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Living and Learning With Guru Nanak:  
Participation and Pedagogy in the Janam-Sakhi Narratives

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

by

Toby Braden Johnson

March 2015

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The Dissertation of Toby Braden Johnson is approved:

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## Acknowledgements

All citations and images in this study fall under typical fair-use guidelines and are used solely for the purpose of this dissertation. They are the property of their creators and proper citations have been made in each instance. I have used these solely as the points in the discussion, as it is necessary to talk about narratives by actually talking about the narratives themselves, and reproducing those presentations as accurately as possible.

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Earlier explorations of ideas and themes discussed in this dissertation appear in the following published works:

“Pedagogy in the *Janam-sakhis*: ‘Teaching Texts’ Moving Past Old Categories.” *Re-Imagining South Asian Religions: Essays in Honour of Professors Harold G. Coward and Ronald W. Neufeldt*. Ed. Pashaura Singh and Michael Hawley. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

“Pre-Colonial Sikh Literature.” *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. Ed. Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Living and Learning With Guru Nanak:  
Participation and Pedagogy in the Janam-Sakhi Narratives

by

Toby Braden Johnson

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Religious Studies  
University of California, Riverside, March 2015  
Drs. Vivian-Lee Nyitray & Pashaura Singh, Co-Chairpersons

This dissertation examines the ways Sikhs relate to Guru Nanak and the tradition he founded through the *janam-sakhi* (birth stories) narratives that present his life's story. Advancing the claim that *pedagogy informs participation* and demonstrating how various *janam-sakhi* authors condition their pedagogical presentations of Guru Nanak's life story through the form and content of their presentation, this dissertation examines the impact of the *janam-sakhis*, not simply as historical relics, but as holding a continuing role facilitating and conditioning Sikhs' relationships with Guru Nanak and the *Panth* (community). As social narratives, the *janam-sakhis* are a shared discourse about how Sikhs choose to commemorate and honor Guru Nanak, conveying interpretations of his life as relevant to their own and acting in accordance with that interpretation. Sikhs reflect on his life, example, and instruction in order to achieve the religious goals he revealed. Participation in the *janam-sakhis*, then, is a product of the narratives' instructional impact, their social functions, and the participants' direct loving relationship with Guru Nanak himself. All of

these processes work in varied and intertwined ways through the pedagogical and participatory projects of the janam-sakhis.

Sikhs' identity, rooted as it is in the relationships constructed by the janam-sakhis, is still being negotiated and defined by their understandings of who Guru Nanak was, how he lived his life, and how they are to live in accordance with the traditions he established. Sikhs participation with the janam-sakhis connects them to Guru Nanak as a personal teacher, their Guru, and all other Sikhs who have or are devoted to the same goals. This study advances previous scholarship regarding historical janam-sakhi manuscripts by taking modern presentations into account, showing how these modern iterations and those same academic treatments continue to refine and define these processes through their specific presentation and discussion of these stories.



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# **1. Participating in Stories: Steps toward a Narrative Theory of Participation**

Stories matter. People take inspiration from the heroes about whom they read. Readers often craft their aspirations to echo great figures in history. Stories about such heroes are told for a reason. They convey lessons with specific goals, spurring an audience both to thoughtful reflection and to action. Stories, as a pedagogical tool, are able to instill teachings at many levels of significance and in a variety of ways. These stories impact audiences in ways that go beyond the enjoyment of a just “picking up” a good read. Some may lay out a history or tradition for readers; others may explicate doctrinal or moral guidance, as well as delineate paths for future actions and set goals for which many readers strive.

More than just a casual read, these stories draw readers into a pedagogical project that extends beyond the written pages: a religious life. Writings about the founder of a religious community or tradition (a religious hero) serve to educate readers about the life of that founder and structure the manner by which devoted readers come to relate to that founder as a significant presence in their lives—extending across the gap of history to foster a personal relationship with the founder—and to the community of those who have also sought to develop their relationship with the founder.

This dissertation posits that this pedagogical function is key to religious literature, a key that is even more significant when this literature narrates stories about the founders of religious traditions. Religious readers are devoted to the programs set out in these narratives, as these stories play an essential role in defining both who they are as religious

individuals, and as members of a specific religious community, with a shared history and future goals rooted in lessons presented by these stories about their founder's life. Stories about Jesus (Gospels), Muhammad (*Hadith*), and the Buddha (*Jatakas*), for example, are shared within their respective devotional traditions and function in a variety of ways to address these pedagogical connections and community connections. These narratives provide readers and listeners a common bond with the founder, and connect readers to their shared history from which their devotional tradition emerged.

History and identity are thus intertwined through a community's participation with stories about the life of the religion's founder. The community's history is rooted in its devotion to these stories, its identity derived from its devotion. Who would Buddhists be without the Buddha? Or Muslims without the Prophet? Or Christians without the Christ? The religious identities of these communities are rooted in the lives of these historical figures.<sup>1</sup>

These stories have also spurred people to think and act in new ways. The "Good News" of Jesus' teachings brought together a new community, not just of reformist Jews, but also of a Gentile audience that spreads across the globe. Their stories about his love, compassion, and charity motivated an emerging "Christian" community to embrace these teachings and strive to live "Christ-like" lives. Today, Christians still emphasize their connection to Jesus, not only through their understandings of his redemptive sacrifice, but

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "historical" loosely, as these communities have said these are stories of *their* past. An image or representation of what the past is thought to be is just as valid in these cases, as what may have actually happened in the world. For this study, the community's assertion of what their history is serves as significant indicator of participation.



also with regard to the message of his teachings that they strive to enact. The origins of Islam and Buddhism, each with their reliance on both the teachings of their founders and the exemplary way in which the founders conducted themselves in accordance with those teachings, echo this reliance on the stories that convey the teachings of, and example set by, their founders. In each of these cases, the ideas presented through the stories gained traction among communities of devotees and served, in many ways, as the origin for new religious ideas and as the expression of religious goals to be reached through using these stories. These founders set forth new religious ideals, goals to be achieved through devoted actions. The stories tell of Jesus' description of the kingdom of God in Heaven; Muhammad's vision for an ordered society acting in accordance with God's will; and the Buddha's rejection of old social and cosmological structures in favor of new understandings of self, community, and ethical action. These stories tie readers to the founder's ideals and present that story as something to which they, the readers, belong—a community that proceeds from that founding.

A religion's founder also comes to be remembered, commemorated, respected, and loved through the continual use of these stories about him or her. Therefore, stories about a religious founder necessitate both a historical connection and reflection on that connection. A comprehensive study of this kind of literature must account for the various ways by which these stories are instructive in these ways. This project examines the role of story as a pedagogical mode in the presentations of the life of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, as found in *janam-sakhi* (birth-stories) narratives.

## Language and Terminology

Stories are quite lively and varied things and there is a long history of scholarship about them. It is necessary, therefore, to set some parameters for the present discussion and clarify the nuances of similar terms and conventional language. Two terms that need clarification are *story* and *narrative*, as the two are often used interchangeably in other studies of the *janam-sakhis*. The distinction between the two lies in identifying the nature of their relationship to one another. A story is the subject being presented, while the specific presentation is the narrative. Narratives present a specific ordering or understanding of a story; in the case of this particular study, the narrative is a specific presentation of Guru Nanak's life—a specific manuscript, book, or recital. The story, meanwhile, is what underlies a narrative account. Guru Nanak's life, whether as a whole or divided into anecdotal selections, is the story being told by *janam-sakhi* narratives—the texts that are to be examined.

Narratives are specifically-intentioned presentations of a story that re-present that story in a form that must be known and remembered in order to be transmitted to others. Each narrative is a new public instance of a story.<sup>2</sup> This form is necessarily varied, as narratives are fluid and malleable in order to suit both the manner of the storytelling and the outcomes desired.

An example helps here. Consider the story of Cinderella: there are many versions (narrations); Walt Disney tells of a glass slipper, the Brothers Grimm used a slipper laced

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<sup>2</sup> Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 28.

with gold, and even the older Mongol version includes a fur slipper.<sup>3</sup> The core of the story remains consistent, but each specific narrative presents it in a different manner to achieve different outcomes or to root it in the cultural understandings of an intended audience. This is no different than the varying ways the story of Jesus of Nazareth is expressed in the supposedly “Synoptic” Gospels. The general story informing them is consistent, but the specific expressions, written and passed down through the ages, vary in both content and form.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is this resultant variety that leads to a quagmire of categorization. The variety of genres into which narratives are classified tends to exaggerate differences found in various narrative representations of a story. Different types of narratives can all tell the same story, while the differences between them reflect a variety of influencing factors and desired outcomes. Too often, genre designators, such as biography, history, hagiography, and myth, are seen as mutually-exclusive operational categories, each serving specific needs to achieve quite different ends. One should not be distracted by the variety of narrative forms employed to convey a common story—the value of this type of literature as a whole lies in the instruction being conveyed.

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<sup>3</sup> A thorough discussion of the origins of the Cinderella story can be found in Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> This holds true when comparing the different accounts of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are all different in scope and intent from the Gospel of John), as well as when comparing later interpretations and supplementary materials that build from these accounts. Robert Walter Funk and Roy W. Hoover, *The Five Gospels: the Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

The focal texts of this dissertation were authored or compiled by Sikhs operating within their religious tradition, writing for purposes of faith and not as exercises to match a specific literary form. To these authors/compilers, the story of Guru Nanak was a fact of history and accounts of his life are narrated to convey and instill valuable religious teachings, yet the academics who later study this literature apply a variety of designations to the *janam-sakhis*.

The work of Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps—specifically in regard to the telling of the lives of religious founders—is useful here to delineate the types of narratives to be considered throughout this study.<sup>5</sup> They offer three distinct categories that serve to describe both the structure of these texts and the significance of their portrayals. The first of these literary forms is sacred biography, which they describe as “an extraordinary form of biography because they both recount the process through which a new religious ideal is established and, at the same time, participate in the process.”<sup>6</sup> These sacred biographies are didactic texts that relate the biographic details of a founder or savior’s life to the mythic ideal and catalyze the “formative development of the religious symbols and images” which serve as the “basic constitutive elements of [the new religious tradition]”<sup>7</sup> In common parlance, sacred biography is often conflated with the second narrative form identified by Reynolds and Capps, that of hagiography. In their view, hagiographical texts focus on the

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<sup>5</sup> Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps, *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

presentation not of a tradition's founder but of later figures who have "realized, perhaps in a distinctive way, an image, ideal, or attainment already recognized by [their] religious community."<sup>8</sup> This distinction of the subject's role and spiritual achievement (be the subject a founder or a later follower) is often overlooked by scholars who simply use the term hagiography to talk about stories that both set and follow the spiritual paths that Reynolds and Capps would see separated into sacred biography and hagiography. Reynolds and Capps also define a third form of literature in this arena, the confessional biography, which is most keenly focused on creating a narrative portrait of the subject's significance through a narrative about that subject's own "chronology, developmental patterns, and the process of self-realization."<sup>9</sup> These generally come about much later in a tradition, when these considerations about spiritual issues are given deliberate literary expression.<sup>10</sup>

All of these narrative forms create, in the terminology of Reynolds and Capps, a life model that can serve as a representation of the focal subject's life held in relation to the culture and contexts surrounding the subject as well as the narrative expression itself. They suggest that in some cultural instances the life model becomes prescriptive—setting out patterns of belief and action via the action or plot of the story which is to be emulated by the audience. The janam-sakhis are one such prescriptive instance. The most important feature to note here is their emphasis that "life model writings" differ significantly from

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>10</sup> A good example of this would be the Gospel of John's focus on discussing Jesus as the cosmically significant Logos/ Word and showing how his life story is indicative of that position.

history writing specifically, the clear presentation of the subject's life or accomplishments is a meaning-making activity, not an historical interpretation read for the understanding of contexts, influences, or effects; differences of genre emerge therefore from the narrative presentations, not from the story itself.<sup>11</sup> At this stage, it is necessary to be aware of the subtle differences, and to be able to move beyond (or behind) them to examine the pedagogical foci of the story being expressed through these instances of narrative—regardless of the form the narrative takes.

### **Historical Narratives and Social Narratives**

A community's narratives are the only point of entry into the story that motivates and unites that group of people. The doctrines and connections expressed through these shared narratives are indicative of a community's innate desire to make their history sensible and meaningful. Narratives make this possible by providing a means to understand how these stories have led people to where they are and where they hope to go. Members of a community look to history (the story their past) to see how it can lead them to the goals (laid out in specific narratives) they hope to achieve collectively. The meaning of "now" and "the future" are conveyed by retrospective understandings, making sense of the past in light of future projects and desired goals. Philosopher David Carr referred to this as the "prospective-retrospective principle" of historical narratives.<sup>12</sup> He builds on this

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<sup>11</sup> More specific attention to the difficulty of genre will be addressed in Chapter 3. That chapter will explore how the assignment of genre designations indicates specific modes of interpreting janam-sakhi narratives, conditioning how they are to be viewed.

<sup>12</sup> David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 60 (hereafter cited as Carr, *TNH*).

point further by asserting that “such narratives may serve to organize and make sense of the experience and action of their authors and their readers, focusing their attention in certain directions and orienting their actions towards certain goals.”<sup>13</sup> The narrative makes sense and is relatable to the community because it provides a starting point and then strives toward an end or goal. History, in the general sense of what has passed or is in the past, is created and located in relation to the community’s orientation towards the desired end.

The meaning of an historical narrative, then, “encompasses and orders the things we value and the purposes we pursue.”<sup>14</sup> This is the meaning ascribed to the narrative in its production, but it can also be understood as the meaning received by the readers of these narratives. Community identity both emerges from this appeal to meaning, and reinforces the need for such an appeal, as the community asserts its take on the meaning and the direction that is “received.” Carr makes this clear with his assertion that “I may not write the story, I *choose* the story in which I am cast as a character, even if the story has already been written and the part I play has been played before.”<sup>15</sup> People choose to take part in some history. They identify with the story of what and who came before them and join in the collaborative actions that follow from the story. No one reading this dissertation experienced the founding of the United States of America, but any American reading this will say that historical moment is part and parcel of their history, despite over two hundred

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

years separating them from those moments. So too have Americans throughout those two hundred years; indeed, anyone who wants to be an American can take up its history and act in accordance with the mission started by the Founding Fathers. Repetition of roles does not diminish the value or outcome of this participation in history; it strengthens the bonds created to the stories and through the community. This is instrumental in the creation of a tradition that can be passed down over generations and remain as vibrant as it was the first time the story was shared.

