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DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.12.02>

“JAHAR PIR JAGAT GURU BABA” VISUAL DEPICTION OF GURU NANAK DEV THROUGH LITERARY SOURCES

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Abstract

With the advent of Arabs in Sind in the Eighth Century A.D, an explicit culture was welcomed by the people of Punjab. By the thirteenth century, Sufism with its phenomenal ideology was able to accomplish its goal through its impact on the social-religious fabric of Northern India. Sufi saints were spreading their message of peace and humanity through their established Khanqas in areas of Pakpattan, Multan and Multan etc. Baba Shakarganj (Sheikh Farid) was one of the most popular amongst them reaching upto the grassroots with his indigenous Punjabi and upcoming Persian language.

In the light of the evidence coming from literary as well as visual illustrations from Persian and non-Persian sources for Guru Nanak's Period an attempt has been made to provide an invaluable insight into life, philosophy and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. Earliest known Persian literary source for Guru's time Dabistan-i-Mazahab, Sikh source Vaaran Bhai Gurdas, B-40 Janam Sakhi and Pahari Paintings as visual illustrations are taken as a source into considerations. It has been tried to make a connection between the literary and the visual means of information available to present Guru Nanak as Pir of Muslims and Guru of Hinds “Jahar Pir Jagat Guru Baba”.

Keywords: Guru Nanak, Syncretism, Vaaran Bhai Gurdas, Dabistan-i-Mazahab, B-40 Janam Sakhis and Pahari Paintings.

Gang banaras hinduahn, musal mana makka kaaba,
Ghar ghar baba gaviye, vajan taal mridang rababa,
Bhagat Vachailhoye aya, palit udharan ajab-ajaaba,
Chhar varan ik varne hoye, sadh sangat mil hoye taraaba,
Chandan vaas vanaspat, aval dom na sem kharaaba,
Hukame andar sabh ko, kudrat kis di karey jawaaba,
Jaahar Pir Jagt Gur Baba||4||

Var 24 Bhai Gurdas, Pauri 24

Introduction

Punjab, land of five rivers is a geographical and historical entity, derived from the Persian words ‘Punj’ (five) and ‘ab’(water). It bears the imprints of several ancient and perhaps the oldest civilizations of the world. The land has the footprints of some of the greatest tyrants of the medieval ages. Its boundaries fluctuated between the rivers and at times extended beyond these limits too. Despite this, Punjab has its own socio-cultural heritage which is different from Ganga-Yamuna doab in the East, Kashmir in the North and the deserts of Rajasthan and Sindh in the West and the South.

With the Arab invasion in Sindh in the eighth century, Punjab witnessed drastic political as well as socio-cultural changes rolling into its history. Lying in the north-western of the frontier of the Indian subcontinent, Punjab from since centuries confronted successive invasions from North-west. With these invasions, people migrated to the fertile plains of Punjab, bringing their beliefs, customs, values, and economic markings. Even the Punjabi language borrowed and assimilated hundreds of phrases from central Asian languages like Persian, Arabic, Tazik and Uzbek. The mingling of the two cultures gave rise to another distinctive culture which was more liberal and practical in outlook. As open to different set of people and culture, people of Punjab, though devastated and defeated number of times of their political freedom, never lost their identity and continued struggling for freedom against Muslim rulers. By the sixteenth century, the people of Punjab, decided to assert themselves against age old caste ridden society, which was facilitated by Guru Nanak, who rejected in theory as well as in practice the entire system of cast and ritualism. Sikh Gurus raised people of Punjab from lower cast to the high position in the society representing ethos of egalitarian society. During the seventeenth century, Sikh egalitarian ideology cemented its association between the peasantry, mostly Jatts of this agricultural belt. After the transformation of the Sikh ideology, Sikhism evolved from the simple peasant followers of ‘Nanakpanthis’ to the ‘Singhs’ of tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Sikhs not only evolved politically, but they also formed into new set of beliefs, cultures which they had taken from the mingling of two different cultures since the last five centuries.

In this proposition an attempt has been made to present Guru Nanak as a great syncretic, an egalitarian and an apostle of peace on the socio-cultural fabric of Northern India through different Persian and non-Persian literary sources. In this paper, special



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reference has been taken from seventeenth century literary Sikh source Vaaran Bhai Gurdas and a Persian source- Dabistan-i-Mazahab which are depicted in Figure 1. Vaaran Bhai Gurdas Ji was written in the period around between 1555-1629. This is the oldest source in the Sikh history. He wrote about the new emerging society whose foundation was laid by Guru Nanak, who organized a new Nirmal Panth. In his first Vaar with 49 Pauris, put greater insight into Guru Nanak’s life.

