece of evidence we can prevent for this assertion is a direct reference regarding the scribe’s religiosity.

The writer [of the janamsakhi] is a faqir, a bondsman of dereliction, an attendant of the sangat; this [janamsakhi] is a result of the submission and study of Daya Ram Abrol.

Daya Rām informs the sangat that he understands himself to be a faqir and in this context the usage of faqir must be connotated as a faqir of Guru Nanak. His life was one of dereliction. Notably he states that the janamsakhi is a result of his submission and study. His use of the phrase, "ਪ੍ਰੇਠ ਭਾਰਤ ਲੱਗਤ" indicates his sitting at the feet of a master and learning from that master. Symbolically we can understand the master to have been Guru Nanak himself, but the manifestation of the Guru and his sabads would have come through Bhai Sangu and his knowledge of the sakhis. In this manner the tradition understanding of the Guru/Sisya relationship is being subverted in order to create an allegorical code signifying submission or conversion.

The relationship between Bhai Sangu Mai and Daya is again referred to later in the same section of the B40.

Those who have experienced such wickedness as is mine, that friend of ours will release it. Recite [study] alongside Bhai Sangu Mal, others who have grasped hold of his hand have at peace. Rejoice! Nanak’s servant has found your refuge, place your hands in Daya’s.

This is a direct call by Daya to the sangat to follow in his steps and learn the meaning of the janamsakhi, just as he had learned it from Bhai Sangu Mal. It is Bhai Sangu Mal who has erased the memory of Daya’s wickedness through the stories and teachings of Guru Nanak. Daya was converted to the order of Nanak through the phenomenological act of reading these texts. Daya too has become an advocate of the faith. Having appropriated this identity, he then tells the sangat to place their hands in his—the implication being that he can lead them towards what he has attained. Directly preceding this is a passage that describes the affects of becoming a Sikh of Guru Nanak.

[Those who recite waheguru] are the respected guru’s beloveds; they are united with the respected guru. They believe in the respected guru. They are the blessed of the respected guru, their faces are of the guru, and they are members of the guru’s court. They work for the benefit of others. They find happiness in the true sabad. Their forehead is radiant. Those who are knowledgeable in the sabad, the guru is in the heart and mind of those who have [thus] seen [experienced] the guru.

This passage shows how the recitation of waheguru and the gursabad impacts those who engage in this praxis. We are told by Daya—the one time sinner—that one attains union with the guru, that happiness is derived from recitations, ones face becomes radiant with the knowledge of

17 Ibid, f. 231 (r).
union, and that one engages in work to benefit others. Daya is recalling his own experience through his studies with Bhai Sangu and imploring members of the sangat to engage in this study as well. He is advocating conversion.

In this passage we again see the refrain "धैर्यम् धर्मम् दर्शनम्" but here it is preceded by the word अमृत, at the side of or with. This preposition then gives the phrase the sense of an imperative for performing an act of study or recitation under the tutelage of a learned person, where as earlier it was preceded by अ giving 'study' or 'recitation' the sense of and the verbs धर्मम् दर्शनम् are perfected. Daya's study, his meditation on the sakhi, is complete. These two references to the study of the janamsakhi gives us an important clue into how the authors attempted to constrain the readings of the text not only by employing literary signs, symbols, and tropes in repetition so that the entropy would be low, but that they also saw the written text as a mechanism to facilitate the learning that occurred through a physical teacher whose very presence would have ensured a lowered textual entropy. The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama, quoting the Granth Sahib, states that if a Sikh of the Guru knows how to write he should prepare copies of the Granth Sahib to present Sikhs as a devotional offering. If conversion were part of the aims of such manuscripts as the B40 then such supervision would have helped direct putative converts in to the fold.

18 मूलनाम सिख सिखाई देखिए जो देखी दिखाई मात्र नी सिखाई जिन्होंने मूलनाम सिख देखिए। सिख सिखाई देखिए। उनके साथ सुधा मात्र नी। उनके सिख देखिए। McLeod, The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama, p. 65.
IV. Receiving Texts: Sangat as Reader

In his book, *The Role of the Reader*, Umberto Eco attempts to analyze, "the semiotic phenomenon of the cooperative role of the addressee in interpreting messages".\(^{19}\) To facilitate his enquiry he uses the categories of sender, addressee, and context. Eco tells us that it is impossible to speak of the anaphoric role of expression –that is the references a phrase takes from preceding words or phrases –without invoking the addressee at the least as an abstract and constitutive element in process of actualization of a text.\(^{20}\) In light of Eco’s discussion on the reader’s role in producing a text, I will be viewing the janamsakhi narrative संगत as an open text.\(^{21}\) Eco’s understanding of reading ‘open texts’ bears resonance with Leaf’s discussion on entropy and information; Eco views such texts as constraining the reader’s interpretative abilities in manner which allows the text to be used only as it wants to be used. That is to say readers are not free to simply apply any meaning to this narrative.

Eco presupposes that authors are cognizant of the active principal of interpretation that the reader plays in the generative process of creating a meaningful text. Through his/her recognition of this fact the author then deploys an ensemble of coded expressions dealt with interpretatively by both the author and the reader in the same manner. These coded expressions function at their most effective when each of the reader’s interpretive turns are reechoed by other subsequent coded expressions that are meant to buttress the actualization of a particular desired meaning. Such a process is an attempt by the author attempt to strictly define and anticipate her/his reader by the creation of a lexical and syntactical organization apparent in his/her text.

We have discussed Daya’s mention of the need to read and/or study the janamsakhi. Other janamsakhi authors have referred to pedagogical usages of sakhis by making note of the necessity of close readings and the experiential benefits of such readings. Piar Singh mentions a

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20 Ibid, p. 4.
21 Ibid, p. 4-10.
manuscript of ‘गोडमट मूर ममुङ्कु मणिएकरु मी बरी’ written by Hariji in 1699 A.D. In Hariji’s exegetical statements concerning the spiritual praxis of Meharbanji we find, “मूर गोडमट मणिएकरु मी बरी ममुङ्कु मणिएकरु मी बरी” Hariji is here addressing the audience informing them of the necessity and benefit of reading the religious debates enshrined in the janamsakhi, “And read the Gosti and alongside [this reading] become reformed.” The conclusion to be made is the same, close readings of sakhis will lead to beneficial spiritual change. There are also echoes of this to be found in the Bhai Mani Singh vāli janamsakhi. In a discussion regarding the impetus for the creation of Bhai Gurdas’ vār we are told:

Then it was requested of Bhai Gurdas that he create one vār so that the guru’s Sikhs could hear it and read it.

The sakhis and gostis were points of entry into the faith, they were meant to be studied and mold belief. It is this role in molding belief where conversion occurs and it is via the meanings implicit in the narrative that the conditions of conversion are tailored.

The authors of a janamsakhi would have been well learned member of the panth who had devoted a considerable amount of time to studying the hymns of the Sikh gurus; they were also well versed in folkloric storytelling –that is to say they readily employed a variety of literary conventions and stories from a number of disparate spiritual traditions. The authors also appear to be well aware of the fact that these texts were edifying, they were meant for reading and study. It was through this act that faith would begin to bloom in the reader’s heart. As Eco has stated such recognition, combined with the importance of their task, would have functioned to ensure that the text was encoded so as to be an ‘open text.’

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23 Singh, Janamsakhi Parampara, p. xi.
One example of such encoding is the usage of the term faqir. This is a term that recurs in a number of different stories and contexts; it is used in the "Guru Nanak Dev Ji" sakhi and we see Daya make use of it in reference to himself in the colophon; calling himself a faqir. Daya’s reference to himself as a faqir may suggest that he too was familiar with such the wonderings characteristic of a mendicant. However, he may have found refuge and shelter with the sangat that had this manuscript prepared. He says in the colophon:

ललो सम भवति भवति वभू गच्छ रहे॥

Nanak’s servant has found your refuge, place your hands in Daya’s.

In the sakhi Guru Nanak is in the company of faqirs –whom he has recently made his followers when they stop to rest and happen to come across some Pathans who are celebrating a wedding. The faqirs are in poor shape but none of the Pathans stop to enquire as to the state of the faqirs, nor do they make any attempt to offer provision food for the faqirs. It should be recalled here that the caring for holy men was considered an integral part of the social duty of a householder in South Asian societies and this duty was emphasized in the Sikh Tradition as well. Neglecting the faqirs was a violation and Guru Nanak brought down punishment in the form of Babar.

Accepting that the aim of this story was to gain new adherents, it would appear that a major audience would have been Muslims. Muslim characters are integral to the story and the choice of ‘Mughal’ and ‘Pathan’ is also relevant considering that these were two political groups that battled the Khalsa for control of Panjab during the eighteenth century. The author depicts Babar as considering Guru Nanak a faqir, he also colors the Pathan converts to Guru Nanak’s panth as faqirs. At a point in the story the prose becomes heavily exegetical and is addressed

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directly at the audience as a point of clarification. Daya felt it necessary to address two questions: Who is a faqir? What is the relationship between a faqir and the divine?