Commitment to meaning, values, and goals does not diminish; it may change over generations and may be open to interpretation, but such commitment remains the tether between the community and the story behind the narrative. Carr describes this as a collective act of retrospection and striving, which creates a transhistorical community that is expressed through these social narratives. Their history is created by individual members' regard for the significant pattern of past events as these relate to those members' present values and the group's desires for the future. The extent to which this story is then "shared by the members of the group, such that its formulation and eventual reformulation would be constitutive of the group and its common undertakings" conditions the loyalty to the group identity.<sup>16</sup> "[S]uch a story can be told by an individual or individuals on behalf of the we; indeed using the we as the subject not only of action and experience but of

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<sup>16</sup> Carr's theoretical framework is rooted in individual agents making choices about working together with other agents who also found value in the narratives in question. I much prefer this focus on known agents and attributable action to the postulations of Ricouer as "collective memory" or Durkheim as a "collective effervescence." See Chapter 3 in Paul Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995).



narration itself”;<sup>17</sup> thus, it becomes the history of the group, an active narration of the community as a collective body.

The task ahead is the explication of how these connections are built, sustained, reinvigorated, interpreted, and reinterpreted over time via the narratives about the founding figures of these historical religious communities.<sup>18</sup> It is helpful to begin with an example from the Sikh tradition that helps illuminate the two most significant relationships that bond the community (*Panth*) with the history conveyed by the narratives (the *janam-sakhis*) of their founder, Guru Nanak. Before moving into these examples and a detailed analysis of the processes underpinning the stories they represent, however, a brief introduction to the *Janam-sakhis* as a literary corpus is necessary.

### **The Janam-sakhis: A Sikh Example of Participation**

Sikhism began with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) bringing together a community that followed the spiritual message that was revealed to him. In that sense, it is fair to look at the *janam-sakhis* as stories about the creation of Sikh traditions, and the worldview they present began with Guru Nanak’s revelations. While the hymns of the *Adi Granth* (the primary scriptural text of Sikhism) are the formal lessons of the Guru’s revelations, defining both a specific relationship with the divine reality and a moral program for Sikhs, the *janam-sakhis* are the introduction to those lessons, serving as a prolegomenon that

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-56.

<sup>18</sup> There are, admittedly, many other types of narratives that contribute to these community bonds. Narratives about founding figures provide the unique and essential characteristic of being the beginning, a starting point for the story of the tradition itself. Narratives about the founders are key for the community’s later conception of itself as having a history; this is where *they* begin as followers or devotees of this figure.

informs community's regard for the formal teachings. No one's first introduction to a religious tradition, after all, is an in-depth scholarly exegesis of, for example, mystical poetry; rather, it is through narratives or prose made deliberately accessible to the young or uninitiated. In the Sikh tradition, it is far more likely that one is first given the stories about Guru Nanak or his nine successors that use anecdotes about their lives to explain their teachings, spiritual discipline, and goals. These lessons begin with the life of Guru Nanak, as recorded in the *janam-sakhis*.

The *janam-sakhis* emerged as historical literature in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, coalescing from an oral tradition about Guru Nanak. They became the primary expression of Guru Nanak's life and actions, operating initially as both records of his traditions and as a means of outreach for the growing community. Some of the historical *janam-sakhi* narratives extant today date to this early period. Others were written during later periods in which representations and/or reinterpretations of Guru Nanak's role and place in the community's life were necessary. This mode of re-presenting or reinterpreting continues to this day, as new productions of *janam-sakhi* stories are made for new audiences and focus on concerns relevant to the modern experience of Sikhs and those interested in Guru Nanak. Major phases of reinterpreting Guru Nanak's story align with historical guideposts: the reign of the later Gurus, the end of the Gurus' line, the colonial period and reforms under the Singh Sabha, and the modern era in which Sikhs find themselves abroad in the growing diaspora.<sup>19</sup> Each of these historical points represents a significant moment that required

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<sup>19</sup> Guru Nanak was followed by nine successors before the title of the Guru was passed to the *Adi Granth*, elevating its status to *Guru Granth Sahib* in 1708. Later, under British rule, Sikhs found new freedom of expression and self-rule that they did not have under Muslim rule in India. The Singh Sabha movement,

the Panth to reconsider its identity in relation to the tradition, and led to a reinvigorated presentation and discussion of the life of Guru Nanak.<sup>20</sup> This process continues in the modern era in which Sikhs continue to engage the janam-sakhis as sources for Guru Nanak's teachings and the tory of his life and the community that follows him.

The janam-sakhis serve as an introduction to not just the moral message, but to the man who serves as a guide along that path as well. The janam-sakhis define Sikhs' devotional relationship with Guru Nanak and set a course for the community as it practices the lessons laid out in the *Adi Granth's* hymns. Sikhs constantly participate in the lessons, history, and traditions described in the janam-sakhis. These narrative presentations are more than just maintaining these facets of Sikh tradition; in reality, they generate participatory relationships and serve as foundational literature for Sikhs' lives as members of this faith community.

The janam-sakhis serve to create the means of participation in two distinct manners: first, by creating a relationship with the tradition of Sikhs who follow the Guru's lessons, and second, by creating a direct relationship with Guru Nanak—a unique aspect of Sikh tradition. No other tradition has such a vibrant body of narrative literature especially dedicated to the life of its founder. Accepted presentations of Jesus' life are generally limited to canonical Gospel accounts. The *Hadith* do not present a cohesive or complete life model of the Prophet Muhammad as a story but instead provide terse discourses and

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which began in the latter nineteenth century, stands out for its quest to provide a coherent expression of what Sikhism is and how Sikhs are unique in the India religious landscape.

<sup>20</sup> The specifics of these points will be discussed in later chapters as the relationship with Guru Nanak is explored.

brief glimpses on his life. The *Jataka* tales are concerned with the Buddha's life before he became the Buddha, rather than discussing the significance of Siddhartha Gautama. In contrast, the janam-sakhis provide an extensive and engaging view of Guru Nanak's life and legacy as a body of literature that complements and supplements the scriptural *Adi Granth*.

A few key factors come to light when discussing the janam-sakhis in this way. First, the janam-sakhi narratives do not present a necessarily coherent or sustained vision of Guru Nanak's life, nor are they offering similar interpretations of his life. Different janam-sakhi texts may include or omit certain anecdotes, reflecting their authors/compilers' varying views on the Guru's life and its meaning for audiences. This variety of the janam-sakhi narratives is indicative of the variety of ways Sikhs have sought to commemorate Guru Nanak's life and continue to do so. Moreover, in addition to varying presentations, Sikhs also use the janam-sakhis in varying manners (homily, history, spiritual edification, etc.).

In the same vein, the various ways scholars view and structure their analyses of janam-sakhi narratives is further indication of the multivalent nature of these presentations. Scholarly attentions have discussed the specific structures and features of these relationships in a variety of ways: presentations of the janam-sakhis as true depictions of Sikh history are emphasizing the role of the janam-sakhis as social narratives, discussions of them as hagiographies stress the devotional function of a relationship with Guru Nanak, exegetical analyses highlight the doctrinal content and instructive quality of these stories, and doctrinal approaches draw out their theological and inspirational aspects.

## **Guru Nanak at the River Bein, Beginnings of a Community and Worldview**

A theologically-informed reading of a janam-sakhi can serve as an introduction to the processes of participation that is demonstrated by Sikhs' regard for and their relationships with janam-sakhis narratives. This not only connects a Sikh audience with the teachings of Guru Nanak, but also connects them to the Guru himself. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, recognizing the importance of the myth of Guru Nanak (and the story behind it) as conveyed by the janam-sakhis, acknowledges "that the Janamsakhis are clearly myths... I seek to make a case for the power of myth and the relevance of mythologization to Sikh faith."<sup>21</sup> She asserts that myth sets the example for Sikh faith and practice by focusing on the pivotal moment of Guru Nanak's life, namely, the story about his disappearance and reemergence from the River Bein. Nikky Singh contends that the sakhis about Guru Nanak's experience at the River Bein are the foundation of the Sikh Panth and their beliefs: "It is my thesis that to this sakhi the Sikh tradition owes its very identity and individuality. It vividly presents Guru Nanak's vision of Ultimate Reality as a totally formless and transcendent being."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the foundations of Sikh theology, Guru Nanak's message, began with his discussion of these principles upon the river's banks; all that is Sikhism follows from it. Nikky Singh notes that the mythic beginning reported in the janam-sakhis relates Sikhs to the tradition of Guru Nanak as laid out in these stories in

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<sup>21</sup> Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, "The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsakhis and Sikh Tradition," *History of Religions* 31.4 (1992), 331. Nikky Singh's use of "mythologization" seems quite similar to Mircea Eliade's "mythicization" which focused on "the transformation of man into archetype through repetition [of stories about him]." See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 37-40.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-2.

a very specific way. This foundational relation to tradition, in turn, enables consideration of the janam-sakhis' role in the larger project of Sikh world-building as cosmogonic myths that define (or possibly re-define) the world's ontological foundations. She provides the sakhi, drawing from the Puratan text compiled and presented by Bhai Vir Singh in 1926:

The River Bein sakhi (#22 Immersion in the river: his call)<sup>23</sup>

It was at Sultānpur that Nānak had a revelatory experience. One morning he did not return home after his bath in the River Beīn and everyone feared that he had drowned. But Nanak reappeared on the bank of the Beīn on the third day. According to the *Purātan Janamsākhi*, the interval had been spent in communion with the Supreme Being. "As the Primal Being willed, Nānak the devotee, was ushered into the Divine Presence. Then a cup filled with *amrit* (nectar) was given him with the command, 'Nānak, this is the cup of Name-adoration. Drink it... I am with you and I do bless and exalt you. Whoever remembers you will have my favour. Go, rejoice, in My Name and teach others to do so... I have bestowed upon you the gift of My Name. Let this be your calling.' Nānak offered his salutations and stood up."

Nānak celebrated the favor through a song of praise:

Were I to live for millions of years  
and could make air my food and drink,  
Were I to seal myself in a cave and ceaselessly to meditate  
without seeing the sun or the moon and without a wink of sleep,  
I would still not be able to measure Your greatness,  
nor signify the glory of Your Name!

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 332-34. This selection is Nikky Singh's presentation of the sakhi.

The parenthetical identification of this sakhi is drawn from W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 73-76 (hereafter cited as McLeod, *GNSR*). McLeod catalogued the corpus of janam-sakhi manuscript traditions in order to compare narratives that presented particular anecdotes about Guru Nanak's life. As it seems unnecessary to reinvent this particular wheel, and as specific reference will be made to McLeod's catalogue in later chapters, it is best to introduce his labeling of the sakhis to remain consistent in this study and to facilitate comparisons with his and other studies of the janam-sakhis that have utilized his formulae as well.

The Formless One is the eternal, irreplaceable truth,  
Attempt not to describe That by hearsay knowledge.  
If it pleases It, It in Its grace will reveal Itself.  
Were I to be shredded and ground like grain in a mill,  
Were I to be burnt in a fire and reduced to ashes,  
I would not be able to measure Your greatness,  
nor signify the glory of Your Name!

Were I to fly like a bird to a hundred heavens,  
Were I to vanish from human gaze at will  
and could live without food and drink,  
I would still not be able to measure Your greatness,  
nor signify the glory of Your Name!

Had there been ton upon ton of paper, says Nānak,  
and had I absorbed the wisdom of volumes beyond count,  
If I had a supply of ink inexhaustible and I could  
write with the speed of the wind,  
I would still not be able to measure Your greatness,  
nor signify the glory of Your Name!\*

Thereupon, the Voice spoke: "Nānak, you discern My will." Nānak recited the *Japu*, which constituted the core of his doctrine and which became the opening text of the Sikh scripture.

The Voice was heard again: "Who is just in your eyes, Nānak, shall be so in Mine. Whoever receives your grace shall abide in Mine. My name is the Supreme God; your name is the divine Gurū." Nānak then bowed in gratitude and was given the robe of honor. A sonorous melody in the *Rāga Dhanāsarī* rang forth:

The skies are the platter; sun and moon, lamps; stars, the pearls.  
The breeze is the incense;  
entire verdure, a bouquet of flowers.  
What an *arati!*  
The Wonder of wonders, Sunderer of the circuit of life and death.  
Thine splendid *arati!*  
Primal music is playing motionlessly.  
You have a thousand eyes,  
but without eyes You are,  
You have a thousand forms,  
but without form You are,  
You have a thousand feet,  
but without feet You are.  
You have a thousand noses,

but without a nose You are.  
Thoroughly enchanted am I.  
There is a light in all and that light is That One.  
From Its light, all are illumined.  
Through the Guru the light becomes visible.  
What pleases You, becomes Your *āratī!*  
Like the bumble-bee, day and night I long for your lotus-feet.  
Pleads Nānak, grant the thirsty bird, the nectar of Your Name. \*\*

Guru Nanak remained in unbroken silence after his reappearance. When he spoke the following day, the first words he uttered were: "There is no Hindu; there is no Musalman."<sup>24</sup>

To illustrate the importance of the Guru's example, Nikky Singh identifies four significant elements in this sakhi that indicate Guru Nanak's "vision of Ultimate Reality."<sup>25</sup> First is Guru Nanak's experience of *darśan* (literally, "seeing" that provides "a spontaneous recognition of absolute knowledge") with Ultimate Reality.<sup>26</sup> Nanak realizes there is nothing to be seen since Ultimate Reality is beyond his comprehension, yet he is still able to take it all in and experience it fully. Second is Guru Nanak's response to his experience of *darśan*, which is to compose poetry, as it is the only form of expression that could begin to convey the Ultimate Reality that is beyond all description. Third is Guru Nanak's choice of the expression of *Ik Oankar* to best illustrate that Ultimate Reality "is beyond gender and causality; it is spaceless and timeless."<sup>27</sup> Fourth is the sakhi's confirmation Nanak's

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 332-34. Nikky Singh's footnotes, noted by asterisks in the selection, are provided here:

\* "Also recorded in Guru Granth, p. 14. I owe translation of this excerpt and the following excerpts from the *Puratan Janamsakhi* to [Harbans] Singh, *Guru Nanak and Origins of the Sikh Faith*, pp. 95-97."