Dabistan-i-Mazahab, ‘school of religious doctrine’, popularly known as ‘school of manners’ first came to light in 1787. His account of the Sikh is based on the information mainly collected in 1643-1644 AD.¹ Under the title of ‘Nanak panthis’ this account is the earliest from the pen of a non-Sikh contemporary writer². Dabistan has great importance among the early Sikh sources as the non-Sikh sources and in the Persian language too. “The Author has taken every care to be true to the fact and recorded stories even legendary in nature”

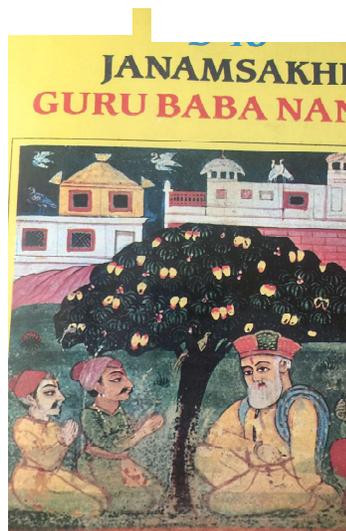
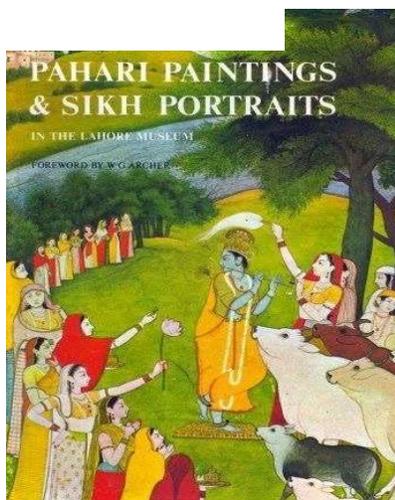
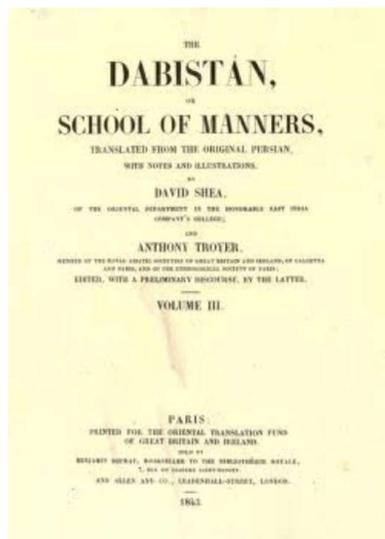
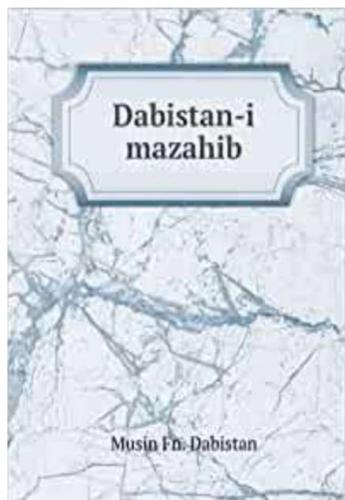
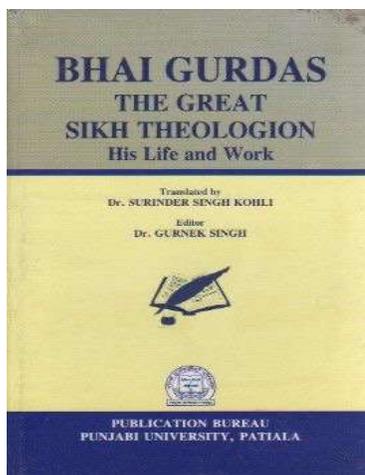


Fig. 1. Persian and Non-persian literary sources - means of information to present Guru Nanak as Pir of Muslims and Guru of Hinds “Jahar Pir Jagat Guru Baba”

¹David Shea and Anthony Troyer. Dabistan-i-mazhib, London 1843

² Dr. Ganda Singh. “Nanak Panthis” in the Punjab and Present, vol.I, part 1. April 1967



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‘Jahar Pir Jagat Gur Baba’³ has been taken as the main adage of Guru Nanak’s life, where Guru Nanak is the Pir as of Sufi’s ideology and a Jagat Guru in the Hindu philosophy. His being Pir of the Muslims and the Guru of the Hindus is being projected with the help of visual illustrations from B40 Janamsakhis⁴ and the Pahari paintings⁵ (figure 2).