A [punitive] calamity was enacted on the Pathans by the mahanpurkh. Khudā believes in the faqirs, the faqirs believe in Khudā. Khudā listens to the requests of faqirs. Whosoever passes through the heart of faqirs, Khudā listens to that. But who are those faqirs who have never requested anything? He is [a man] of few requests. In patience and friendship he resides. He understands Khudā. In compassion and love he resides. But such a faqir is [made] of something else. Yet even these householders are wanting. Whosoever within the four varnas takes on the lifestyle of a faqir, be they Hindu or musalman, be they whatever, perform seva for him. Do not contemplate his karma. It [seva] is the activity of a man who are affluent. Whatever else is requisite [in regards to a faqir], it is obligatory to perform seva. If nothing else, do not speak abruptly with a faqir, it is better to remain quiet.

The term faqir is of Arabic origin and originally meant ‘a poor person’; it was diametrically opposed to amir or ‘rich person’. However, with the rise to predominance of the Sufi tradition the term faqir took on a meaning similar to sanyasi in South Asian societies: a religious mendicant, a person engaged in worship of the divine that was outside the pale of society. However, during the eighteenth century in Panjab, it appears to have been generalized beyond the limits of just Sufi mystics to describe practitioners of bhakti and it was being applied to members of the Khalsa who were fleeing persecution. Indeed, after having his caravan train looted upon his return from the sacking of Delhi, Nadir Shah questioned Zakariya Khan in Lahore about who the looters were. Zakariya is said to have replied, “They are a group of faqir who visit their Guru’s tank twice a year and bathing in it disappear.” Daya attempts to encode the term faqir such that a faqir it can appeal to Muslim members of the audience or converts with

Muslim backgrounds as well as signal that a true faqir is a Sikh of Guru Nanak. His statements regarding the relationship between faqirs and the divine, as well as the obligations of householders to care for faqirs without considering who they are or their actions has particular pertinence in an eighteenth century context of persecution. People would have been reluctant to assist Khalsa members for fear of reprisal from the authorities.

The Chaupa Singh Rahitnama states quite plainly that Turks and Pathans were not to be trusted and a taboo seems to have existed concerning social dealings with people of Islamic backgrounds. Musalman converts may have been given harsher treatment and been distrusted. Daya states that, “Whosoever within the four varnas takes on the lifestyle of a faqir, be they Hindu or Musalman, be they whatever, perform seva for him.” Recalling that in the story faqir was being used in the same sense the Zakariya used it in reference to Sikhs, Daya is requesting that converts—whether Hindu or Musalman be respected and treated well. By couching his statements in the use of Islamic terminology Daya enables the occurrence of the discourse without gaining undesired attention from the authorities. He also encodes the sakhi in a manner that would be most readily understood by the target audience.

**Conclusion:**

How does “The Massacre of Saidpur” janamsakhi narrative help understand the concept of conversion in the early Sikh Tradition? In this chapter I have shown how the colophon of a janamsakhi can be read for important signs that signify the ideological presuppositions of its author. It has also shown that the colophon can also provide important information regarding how the text was meant to be received by audiences. I have explained that through narrative mechanisms the janamsakhi attempts to signal conversion as both process and epiphany; as both a conscious voluntary phenomenon and as an unconscious involuntary phenomenon.

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Contextualized in this manner conversion connotes a typology where the social and culture movement of an individual signifies intensification. This intensification is understood as a revitalized commitment to a faith with which the individual has had previous affiliations—a shift from nominal to central.\textsuperscript{27} In a tangential, but related vein, the story also seeks to impress upon the audience a sense of the obligation that they have towards converts because of the inherent risks involved in such interpretative shifts. In order to facilitate intensification, the janamsakhi’s author first develops a rhetoric whose aim is to transcend resistances individuals may have toward conversion. In the next two chapters I will attempt to flesh out this argument through the discussion of a particular sakhi, “हनुमान न बलवन्.” I will begin in the next chapter by presenting my translated and truncated version of the sakhi and the subsequent chapter will discuss in detail the relationship between the narrative and a rhetoric of conversion that the B40’s author attempts to develop.

\textsuperscript{27} This means that for a person to be considered a convert by their peers there must be a shift from a nominal commitment to a central commitment with the shared beliefs of the group. See: Rambo, p. 13.
Chapter Four

The Massacre of Saidpur

Before further discussing the conceptualization of conversion and its relation to the janamsakhi in the Sikh panth’s early historical period, I will proceed here in providing a stylized and paraphrased account of the janamsakhi narrative, “Saidpur Da Katlam.” As my rendering of the narrative is merely meant as an outline of the events it recounts I have elected to present the story without including the original insertions of Guru Nanak’s bani. The complete story as found in Piar Singh’s edited can be found in the appendix.

It is said that from a young age Baba Nanak was always a little different from the village’s other children. While the other children preoccupied themselves with common games and the mischief making that was expected of children their ages, the Baba instead chose solitude so as to engage his fascination and preoccupation with questions regarding the divine. Baba Nanak’s march toward adulthood was continually punctuated by the display of exceptional qualities meant to signal his spiritual greatness in the eyes of those who witnessed his feats. He was guru and founder of a panth. Much of his life was characterized by travels, and meetings with spiritual interlocutors were common. The occasioning of a massacre at Saidpur promulgated a meeting between Baba Nanak and Babar, the first Mughal Emperor. The sakhi describes this meeting.

1 This story in the original Gurmukhi, as found in the Piar Singh’s edited B40 can be found in Appendix I.
Nanak and Mardana, Baba Nanak’s faithful rabab player, were traveling in the company of some faqirs\(^2\) through the city of Saidpur. They happened to stop at Saroe, on the city’s outskirts. Pausing there to rest, they saw a Pathan wedding party passing their way. The Pathans were preoccupied with dancing and revelry; they paid no heed to the company of faqirs that was nearby. The faqirs were hungry and as a result were weakened and in a generally poor state. Seeing his companions in such a state, Baba Nanak rose and set out with his followers asking for food from some of Saroe’s townspeople. Much to his consternation Nanak and his companions were refused at every door they approached. A Raag in Tilang arose out of the frustration that the Baba felt as a result of their mistreatment. Overhearing the Baba’s raag, a Brahman grabbed an offering of grains and approached Baba Nanak asking that the Baba recant his utterance. To this Baba replied that it was already too late, his utterance was taking the shape of an action as they spoke and therefore could not recant the words. Baba advised the Brahman to gather his family and leave the town forthwith to a retreat some distance away from the settlement, for a great and tragic massacre was about to occur. The Brahman heeded Nanak’s advice; his life was spared. Nanak also left for a more isolated place.

The next morning came, and by God’s will Mir Babar fell upon the area. Death traveled alongside Babar through the village and its surrounding areas. Both Hindus and Musalmans were indiscriminately massacred; houses and businesses were robbed and people made prisoners. It was Baba Nanak’s sabad that had precipitated the slayings. The mahanpurakh’s wrath brought havoc upon the Pathans.

Khudā\(^3\) grants the requests made upon him by faqirs. Just as the faqirs believe in khudā, khudā also believes in them. Whatever thoughts happen to pass through the mind of a faqir, to that thought khudā is always listening. But one might ask who is a rightful faqir? There are

\(^2\) Faqir refers to a poor person and is also an epithet for religious mendicants.
\(^3\) Khudā is an epithet for God.
those faqirs who ask little or nothing for themselves; who live in faith and patience. He who has subdued his soul's five subtle elements, can apprehend danger from a distance, and he who can recognize khudā, he is a rightful faqir. Yet, there is another type of faqir, one who having nothing needs provision. But is there not also want in these householder men? Whoever dons the dress of a faqir, whatsoever type of faqir they are, should be attended upon and his wants fulfilled without consideration of the faqir's actions, or karma. Verily, such are the ablutions of the prosperous; giving to those who want and not speaking ill of those who want—those who are faqirs.

On the third day after the massacre Baba Nanak and Mardana came again to the village. When he set his sight upon the homes of the village and saw the remnants of the massacre, he asked Mardana “What happened here? Mardana replied, “Your words have seen fruition.” Stricken by what he saw, Baba Nanak asked Mardana to play his rabab. A rāg of lament was recited in [the meter of] āsā.

The two of them managed to make their way to Babar’s encampment, where the Pathan prisoners were being transited from Hindustan back to Khurasan. Babar also came up from the rear and now made his entrance in to the encampment. Now in regards to Babar, whatever he was surely he was a Qalandar. By day he acted as a padashah; at night, having placed anklets upon his feet and having lowered his head, he would worship khudā. Then at dawn he would arise and perform namaaz; he then read the thirty sections of the Qur 'ān. Afterwards, he ate bhang.