\*\* "Also recorded in Guru Granth, p. 13."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 339.



role as Guru, with Nikky Singh noting that “he was recognized as the "founder" of a new religious community.”<sup>28</sup> Nikky Singh provides, in four steps, a means to illustrate how Guru Nanak came to serve as the personal teacher and exemplar for the Sikh community. All of this hinges upon the revelation of the (new within the context of the story being told) Sikh worldview that is presented in this janam-sakhi narrative.

Implicit in Nikky Singh’s analysis is an understanding of this anecdote’s function as a creation myth. It describes a new ontological status or understanding not only of the divine Ultimate Reality through Guru Nanak’s darśan of Ultimate Reality, which he came to express as *Ik Oankar*, but also of humanity’s interaction with it as members of the new Sikh religious community. It follows from Nikky Singh’s analysis that, Sikhism begins with Guru Nanak. Stories about Guru Nanak are thus about the creation of Sikhism, a new faith tradition with Guru Nanak as its beginning and center.

These three terms—*creation*, *beginning*, and *center*—lead directly to the work of Mircea Eliade, and with good reason. Eliade describes the special relationship between religious belief and myth by focusing on the relationship of these terms. Eliade takes a phenomenological approach to discuss how religious practitioners who conceive of the relation of time and history as commemorative rituals repeat the actions and outcomes of such stories.<sup>29</sup> Eliade contends that, during the act of commemoration, any separation between the act of reading and the “history” being read becomes irrelevant. Time is

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>29</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 37-40.

collapsed; any separation is overcome—insomuch as the primordial time (or better yet, the time in which order is created) which is being read about is actually reinvigorated and reestablished in the here and now through the reading and enactment of these myths. Eliade emphasizes “two important propositions” here:

1. Every creation repeats the pre-eminent cosmogonic act, the Creation of the world.
2. Consequently, whatever is founded has its foundation at the center of the world (since, as we know, the Creation itself took place from a center).<sup>30</sup>

It is the repetition of creation stories, and the acts depicted therein, that fosters this collapse of time, bridging the moments of creation to the present. Eliade focuses on “the abolition of time through the imitation of archetypes [paradigms] and the repetition of paradigmatic gestures.”<sup>31</sup> The new world is established, and continually maintained, by the repetition of these acts by religious practitioners.

Unfortunately, Eliade describes all of this in the flowery language of phenomenology, referring to unreliable concepts of the sacred and sacred time, rather than rooting his assertions in the interplay between the story and its performers and audience.<sup>32</sup> This then allows ample room to build from his premises to lay out a demonstration of the construction of these relationships through analyses of both the narratives’ presentations

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 18. While Nikky Singh’s argument may intone a view of the River Bein as the Sikh center, the corpus of janam-sakhi literature, as will be shown in this study, promote a worldview that firmly puts Guru Nanak at its center.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 35. Read archetypes as paradigms. Eliade notes that he did not intend to convey the impression of archetypes as Jung employs the term, but rather as paradigms to be followed. Ibid., xiv.

<sup>32</sup> I dare to call Eliade’s conceptions of the sacred and sacred time unreliable, because no religious tradition (let alone the academy of scholars of religion) agrees upon what these may entail. They are so broad in their coverage that they offer little value as direct analytical categories.

and their apprehension by audiences that indicate the commemoration and participation to which he alludes. It is, therefore, possible to begin a specific analysis of the River Bein sakhi by considering it, as Nikky Singh does, the beginning of the Sikh message.

This sakhi presents Guru Nanak's moment of darśan, though that moment reportedly lasted three days. The moment of Guru Nanak's emergence from the River Bein serves much the same function as a rite of creation. By presenting Guru Nanak's new vision of Ultimate Reality, the janam-sakhi narratives reveal a new ontological state of the world under the auspices of *Ik Oankar*. This new vision found traction through the poetry of Guru Nanak and created a new social order—the Sikh Panth. As Nikky Singh describes, each retelling or re-presentation of this story reinvigorates this moment of revelation and creates the new order for each Sikh who participates in its revelatory mission. The connections between Guru Nanak and the later Sikh community are simultaneously diachronic and synchronic as the new Sikh worldview is revealed again and again through each telling and enactment of its message.

Eliade extends his discussion of creation rites and commemorations to the repetition of the essential paradigms that foster the lasting use and value of the commemorative stories and actions. One of the key paradigms he describes is the “mythicization” of a person, which focuses on “the transformation of man into archetype [paradigm] through repetition [of stories about him].”<sup>33</sup> The myth of Guru Nanak certainly follows such a plan, as Guru Nanak came to be the primary exemplar for Sikhs in the many generations to come.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 37.

This is just as Nikky Singh describes, though she modifies the terminology by calling it “mythologization”;<sup>34</sup> the intent and process work in the same manner, specifically that the repetition of a person’s exemplary conduct affirms the understanding of the individual as a paragon of virtue to be emulated by the audience of the story. Through this process, the janam-sakhis both create and sustain a strong connection between Guru Nanak-as-exemplar and the Sikhs. This connection becomes even more evident when considered alongside Eliade’s suggestion that,

[T]he same [collapsing of time] holds true for all repetitions, i.e., all imitations of archetypes [paradigms]; through such imitation, man is projected into the mythical epoch in which the archetypes were first revealed. . . insofar as an act (or an object) acquires a certain reality through the repetition of certain paradigmatic gestures, and acquires it through that alone, there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of “history”; and he who reproduces the exemplary gesture thus finds himself transported into the mythical epoch in which its revelation took place.<sup>35</sup>

Eliade understands the paradigm as enlivened through repetitive action.<sup>36</sup> In the case of the janam-sakhis, each narrative repetition of the story about Guru Nanak’s call at the river, his new revelatory message, and his new mission as guru, would also reinvigorate the paradigms of belief for Sikhs.

Essentially, Eliade was striving to show how narrative programs, enacted through ritual and story, come to structure and condition the actions of later generations who view these stories as not only their sacred history, but also as a sacred commitment that

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<sup>34</sup> Nikky Singh, “Myth of the Founder,” 331.

<sup>35</sup> Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> We will later see this idea of education via repetition reinforced in a variety of ways: through narrative theory, through descriptions of hagiography, and simply as a pedagogical tool.

constantly needs to be engaged to be effective. He revealed the essentially educational program that undergirds religious action and memory—*pedagogy informs participation*. Once taught, the lessons have to be lived.

### **Modes of Pedagogy and Participation in the Janam-sakhis**

The Sikhs have their own traditions that indicate their expression of these (or incredibly similar) understandings. As the divine expression of Ultimate Reality, *Ik Oankar*, is regarded as both transcendent and immanent, the collapse of any historical difference with Guru Nanak's first darśan experience is rendered, if not moot, at least inapplicable, as the divine unity encompasses all. Also, consider the Sikh view of the continued presence of the Guru as manifest in the *Guru Granth Sahib*: Guru Nanak, who first experienced this and shared it with the community, is still present and thus the temporal distance between his moment of darśan and the reader's apprehension of it is lessened by his continued presence. He is not as distant a figure as the commemoration would lead one to believe.

Acknowledgement of these points is at the heart of all treatments of the janam-sakhis, not just the River Bein sakhi. Eliade's implied temporal collapse is evident throughout. First, the janam-sakhis connect the community of Sikhs who have followed Guru Nanak to the doctrines and traditions of that community (synchronic and diachronic relationships, respectively). Second, the stories of his life establish a relationship between Guru Nanak and all Sikhs; he becomes known to and through the ages not simply as a historical figure, but as a living presence, a resident teacher (a synchronic relationship). A

brief explanation of each of these is warranted to show how they are demonstrated by the texts of the janam-sakhis and affirm continued presentation and use by the Sikh community (the pedagogical-participatory relationship).

The foundation of the relationships with Guru Nanak and his tradition is created among the community of Sikhs, individuals devoting their lives to the message of Guru Nanak's revelation as presented in the janam-sakhis. The acknowledged goal of this effort is to join in the history and traditions that keep these stories alive and active so they may continue to guide Sikhs toward the spiritual goals laid out by Guru Nanak. There is an implicit acceptance of the stories as the actual depictions of what happened in Guru Nanak's life and in the community of his followers. Thus, the janam-sakhis need to be understood as a history of the Sikh community itself, a story that both unites and motivates the Panth to act in accordance with their tradition and faith. Individual Sikhs participate in the story, each taking this history as his or her own and striving to embody the goals and mission laid out by Guru Nanak. To be a Sikh is to join in the pursuit of the goals laid out by him as conveyed through the stories about his life. Identification with, and allegiance to, Guru Nanak and his Panth is negotiated through these stories by members' relationship with not only Guru Nanak directly, but also the tradition which he initiated.

The creation, adherence to, and sustenance of this tradition is manifested in two ways in the janam-sakhi literature. The first is in playing a role as a social narrative, setting a trajectory for the community by relaying the past with a clear intent toward future goals. The janam-sakhis, then, serve to present specific doctrinal lessons that supplement or

explain the spiritual lessons of Guru Nanak, providing the means for adhering to the tradition delineated by the social narrative.

The janam-sakhis structure the historical and teleological views of participants, focusing attention in certain directions and orienting actions toward goals laid out by Guru Nanak's life and teachings. This is the Sikh version of David Carr's "prospective-retrospective principle." The Sikh community and tradition are then defined by the people who continue to engage in its projects and draw upon the stories about Guru Nanak. Sikhism is instilled via these stories and these stories blend into the background memory of Sikhs. Each new janam-sakhi narrative that gains a footing in the community's appreciation can be seen as a reorientation, or at least an attempt at reorientation, of the community in considering the story, mission, and goals of the Panth in light of the new telling and new circumstances. Some tellings are successful, others not, but each can be seen as a way to reinforce the bonds of a community whose membership is built upon participation in the projects laid out by Guru Nanak and transmitted through old and new traditions elucidated by the janam-sakhi narratives.

The second aspect conditioning the active engagement of the reader is the specific presentation of doctrines that set forth the principles of Sikhism. The stories provide parameters that structure the actions of their readership. This is the pedagogical program of these stories, to teach about Sikhism. As such lessons are instilled through the aid of the janam-sakhi stories, one begins to live as a Sikh, in line with the community ideal. The janam-sakhis' lessons condition behavior and build bonds with others who also live by

these standards. The tradition is maintained by guidelines established through shared commitment to the lessons these stories convey.

The ties between community, tradition, and these narratives are further strengthened over time as the stories become a place for reflection, interpretation, and reinterpretation of community identity. The processes of producing these bonds through engaging the stories and acting upon their guidance necessitate their continued reinterpretation to sustain their applicability over time and in new situations for the living community. Therefore, attention must be given to new interpretations of old stories, variant tellings, newly-created anecdotes or elaborations, and even the deliberate forgetting of some tales; all of these reflect the full scope of ongoing engagement of applying the stories' messages and keeping them relevant in a changing world.

Social narratives, like the *janam-sakhis*, are as active and alive as the community itself, as these narratives are crucial for understanding who the community is and how they came to be whomever they are. The community is held together by a core of teachings and traditions presented by the narratives. Together they serve to condition the thoughts and actions of community members, setting the acceptable standards and practices that the community recognizes as its own. It is this focus on the religious path laid out by Guru Nanak and devotion to his mission and to him directly as their Guru that serves as the bond holding the community together.

The *janam-sakhis*, then, depict the practical implementation of the Sikh mission embodied in the life story of Guru Nanak. As he is the model of Sikh behavior, the *janam-sakhis* act as blueprints for reproducing and emulating that model. The bond between



Sikhs, as learners, and their Guru is structured in accordance with the moral character of the Guru himself and supplements the revelatory message that he expresses. The Guru's presence is manifested as instruction.

The story form of the *janam-sakhis*, setting up a situation (or plot) which leads to Guru Nanak's recitation of new *bani* (sacred utterances, collected in the hymns of the *Adi Granth*), helps to coordinate and sustain the learning effort of Sikhs. The stories are constructed lessons, tying Guru Nanak's actions to his message through the narrative. *Janam-sakhi* narratives often provide the context for and rationale behind the Guru's hymns, or they can help Sikhs to realize how their own actions can be informed by and derived from the Guru's inspiration. Guru Nanak becomes a reader's guru; he is their teacher.

This reader-teacher relationship is constructed in a variety of ways in the *janam-sakhis*. Some are direct appeals to get to know Guru Nanak and his message. For example, the closing declaration of the *Adi Sakhis* is very clear as to its function in the lives of Sikhs, as it says:

He who reads or hears this sakhi shall attain supreme rapture. He who hears, sings, or reads this sakhi shall find his highest desire fulfilled, for through it he shall meet Guru Baba Nanak. He who with love sings of the glory of Baba Nanak or gives ear to it shall obtain joy ineffable in all that he does in this life, and in the life to come salvation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 243 (hereafter cited as McLeod, *EST*). Citing the *Adi Sakhis* as presented in Piar Singh, ed., *Śambhū Nāth vālī Janam Patrī Bābe Nānak Jī kī prasidh nān Ādi Sākhīān*, (Patiala: printed by editor, 1969), 101.

This is known as a *phalashruti* (*phala*-‘fruit’; *shruti*-‘hearing’) passage. The rewards promised in the selection suggest a value far more significant than edification.

This passage is very clear about why reading its story is important for Sikhs—the readers are enjoined to listen to it, sing it, or read it so that they will virtually find Guru Nanak and salvation. Others, like modern janam-sakhi presentations in children’s books and on the internet, use the selection of specific sakhis as a means to distill and regulate the vision of the Guru that is presented and to condition the relationship in accordance with this specific vision.

While Guru Nanak’s *bani* is recorded in the scriptural form of the *Adi Granth*, there is not much biographical information presented. Nor is there a clear indication of his personality outside of his divine poetry. The janam-sakhis, therefore, are key in assembling and presenting Guru Nanak’s life to later readers. They make it possible to know him as a more complete person than as he is presented via his hymns in the *Adi Granth*.

The personality of the Guru is present via the narratives about him, thus making the Guru present in each telling (though in a slightly different manner than he is found in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.) The janam-sakhi narratives enliven the audience’s scope of interaction with the Guru; he is present to all Sikhs who read his stories (and maybe to non-Sikhs as well). Sikh readers come to learn about Guru Nanak as a man who did things in the world: he is shown as a member of a community who worked and lived the Sikh message, just as later Sikhs try to do it. As the teacher in these texts, Guru Nanak is shown to have a personality, habits, and aspirations. He is a person to be known and loved and emulated.