Guru Nanak after visiting birthplace of Baba Farid and meeting his successors in Pakpattan, came in to influence of Sufi ideology. With his coming into their contacts, he started believing in monotheism, sharing (wand chakna) in form of Langar, values of true sangat (congregation) as ‘sadh sangat’. All these harmonic interactions left a great imprint on him by shaping his universal brotherhood ideology which took shape in a proper way in the future centuries.

Baba Farid said – “Khaalak khalak mahi khalak vasai rab mahi;
Manda kis nau aakhiye jan tis bin koi nai”⁶

Says Farid, the creator (God) is in the creation, the creation abides in God,
Whom can we call bad? there is none without him.117511
Guru Nanak said, ‘I am neither a Hindu nor Muslim, I am a follower of God’

Guru Nanak spread the message of wellbeing of all ‘Sarbat da bhala’, universal brotherhood for whole humanity. He said religion is not mere consistence of words but looks all men and women’s equality. ‘Nanak naam chardi kala, terey bhane sarbat da bhala’ For the dissemination of his ideology of truthfulness, Sewa and Simran and most important three principles Naam japna, Kirat karna and Wand chakna, Guru Nanak travelled different places. Dabistan-i-Mazahab and Bhai Gurdas differ over these travels or udasis as called by Sikh chronicles.

“Babe bheekh banaai udasi ki riti chalai,
Charhai shodhani dharat lukai .”⁷

B40 Janam Sakhi and Pahari painters clearly illustrated through their paintings that Guru Nanak travelled widely to propagate his teachings throughout Southwest Asia, Sri Lanka, Nepal and up to Mecca and Medina and Baghdad.

In Bhai Gurdas words: “Phiri Baba gaya Bagdad no bahari jai Kia Asthana.
Ik Baba akal rupi duja rababi Mardana...”⁸

Guru Nanak also stressed on to be abhorrent to five evils Ego, Anger, Greed, Attachment and Lust which leads to illusion (maya) which eventually act as a rampart towards salvation. Dialogues were held with sects of Yogis, Sidhas, Muslim ulemas and Sufis at different places like Multan, Uch, Achal Batala, Kashmir and in Baghdad, Mecca, Madina. Dabistan, Vaaran Bhai Gurdas ji mentioned in their Sikh and non-Sikh sources through their prose and poetry and B40 Janam Sakhi and Pahari painters depicted these dialogues beautifully through their distinct style of paintings.

³ Bhai Gurdas, Varaan, Var 24, Pauree 4, Bhai Gurdas was a scholar under Guru’period who wrote about Sikh Gurus in ‘Varaan’; Dr.Jodh Singh. “Varaan Bhai Gurdas”, volume 1 and 2, Patiala 1998

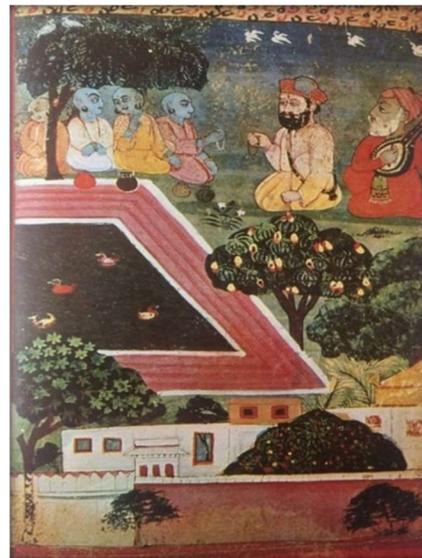
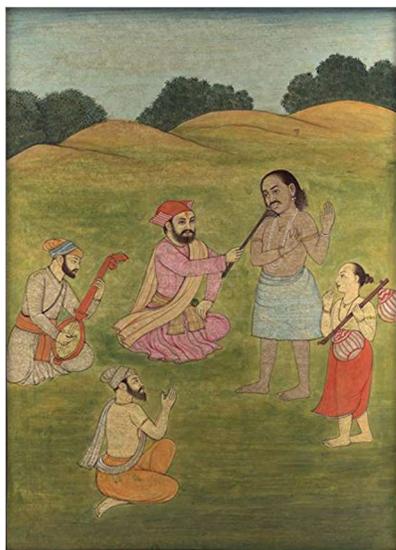
⁴ Mcleod.W.H The B-40 Janam Sakhis, Janamsakhi Guru Baba Nanak’, Amritsar,1980.; Surjit Hans (B-49 Janam Sakhis Guru Baba Nanak Paintings, Amritsar,1987.