Upon entering the encampment, Baba Nanak began to sing his sabads and even the prisoners were drawn to him. These sabads gave voice to Baba’s feelings of helplessness regarding the prisoner’s plight. “Mardana,” Baba Nanak said, “play your rabab.” Baba recited a sabad in rāg tilang about the oppressed and the oppressor. Hearing the sabad from a distance, Mir Babar said to his attendees, “Friends, bring this faqir to me.”
Some men came to get Baba Nanak and brought him into the presence of Babar who called out, “Faqir! That hymn which you have just given voice to, recite it once more.” Then again Baba Nanak sang the sabad and upon hearing the sabad again, the doors of understanding were opened for Babar. Babar said, “Friends, this is a virtuous faqir.” He opened his pouch of bhang and placed it in front of Baba saying, “Faqir! Have some bhang.” Baba declined the request saying, “I have partaken of bhang whose intoxicating effects are so powerful that it intoxication will never wear off.” He asked Mardana to play the rabab and Baba recited a sabad in rāg tilang that expounded upon the everlasting effects of his bhang.

Hearing this sabad Mir Babar was very pleased. He said, “Faqir, accompany me.”

Baba replied, “Sir, will you stay three days instead?”

Babar acceded to Nanak’s suggestion. Then upon noticing the prisoners, Babar was stricken with sadness. Baba again asked Mardana to play the rabab; a song of lament was sung in raag asa. Upon completing the sabad Baba Nanak fell into a stupor. As Baba was lying there, Babar came to stand above him. He said, “What has happened to the faqir?” People replied that he had become afflicted due to the suffering of the prisoners; that, having witnessed khudā’s wrath he had come upon this condition.

Babar said, “Friends, let us pay heed to the will of khudā so that this faqir may rise.”

Hearing this Baba sat up and such a light was given off by his having sat up that people felt as though they had witnessed the rising of a thousand suns. Witnessing this wondrous act, Babar made salaam to Baba and requested that Baba Nanak be compassionate. Baba replied, “Mir ji, if it is compassion that you desire then release the prisoners.”

Babar said, “I have one request, if you will allow me then I would ask it?” Baba Nanak bade him speak and Babar said, “Ji, if you will make one utterance on my behalf then I will release the prisoners.” Baba told him to ask what he would. Then Babar said, “I ask only this, that my kingdom last for generations.”
Baba Nanak said, “Your kingdom will be long lived.”

Then Babar clothed and released all of the prisoners. Baba Nanak was overjoyed. Baba Nanak and Babar went their separate ways. The sakhi is complete.
This chapter’s discussion of conversion in the Sikh Tradition is prompted by two recent discussions concerning the Sikh Tradition and conversion in which the conceptualization of conversion is not fully developed or else is described as a substantially meaningless event. I will be reading the narrative “The Massacre of Saidpur,” with sa-hridaya. The sakhi describes a meeting between the first Mughal Badshah Babar (1483-1530) and Baba Nanak (1469-1539), the first Sikh guru. It is an emanation from a community of believers and displays the power Guru Nanak had in conveying the worth of his dharmic message; his ability of bringing people into the fold of dharma. I will begin the chapter by considering the methodological approaches of other writers who have examined conversion outside of the Christian tradition. Then I will move on to discuss the sakhi to flesh out an embedded structure for conversion that bears semblance to the process of conversions that Lewis R. Rambo has discussed in his book, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, where he combines many facets of the interdisciplinary study on conversion into one text.

II. **Conversion: The Process Outside the Christian Fold**

In his book *The Rise of Islam & The Bengal Frontier: 1204-1760*, Richard Eaton describes the historical process through which Muslim rule in Bengal led to the adoption of

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2 Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*.
Islam by the majority of its native population. In this argument Bengal is construed as an economic, cultural, religious, and political frontier. Eaton also recognizes three factors that, through a complex interaction, created an environment that enabled conversion to Islam. These three factors were: firstly, the development of Islamic government; secondly, Islamic religious institutions; thirdly, an economic policy of land reclamation helped facilitate the conversion on many Bengalis to Islam. These three factors combined led to a slow process of acculturation in Bengal, where the province was slowly incorporated into the Mughal Empire. Since the Empire’s leaders were Muslim, Eaton has chosen to call this acculturation Islamization; conversions occurred in conjunction with this process. While the question of explaining this process of Islamization of Bengal as a history of development and institutionalization is well argued, many of the other questions Eaton raises in his introduction remain virtually unexamined: Who converted to Islam? Why? What was the meaning of this conversion? As I believe my primary interest is in the latter two questions posed by Eaton, why convert and what was conversion’s meaning, it appears to me that a conventional historic approach would not be effectual in assessing the humane or personal issues related to the conversion phenomena.

The problem with such an approach is the inability to develop an archive whose veridicality is unquestionable and unproblematic since there is a paucity of personal accounts of conversion from converts, such as are abundant in the Christian tradition. The discourse on conversion in South Asia has often been approached historically through focusing on the materialistic motivations—such as individual political or economic motives, which are external to an emotive human impulse for religious experience. Through their materialistic arguments the concern of such studies tends to center upon coerced assimilation or conversion. As the historian

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attempts to incorporate other possible motivations for conversion it becomes increasingly problematic to maintain the view of conversion as simply a matter of coercive force.

By approaching conversion through a genealogical approach and employing literary criticism, Gauri Vishwanathan proposes that conversion is best approached as fluid motion and should be understood as an act of individual agency. She persuasively argues how conversion, can function in modernity as a site of indiscriminate subversive criticism of those faith traditions from and to which an individual has converted. The psychologist William James, in his classical exegesis on religious experience devoted an entire chapter to understanding the process of conversion. To further a psychological understanding of religious experiences James focus's on personal religion, enshrined in the religious feelings and religious impulses of individuals. Personal religious experiences were accessed by James through readings of religious literature produced by articulate and self-conscious men –namely, autobiographical works or works of piety. Devin Deweese, a historian of Central Asia and Sufism has also recently employed literature to conceptualize Islam's introduction and spread amongst Inner Asian peoples. Deweese echoes Vishwanathan's and James's approach, in his desire to examine how Inner Asian people experienced conversion he chooses to focus on literature. However due a paucity of autobiographical accounts, he is forced to instead attempt to understand the phenomena and its expressions through narratives and stories –namely, a popular story that relates the conversion of the Mongol ruler Ozbek Khan by a Sufi representative of Islam, known as Baba Tükles.

While such approaches to conversion can never replicate real-time experiences of conversion,

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4 See Preface in: Viswanathan, _Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief_.

5 Feelings and impulses are construed as distinctly religious when their method of interpretation is being based on some conception of divinity. Religious experiences are seen as emotive and visceral phenomena —thereby transcending any moral espousals that religion entails. See: James, _The Varieties of Religious Experience_, pp. 12-50.

we can conceivably attempt to tackle the questions of why and begin to plunge the depths for meanings in conversion through similar approaches.

III. Rhetoric and Resistance:

The nature of conversion arises out of a religious matrix that encapsulates the words, ideas, images, methods, and metaphors of a religious tradition. Conversion can take place through ritual that foster experience and action consonant with religious mandates and goals. Alternately, it can occur when rhetoric for the interpretation of life becomes an individual’s frame of reference. Conversion can also be understood to occur when a person’s subjectivity becomes guided by a particular set of religious sensibilities and strictures. However, these movements are opposed by a degree of resistance from individuals and societies.7 This is especially prevalent in sophisticated cultures, such as found in South Asia, that are so coherent, powerful, and adaptable that they are able to affectively position their resistance. Vishwanathan has recognized that forced conversion often triggers mechanisms of resistance even when acculturation occurs quite readily.8 Sikhs in the eighteenth century were still participating in a relatively new religious tradition and would likely have encountered resistance to their faith. The janamsakhi tradition seems to have been appropriated as a vehicle to offset this resistance and embed the Sikh Tradition within the cultural universe of South Asia—a universe that included both Islamic and (many) Hindu methods of religiosity.

Preceding the sakhi “नैतिकता व दरक्षण” is another sakhi that describes Baba Nanak’s visit to a place where Pathans worshipped; it also states that during this visit he made the Pathans his followers. “The Massacre of Saidpur” begins by repeating the last sentence of this earlier sakhi: there was a Pathan wedding where a celebration was underway. As the scenario unfolds, the

7 Rambo, Understanding Religious Conversion, pp. 34-36.
8 Viswanathan, Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief, p. 37.
faqirs accompanying Baba Nanak are said to be in a poor state. However, they are not noticed by the merry-makers nor does anyone inquire about their state. Even when they ask for assistance they are refused. This treatment culminates by inciting Nanak’s anger. He then recites a sabad in anger, through which the arrival of Babar and the ensuing massacre promulgates. The beginning section of this story is meant to deflect resistance from putative converts via first showing Nanak’s ability to correct his follower’s suffering and secondly by expressing conversion as an intensification of belief and praxis –as opposed to a radical movement or departure of belief and praxis. This thematic attempt at weakening the audience’s resistance to Nanak’s message continues through to the meeting between Babar and Baba Nanak.