The janam-sakhis evidence this direct devotion as emotional appeals to Guru Nanak. They are not simply records of memories about him but are also appeals for his

continued guidance as a personal friend, a guru who walks with and advises devotees throughout their lives. This is at the heart of why Sikhs choose to be followers of Guru Nanak, just as they have for centuries and will continue to do so. They learn from the Guru himself (through both the *Adi Granth* and the *janam-sakhis*) and practice those lessons as numerous other learners have, as members of a diachronic community that spans the intervening centuries and also renders the temporal gap between them and their Guru irrelevant.

Despite the variety and differing approach and regard, this all adds up to a tradition of faith based on the relationships forged via these stories. From that, it is possible to elaborate on a theory of narrative participation. Eliade's theory is rooted in a solitary moment of creation, but a relationship is now evidenced and buttressed by Carr's description of a social narrative. The relationship is a process that works to build bonds at each moment of engagement with these stories that stretch across time, history, and distance. A community is created by way of taking Guru Nanak as its founder, stirring individuals to accept and enact the lessons he set forth, and joining others who have done so as well, thus creating a community that shares in the endeavor. The task ahead lies in clearly illuminating how the *janam-sakhis* and their readers participate in these relational processes. The specific focus from this point onward is an examination of the processes of engagement that foster these relationships.

## **The Process of Demonstrating a Theory of Pedagogical Participation and the Relationships They Foster (The Plan of this Dissertation)**

This dissertation will demonstrate the essential features of the janam-sakhis (as both stories and narratives) that indicate the modes of participation in these relationships. This will be accomplished by historical and textual/narrative analyses and through examination of other modes of scholarly interpretation of the janam-sakhis. It is the goal of this examination to demonstrate how participation in the janam-sakhis is a product of the stories' instructional impact, the narratives' social functions, and the direct loving relationship with Guru Nanak himself. All of these processes work in varied and intertwined ways through the pedagogical and participatory projects of the janam-sakhis.

The next chapter provides a thorough description and analysis of the historical janam-sakhis in their varied forms *as* the traditions of the Panth. It will begin with a review of the history of the janam-sakhi manuscript traditions before providing a few select stories to be examined in detail to demonstrate the form and content of the janam-sakhis.

Chapter Three considers how the janam-sakhis have been regarded by academics in the field of Sikh Studies in Western universities and compares these understandings with other scholarly treatments of the janam-sakhis. The last section of this chapter sets forth a comparative model that illustrates the interpretative modes of these scholarly treatments, to allow for more engaging and fruitful comparisons among not only the varied janam-sakhi narratives, but also among the scholarly treatments that seem to stand in opposition or appear incompatible with one another. Essentially, this chapter puts forth the participation model as a comprehensive mode of explanation that can address the concerns of previous studies and serve to bridge their concerns as well. This chapter illustrates how

previous academic studies of the janam-sakhis serve the pedagogical project of the janam-sakhis literature through the specific interpretations offered in those academic treatments.

Subsequent chapters demonstrate how participation in the janam-sakhis continues with new presentations and the continued examination of these narratives. Chapter Four acknowledges the continued presence and role of the janam-sakhis today by describing the new versions of the janam-sakhis that are being produced in a variety of media forms. The janam-sakhis are not simply a historic legacy, as many are inclined to describe them. They are still an active and vibrant textual focus for the Sikh community. These new presentations warrant attention as janam-sakhi narratives in the same ways as their historical predecessors, but they also necessitate new ways to address issues arising from their transmission in new media forms quite different from the old manuscripts and oral traditions.

With a clear presentation of the importance of the modern janam-sakhis established, Chapter Five examines the janam-sakhis' program as social narratives, forging a community through devotees' participation in the projects of the stories. This requires consideration of how stories and narratives foster this community relationship. It is helpful here to turn to consideration of the janam-sakhis as scriptural texts and to examine them in light of related theories that help elaborate both their role in the community and the community's privileged ties to them. This turn helps describe the sustained presence of the janam-sakhis in the public memory of the community as an operational principle working in the background of the community's thinking and self-conception. Specific

attention will be given to new janam-sakhi iterations that best serve as expressions of these continued engagements and reveal the continued participation of Sikhs with these stories.

The final chapter frames one facet of the pedagogical intentions exhibited by janam-sakhi narratives regarding the selective presentation of sakhis. Choosing to present certain anecdotes from Guru Nanak's life, rather than others, sets both a specific agenda for such a narrative and conditions the narrative's application or interpretation. Therefore, as pedagogy informs participation, this chapter illustrates one key way that the lessons conveyed by the janam-sakhi narratives are presented to an individual which then gives rise to actions in accordance with those lessons. This process starts with an individual's apprehension of the lesson and extends through the collaborative efforts of a community which has chosen to participate in the lessons and traditions set forth.

The ultimate goal in all of this is to demonstrate a better model to engage the stories and narratives found in religious traditions that truly matter to their devotees—to show how individuals draw inspiration from these narratives and share them through a community and across the span of time. The collapsing of temporal distance that occurs in and through these narratives is indicative of a process of participation, making the past present so that its heroes can live again or so that their teachings can be applied today. Examining a community's affective connection to those devotional figures is key, and it is made possible by and through a study of their social narratives. The following chapters of this dissertation are the first steps toward that goal.

## 2. The Janam-sakhis: A History of Devotional Participation

The janam-sakhi narratives are the primary account of Guru Nanak's life. No other text presents his life in such detail. They are crucial instructional tools because they present Guru Nanak's message in a manner that is understood and relevant; they serve as an introduction to not just the Sikh moral message, but also to the man who is to serve as teacher along that moral path (the Guru). Thus, the janam-sakhis' purpose is quite different than that of the *Adi Granth*. The janam-sakhis define the fundamentals of Sikhs' personal relationship with Guru Nanak. Use of the stories helps instill those fundamentals in Sikhs' daily lives and describe a spiritual course for the Panth. The community acts upon the lessons of the janam-sakhis in preparation for the more developed spiritual message revealed in the *Adi Granth*'s hymns. This highlights the important role of the janam-sakhis, one that targets often Sikh youth everywhere by introducing them to Guru Nanak's moral message or helps others rejuvenate their own connections with the Guru's message. The lessons of the janam-sakhis then serve to inform the later development of these principles as a Sikh becomes more involved with the formal teachings recorded in the *Adi Granth* and embodied by the community.

This chapter will begin by discussing how the relationships between Guru Nanak and the Sikh audience first came to be expressed through the early janam-sakhi narratives. There are a variety of janam-sakhi texts and they all strive to present Guru Nanak in their own way. Each stresses certain elements or features of the Guru's life or teachings towards a specific presentation goal. They are, as McLeod notes, "purposeful writings" that paint an intentional portrait of Guru Nanak in the light (be it the context or explanations offered

in the narratives) in which the author wants him to be seen and as the premiere model for spiritual growth and guidance.<sup>38</sup> These narratives have undergone numerous changes, ranging from changing modes of presentation, to shifted emphases, to the embrace of new technology that allows presentations to reach around the world.

The janam-sakhis are not, nor have they ever been, a singular or monolithic presentation of Guru Nanak's life. As a body of literature, the janam-sakhis have grown from a humble oral tradition centered on the Guru to a tradition that encompasses stories deeply integrated in Sikh belief and practice. The stories are known by heart; however, the specific understandings of those stories may be applied quite differently by and in each later narrative presentation.

### **Traditional Modes of the Janam-sakhis**

The stories collected in the janam-sakhis, in all likelihood, began with family and friends close to Guru Nanak and were spread by these associates to others. Thus, early oral traditions about Guru Nanak presented his life and teachings to audiences who may not have had the opportunity to meet the Guru in person. Despite the traditions about the Guru's far-ranging journeys, these stories were able to travel even farther and faster to reach people in remote areas. Through the janam-sakhis, the stories about Guru Nanak and the Sikh teachings included in them could be a constant presence in the daily lives of those who did not live near his residence in Kartarpur, as well as for those generations living after the Guru's death.

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<sup>38</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 11.



The earliest extant janam-sakhi texts are dated well after Guru Nanak's death, thus it stands to reason that the literature itself was created and compiled over time and was subject to later editorial additions, changes, or redactions. Scholarly treatments of the janam-sakhis have tried to take this into account, casting the janam-sakhis as narratives created later for the veneration and commemoration of Guru Nanak. This focus on later construction of the janam-sakhis can then account for the variety and somewhat contradictory nature of specific janam-sakhi narratives.

The most cogent elaboration of the process by which the earliest known janam-sakhis came to be authored or compiled is to be found in W. H. McLeod's *Early Sikh Tradition*.<sup>39</sup> McLeod addresses two key issues with regard to the origins of the janam-sakhis: 1) the traditions' various constituent elements, and 2) the formation and contexts of the specific narratives of the janam-sakhi texts. This section will examine these constituents before moving on to a discussion of the specific janam-sakhi traditions that emerged and are the foundation of modern presentations. While McLeod's work provides a framework here, the contributions of other scholars will be noted where valuable.

McLeod contends that the janam-sakhi narratives were derived from an earlier oral tradition about the life of Guru Nanak that was popular throughout the Punjab in the early seventeenth century. These stories were not necessarily inventions of that time, but they were drawn together from the communities' "authentic memories concerning the actual incidents from the life of Nanak."<sup>40</sup> Obviously, those Sikhs who met Guru Nanak would

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<sup>39</sup> McLeod, *EST*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

remember him and tell others about him, parents would tell children, and so on throughout the community of Sikhs. These stories worked in combination with Guru Nanak's *bani*, as his hymns were ever present in the community via the *Adi Granth*.<sup>41</sup> The early stories worked to elaborate upon and explain the hymns, giving contexts and rationale for the mystical poetry sung by the community. The combination of the Guru's verses and his life practices guided Sikh community practices, which influenced the formation of the *janam-sakhis* as "received tradition or the impulses derived from Nanak's own words."<sup>42</sup> These elements were eventually passed along and compiled as the *janam-sakhis*.

To these earlier constituents, McLeod adds Bhai Gurdas' *Var I*. Bhai Gurdas was a nephew of the third Guru, Amar Das (1479-1574), and was close to the next three Gurus as well (Guru Ram Das 1534-1581, Guru Arjan 1563-1606, and Guru Hargobind 1595-1644). Bhai Gurdas was the scribe who assisted Guru Arjan in compiling the *Adi Granth* in 1604. His *Vars* (ballads) are a record of the Sikh community and traditions that are unmatched by any other source. They are generally regarded as the "key to the *Guru Granth Sahib*," as Bhai Gurdas' insights and elaborations on the scripture were taken as authoritative by the community. *Var I* is a record, albeit a sparse one, of anecdotes giving a brief outline of Guru Nanak's life in a rough chronology and through accounts of his travels. Kirpal Singh contends that the *Vars*' accounts were based on the eyewitness of Bhai Buddha (1506-1631), a young contemporary of Guru Nanak. Therefore, Kirpal Singh

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<sup>41</sup> Depending on their time and location, early *janam-sakhi* compilers may not have had the finalized *Adi Granth* available to them. They would have worked from the versions of the hymns that they knew.

<sup>42</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 57.

asserts, this gives the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas “the authority of a contemporary source”<sup>43</sup> so that it served as the authoritative account of Guru Nanak’s life up to the time of Guru Hargobind. McLeod avoids such a direct claim of authority and describes the *Vars* as a poetic eulogy for Guru Nanak meant to magnify his greatness.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of the differing opinions on the *Vars*, it is possible to see that a common and consistent framework for the Guru’s life was established by someone who was close to the lineage of Gurus and had intimate knowledge of Guru Nanak’s verses through assisting Guru Arjan with the compilation of the *Adi Granth*.<sup>45</sup>

### **Janam-sakhi Textual Lineages**

Oral traditions about the first Guru were varied and many, lovingly recorded by a number of Sikhs over the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Originally they were called *janam-patris*, meaning birth horoscopes, as they were comparable to horoscopes prepared by Brahmins for children based on the time of their birth.<sup>46</sup> As this early tradition developed into a more robust literary genre, the story (*sakhi*) of the Guru’s life

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<sup>43</sup> Kirpal Singh, *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2004), 33 (hereafter cited as K. Singh, *JTAS*).

<sup>44</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> This is not to say that the *janam-sakhis* are products of these items only. McLeod directed readers’ attention to consider the lasting impact of the Hindu Epics and Puranas, as well as the ascetic Nath tradition and the more recent influence of Sufis in the Punjab (see McLeod, *EST*, 64-5). One cannot overlook the influence of the milieu of Indian religious traditions and writings in the production of the *janam-sakhis*.

<sup>46</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 11.

overshadowed any comparison to the horoscopes. Thus the more story-focused designation of janam-sakhi took hold and continues to identify this material today.

Ultimately, certain tellings and retellings of these stories and the specific ways in which these were combined crystallized into a small number of individual narrative traditions. These include the popularly personal and fantastic accounts of the *Bālā janam-sākhī* and the two composite manuscripts known today as the *Purātan* (ancient) *janam-sākhī* and the *Ādi* (First) *Sākhīs*. Also part of these historic janam-sakhi traditions are the *Miharbān janam-sākhī*, which is attributed to the leader of the schismatic Mina sect, and the *Janam-sākhī of Bhai Mani Singh*, an eighteenth-century text attributed to a close companion of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Additionally, two janam-sakhi manuscripts, referred to by their library catalog designations *LDP 194* and *B-40*, stand out as individual janam-sakhis that, although related to the Puratan and Adi Sakhis, are distinct enough to warrant their inclusion separate of either lineage.

These new and varied manuscript traditions grew throughout the following centuries, and it is reasonable to assume that regular Sikh engagement with these differing traditions ultimately led to a well-organized and relatively stable image of the first Guru and his life story, as well as the reification of the particular janam-sakhi traditions in which these fixed narratives were sustained over centuries. The shift from an oral tradition to the texts still extant today is marked, as McLeod outlines, by four distinct stages. The first stage is the simple random collection of material about Guru Nanak, with no specific organizational principle at work. McLeod gives the example of *LDP 194* (manuscript no. 194 in the Languages Department of the Panjab, Patiala), which is given in two portions,

the first of which is a narrative, and the second of which is simply a collection of quotes from Guru Nanak's *Adi Granth* hymns *Siddh Gost* and *Var Asa*.<sup>47</sup>

The second stage marks the shift from a random collection of anecdotes to a specifically organized narrative. This stage demonstrates a more conscious effort to make the chronology of Guru Nanak's life sensible and significant: Guru Nanak's travels are organized into four voyages towards the four cardinal directions. Here is where the development of the various *janam-sakhi* traditions begin.