⁵ F.S. Aijjaududin, ‘Pahari Paintings and Sikh Portraits in the Lahore Museum’,1977.

⁶ Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Ang.1381

⁷ Ibid, vaaran,Var I, Pauri.24(First episode of Guru Nanak Dev)

⁸ Ibid,Var I, Pauri 35,(Bagdad Gaman).



Babe kiti sidhi go sati sab adi santi widhan vichi ai....”⁹

Fig 2. Visual depiction of Guru Nanak Dev in Pahari Painting and in B-40Janamsakhi

Guru Nanak in his words and deeds propagated against caste-based distinction and discriminations of contemporary society. His preaching of a casteless society transpired in his concept of Sangat and Pangat. The Guru in the company of Bhai Mardana, a Muslim Rababi spread his message to the entire world through the divine Ragas. These divine messages are well quoted in the Persian source Dabistan-I-mazahib as well as non-Persian sources,¹⁰ B40 Janam sakhi is also a good source of presenting illustrations where Guru Nanak with Bala and Bhai Mardana is propagating and preaching Sikh ideology through visiting different places (Figure 3). In these illustrations Guru is shown with Bhai Mardana is reciting bani with his Rabab.

As in words of Dabistan, translated as “Just as Nanak praised the Muslim, he also commended the Avatars, gods and goddesses of the Hindus but he regarded them all as created beings, not the creator. He denied (possibility of) dissent of (God into human spirit) or Union (between God and man). He held the Muslim rosary in his hand and put (Hindu) sacred thread on his neck. He recited the formula of faith and offered prayers in the Muslim manner and recited the Gayatri mantras and offered puja according to the Hindu religion”¹¹The author of Dabistan uses the term Sangat for congregation and dharamsala for Sikh sacred space. Importance to pious sadh sangat.

“Sadhu sangati sachu khand vichi sati gur purakhe Vasai Nirankara”¹²

Sikh of the Guru serves the Sikhs of the guru like his parent. The author says that Sikhs were not much concerned about caste distinction, no restriction on a Brahmin becoming a Sikh of a Khatri, or Khatri subordinate himself of a Jat. The information it gives is not only comprehensive but also significant when combined with the evidence of Bhai Gurdas who wrote mostly in the early decade of 17th century.”¹³ Bhai Gurdas’s in his Vaaran, says all the four varnas were reduced to One and the pauper was made equal to the prince.¹⁴

“Chare pair dharam de chari varan ik varanu karaai.
Rana rank barabari pairi pavana jagi Vartaia....”

⁹ Ibid, Var I, Pauri 44 (Discussion with the Siddhs and tour of Multan)

¹¹ J. S. Grewal, P. 52 Sikh History in the Persian Sources, edited by Irfan Habib.IHC,2001