Resistance to conversion is an inevitable outcome of any active campaign of proselytization. Such resistance can occur at a societal level or an individual level. People generally are not open to changes in faith because they often signify dislocation or disassociations of the individual from his rhetorical system for interpreting life –this system of rhetoric is embedded in the words, ideas, images, symbols and metaphors that comprise any particular faith tradition. A possible conversion event signifies a threat to the person’s sense of place and purpose, which are again enacted through faith traditions. In order to evince conversion the advocate must develop a mechanism to deal with the system of resistance.

Resistance is also informed by a system of availabilities: structural availability, intellectual availability, and religious availability. Structural availability refers to the freedom a person has to shift rhetorical systems. This availability depends upon the social networks within which humans function. They can prevent a conversion event regardless of how much an individual may desire conversion. Thus despite the appeal of the new spiritual system, a person may reject it on the basis of a feeling that the shift is effectually untenable. Intellectual availability signifies the ability of the new framework to be compatible with the individual’s

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previous cognitive framework. The degree of compatibility will affect the desirability of a shift. Religious availability similarly means that the previous system of beliefs and practices must be compatible with the putative system to be adopted.\textsuperscript{10}

It is my assertion that this system of resistance and the network of availabilities work in tandem and exert a series of feedback loops upon one another. To facilitate conversion one must develop a rhetorical mode that effectually increases the degree of availability and decreases the level of resistance encountered from individual converts. The author of the janamsakhi anecdote attempts to circumvent individual resistance and enable the largest degree of availability by contextualizing the bani within an extant spiritual framework—in this case it is Islam. They thereby subversively promote conversion by appropriating extant belief systems while developing a subtlety of difference.

The very depiction of apathy toward the faqir’s hunger expresses the idea of resistance. It is considered one of the duties of individuals living as householders to provide and care for those who have renounced the world. The people’s inability to do so, especially during a celebration of a wedding where there is a general abundance of food, shows the populace’s reluctance to engage with these new devotees. The faqirs suffer as a result of there having donned the rhetorical system of belief and praxis that Nanak expressed. It also shows that the social system of these Pathans cum faqirs has been ruptured by the conversion—a body of their peers no longer recognizes them. The problem of resistance is confronted head-on by associating it with the general problem of suffering.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, pp. 60, 61.
I am aware that the following sabad is a variant from the canonized version found in the Guru Granth Sāhib; however I have chosen to present the sabad as it occurs in the B40 janamsakhi to maintain consistency. The sabad that Nanak recites at this moment deals also with the theme of suffering:

\[
\text{Ve Lālo, act through your religious knowledge as expressed in the master’s bani.}
\]

A wedding party of impiety has come rushing from Kabul, forcefully it demands wealth, Ve Lālo.

All recourses have stood up and hidden themselves away, falsehood roams as the chief. Ve Lālo.

\[
\text{Ve Lālo, the authority of the Qazis and Brahmans has weakened, Shaitaan struts flamboyantly about.}
\]

Musalmans read the sacred books, through their hardship they enact the master, Ve Lālo.

\[
\text{Ve Lālo, the ancient communities and hindvasis – they also apply the divine writings.}
\]

Sing blood’s wedding songs! As Nanak places love’s vermillion in the bride’s parted hair, Ve Lālo.

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Nanak relates the sahib's qualities, in the killing fields he relates the Sahib's mystery.
That which gave rise the colorful world order, watches sitting separately –
alone.

The body's clothes are in tatters, Hindustan spoke out in petition.
The truthful sahib, the true ascetic, the truthful name will act out its mystery.

Coming in seventy-eight and leaving in ninety-seven. More warrior disciples will rise.
Nanak recites truth's bani, at the moment of truth the true ones will listen.

If, as Sagar has argued, we accept that the facts presented in the janamsakhi were regarded as mutable to reflect scriptural and traditional concerns about the divine, then it follows that the sabads too could have been deployed mutably to reflect concerns for gaining adherents. I will be considering this sabad as a conscious rhetorical device in the janamsakhi’s author repertoire that deploys suffering as a prompt directed at the audience to reduce resistance when considering the veridicality of Baba Nanak’s message. I do not seek to disavow a spiritual interpretation; rather, I merely suggest that a spiritual concern was working conjointly with a concern in promulgating the message of Guru Baba Nanak and thereby gaining adherents.

In this vein, the first thing noticed is the prominence and play with the color red. Such imagery expresses the diametric opposition between a set of binaries: suffering and joy, innocence and pessimism, anger and happiness. The first instance of an allusion to the color red is Nanak’s becoming angered and wrathful because of the treatment of his faqirs by the local

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13 Sagar, "An Analytical Study of janamsakhi Genre," p.125
While not explicitly saying that Baba Nanak became red in the face, their is an allusion to the reddening of the face that occurs when a person is angry when we consider the prose conjunctively with the bani. Therefore in the sabad that Guru Baba Nanak recites, one interpretation of his refrain दे लले, ve lālo, is in reference to the anger which Nanak experiences due to the suffering of his faqirs and also the anger that the audience should experience.

Concomitantly, Nanak’s vocative refrain, दे लले, can be interpreted as “Oh children!” Such a potentially pejorative usage could be taken to express a hierarchical relationship between guru and sisya, where Nanak as Guru or as an elder is trying to persuade or communicate with someone who is younger or less knowledgeable than he is. The imagery employed however is again that of the color red, लले, which is a common way to refer to one’s child. It acts as a signifier for health, happiness, and prosperity. A healthy child is generally thought of as having a reddish-rosy complexion. The reference to happiness is the reddening of the face that occurs from profuse laughter. Innocence is furthermore notated as well in relation to the shyness that a child feels when they are around new and strange people or happenings – often blushing is common in such instances. These three elements of childhood can be expressed to their utmost in an environment that is one of prosperity. Nanak is being deployed as a harbinger of prosperity to increase the allure of his message for the listeners.

Another prominent use of this imagery is reference both within the sabad and within the larger narrative structure to a wedding. The occasion of a wedding occurs in a preamble to the Saidpur story, it is called विवाह वाटा है. The wedding is occurring and they are joyously celebrating the occasion. This aspect of the story is significant enough that it receives separate attention and is then repeated in the बैलवाटा वाटा वाटा story. The celebrator’s refusal to provide
food for Baba Nanak’s faqirs initiates the arrival of Babar. It is a result of this action on the part of the town’s people that causes the massacre to ensue. The color red figures prominently in the sartorial marking of participants in weddings. The theme of wedding has echoes in Nanak’s sabad; दुष्कर्म – impiety, avarice, sin – is personified as the groom who has come along with a party of men to forcefully take home his new bride. A further reference to wedding in regards to the prominence of the color red is this line: यहाँ आये मानिस साधीचति लरुण तुं का ज्ञेत धारणित दे सखे। Nanak is telling the people to sing wedding songs of blood while he places a vermillion paste into the bride’s parted hair – to signify union between bride and groom. The prominence of red in both these instances is employed to juxtapose a happy occasion with an ensuing paradoxical suffering and loss; this occurs structurally within Nanak’s sabad and within the larger framework of the story.

Surjit Hans has stated that the color red was often used to depict a relation between guru and devotee, where the devotee wears red clothing and paraphernalia in order to signify his servitude.\(^\text{14}\) This is also reflected in the dress of bride and groom; the bride wears red to mark the asymmetrical difference in status between herself and her husband. Baba Nanak’s use of red in reference to a wedding convolutes joyous occasions with distressful events, the purpose being to reduce the distinction between suffering and joy. The attainment of such an understanding is shown to arise out of interaction with the guru and his bani. This privileging of Nanak and his bani is meant to promote consideration of the bani, which may lead to a shift in understanding. Thus resistance is decreased and the intellectual availability increased.

Placed between the references employing red imagery in the context of a wedding is this line: लक्षण घड़िया ली गल घड़ी अभद्र दिखे नैवल के सखे। मुहल्लने ख़ाजे देवेश वरदम भरो मल्लिया धुमरि दे सखे। Nanak here deploys the motif of loss

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less opaquely, saying that the Qazis and Brahmans have been ineffectual and Satan roams freely and openly. Qazis and Brahmans are considered to personify सच्च जान, which have hidden themselves away in the face of falseness. The loss of the religious elite is juxtaposed with the continuing spiritual pursuits of common people, both Hindu and Musalman, who persevere despite the difficulties present. Nanak expresses the innocence and persistence of the common people’s religious pursuits in contradistinction to the pessimism and duplicity of religious elites in the face of hardship. By encouraging religious practice, in a general sense, the advocate-believer reduces religious resistance to the thought prevalent in the bani.