Once a sensible scheme of order was established (though the specific order of anecdotes differs in the various *janam-sakhis* themselves), attention turned to the development and addition of exposition and narrative discourses as an integral part of the *janam-sakhis*, an attention which marks the third stage. McLeod defines the development of different types of narrative anecdotes thusly: narrative discourses, which are built upon the verses of Guru Nanak; didactic discourses, which are narratives with added exposition and exegesis; heterodox discourses and their deviant emphases; and, finally, codes of discipline, which lay the groundwork for the development for the codification of Sikh behavior in the *rahit-nāmā* literature of the seventeenth century and later. The *Miharban janam-sakhi* serves as the clearest example of these narrative developments.

The final stage of *janam-sakhi* development that McLeod describes came in the nineteenth century and is a product of technology—the emergence of print editions of the *janam-sakhis*. With the development of print editions came increased circulation and availability compared to manuscripts, the settling (to a degree) of continued variations

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

inherent in the manuscript traditions, and the specific promotion of certain versions of the janam-sakhis which further increased their popularity.

Any historical or content analysis of the janam-sakhis must draw heavily from the work of W.H. McLeod as presented in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* and *Early Sikh Tradition*, two seminal examinations of the historic janam-sakhi traditions. McLeod's examination of early manuscripts is unparalleled, and provides a foundation for this analysis to move beyond the historical settings to examine the janam-sakhis' role in fostering participation in the relationships described in the first chapter of this study. Other elements of McLeod's analysis, such as his method of cataloging the individual sakhis and his counts of those sakhis appearing in these early textual sources will be addressed in these descriptions of the primary janam-sakhi lineages as well.

#### The Bala Janam-sakhi [48/ 74/ 77 sakhis<sup>48</sup>]

The earliest extant manuscript of the Bala janam-sakhi is dated *samvat* 1715 (1658 CE), roughly one hundred and twenty years after Guru Nanak died. The different sakhi counts note differences between three editions of Bala janam-sakhis.<sup>49</sup> By asserting that its purported author, Bhai Bala, was a close friend and traveling companion of Guru Nanak,

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<sup>48</sup> A bracketed number, or set of numbers, will be noted with the introduction of each janam-sakhi texts to be discussed in this study. These note the number of individual anecdotes presented in the manuscript or text as classified in accordance with the scheme laid by McLeod in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. This study will make use of these counts throughout the discussion. McLeod, *GNSR*, 73-76. Unless noted, these counts will be my own, following McLeod's criteria.

<sup>49</sup> McLeod references the Hāfaz Qutb Dīn lithograph and the lithograph from Dīvān Būtā Singh of Lahore, both dated 1871, as well as a modern version published in 1942 by Munshī Gulāb Singh and Sons of Lahore.

this tradition claims to be an eyewitness account of the Guru's life. Bhai Bala is said to have told these stories, a chronicle of his personal experiences, to the second Sikh Master, Guru Angad (1504-1552 CE), who sought to know his predecessor's birth date. The janam-sakhis of Bhai Bala became the most popular account of Guru Nanak's life throughout the eighteenth century, partly due to the personal connection with the Guru through Bhai Bala and partly due to its fantastic depictions of the Guru's spiritual power, which are reminiscent of the Puranas' heroic depictions of good triumphing over evil.<sup>50</sup>

Bhai Bala's first appearance as Nanak's companion was in the "Sacha Sauda" sakhi (sakhi #16 "Khara Sauda: the Feeding of Saint Ren and the Faqirs").<sup>51</sup> He is not mentioned in any other early janam-sakhi collection, nor in any other Sikh writings from that era. Bhai Bala was not even included in Bhai Gurdas' eleventh *Var*, which listed prominent Sikhs of this period. This leads W.H. McLeod to consider the "Sacha Sauda" anecdote among the "improbable sakhis" regarding the history of Guru Nanak.<sup>52</sup> Because neither Bhai Bala nor the "Sacha Sauda" story appear in earlier janam-sakhi traditions, or even in some influential later ones, McLeod doubts the historical validity of Bala's depiction of this anecdote about Guru Nanak's life (along with the very existence of Bhai Bala himself). This assertion was vehemently contested by those Sikhs who contend that the Bala janam-sakhi is an accurate and true history of Guru Nanak, as tradition and the text would indicate.

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<sup>50</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> McLeod's studies label this sakhi as #16 "Khara Sauda: the Feeding of Saint Ren and the Faqirs," but it is commonly known by Sikhs as "Sacha Sauda," the key phrase that sums up the True Bargain of Guru Nanak's lesson. McLeod's labels for sakhis are used throughout this study.

<sup>52</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 83.

Sikhs commemorate this story in numerous ways. Two of the most prominent being in the form of two gurdwaras that mark locations noted in the sakhi: Gurdwara Sacha Sauda and the Tambu Sahib Gurdwara, the latter of which guards the tree under which Guru Nanak is reported to have hidden from his father.<sup>53</sup> While there is no external evidence supporting the claim that Bala was close to the Guru, or even of the existence of Bhai Bala, this is by far the most popular of the janam-sakhi traditions.

The intent of Bala's janam-sakhi has also been called into question by numerous Sikh scholars. Some of Bala's other sakhis have Guru Nanak prophesy the arrival of a greater saint in the lineage of Kabir and Nanak—Baba Hindal. This has led some to question the veracity of the Bala janam-sakhi as a whole. W. Owen Cole points out that the Bala "manuscript is designed to promote Baba Hindal and Kabir at the expense of Guru Nanak."<sup>54</sup> Surjit Hans' analysis leads him to label the Bala janam-sakhis as "heterodox" because "the institutions of guruship and sangat are attacked."<sup>55</sup> Hans further describes how "the Bala Janamsakhi manages to keep Guru Nanak's spirituality in a low key by making him keep a low profile in the narrative of 'wonderful exploits'."<sup>56</sup> Despite the "taint" of the sakhis proclaiming the arrival of Baba Hindal,<sup>57</sup> the Bala janam-sakhi became

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<sup>53</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, s.v. "Sachchā Saudā, Gurdwārā." And Gurmukh Singh, *Historical Sikh Shrines* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1995), 54-55.

<sup>54</sup> W. Owen Cole, *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 169.

<sup>55</sup> Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* (Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1988), 204.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>57</sup> K. Singh, *JTAS*, 42.



the most popular janam-sakhi tradition in the eighteenth century. This may be due to the fact that references to Baba Hindal were excised from later copies of Bala janam-sakhis (both manuscript and later print editions),<sup>58</sup> although devout Sikhs and modern scholars have also offered additional theories as to why an apparently heretical tradition could have gained such a following. As one example, Kirpal Singh suggests that the sakhis referring to Baba Hindal were added later to Bala's account, but no other scholars (McLeod, Hans, Cole) report any evidence to corroborate this.<sup>59</sup>

The *Purātan* Janam-sakhi [67 sakhis<sup>60</sup>]

This collection was initially thought to be the oldest of all extant janam-sakhis by those who discovered it in 1872; hence, it was given the name *purātan*, meaning ancient. It presents a more concise and less fantastic story about the life of Guru Nanak. The manuscripts are most likely from the mid-seventeenth century, and indications are that they were compiled from still earlier sources. Despite its vague dating, the Puratan tradition rose to prominence under the influence of the Singh Sabha reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because of the absence of fantastic elements present in other extant versions of the Bala janam-sakhi—it presented a realistic vision of the Guru that was in keeping with reformers' modern sensibilities.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>60</sup> Count from McLeod, *GNSR*, 73-76.

Recently discovered Puratan manuscripts further call common understandings of this janam-sakhi's history into question. Gurinder Singh Mann presents evidence of Puratan manuscripts dating from the late 1500s that calls into question the full extent of Guru Nanak's travels.<sup>61</sup> These "new" manuscripts suggest Guru Nanak's travels were far more limited than later janam-sakhis indicate. The place names mentioned, such as the Shivalik Hills in the Punjab/ Himachal Pradesh region, are far closer together than the wide-ranging journeys reported in other janam-sakhis. If these manuscripts are indeed the earliest Puratan texts, as Gurinder Singh Mann claims, then they represent an early core of stories that were then exaggerated as they spread.

#### The Miharban Janam-sakhi [65 sakhis<sup>62</sup>]

Named after their author, Miharban (1581-1640), of whom there is historical evidence, these janam-sakhis are tied to the schismatic Mina sect.<sup>63</sup> Discovered in 1940, the text is not simply the story of Guru Nanak's life, but a scriptural exegesis as well, an exegesis that indicates a strong Khatri affiliation, rather than an affiliation with the rising Jat influence in the Panth. These elements contributed to McLeod's assertion that the Miharban janam-sakhi likely developed much later than the manuscript's date of 1828 CE, possibly during the late nineteenth century. Surjit Hans refers to these differences in the

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<sup>61</sup> Gurinder Singh Mann, "Stories of the Founder: The Puratan Janam Sakhi Re-visited" (paper presented at *Expanding Horizons: Sikh Studies at the Turn of the 21st Century*, Santa Barbara, CA, November 14, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 73-76.

<sup>63</sup> Sodhi Miharban was the son of Prithi Chand (1558-1618), the elder brother of Guru Arjan, who was passed over for the guruship and contested the decision.

Miharban as reflective of the text's "sectarian interest" and places his discussion of it (and the Bala Janam-sakhi) within a chapter titled "The Unorthodox Janamsakhis"—implying that the others are orthodox texts.<sup>64</sup>

### Other Janam-sakhi texts

There are other less prominent or singular janam-sakhi manuscripts that have been discovered as well. One such example is the *Janam-sakhi of Bhai Mani Singh*, the *Gyān-ratanāvalī* (60 sakhis<sup>65</sup>), a collection from the early eighteenth century attributed to Bhai Mani Singh (1672-1738), a scholar and companion to the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708). He is said to have written his janam-sakhi as a commentary on Bhai Gurdas' *Vars*. McLeod points to internal evidence in the text that casts doubt on the authorship claims of this text: first, Bhai Mani Singh is referred to in the third person within the text; second, the language elsewhere is in a modern style; and third, it lacks the coherency of a single author. The sakhis within the collection point to an early Mina influence, which indicates that the compiler(s) may have either used earlier Miharban sources or sources common to the two.

Another example would be the *Adi Sakhis*. The *Adi Sakhis* were discovered in the library at Punjab University, Lahore in 1947, along with other manuscripts uncovered in India in the late 1960s. McLeod identifies materials in the *Adi Sakhis* drawn from the Miharban in a manner that he describes as "reciprocal borrowings." The extant manuscripts

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<sup>64</sup> Hans, *Reconstruction*, 203 and 198.

<sup>65</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 73-76.

are both dated 1701, which, McLeod suggests, is evidence that they were copies of an earlier manuscript.<sup>66</sup>

The *B-40 Janam-sakhi* (38 sakhis<sup>67</sup>) is an illustrated volume found in the India Office Library. McLeod says it is “perhaps the most important of all extant janam-sakhis.”<sup>68</sup> A number of factors support his claim. First, a note appended to the manuscript, now housed in the British Library, gives details about the text being commissioned by Bhai Sangū Mal, compiled by Dayā Rām Abrol, and completed on August 31, 1733. The B-40 is unique because it is an illustrated janam-sakhi manuscript.<sup>69</sup> Finally, as one of the latter compilations, the B-40’s composite construction represents the widest range of antecedents, drawing from “examples of all the major forms to be found in janam-sākhī literature.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 30-33 and 219-220. McLeod, surprisingly, did not include the *Adi Sakhis* in his sakhi analyses in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. Thus, I was not able to discern a specific sakhi count. The omission of this count does little to impact the analyses to follow, but acknowledgment of its exclusion was warranted.

<sup>67</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 73-76.

<sup>68</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 43.

<sup>69</sup> Alam Chand Raj’s beautiful illustrations are reproduced in *B-40 Janamsakhi Guru Baba Nanak Paintings*, ed. Surjit Hans (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1987). I had a chance to view the actual B-40 manuscript at the British Library on August 6, 2009. The images are fading, but the text itself has held up well. My thanks to Marina Chellini, North Indian Asian and African Studies at the British Library for helping me view this text and other janam-sakhi manuscripts.

<sup>70</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 43. For further analysis of the B-40 see: McLeod, *GNSR*, 229-233; and W.H. McLeod, *The B40 Janam-Sakhi* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1980).

### A Summation of the Historical Janam-sakhis

From the time of their authoring or compiling, these texts go on to spur, influence, and generally define the authoritative body of sakhis recognized as the legitimate portrayal of Guru Nanak's life. Collectively, they are the references consulted by Sikhs and scholars for the historical record of Guru Nanak's life. But this is not to say that these manuscripts are prominent in the lives of Sikhs today. The stories are well known, but the specifics of these narrative accounts are not. To the average Sikh, the janam-sakhis are the stories, not the manuscripts; the differences of their origins, intentions, and contents are not well- or widely-known. If one were to go into a bookstore in India and ask for the janam-sakhis, one would be more likely to be led to either a scholarly analysis of the stories or a children's book that tells merely a portion of the stories of Guru Nanak's life.

This becomes even more of an issue as one takes into account the advances of the internet: the presentations of the janam-sakhis found on-line are paraphrased, summarized, or otherwise distilled from the original manuscripts, not direct presentations. As mentioned before, each new narrative presentation, including these distillations, is directed to a new audience with new concerns and sensibilities. This is an ongoing process revealed by the continued production and use of janam-sakhi narratives. This study shall devote more attention to newer presentations than to older ones, as they present the current discourse of the janam-sakhis—presenting specific sakhis in a variety of ways.

## Select Sakhis

This section will present some of the most popular sakhis<sup>71</sup> found in modern iterations of the janam-sakhis, as well as a few other key selections that provide readers a more thorough overview of the life of Guru Nanak. The eight anecdotes to be considered here (along with sakhi 22 “Immersion in the river: his call,” which was presented in the first chapter) are indicative of the three phases of Guru Nanak’s life as conveyed by the janam-sakhis: 1) his early life, 2) his call and his travels teaching, and 3) his life while settled at Kartarpur. The sakhis presented here were selected from modern janam-sakhi iterations readily available to contemporary readers. The goal of this means of selection is to best emulate a reader’s situation today. Additionally, choosing selections from a variety of sources demonstrates the differing styles of contemporary janam-sakhi presentations.