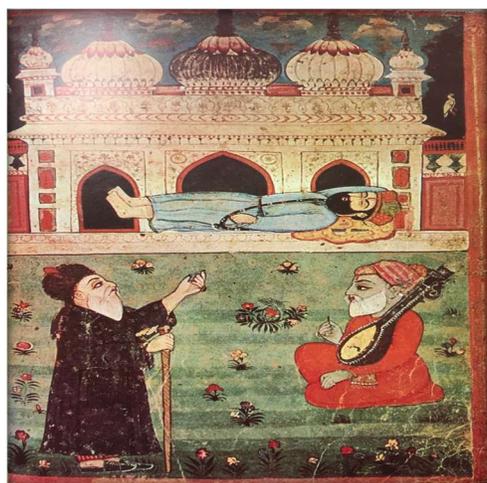
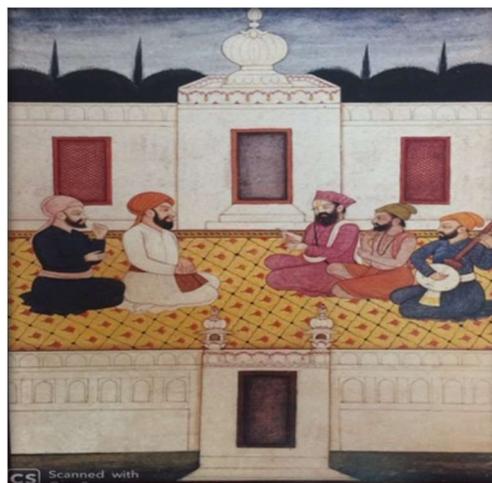
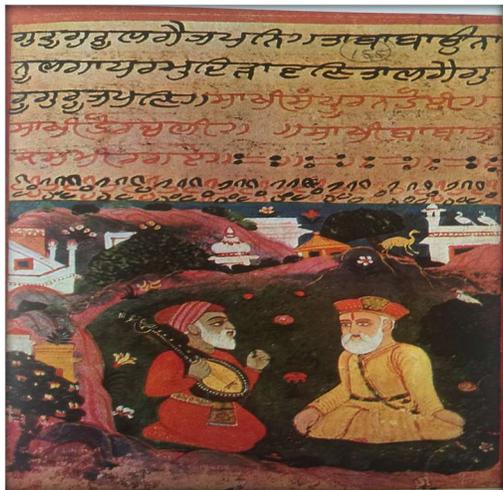
¹² Var VI, Pauri 4, p.9

¹³J. S. Grewal, Ibid, P.10

¹⁴ Var I, Pauri



Author of Dabistan took of Guru Nanak in a different way of talking up to as austerity. There is mere reference to his travels which figures so prominently in Janam Sakhis. In the Vars of Bhai Gurdas connected with the idea that Guru Nanak saved people in



the four directions through propagation of his message.

Fig 3. Guru Nanak travels to Sultanpur Lodi, Multan, Mecca, Bagdad etc. depicted in different forms of attires in with tilak on his forehead, rosary in his hands in dialogue with different Sufi saints and Maulavis

As far as image of Guru Nanak among common people according to Dabistan was that he used both Hindu and Muslim symbols- the image being that of both Hindu and Muslim, are being equidistant from Hindus and Muslims. He held the Muslim rosary in his hand and put (Hindu) sacred thread on his neck. He recited the formula of faith and offered prayers in the Muslim manner and recited the Gayatri mantras and offered puja according to the Hindu religion¹⁵. He is also shown carrying a book in his hands, as always observing others and accommodating their ideas in to his fold, depicting his tolerance for all. For Guru Nanak all were equal in his eyes, following the true path to reach up to true God, one has to follow the path of naam Simran, truthful earning and sharing with all. Guru Nanak believed in a positive dialogues between humanity irrespective of caste ,creed and colour.

A humble attempt has been made here for the young readers of this century who are connected with the audio-visual world, to bring them in, into fold of Guru Nanak's magnetic 'Aura' which is much required in the present scenario. Sikhism, although, one of the youngest religions in the world, with passing of years, the threat of losing critical evidence that may support the existence of the

¹⁵ J. S. Grewal, P. 52 Sikh History in the Persian Sources, edited by Irfan Habib.IHC,2001; Manisha Mishra. Traces of Syncretic Novelities in the Religious systems of the Hindus in the "Dabistan", PIHC, vol.63 (2002) PP. 447-452



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eminent Sikh personnel and occurrence of several incidents of utmost importance in the Sikh history is also increasing. This upcoming challenge where due to the lack of sufficient evidence critical events in Sikh history may also be considered as a mythology has led to the conception of this paper. An attempt has been made through this paper to highlight some of the imperative sources including literary and nonliterary sources respectively (Dabistan-i-Mazhab and Vaaran Bhai Gurdas) and (B40 Janam Sakhis and Pahari Paintings). Based on the concordance found between these four sources, I conclude that in the upcoming years, where further research may be endeavoured to support the occurrence of various incidents during Guru Nanak Dev’s lifetime, these sources may serve as critical evidence. Hans George Gadamer, in his book ‘Truth and Method’, quoted: “Picture is not just an image and definitely not a copy; it’s real nature “belongs to the present”.