Nanak’s role as a foil to the religious elites during periods of spiritual hardship is most poignantly expressed in an allusion to the color red, मरण वे गृहेत रातियाँ अधी भस्मयांत विच अधी ममेल। While standing in the killing fields Nanak is singing the praise of the divine. Death is associated with blood and Nanak by standing alone in the fields of dead is shown as a redeemer. Nanak has replaced the Qazis and Brahmans as a spiritual figurehead, it is Nanak who stands in places of desolation and reveals the mysteries of the divine. Having raised doubt concerning the current status of spiritual vitality and the role of the religious elite in promoting such vitality, the author moves on to position Nanak as the sole replacement. Having reduced resistance and increased availability, conversion become available for consideration.


guru Nanak: The Light of Conversion to the Sikh Tradition

During the initial portions of this anecdote the author’s prose and the embedded gurbani is meant to pose a philosophical question bearing semblance to the question of evil or, perhaps more aptly, the question of suffering often discussed in Judeo-Christian religious philosophy. In the Judeo-Christian contexts this question interrogates one of the characteristics that circumscribe God: the omnibenevolence of the Supreme Personal Being. In the context of the
HtUcf anecdote, there is an allegorical reference to the suffering incurred by Baba Nanak’s followers. Directly preceding the HtUcf anecdote is another parenthetical story called Kirhi Pathanan Di, which considered on singularly doesn’t seem of any significance. However, it is here that the story of conversion and its relation to the question of suffering takes form:

\[\text{Kirhi Pathanan Di}\]^{15}

Then Guru Baba Nanak left there [Patna]. Passing through Dipalpur he arrived at Kanganpur, from Kasur to Tape –through Goinval, Sultanpur, Vairoval, Jalalavad. Nanak passed through a “kirhi” of Pathans and these Pathans were made devotees by baba nanak. Then they passed through Vithande to Saidpur and through Saidpur to Saroe. Here too Pathans came forth to become the baba’s devotees. They stopped at Saroe, where at the house of one pathan a wedding was occurring and the pathans were [celebrating by] dancing. The sakhi is complete. -17-. Another sakhi starts; that which concerns Babar Patisah.

Although no particularities concerning the conversions are elaborated, the expression घठठ भूमीने जीवन, he made the pathans his devotees, shows that the converts were not being conceptualized as having undergone a significant reconstitution of their being. That is, the process alluded to is one within the Afghans own tradition. Becoming a भूमीने, or devotee, references the Islamic Sufi tradition, a tradition with which the Afghans were most familiar. Furthermore, having converted they are henceforth referred to as faqirs and not Sikhs. Faqir is also a term of primarily Islamic origins, referring to one who has thrown off the fetters of this world and forsaken material gains.

\[15 \text{ Kirhi is best translated as a secluded place where religious austerities occur; alternately a prayer voiced in the hope of keeping one vigilant. हृती; घठठे हृती मथ् खलय; मथ् खलय हृती हृती भूम।} \]
This also in consistent with the development of a rhetorical mechanism to signify conversion that uses and deploys the dominant traditions to facilitate change.

The travels of Nanak should not be contextualized as his own spiritual quest because the advocate is construing them as narrations of Guru Nanak spreading his message and gaining adherents to his spiritual insights. Through travel Guru Nanak gained adherents by intensifying the people’s own belief; joining them more vehemently to their own tradition but also to his person and his thought. The latter point in time would enact a lasting process of change in the person’s spiritual life. The purpose of the anecdote is to chart some of Nanak’s movements and by doing so connect these movements to a proselytizing campaign in which Pathans were persuaded to become followers of Guru Nanak. A subtle shift is shown to occur, accepting the veridicality of Baba Nanak’s sabads, and thereby eliciting conversion.

A more explicit iteration of this intensification process occurs when Baba Nanak has a discourse with Babar. Whereas in the first half of the story the village of HUET is the place of suffering—a zone that Nanak, Mardana, and Nanak’s faqirs enter, during the latter half of the story there is a shift from village to Babar’s or imperial encampment, and the people suffering are now those very people who caused Nanak’s faqirs to suffer. The theme of suffering therefore follows through to the meeting between Babar and Baba Nanak; however there is a significant reversal of the suffering’s foci. After precipitating this meeting, the faqirs disappear into the background. Both Nanak and Babar enter into this zone of suffering from outside and the enactment of conversion ensues. Babar is shown to have experienced an interpretative shift in a four-fold process: crisis or striving, opening, fulfillment, and finally submission. The meeting with Nanak compels this process through the concomitant experiences of gurdarshan, gursabad, and awe.
From the very moment of his entrance into the HoTO, Babar is neither understood nor introduced by the author as ruler or Shah. Instead Babar’s spiritual endeavors and strivings are emphasized, “भीत्र घरवाल न घर मु बर्खश घर॥” By understanding Babar as a qalandar, the author distinguishes Babar as a follower of a prescribed spiritual methodology. Mention of his role as Shah receives only terse mention, “During the day he performed his duty as ruler.” Babar’s nightly ritual gets comparatively ample attention:

At night, having tied anklets around his feet, and having lowered his head [in humility] he used to worship Khudā. And, at dawn he rose and performed namāz, read the thirty section of the Qur ’an, and then ate bhang.

Babar’s character is developed to express a deep-seated heterogeneity and discordance, something William James recognized in persons he called ‘twice born’. For such people the world is a double storied mystery; their natural and spiritual lives are bifurcated and they see as falsity implicit in natural good. Their moral and intellectual constitution is incompletely unified and they experience a desire to loose either their spiritual or natural lives to fully participate in one or the other. Babar’s life is split between natural, worldly duties and his yearning for connection with the divine –as expressed by the author’s division between day and night. Furthermore, the components of worship are also divided where at night he is shown performing a type of worship consistent with that of a Sufi, in the morning he partakes in a more orthodox course of worship consisting of namaaz and reading the thirty-two sections of the Qur’an. A shift from orthodox to heterodox occurs with Babar’s intake of *bhang*, an intoxicant that is integral to some South Asian spiritual praxis. Babar is depicted as a person yearning and striving for

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16 Shri Guru Granth Kosh Volume I.
17 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 155-156.
transcendence of union, which can be understood as a type of crisis—an integral component of conversion.\textsuperscript{18}

This yearning is meant to reveal an opening or attentiveness to spiritual endeavors. The resistance to Nanak’s message is low while the availability is high; it is the beginning of a process of change. From this point onward intensification will occur. Immediately upon entering the encampment Nanak sees the miserable plight of the prisoners. His response is to recite sabads, which draws everyone’s attention upon him.\textsuperscript{19} From here the interaction between गुरुजयते and गुरुज्यती begins; the recitation of the sabad and the vision of the guru are inextricably associated to the process of conversion. It is through examining the relatedness of the prose with the narrative—the sabad with the darshan—that we can arrive at more satisfactory conclusions regarding proselytization and conversion.

Upon entering the Mughal encampment Nanak recites this sabad:

\begin{quote}

\begin{center}
\textbf{॥कुंभ निलौत॥}
\end{center}

वर्त देविक भुयणर भावि विन्दुवर इकारिङ॥

_The frightening of the lands from Khurasan to Hindustan was spoken of and seen._

अपूर दे रेरत र सुभि दबि सभ वायि भुगाल जाजिङ॥

_Blame cannot be placed upon you. The Doer, having given birth to the Mughals enabled their rise._

अभी मार्ठि उल्‌स कुलि न ओ ए एक स्रभि थाहिङ॥

_Despite having caused such death, no pain was felt by the Minstrel._

\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Crisis can have numerous forms: religious, political, psychological or cultural. It is often stimulated by extraordinary or mystical events, but can also be understood as a desire for transcendence where a person moves successively through a series of developmental stages in order to mature cognitively, affectively, and morally. See: Rambo, pp. 44-54.

\textsuperscript{19} तत्र तथा स्वमि विच भावि शापिङ॥ ज करत न्याय कर्षिङ॥ कर्षिङड हः त्रधे वेलिङ॥ कर्षिङड दले श्रधेश लयि महतु भास्ति देते दै॥

_\textsuperscript{18} Singh, ed., Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, p. 71._
You are that very origin of all acts. When the strongest of the strong kills, 
then accept it, move forward and have no cause for complaint.

The brave kills the lion. Courage will still flow from the Master. The 
rubies have been spoiled; wealth worth millions, yet that wealth will not 
accompany you [to the grave].

If one becomes greater than the world, then one should perform wonders by 
accepting the underlying meaning of things.

The Master’s vision extends to an ant who gathers grain. The Killer kills, 
the Creator creates, and Nanak expounds the name.