All of the sakhis to be presented here and throughout this study are in English, drawn from English-language sources. These selections represent a specific manner of presenting the story of Guru Nanak’s life to audiences in communities where English is prominent. This is but one branch of the diaspora, and sakhis directed to other regions would employ other languages. These selections provide a snapshot of materials being directed to audiences primarily in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.

In its own way, this section of the project is its own (admittedly truncated) janam-sakhi—it is this author’s presentation of the stories, compiled from an available tradition

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<sup>71</sup> Popularity, in this case, is determined by the number of times these stories are presented across the sampling of narrative texts discussed throughout this study. The specific details and rankings are discussed in Chapter Six.

(contemporary texts), in a manner similar in some ways to the early compilers and strikingly different in others.<sup>72</sup> However, it still conveys the major messages and moments of Guru Nanak's life.

These selections follow the general forms of classical janam-sakhis, offering the stories around Guru Nanak's teachings and contexts for his recitations as recorded in the *Adi Granth*, though not all are as developed or specific in these areas. These selections also demonstrate the variety of modern janam-sakhi presentations, ranging from texts directed at educated adults to children's books and even to a selection from an illustrated comic book telling of Guru Nanak's life. New presentations of the janam-sakhis are quite different from the old manuscript traditions and must be considered in their own right as valid presentations of the Guru's life.<sup>73</sup>

The following sakhis are presented in order based on the life of Guru Nanak. The numbering system developed by McLeod, was concerned with an authoritative order and used the Miharban version as a basis for his work. McLeod identified and inserted other sakhis that showed a specific chronological order into that schema to bring the full list to one hundred sakhis. Sakhis that did not provide sufficient evidence to suggest a specific chronology were labelled "Miscellaneous *sākhīs*"<sup>74</sup> and were numbered sakhis 101 to 124.

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<sup>72</sup> This selection of sakhis was drawn from a sampling of popular sakhis that involved statistical comparisons to rank which sakhis were the most popular among the materials evaluated and random selection of which iteration to be discussed throughout this dissertation. For example, sakhi 124 "Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo," can be found in thirty of the thirty-five sources consulted. The specific iteration of sakhi 124 to be presented here was chosen at random to avoid any bias privileging a specific iteration over others.

<sup>73</sup> Discussion of these differences can be found in Chapter Four. For now, it is important to note what these narratives convey about Guru Nanak's life and spiritual message. These sakhis demonstrate how the stories are being presented to English-speaking audiences today.

<sup>74</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 71.

McLeod notes that he added the numerical label to the sakhis “for ease of reference in the discussion which follows,”<sup>75</sup> and this study shall employ them for the same reason.

### 5. Investiture with the sacred thread

As Nanak reached the age of thirteen, it was time for him to be given the *janeu*, the sacred thread woven of seven cotton strings and worn by upper-caste Hindus as a mark of their being ‘twice-born’. Elaborate arrangements were made for the occasion and relatives and friends were invited. But when Pandit Hardyal, the family priest, tried to place the thread across Nanak’s shoulder, as is usually done, the young Nanak refused to wear it, saying: “How can you differentiate between men by such badges (‘twice-born’)? It is their actions that should characterize them. I will not take such a badge. Besides, the thread will get soiled and break.”

Nanak’s steadfast refusal to wear the sacred thread took his parents and the guests by surprise, but he recited the following hymn elucidating what a *janeu* ought to be:

Let compassion be your cotton!  
Spin it into the yarn of contentment;  
Give it knots of continence,  
And the twist of truth,  
Thus will you make a *janeu* for the soul.  
If such a one you have,  
Put it on me.  
The thread so made will neither snap, nor become soiled.  
It will neither be burned nor lost.  
Blessed is the man, O Nanak,  
Who wears such a thread around his neck!

The ceremony did not conclude and the assembled guests left. Obviously the family must have been upset, too, since elaborate arrangements had been made for the guests.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>76</sup> Roopinder Singh, *Guru Nanak: His Life & Teachings* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2007), 13-14.



The Sikh rejection of Hindu caste distinction as a social order and hierarchy is obvious here. The young Nanak points out, through the verse, that no outward sign can distinguish or denote one's state of purity. It is a blatant rejection of the separation of people by the caste system, with Nanak implying that even the lowly can be pure and honorable, and the righteous high-born can be, and often are, sullied. The counter offered by Nanak is an honest life of compassion and contentment.

#### 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Saint Ren and the faqirs (a.k.a. "Sacha Sauda")

Having worked as a cattle grazer for several years, Nanak gave up that work. His father tried him out in several vocations but none could hold his interest for long.

Nanak felt happiest in the company of sadhus and fakirs. He enjoyed having religious discourses with them. His father did not like this at all. He wanted him to earn a decent livelihood, marry and raise a family like any ordinary man. So he packed him off with a large sum of money to try out his luck in business.

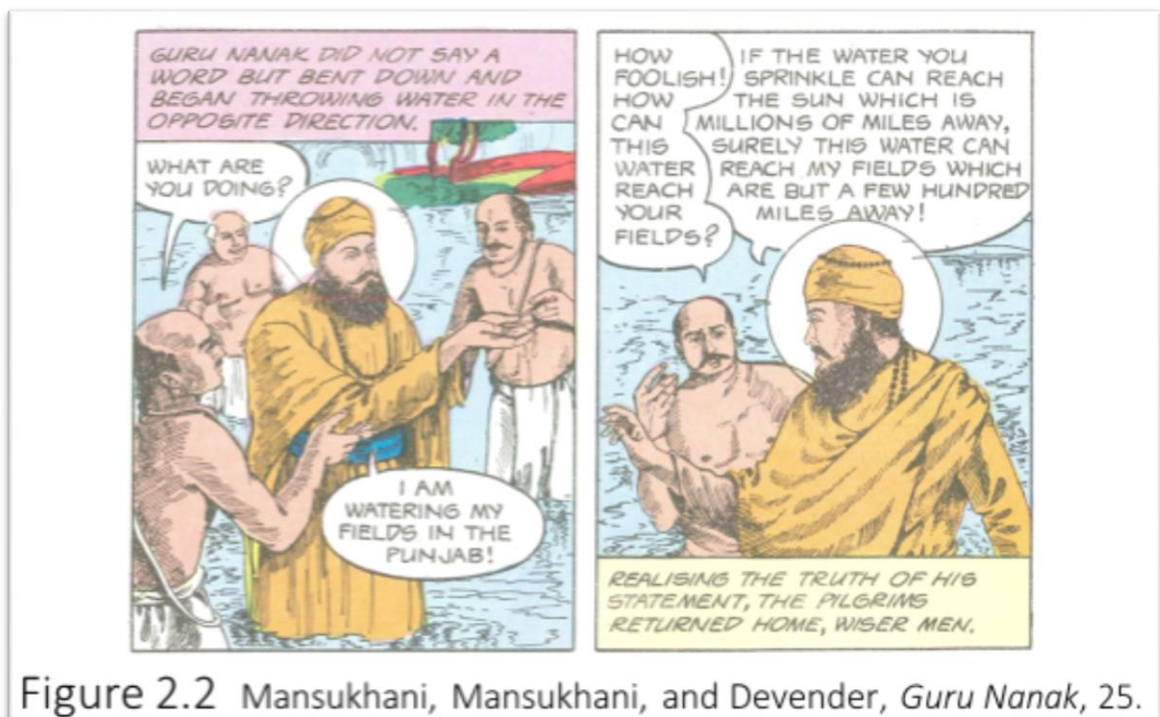
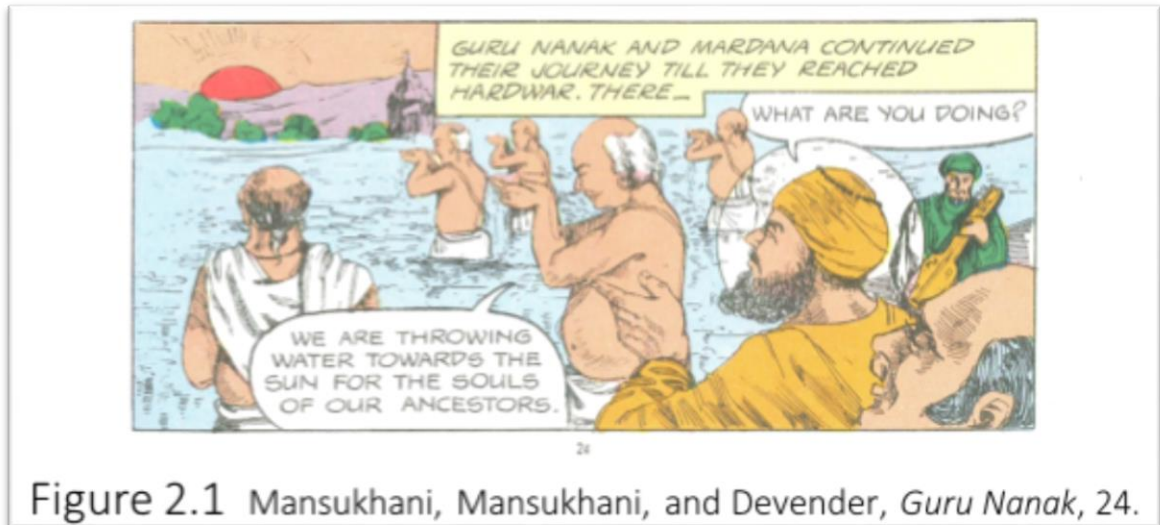
Accompanied by a friend, Bhai Bala, Nanak set out towards a nearby town Chuharkana, where he spotted a group of hungry sadhus in a grove of shady trees. Despite protests from Bhai Bala, the kind-hearted Nanak spent all his money on feeding the holy men. According to him, it was the best bargain he could strike with his capital. This was the 'sachcha sauda' or 'good bargain'.<sup>77</sup>

Simply seeing this as the promotion of Sikh conceptions of charity (*dān*) and service (*seva*) to those in need will suffice for now. The implications and ramifications of this sakhi will be explored at length in Chapter Four when how Sikhs interpret a sakhi will be discussed.

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<sup>77</sup> Mridula Oberoi, *The Sikh Gurus Life and Times*, Madhuban Children's Books (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1992), 15.

34. Hardwār: the watering of his field



This illustrated sakhi (figures 2.1 and 2.2)<sup>78</sup> demonstrates the humor used by Guru Nanak to point out the absurdity of doing ritual just for the sake of doing ritual. His criticism runs deeper, pointing out that people could be doing something of value, such as

work that makes a contribution to society; focusing solely on religious action accomplishes little in the long run. Watering his fields, for example, will at least result in people being fed. Guru Nanak is asking, what good does “watering the ancestors” do for the people around you? This demonstrates his larger social concern.

### 103. The coal and the thorn

From Garhwal Hills, Guru Nanak Dev had plans to go to the South. On his way he visited Allahabad, Ayodhya, Varanasi and Gaya. On his way to Patna Sahib from there, the Guru stayed at a village named Akbarpur.

There were two shopkeepers at Akbarpur. Both would close their [sic] shops at the same time in the evening. Then one would go to a life of sin with a prostitute. The other would go to Satsang.

One day they were discussing their experiences in the evening. The first said that on his return from the prostitute, he found a gold coin. The second narrated that on his return from Satsang, he got a thorn stuck in his foot.

The shopkeepers were unable to explain why it happened the way it did. Since the Guru was in the village, they went to him to seek explanation. The Guru took them to the two spots and asked them to dig up there.

When the first spot where the gold coin was found was dug up, they hit a vessel full of burnt coal. Guru Nanak Dev said: “This is what happens with sin. It burns up the jewel of life and converts it into coal.”

When the second pot was dug up, they found a hole with snakes in it. The snakes, however, withdrew, into the hole. The Guru explained: “Good company, particularly company of saints drives away all vices.” It is because of Satsang that the shopkeeper was not bitten by the snakes.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> G.S. and Naniki Mansukhani, and Devender, *Guru Nanak*. Ed. Anant Pai. Amar Chitra Katha Vol. 590 (1973; Mumbai: India Book House, 2006), 24-25.

<sup>79</sup> H.S. Singha and Satwant Kaur, *Guru Nanak Dev*, Divinity Sikh Studies 3, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (1995; New Delhi: Hemkunt, 2008), 30-31.



Figure 2.3 H.S. Singha and Satwant Kaur, *Guru Nanak Dev*, 31.

The appeal to a life of purity (*isnān*) and devotion (*nām*) is clearly made in this story, as these virtues can stave off vices, threats, and, in this case, snakes. In contrast, sin (though it is doubtful Guru Nanak would have chosen that word) burns away all that is or can be good in one's life, and reduce fortunes to rubble. The reader is offered a clear choice between these two paths—devotion or worldly pleasures—and the end result of each is made clear.

## 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped

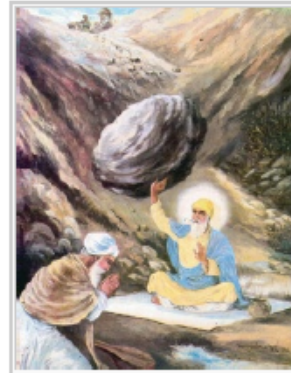
### Guru Nanak at Hassan Abdal

(Redirected from [Guru Nanak and Wali Qandhari -1](#))



After travelling through [Arabia](#) and many other countries, in 1521 A.D during the summer season, [Guru Nanak](#) reached a place called [Hasan Abdal](#). [Hasan Abdal](#) is located fifty kilometers from [Rawalpindi](#) in present-day [Pakistan](#) to the west side of the mountains. This is a hilly area and some places here have natural fountains which flow from the ground.

[Guru Ji](#) with [Bhai Mardana](#) and a small party halted at this place at the foot of a hill. Under the cool shade of a tree, [Guru Nanak](#) and [Bhai Mardana](#) started reciting [Kirtan](#) as it was their normal practice. Slowly, the local devotees began to gather around the Guru. Soon, a large crowd of people began to regularly gather around the Guru. He talked to them about God and the true path of the holy. He told them the greatness of God and His creations and how we should all remember God at all times. More and more people began to gather around the Guru as each day went by.



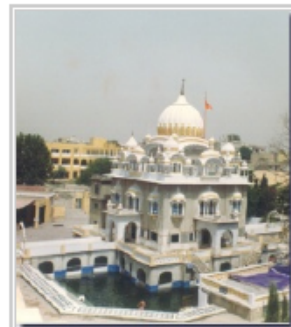
Wali throws a rock at the Guru

Contents [\[show\]](#)

### Wali Qandhari's Hill

On the top of the nearby hill, there lived a [Muslim](#) priest (also referred to as a "pir"). His name was [Bawa Wali Qandhari](#). [Wali Qandhari](#) had established a celebrated [dera](#) (holy place) at this hill at [Hasan Abdal](#), near a natural fountain. His house was very close to the fresh water spring from where the water flowed down to the town and was then used by the people for all their needs. There was no other source of fresh water nearby, therefore [Wali Qandhari](#) used this [dera](#) to assist people who followed his faith and to punish the "non-believers".

[Wali Qandhari](#) was an arrogant person, when he saw people gathering around [Guru Nanak Ji](#) instead of his place, he became very angry. So, he stopped the spring water from flowing down to the town. The people became frustrated and now the question arose, how could they and their cattle survive without water?



Gurdwara Panja Sahib at the site of this incident

### Group Goes To Wali Qandhari To Ask For Water

A group of them went to [Baba Wali Qandhari](#) and begged him to let the water flow down as before. But [Bawa Wali Qandhari](#) said angrily, "Go to your Guru, the one you visit everyday now and ask him for water." The people went to the Guru and told him the whole story.

The Guru said, "Don't lose your heart. Trust in God. He will not let you die of thirst."

The Guru then said to [Bhai Mardana](#), "Go and appeal to [Bawa Wali Qandhari](#) and request him to let the water flow down to the town."

[Bhai Mardana](#) went to appeal to [Wali Qandhari](#) to release the water so that the village folk could quench their thirst



and give water to the thirsty animals. But as soon as Bhai Mardana got to the top of the hill, Bawa Wali Qandhari began shouting angrily, "Go back to your Guru and ask him to give water to the people. I will not give you any water."

Guru Ji asked Bhai Mardana to go again. Although he was reluctant, Bhai Mardana very humbly approached Wali Qandhari and begged for water. He requested and begged him to release the water so that they could quench their thirst, but, Wali Qandhari again refused to give him any water and even abused him with harsh words.

Despite all of this, Mardana still very politely stuck to his request. Wali again ironically remarked: "Why don't you ask your Master whom you serve? Isn't he able to give you any water?"

### Bhai Mardana Returns Empty Handed

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Bhai Mardana returned to the Guru and narrated what Bawa Wali Qandhari had said to him. The Guru sent him once again. Bhai Mardana was very reluctant to go as he knew that the Wali would not change his mind; still Bhai Mardana obeyed the Guru's request.

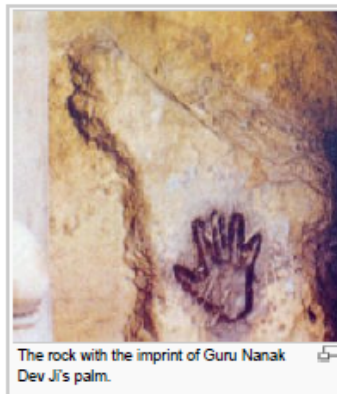
But again he came back empty handed with the same story. The frustration of the public grew each second. The Guru said, "Don't lose your heart. God is great and merciful. He can make springs flow from wherever He likes. Let us all pray to Him." They all prayed together with much dedication.

### A Small Stream Flows From The Ground

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Then Guru Nanak Dev Ji lifted a stone under his feet. At once, a small trickle of cool, clean water began to flow from the place where the Guru had lifted the stone.

At the same time, Bawa Wali Qandhari's spring began to dry up. He was red with anger; he could not control his fury. In this crazy state of his mind, from the top of the hill he pushed a large rock towards the Guru. The rock came rolling down towards the Guru.



### Wali's Big Rock Tumbles Down The Hill

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Wali Qandhari thought that the rock would crush the Guru to death. However, the Guru quietly and calmly raised his hand and the rock stopped at the instant it touched the Guru's hand. The Guru's hand was imprinted on the rock. Wali Qandhari's pride was broken.

He could not believe how such a huge rock could have been stopped. Instantly, he realised that the Guru was a person of God and that God Himself had protected his devotee. He quickly came down and fell at the Guru's feet. The Guru said to him, "Rise my friend. Live as lovers of God should live. Be kind to all."

This sakhi depicts (another) triumph over a disgruntled holy man, in this case a Muslim, upset by the intrusion of Guru Nanak into his devotional precincts.<sup>80</sup> The Guru overcomes the Wali in both debate and spiritual power (the ability to stop the boulder). The demonstration of Guru Nanak's prowess convinces the Muslim to bow before Nanak, implying that he then devotes himself to the Guru's mission.

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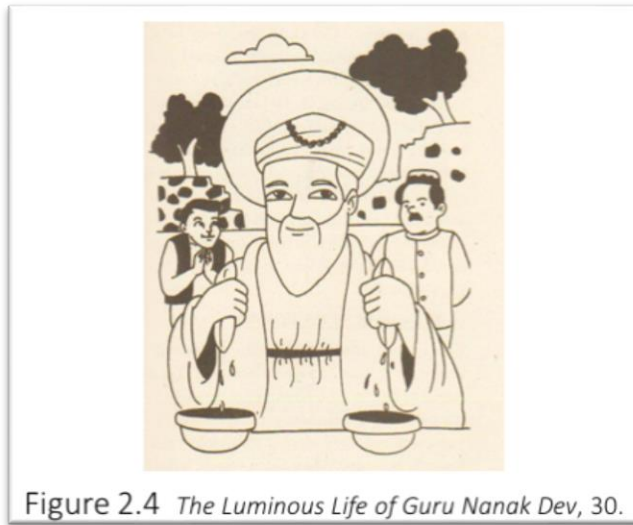
<sup>80</sup> *SikhiWiki: Encyclomedia of the Sikhs*, "Guru Nanak at Hassan Abdal," accessed July 29, 2014, [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Guru\\_Nanak\\_and\\_Wali\\_Qandhari\\_-1](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Guru_Nanak_and_Wali_Qandhari_-1). Screen capture taken August 22, 2014.

#### 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Accompanied by Mardana, the Guru made his first stop at Saidpur, now known as Eminabad, and there he met a poor carpenter named Lalo. The Master looked at poor Lalo politely and he was blessed with Divine love, he was a blessed man. The Guru chose to stay with Lalo for sometimes as a guest. The news reached Malik Bhagoji, the chief of the town, that a holy person was staying with Lalo. Malik Bhagoji was a corrupt man and he had amassed wealth through unfair means.

He held a big gathering and invited all holy men including the Guru. The Guru, however, did not accept the invitation. The Malik then made a special arrangement for the Guru and requested him to come and eat at his residence. At last the Guru went there and Malik Bhagoji said, “O holy man, I have prepared so many dishes for you, but you are staying with a poor carpenter and eating his dry bread. Please stay with me.”

The Guru replied, “I cannot eat your food because your bread has been made with money sucked from the poor through unfair means, while Lalo’s bread is made from the hard-earned money.” This made Malik Bhagoji very mad and he asked the Guru to prove his point. The Guru then sent for a loaf of bread from Lalo’s house. In one hand the Guru held Lalo’s bread and in the other that of Malik Bhagoji, and when he squeezed both, milk came out from Lalo’s bread and blood dripped from Malik Bhagoji bread. Malik Bhagoji was completely shaken by his guilt and asked for forgiveness. The Guru asked him to distribute his ill-gotten wealth among the poor and henceforth live an honest life. Malik Bhagoji was re-born with Guru’s blessing.<sup>81</sup>



<sup>81</sup> Shyam Dua, ed. *The Luminous Life of Guru Nanak Dev* (Delhi: Tiny Tot Publications, 2004), 28-30.

In today's parlance, this sakhi would represent the differences between those exploited workers who make an honest living and predatory market-manipulators (a.k.a. the 1%) that exploit that honest labor. Guru Nanak steps in as arbiter in this situation, setting up the comparison of the two sides and illustrating the rewards each can expect. Some may see this as an explanation of karmic justice, but Guru Nanak's invocation of charity here suggests a more worldly focus than karmic retribution may imply. The Guru points out how the humble offering of Bhai Lalo, given in love for Guru Nanak, exemplifies his compassionate ideal of service and charity.

#### 92. First Meeting with Lahina

Jodha was a disciple of the Guru who lived in a small town, Khaddar, about 50 miles away from Kartarpur. Bhai Lehna was a son of a rich trader and was also living in Khaddar. Bhai Lehna was a devotee of Durga—a Hindu goddess of energy, and he used to go every year to the temple of Durga in the Kangra Hills.

One morning, when Bhai Jodha was reciting Japji, Bhai Lehna heard him and was touched at heart by the ecstasy of Divine Word. He asked Jodha whose composition it was. Bhai Jodha explained in detail about his Guru and so Bhai Lehna was inspired to see the Guru. On the annual occasion while his fellow devotees went on to the temple of Durga, Bhai Lehna stopped on his way to see Guru Nanak. On seeing the Guru he was completely overtaken by love and compassion of truth. When Bhai Lehna told his name, the Guru said, "Though Lehna is here, where else can it be found?" In Punjabi language 'Lehna' means to pay dues or to receive. The Guru meant, "What though [sic] desires to receive—salvation, is here, and nowhere else." After receiving some religious instructions from the Guru, he began to repeat God's Name.

It is said that Bhai Lehna in a vision saw a female in red dress serving the Guru's house. Lehna asked who she was. She replied that she was Durga (goddess), and that she came once a week to do the service for the Guru. On this Bhai Lehna became convinced of the Divine Glory of Guru Nanak.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 78-80.



This sakhi demonstrates how the Guru's words inspire other to find the true path. Bhai Lehna was converted to the Guru's message by hearing and meeting Guru Nanak, affirming the power of his message and personality. This narrative also offers an explanation or play upon Lehna's name, that suggests his pending spiritual journey (ascension to the guruship as Nanak's successor) was ordained. Lehna's vision of Durga is another nice touch demonstrating how the Hindu pantheon is subject to Guru Nanak's teachings, expanding his authority as Guru.

#### 100. The death of Guru Nanak

##### **Merger in God**

....On the seventh September 1539 A.D., Guru Nanak told the congregation that the time had come for him to merge in God. All Sikhs should consider Guru Angad his successor. "There is no difference between me and Guru Angad." Giving this message to the congregation, Guru Nanak lay down and covered himself with a sheet. The news that Guru Nanak had merged with God, spread all over the city of Kartarpur. His house was filled with Sikhs. Guru Nanak's Sikhs were not only Hindus but also Muslims. For Guru Nanak, no one was a Hindu or a Muslim. All were the creation of one God. As such it was essential for all to consider him a guide who showed the true path. A debate started among them for the dead of Guru Nanak. Hindus said, "We shall cremate the body of Guru Nanak." On the other hand Muslims said, "Guru Nanak was our spiritual guide. We shall bury his body according to our custom and construct a tomb over it."

So, when Guru Nanak passed away, there arose a conflict of the very type which he had devoted his life to ending. Neither party had come to any conclusion, when a saint came from outside of Guru Nanak's audience. He advised those who were quarrelling, "Please first see below this sheet whether Guru Nanak's body is here or not. You are fighting among yourselves without even seeing the body." Listening to the advice of the saint, they lifted the sheet and found some flowers lying there. Those who were quarrelling, fell silent on seeing the flowers. The body of Guru Nanak had merged with the five elements from which it had been created.

The quarrelling Hindus and Muslims divided the flowers in halves and tore the sheet that Guru Nanak had covered himself with, in two pieces. To carry on the traditions and customs of their respective faiths, the Hindus cremated the flowers and sheet. They also constructed a monumental stone over it to worship. The Muslims buried the flowers and sheet and erected a tomb on the bank of river Ravi near the Hindu monumental stone. Both began to worship the stones, a practice which Guru Nanak had urged them to abandon. God did not want it that way. The water of the river Ravi washed both of these away. All traces of the monument and the tomb have disappeared.<sup>83</sup>

A common theme running throughout the janam-sakhis stories is the depiction of Guru Nanak as a unifier of Hindus and Muslims. With his passing, the old divisions become apparent again, as his “formerly” Hindu devotees and Muslim devotees each fall back into old patterns of belief and practice, rather than keeping with Guru Nanak’s instructions (or consulting with the newly installed Guru An̄gad). Ultimately, the disparate concerns of each faction are nullified, as the river rises to wash away the markers left by both, leaving only the memory of Guru Nanak behind.

### A Life Presented

These eight sakhis provide a glimpse at the variety and depth (or lack thereof) offered in janam-sakhi presentations. Even such a brief treatment (and exegetical appendage) suffices to give a fair picture of Guru Nanak’s life and message. These stories are all memorable and easy to comprehend. They offer a gateway into the theological discussions and poetry of the *Adi Granth*. But that is not necessarily the concern of this study. The focus at this point should be on how these stories came to be representative of

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<sup>83</sup> Santokh Singh Jagdev, *Guru Nanak Dev Ji*, Bed Time Stories 2, 3rd Edition (Birmingham: Sikh Missionary Resource Centre, 1996), 85.

Guru Nanak's life and how those presentations serve to convey teachings. The next section looks at how the janam-sakhis have been regarded in the colonial and modern eras, examining how Sikhs and scholars have examined the janam-sakhis.

### **A Life Analyzed and Re/Presented: Colonial-era Janam-sakhis**

The inevitable complement to the variety of janam-sakhi lineages and presentations is the thorough examination and explication of that variety in an attempt to discern the valid from the vapid and to pursue the core of understanding that is most appropriate and applicable to the lives of Sikhs. Scholars can, and certainly have, sought to discern not only the processes by which the janam-sakhis came to be, but also the means by which they are employed through analyses of their contents' respective foci. It is the contention of this author that each type of examination and explanation of the janam-sakhi stories, as well as the specific narratives, constitutes new presentations of the stories as well. These new presentations further condition these stories' lives with regard to Sikh beliefs and practices through the specific construction of and discussion in their narratives. Therefore, it is necessary to review how Sikhs and scholars have sought to engage the janam-sakhis.

Unfortunately, we have no record of individual Sikhs' response to these stories from the earliest periods of potential engagement. A fair starting point must be considered, and, for this study, the first translation efforts by a non-Indian is a good place to begin. This would be Ernest Trumpp's *The Adi Granth or the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs*, first

published in 1877.<sup>84</sup> This volume, which provided the first English translation of the *Adi Granth*, includes a detailed comparison and presentation of janam-sakhi manuscripts in order to provide readers an account of Guru Nanak's life.