Babar also hear this verse and desires to have Nanak brought before him. Upon arriving Nanak is honored by Babar: ना आएभी अपनि क्षेत्र तथा बना बलि वर्तमान बच्चा। The experience that Babar has upon hearing the sabad and seeing Nanak recite the sabad is described as having his doors opened by Nanak’s performance: उस घटना ते विष्णु धुरिल गरे। The essential word in this sentence is अपनि, this word has several meanings including the ‘tenth-door’ or mind. Such a reference expresses the ability of Nanak’s performance to access and affect, with relative ease, the mind of one who hears the sabad.

James discussed the moment of epiphany as a transient moment of intense happiness, 
whose nature and quality were important not its permanence. Babar, after listening to the sabad, experiences a moment of realization. Nanak states that both the mighty and weak are at

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20 Ibid
21 Nabha, Mahan Kosh., Panjabi Kosh V.1-6.
22 James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 159-236.
the mercy of the divine will; that the divine is beyond experiences of suffering and joy. Those who are successful in this world are responsible to perform wonderful acts and these actions occur by submission to the divine. Thus, we can understand Babar’s realization to mean acceptance of the responsibility he has as ruler to his subjects; the fruition of this realization is related via the provision of proper clothing and release of the prisoners near the end of the anecdote. By recognizing the merit in Nanak’s words, Babar effectually ends his period of crisis and yearning for transcendence. The moment’s epiphany also furthers the conversion process.

This moment is expanded upon in detail in the janamsakhi anecdote. The next portion of their meeting juxtaposes the inabilities of Babar’s previous spiritual praxis to affect any lasting permanent level of transcendence with the power of Nanak’s sabad to affect change. The symbolism and imagery employed here is of ingestion, hunger, and intoxication. Babar is pleased with Nanak and, recognizing him as a faqir, offers him some bhang from a pouch. Nanak declines, saying he has ingested an intoxicant whose effects never wear off. He expands upon this by reciting the following sabad:

```mermaid
//\n//tHcMII
//
//tu
//tR3t
//HUT ft ^fe^u
//u^teu
//
//Fear of you is the Bhang, my atman is its pouch of skin. An intoxicated faqir, I have become freed from all worldly shackles.

//\n//चत्र चमर चमर ची मुह॥ उहृ चन भजाहू तीढ़ लीढ॥

//Perform the act of begging if you have hunger for revelation. Day in and day out beg at your door.

//\n//9॥ उहृ चमर ची बजाहू महरव॥ मै डच महाधु दीधिः अगाधिरि

//By acting according to your revelation I have wanted, begged for, and received fear.
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Saffron is within flowers, the fawn within the deer. All of these are songs of the intoxicated body. Yet it is verily that sandalwood fragranced light of a bhagat that cleanses all.

No one will call a container of ghee polluted. Only such a bhagat is categorized properly. By continuously bathing in the name [essence], they remain happily connected with the divine. Nanak, having begged at your door, has taken on that form.

Nanak implores Babar to rebuke his transient ritual praxis. The permanent intoxicant that is opaquely referenced prior to singing the sabad is fear or awe. One who hungers for transcendence should beg for fulfillment by begging for the realization of this awe. If this is done, Nanak states that even an empty or defiled container becomes brim filled with ghee—clarified butter—absolving it of pollutants. True beauty is internal and is realized through association with a true bhagat. In order to attain true transcendence, one must ingest, internalize, and intoxicate oneself with awe or fear; this is done with the help from a true bhagat—Nanak and his sabad. One who is able to do this successfully is purified. This change from polluted to pure via Nanak and his sabad is an argument for conversion.

By shifting to Nanak’s prescribed praxis, then, one can experience true fulfillment. After hearing the sabad it is said that Babar became extremely happy: ॐ भीत घसूल महसूल धुमधुल वैसा॥

The word धुमधुल has a subtlety in its meaning, it signifies satiation in the context of food. It also is related to a feeling of peace. Babar’s experience of this feeling shows that he has ingested Nanak’s words and has become fulfilled; his yearning has ended. He no longer has need of the bhang.

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23 William James recognized happiness as one of universal expressions and effects of the conversion process. See: Ibid, p. 236.
24 Shri Guru Granth Kosh Volume 2.
This shabad’s imploring of the importance of begging has an important reverberation in the context of this anecdote; it refers back to the massacre that had been brought on by the refusal to oblige the begging faqirs—to heed their requests. Thus the story cycles back to the first act of conversion and the massacre that occurred because of the people’s transgression against the faqirs. The purpose is to subtly invoke a heightened sense or fear in the audience so as to make them aware of the importance and need for conversion. The devastation and deprivation left by the massacre has provided an opportunity for new beginnings; for renewed commitment to spiritual praxis.

The final act in the process of Babar’s conversion is submission. This occurs after witnessing a miracle. When Nanak awakens from his loss of consciousness—an awakening prompted by Babar’s command to supplicate before Khudā—a light brighter than that of thousands of suns combined occurred. This act of supplication expressed by स्वर्णि अल्ला उप नेदर, is a submissive posture and also one of acceptance. This posture of placing one’s hands together in front of the chest can be understood as a Hindu mode of submission. The people in the encampment are thus reintroduced into the narrative—and symbolically represent the audience listening to the anecdote. Babar’s voice is an echo of the author’s who is imploring his audience to accept the greatness of Baba Nanak and in doing so accept his ritual praxis. Babar then performs an act of submission or salaam, which in an Islamic context signifies conversion. Thus the author addresses the congregation, or मंच, and the individual’s in succession compelling them to become the guru’s Sikhs. Both summons for adopting Sikhi are within the vocabularies of separate, distinct, and well established developed traditions. The author attempts to subvert meanings inherent in these other traditions in order to enable the adoption of Nanak’s message. Another technique used is to privileging the salvific prowess of Guru Nanak and by

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25 Deweese gives the Arabic terms ‘aslama’ and ‘dakhala’ meaning submitted and entered respectively as referring to conversion to Islam. See: Deweese, Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition, p. 23b.
doing so create a feeling of awe in the audience. Such a feeling would then lead one to adopt the Sikh faith.

V. 

मैस्पुष र वज्लम: The Sakhi in Other Janamsakhi Manuscripts

In this segment I would like to briefly discuss some other versions of the above discussed sakhi. An examination of the other manuscripts reveals that not all authors of the janamsakhi were interested in the “मैस्पुष र वज्लम” sakhi as rhetoric for conversion. I will begin by discussing the version found in नमामिद दली घर, the critical janamsakhi edition from the Bala tradition. While this edition also describes a meeting between Mir Babar and Baba Nanak, the setting for the meeting is completely different as is the auspices that occasion the meeting. In fact, this version bears greater resemblance with an account of a meeting between another sant, Surdas, and the third Mughal ruler Akbar. Indeed, a question by Babar concerning Guru Nanak’s relationship to Kabir, another prominent sant, roots Guru Nanak firmly within the bhakti tradition. This is a trajectory quite different from the ideology of the Khalsa, which viewed Guru Nanak as a unique figure who was a restore of dharma and a harbringer for another satiyyug that the Khasa itself embodied. This reveals a major ideological difference between the author of the B40 and the Bala’s ‘author.’ As already discussed, the B40 is quite similar to the Purātan janamsakhi tradition and therefore theologically and ideologically it is considered orthodox. However, the Bala tradition is linked to a heterodox sect called the Hindālis. In addition to this ideological difference, the origin of the Bala tradition is chronologically earlier (mid-seventeenth century) than the mid-eighteenth century origin of the B40.

26 Kohli, ed., Janamsakhi Bhai Bala, pp. 279-287.
28 Deol, "Eighteenth Century Khalsa Identity: Discourse, Praxis and Narrative."
hundred year gap coincides with the period that saw the transmogrification of the Sikh panth beginning with Guru Hargobind.

In the Bala tradition’s version of the sakhi, neither the town of Saidpur nor any groups of Pathans are mentioned in the story. Rather, the meeting occurs in Delhi after Babar has invaded and deposed its previous rulers, the Lodi Sultans. The reigning Sultan, Braham Khan Lodi, had imprisoned Nanak and upon hearing of his spiritual prowess Babar orders his release. He is brought to the court, where a cordial discourse on religion between Babar and the Guru occurs. The tone of this discourse is strikingly different than the B40 narrative as there is no mention of Guru Nanak making Babar fearful. Interestingly, Babar tests Guru Nanak by requesting that Nanak perform Salām, or to prostrate himself, before Babar. Guru Nanak respectfully declines and Babar exclaims that the Guru has acted correctly because one should only ever bow before Khudā. Babar also does not perform Salām before Guru Nanak. Finally, in regards to the inclusion of Gurbāni, there is a greater amount in the Bala janamsakhi version than in the B40’s account. Furthermore, some bani accredited to Guru Nanak in the Bala sakhi is not found within the Adi Granth.

Apart from the Bala janamsakhi version of Guru Nanak’s meeting with Babar, most of the other janamsakhis that I had an opportunity to examine are consonant with the B40, although there are some interesting differences that lend credence to the narrative being rhetoric for mimesis of Babar’s conversion. In LDP-194 Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the story is virtually the same except that it is not preceded by the sakhi “विज्ञ धर्मम ची.” Another janamsakhi, Shambu Nāth Vāli Janam Patri, contains a version of the “मैं मृत्यु न च वृक्षम” sakhi also describes the meeting between Babar and Guru Nanak as one which led to Babar’s

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30 Similarly, Akbar also tests the purity of Surdas’s faith. Surdas is successful and is his spiritual prowess is legitimated. This provides credence to the discourse that forms the cusp of the vārtā.

conversion. However the physical act of Babar’s submission is not described as a performance of Salām, it is rather narrated as Babar kissing the feet of Guru Nanak. In this version of the sakhi Babar’s performance of charan amrit, as opposed to the B40’s act of Salām, appears to be directed at a different audience of potential converts. Finally, Janamsakhi Sri Gur Nanak Shah Ki, also reiterates the motif of conversion in its retelling of the sakhi. However, the exegetical segment of the B40, which relates the importance of treating a faqir properly, is distinct in comparison to the other janamsakhis. In returning to the argument concerning the ideological predilections of the janamsakhi’s authors, it appears that the various ideological stances led to varying usages of the narrative enshrined by the larger tradition promulgating in the creation different cultural meanings.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that the janamsakhi anecdote employs a rhetoric aimed at employing extant lexicons to show the ability of Baba Nanak through, and enable a process of change that ultimately lead to submission to Baba Nanak’s mode of praxis. A potential convert is shown to transit through four stages: crisis or striving, opening, fulfillment, and finally submission. Intrinsic to such a programme is the need to reduce resistance and promote availabilities; descriptive incorporation of extant modes of praxis also facilitated this need. Although the term Sikh is not seen in this narrative, Babar is shown performing an act of submission to Baba Nanak. Also the terms Hindu and Muslim are operative as is an understanding of the meanings, modes of praxis and rituals prevalent in these traditions. Fluidity is present in the ability of the author to employ these terms

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33 The end portion of this version of the sakhi has a direct comment on the use of the narrative to bring new adherents in to the fold: रिए तथ्यो में सुन्न हूँ हुसैन! ध्यान दबात मदद ही भराए। तीनो तूफ छीटी जैज हुज्जात! तीनो तूफ छीटी जैज प्रत्यक्षी। तीनो तूफ छीटी जैज ब्रह्माता ही (284) Gurdev Singh, ed., Janamsakhi Sri Gur Nanak Shah Ki (Patiala: Publication Bureau Panjabi University, 1985), pp. 124-130.
and modalities to create meaning in a text that was meant to emotively bind with the audience. Yet, the difference is implicit in the very terms themselves. If there were Muslims and Hindus, the author identifies Nanak as neither—a subtle move towards distinction. Sikhs’ substantive identity is seen in the sakhi’s deployment of Gurbani and the depictions of its effects; early Sikh identity was—much as it still is today—associated with gurbani. Reciting, listening to it, reflecting and incorporating were modes of praxis—one could remain impartially associated with another tradition, but incorporating Nanak’s message marked a significant interpretative shift to signify, at the least, nominal conversion.

While proselytization may currently be constrained to intra-faith attempts at promoting unification with the Guru’s message, the janamsakhi is a remnant of a period where Sikhs actively developed a rhetoric whose aim was to gain new adherents. If universality is meant to express the ability of a message to transcend any specific categorical restraint, then this janamsakhi narrative can be seen as an expression of universalism in the early Sikh Tradition because it is reaching out to communities beyond itself through the vocabulary of those very communities. Within the context of the time early Sikh can be understood as attempting to engage meaningfully with other communities and gain new adherents. A nascent community would necessarily be translocal in its expressions.

There can be little doubt that the janamsakhi was a vehicular expression of gurbani, a method of communicating the depths and richness that could be attained by reflections on Baba Nanak’s words. This was an important forum to enable access to the bani, therefore much as importance of bani was stressed so too was the importance of knowing the sakhis of Nanak’s life. The goal of both was to attain a deeper understanding of what the gurus were communicating, with the hope that salvation could be had via such praxis. But just as the story distinguishes two types of faqirs, ones who have no wants and others that do want, so too did the anecdotes functioned in different ways. One of these was to proselytize. Attempts at
understanding conversion to Sikhism pose the challenge of attempting to understand mechanisms of a nascent tradition, which lacked a tradition of encouraging the expression of first hand religious experiences from new converts. Nevertheless conversions occurred and the panth continued to grow, attempting to understand early attempts of conversion may help elucidate how new panths asserted themselves and successfully combated the hegemonies of well-established and longer-lived traditions.
Chapter Six  Conclusions:

Myopic considerations of religious conversion in the Sikh Tradition have exposed a lacuna emerging out of assumptions that the early Sikh panth had no solidified conceptualizations of identity. Following this, conversion could not have occurred, as it would have meant a substantially meaningless transition. However, such assumptions are operating on a tacit understanding of conversion requiring reified categories of identity as can be found in Judeo-Christian traditions. Conversion is seen in the above as a moment of epiphany or sudden shift, when in actuality it is a process that entails a slow purposeful shift towards a new faith. Truly, no categorical framework can be so rigid as to disallow internal shifts of meaning and thus accommodate a range of individual identities. Yet, situations may arise when the boundaries of one particular representative set are transgressed—the narratives being incongruent with the defining constructs of that framework—a conceptual leap may be required demanding an interpretative shift from one to another categorical set. These two disparate and problematic transitions I refer to respectively as intratraditional conversion and transtraditional conversion.

Conversion enables an ambiguous and unstable relationship with one’s identity, given that is not static and especially during conversion processes identity is in a constant state of flux. Bearing this in mind, the ambiguity of identity in the early Sikh panth likely promoted conversion rather than prohibited its occurrence.

This thesis outlined a conceptualization of religious conversion within the Sikh Tradition through its active representations in the literature known as the janamsakhi. More specifically, by discussing the sakhi “ਹਰੁਬੁਂ ਵਿਚ ਵਲਲੇਸ਼ਵਰ,” I posited how the author narrated an act of conversion by Guru Nanak. In this sakhi, Babar is characterized as a person striving for unequivocal religious experience and by extention he is involved in a praxis that has not
successfully produced results. Guru Nanak's enunciates a curse bringing about the destruction of Saidpur and the imprisonment of the town's women and children. Inevitably, this act, leads to the meeting of Babar and Guru Nanak. Upon hearing a sabad by Guru Nanak, Babar is immediately interested in the power of this faqir. The ensuing discourse between the two leaves Babar stunned. However, the emperor's harsh treatment of the prisoners accompanying him back to Kabul causes Guru Nanak to lose consciousness. Upon Nanak's resuscitation, Babar (and those of his party also present) witnesses a light brighter than a thousand suns. This is the religious experience, or epiphany, for which Babar had been striving. After the discourse with the Guru, Babar becomes convinced of the value of following Guru Nanak's teachings, and consequently, he performs an act of submission acknowledging his devotion. Through this gesture the first Mughal Emperor Babar has converted.

The sakhi was recited when sangats gathered for worship. Its narrative is strategically ambiguous as to whether or not Babar has undergone an intraditional conversion or a transtraditional conversion. This point would have been significant when considering the interfaith composition of the sangat. Such ambiguity would have helped reduce resistance to the spiritual message of Guru Nanak that was being reiterated in the sakhi. Paul Ricoeur's ideas on narrative refuguration are particularly useful; the act of reading and reception often lead to mimesis of the story through the occurrence of a phenomenological moment. The order of narrative becomes an order of action and subsequently, that very act crystallizes into an order of life. The narrative in this capacity has refugured life. Considering the sociopolitical climate of the eighteenth century I argued that the janamsakhi was used to consolidate the panth, which was fraught with factionalism after the last guru's death. Also, by privileging the preemience of Gurbani to enable religious experience, and thereby conversion, this sakhi supported the legitimization of the Guru Granth Sāhib at a moment when the panth was coming to terms with the notion of the text as guru.
Finally, I suggested the importance of the janamsakhi’s colophon as a means to better understand its cultural meanings, as well as the philosophical and ideological predilections of its authors. These segments provide useful insights into the nature of the panth during the time of their creation. I believe that the janamsakhi and other early secondary literature can be analyzed in terms of its cultural meanings. It is my contention that the Sikh panth was attempting to assert itself in an atmosphere of competition and amongst already entrenched religious traditions. One intriguing question that needs further investigation is how the advocates of the Sikh faith were able to do this successfully. As Sahlins has indicated, scholars need to better understand the cultural symbolic modes of the particular worldview they study in order to meaningfully analyze the political, economic, and material aspects of history. Closer readings of the secondary religious literature produced by the early panth, as well as contemporary literature from discordant traditions, may help historians contextualize this poorly understood moment in Sikh history. Such readings may also help to elucidate how and the degree to which religious culture in South Asia underwent its own conversion through analysing the symbolic modes of discourse through which its cultural meaning was created.
Bibliography


APPENDIX:

||विज्ञ पठाना ची||
उस गुन वास्तव तथ्य दृष्टि जिन्मा। शिक्षालु धमान्त विशा से वमृत रिश्ते उबे रिश्ते वेदियोखा सूलक्ष्य देवेदाल सलगाय पदेपर सा चयनी निर्धारित विष्टलिख। पठान भुजी वीमा। दिव दिऩ देखे रिश्ते मैसूर रिश्ते मनो हात निल्लिख। दैवे साता बैठा मध्य रेते वे क्षति हीरापु वा मध्य रेते वैसी। सधी मंहानूत जेटी। ॥१०॥ सधी वे देख चली। व्यक्तु पद्मिनय नल चली। ॥

||मेसूर द ब्लाम॥
कैमंत यथार्थ नल जेटी। दैवे नामित वैठा आते पठान वे क्षति हीरापु वा मध्य रेते वैसी। अज वचन से सात ब्लाम धर्मशास्त्री वीमा। दैवे यथार्थ दिनिंग। निधि यथार्थ बैठा ब्लाम विज्ञ लयी भूपी। आते ब्रह्म वृद्धि अण्ड मीत। ॥ उस यथार्थ दैवे धर्म निष्ठा। ॥ हथराम ते ब्लाम नल है बान जिन्मा। निष्ठा भूमाल पश्चिम। नित्यी हरी दिभे नित्यी हरी भूमाल जिब्रे ना भूमाल। दै यथार्थ यथार्थ ब्लामाल निष्ठा। उस यथार्थ वैटिका व्यतिरिक्ताभ्यास यथार्थ निष्ठा। दिल्लिया दिनच वचन मध्य बीज वर्त निष्ठा। ॥लूपा निष्ठा॥ नैसी मे आदे भगव वे घरी बैठा व्यक्तु विज्ञ देखे ललें।
पप दे मक्के है वचन निष्ठा साती भंडो बदन दे ललें। / सधी पतझु दृढ़ दय बदने वृद्ध दिवे यथार्थ दे ललें। बप्तिका बाहरा वे बाल घरी मध्य दिवे बैठा देखे ललें। भूमाली पद्मि वेदेखा वमृत भति बाहरा पुरानके दे ललें। नाट भूमाला अत तिन्तनिया देख वी वैठे वैष्टि दे ललें। भूमा वे मेधिया वारीभावी रत्नबंध वृद्ध वा भूमा वाल्लि दे ललें। ॥११॥ निष्ठा॥ मनवश�
वे ब्रह्म तथात आदे भमुली बदत भविष भूपी। नित्य दूरस्थी बैठा महामी देखे बैठा वदिक निष्टेल।
वप्तिका बाहरा तुम्ब तुम्ब पेनी निष्टेल। मध्य निष्टेल। मध्य उधान मध्य निष्टेल। बैठा भूमा। आदि आदि नारी मार्गरे देख दी दूरस्थी भविष दे देखा। मध्य दि बाली तला
अथे मध्य मूलोमी। मध्य दि देखा। ॥२॥ ना देखे मध्य बाली वैण। शिखा वादिक कृत्तिक। से देखे
मध्य बाली से रिन ब्लाम बैठा। भूपे वे वेदेखा बदत वाली यथार्थ दूर आदि भविष भूपी। आदितिकमु
भव्यजलह सी देव ने मघट बनाया रा तीजा इंद्र में देवताओं। इन्हें आदिप्रभु मुखभारी तुष्टि दिलेते हैं लक्षमा। रत्न गायत्री पुत्र ई० आदि भिक्षु थे। रेष प्रथम देव सिह देवाये यहूदी आपेक्षे दशन हैं नविक। इशा कुला तर्की। से इशा कुला उपस्थित मात्र बिभाग।

उसे दरबार में रहे हैं मात्र नविक। इसी में रहे हो खर्च िसी में रहे हो खर्च मात्र बिभाग।

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इसी में रहे हो खर्च िसी में रहे हो खर्च मात्र बिभाग।
वेदी भुगत त ओज़ा अंग निवेद न पतल लिखित। भुगत पतल गड़ी सज्जी चौपू भि अङ जयजय। हुज़ेरे सहार ऊज़ी क़ल्ली डंडा नाज़ी। सभी बी चौड़ी सकला पाटे डिना भज्जा। उस निवेद तेज़ित भागु उदारा पाटी ठबरा। डिनरा डिनरा मिल युवा पाटी ठबरा। रम भगतत। निव वे बङ्गे पाटी ली आत्मा निव दिनु छेत निवा। सुझ। अगर वे बङ्गे बङ्गा विम हु आधि मुसाफी। उबारी गुच्च चल्चितों डिनरा नवन लिखिता पाटी। उस में बाद वे बङ्गे बङ्गा सज्जी चौपू बेही। वेदी चौपू छेत्री बैठी चल्चिता। सुभासी भीत बज्जा ती हिली। निवेद निव ते बे धुतम मु झे ओज़ा। उस ओज़ा भिले साफ़ बांध लमब लिस लिखिता। भीत बज्जा नु घा मु वलदव। रित बदु भागजामी बठुरा। राँच बदु धैर्य सामान या बांध मिल उलभु रित बांध बुदापति दी बेही। बठुरा। राँच बदु धैर्य सामान या बांध मिल उलभु। रित बांध बुदापति दी बेही। बठुरा। राँच बदु धैर्य सामान या बांध मिल उलभु। रित बांध बुदापति दी बेही। बठुरा। राँच बदु धैर्य सामान या बांध मिल उलभु। रित बांध बुदापति दी बेही। बठुरा। राँच बदु धैर्य सामान या बांध मिल उलभु। रित बांध बुदापति दी बेही। बठुरा। राँच बदु धैर्य सामान या बांध मिल उलभु। रित बांध बुदापति दी बेही। बठुरा। राँच बदु धैर्य सामान या बांध मिल उलभु। रित बांध बुदापति दी बेही। बठुरा।
हँग भले भें और चैत। मैं देखा और जीवित होंगे। 10. जब तक चमत्कार नहीं हुआ। उसी सिर्फ भाग्य ो हो केंद्र। 11. उसी चमत्कार दिन बढ़ी समय। मैं देखा और जीवित होंगे। 12. जब तक चमत्कार नहीं हुआ। उसी सिर्फ भाग्य ो हो केंद्र। 13. ना देखा सबसे ध्वनि वरिष्ठ। 14. भाग्य चमत्कार घर नहीं हुआ।

बीते हिएं दवीद में जगह चल। 15. भाग्य चमत्कार घर नहीं हुआ। घर बच्चा बच्चा घर नहीं हुआ। घर बच्चा भविष्यवाणी वरिष्ठ रस्ता में रस्ता रस्ता। उसा भाग्य और घर नहीं हुआ।

मिल मिल में भें घरी भागी भागी। मैं देखा और हस्तीनि गाँव दिया पत्रिका।

भविष्य बीता है। हूँ दिन तरंग तरंग दिन वरिष्ठ। 16. बाहें सोचा बीता। भविष्य बच्चा बच्चा मन में।

हर दिन दीवार रहें देखि वच करो घर घर है। घर बविष्य भविष्यवाणी वरिष्ठ रस्ता में रस्ता रस्ता।

भविष्य बच्चा बच्चा मन में। 17. भविष्य बच्चा बच्चा मन में।

हर दिन दीवार रहें देखि वच करो घर घर है।

भविष्य बच्चा बच्चा मन में। 18. भविष्य बच्चा बच्चा मन में।
हरि श्रीम गङ्गापांडा तेलुक। अपनी ही वहीं मृत मुक्त मृत हो रहें। उ गङ्गापांडा मल्हुं तीर्थं। आजिहित्व नी तू निवासरात मैं। उ वथः आजिहित्व भीत ही भिक्षु मन्त्र नौ उ ं धनीरं धन्दी रूपी। उ गङ्गापांडा तरिका नी विस्मृत अलम नौ मे अपने उ न रुण। वथः तरिका बलुः मे नौ चित्र लच्छू चित्र रूपी। उ नेतु। वथः तरिका बलुः दूर में। उ गङ्गापांडा तरिका नौ विज्ञान नौ धाती भवियी नौ धार्मिकी वही यज्ञमी नौ नाचिं। उ वथः तरिका नौ धाती धार्मिकीं नौ धार्मिकीं नौ नाचिं। उ गङ्गापांडा महङ्गे धनीरं धन्दीरं धन्दीरं वे धन्दी रूपी। उ वथः नी वथः वथः तेलुक। गङ्गापांडा मल्हुं तीर्थं तीर्थं तेलुक। मधी मंगूरु तेलुक।