Trumpp found this to be a difficult task, having started out with contemporary lithographs of the Bala janam-sakhis, which, due to their popularity, he acknowledges as "the usual Sikh tradition concerning Nānak."<sup>85</sup> He then, in turn, dismissed their fantastical and wondrous accounts outright, saying they "could by no means be trusted."<sup>86</sup> He continues,

I had reason enough to assume the formation of myths about their first Guru has already progressed far, notwithstanding that his life falls altogether within the period of historical light, as among the rubbish of miraculous and often absurd stories I could detect very few historical facts with deserved credit. The man, as I had him before me in his own words and sayings, as contained in the Granth, would by no means agree with what the miraculous stories had made of him.<sup>87</sup>

In 1872, he was sent a janam-sakhi manuscript from the India Office Library. Surprised by its contents, Trumpp declares, "As soon as I commenced to read the book, I observed with great pleasure, that this was a description of the life of Nānak quite different from all the others I had hitherto seen."<sup>88</sup> This was the famous *Colebrooke* manuscript of the

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<sup>84</sup> Ernest Trumpp, *The Adi Granth or the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1877).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

Puratan lineage,<sup>89</sup> though no one had examined it closely enough to note that it was a janam-sakhi! In comparison with the janam-sakhis that he had in his possession, Trumpp claimed that this manuscript was the older tradition. It is possible to mark this occasion as the first formal identification of the various janam-sakhi lineages, distinguishing the Puratan line from the Bala (with the Miharban manuscripts not “discovered” until 1940).

While Trumpp’s discovery must be lauded, his treatment of the texts and his attitude towards those who believed in them left a lot to be desired. Sikhs who believed in the more incredible journeys of Guru Nanak as portrayed in the Bala janam-sakhis were dismissed by Trumpp, “owing to their wild, uncurbed phantasy and the low standard of education among the masses of the population.”<sup>90</sup> He criticized the inclusion of Bhai Bala as a means to vouch for the authenticity of the stories, and praised Bhai Bala’s exclusion in his new find. “If Bhāi Bālā had been the constant companion of Nānak and a sort of mentor to him, as he appears now in the current Janam-sākhīs, it would be quite incomprehensible, why never a single allusion should have been made to him in the old tradition.”<sup>91</sup> This obviously did not sit well with Sikhs, who had enjoyed the stories of Guru Nanak and Bhai Bala for decades. But his ultimate dismissal of the janam-sakhis as simply a biography “applicable to every Hindū Faqīr” suggested that the popular tradition of Guru Nanak, as evidenced in the Bala janam-sakhis, was embellished by early writers,

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<sup>89</sup> This manuscript was given to the Library of East India House around 1815-16 by Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837). Colebrooke was a Sanskrit scholar and a co-founder of the Royal Asiatic Society. McLeod notes that in-text evidence suggests this manuscript is from 1653. See McLeod, *EST*, 22-25.

<sup>90</sup> Trumpp, *The Adi Granth*, ii.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

because the source material on Guru Nanak “appeared too scanty.”<sup>92</sup> Trumpp was essentially claiming that Guru Nanak’s story, as presented in the Puratan janam-sakhi, could not compete with the fantastic stories of other holy figures being circulated, and had to be exaggerated in order to hold readers’ attention, thus explaining both the content and popularity of the janam-sakhis of Bhai Bala.

This was not the best way to begin a fair analysis of the janam-sakhis. Luckily, a more tempered and respectful presentation followed in 1909, with the publication of Max Arthur Macauliffe’s *The Sikh Religion*.<sup>93</sup> He was a former government official in India in the latter part of the nineteenth century and was already familiar with the janam-sakhis, having translated the other well-known Puratan janam-sakhi, the *Hāfizābād* manuscript.<sup>94</sup> Like Trumpp, he accepted the Puratan traditions as authoritative over the popular Bala traditions, though his derision was directed at the texts, rather than the population that read them. His presentation included eighty-one sakhis, which was, by far, the most of any collection up to that point.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

<sup>93</sup> Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909; Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1998). Citations refer to the Low Price Publications edition.

<sup>94</sup> The *Hāfizābād* manuscript, named after the town of Hāfizābād where it was located, was acquired by Oriental College, Lahore in 1884. This manuscript added sakhis not found in the Colebrooke manuscript, as well as adding a conversation between Guru Nanak and Babur, while omitting a few passages from other sakhis. There may be more differences, but some folios were missing from the manuscript. Macauliffe translated and published the text as the *Janam Sākhi Bābe Nānak Ji ki* (Rawalpindi, 1885), using the Colebrooke manuscript to fill in the gaps.

<sup>95</sup> Macauliffe’s use of 81 sakhis, as identified by McLeod (*GNSR*, 73-76), is the largest single collection of sakhis that this author has been able to uncover in scholarly or popular treatments of Guru Nanak’s life. The significance of these counts will be explored in Chapter Six.

Macauliffe's goals for writing his survey of the life and works of Guru Nanak were made clear as he writes, "I have presented their religion according to the desires and teachings of their Gurus.... this work is intended to be an exact presentation of the teaching of the Sikh Gurus and orthodox writers as contained in their sacred books."<sup>96</sup> He is just as clear about his view towards methodology: "to write this work from an orthodox Sikh point of view, without any criticism or expression of opinion of his [the author's] own."<sup>97</sup> To craft his presentation, Macauliffe took advice from Sikhs on his translations, and their influence on this process is evident. In his preface, Macauliffe references letters from those who assisted his endeavors. One such letter states how the process worked: "Wherever any of us found what seemed to be an error, we all met, discussed the passages, and either corrected it or allowed Mr. Macauliffe's translation to stand. Wherefore we now state that Mr. Macauliffe's translation has been fully revised by us, and is thoroughly correct."<sup>98</sup> It is hard to believe, however, that the *only* changes these Sikhs made were just in Macauliffe's translations.

One can see, then, how the "orthodox Sikh point of view"<sup>99</sup> entered Macauliffe's work here. Macauliffe boasted of the support and praise he received in his mission from the same Sikhs responsible for redefining Sikh tradition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—the Singh Sabha reformers. These Sikhs sought to present Sikhism

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<sup>96</sup> Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, xv-xvi.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

through a specifically Khalsa-centered identity and rejected non-Khalsa depictions of Sikhism.<sup>100</sup> A letter from a publication called *The Khalsa* had warned him against utilizing spurious materials:

The trade of traitors among us who to please our wealthier and more influential neighbours, compromise our beliefs by ascribing to our great men thoughts that they never conceived and deeds they never did, will languish, the promiscuousness in Sikh ideas will vanish, and Tat (pure) Khalsa will begin to start on a new career.<sup>101</sup>

An address received from the Singh Sabha of Amritsar is still more revealing of Macauliffe's compliance with the project of this reform movement.

In the lives of the Gurus which you are about to write, we desire you to consult the Gur Bilas, the Suraj Parkash, and such other works as been compiled from ancient writings not corrupted by the Handalis, the followers of Kabir, and the poets who infused foreign elements into our religion. The Khalsa and the whole Sikh race will be thankful to you for attending to this request.<sup>102</sup>

Macauliffe is having his material selected for him and his translations guided by this view of Sikh history. He presents the Singh Sabha view of Sikh history and identity to Western audiences.

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<sup>100</sup> The Khalsa (the Pure) was an order established by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 in response to continued persecution and forced conversion by Mughal authorities. Tradition holds that Guru Gobind established the Khalsa and ordered the adoption of the "Five Ks" as an unmistakable identifier of Sikh faith. No one could deny being a Sikh if they, as Sikhs, were required to keep these commandments. The Khalsa required that members keep their hair unshorn (1. Kes) and wear a comb (2. Kangha) to keep it clean at all times (the turban served as a covering for both of these elements). Khalsa Sikhs were also required to wear special breeches as a sign of purity (3. Kachha), a steel bangle as a symbol of devotion to God (4. Kara), and a short sword (5. Kirpan) to show their dedication to defend those unable to do so for themselves. Khalsa practices and guidelines are further delineated in texts called the *rahit-nāmās*. The Khalsa becomes the dominant expression of Sikh identity during the Singh Sabha reforms.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., xii-xiv.



Macauliffe's presentation is skewed towards a very specific depiction of the life of Guru Nanak, one distilled from the variety of oral traditions and written sources. Reading Macauliffe today may do more to tell of the Singh Sabha's agenda regarding the janam-sakhi materials than about the history of Guru Nanak and the janam-sakhis. This singular focus to make an authoritative presentation about Guru Nanak, as found in both Macauliffe's and Trumpp's works, could be seen as Western-oriented janam-sakhi compilations. Each is more concerned with telling the story in ways relevant to the Western audience, ways that are not necessarily in-line with Sikh traditions.

Somewhat in response to these Western intrusions, and somewhat necessitated by Sikh cultural concerns, a few new (for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) presentations of the janam-sakhis have emerged in Sikh literature. Three of these texts are still being reprinted and are available in bookstores in India today. Two of these three texts come from a leading member of the Singh Sabha movement, Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957), who edited a compilation of the Puratan janam-sakhi<sup>103</sup> and authored the more popular audience-oriented, *Gur Balam Sakhian: Stories of Beloved Guru Nanak*.<sup>104</sup> Bhai Vir Singh was a literary giant in the Sikh community of the early twentieth century. He wrote newspapers, novels, and academic pieces to inform the community, as part of the Singh Sabha's program to assert a specifically Khalsa-oriented vision of Sikh identity. Vir Singh's Puratan text compiled both the Colebrooke and Hafizabad manuscripts and rejected the

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<sup>103</sup> Vir Singh ed., *Huṅ tak milān vichon sa ton Purātan Janam-sākhī Srī Gurū Nānak Dev Jī* [The Earliest Extant Janam-sakhi of Srī Gurū Nānak Dev Jī] (New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 2006).

<sup>104</sup> Vir Singh, *Gur Balam Sakhian: Stories of Beloved Guru Nanak*, trans. M.L. Mongia (New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 2007).

more fanciful, though popular, presentations of the Bala janam-sakhis. The thirty-six sakhis presented in Vir Singh's *Gur Balam Sakhian* are more of a literary venture, focusing on the succinct narrative and keen storytelling indicative of his place as the father of the Punjabi novel.

Puran Singh's (1881-1931) *Book of the Ten Masters* is another popular presentation of janam-sakhis that also emerged in this period.<sup>105</sup> It presents the lives of all ten Sikh Gurus to various degrees, with Gurus Nanak and Gobind Singh receiving twenty-six and twenty-seven pages, respectively, while the seventh and eighth Gurus barely two pages each. Puran Singh conveys the life story of Guru Nanak through anecdotes corresponding to twenty-seven sakhis as identified by McLeod. Most of these anecdotes are very brief, barely half a page each, and do not include scriptural references or citations, focusing instead on a simplistic narrative presentation.

This period, from the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, should be seen as a new stage of janam-sakhi development—a shift from locally owned devotional texts to very public and popular renditions. By today's standards this would be akin to the shift from using a mimeograph to make copies for friends to having an ebook available on Amazon.com. The range of exposure for these narratives grew in ways that had never been imagined previously. These new versions were accessible by more Sikhs, as the families and libraries that possessed manuscripts or lithographs lost their exclusive claims to these texts. Additionally, by introducing translations of the janam-sakhis, it

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<sup>105</sup> Puran Singh, *The Book of the Ten Masters* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1926; Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2008). Citations refer to the Singh Brothers edition.

became possible to see entirely new audiences (especially academics) engaging with the stories of Guru Nanak for the first time. How this new academic audience engaged the janam-sakhis is to be explored in the next chapter.

### **3. Academic Participation in the Janam-sakhi Project**

In the latter half of the twentieth century, new academic audiences began engaging the janam-sakhis, and these audiences brought new questions to bear upon the stories and the different narrative traditions that conveyed them. The first scholar to examine the janam-sakhis in the light of modern academic (Western) critiques was W. H. McLeod with his 1968 volume, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. This provocative work opened the flood-gates for others to respond to McLeod's analysis and concerns, as well as to present their own evaluations of the janam-sakhis and their role in the Sikh community. This section of the study will first examine the approach McLeod took to the janam-sakhis, as his was the pioneering effort, before discussing other scholars who have sought to engage the janam-sakhis. The goal of this examination is to clearly present how these scholars have sought to discuss and represent the janam-sakhis in quite different manners. Their presentations represent discourse about the janam-sakhis, and this dissertation seeks to establish a framework for a third-order discourse that takes these presented positions into account as further pedagogical constraints in the larger picture of the janam-sakhis' project. Critiques offered in this chapter are meant to differentiate the approaches. It is not the goal of this work to resolve the contentious issues these scholars have stirred, but to bring together the often disparate positions and move toward a common ground of discussion about these issues as their viewpoints on or interpretations of the janam-sakhis.

These responses will be considered in a thematic way, as a variety of authors take similar approaches to both respond to McLeod and (occasionally) to advance new modes

of inquiry in regard to the janam-sakhis. The first mode of response comes from traditionally-oriented scholars who insist that the janam-sakhis were the actual history of Guru Nanak, and offer a wide range of textual and associated historical evidence to support their claims along with the tradition that instilled them. Other scholars, however, responded by offering alternative ways to view the texts as more than simply historical records; noting how often the janam-sakhis were used in homilies and exegesis of the Adi Granth, these scholars focused on the narratives' use in educational programs. Still other scholars sought to build upon the historical foundation of McLeod's studies and explore the janam-sakhis as indicative of sectarian concerns in the community, reflecting the ever-evolving process of negotiating the idea of what it means to be a Sikh following Guru Nanak and how a follower's understanding of Guru Nanak's life influences that idea. Finally, the examination turns to those scholars who utilize literary approaches describing the janam-sakhis as a hagiography focused on the presentation of Sikh memories of and hopes for the life of their founder, a format reflective more of an idealization or exaltation of Guru Nanak's life than a strict historical record.

These varied approaches represent the conversation that this dissertation is intended to both address and disrupt. By describing these approaches in detail, it is possible to see how they use the janam-sakhis to accomplish their individual pedagogical projects, directing readers to accept certain presentations and reject others. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how all of these approaches engage in the *same* general pedagogical project of telling the janam-sakhi story in order to convey a specific understanding of Guru Nanak's life that has value and meaning to the community who reads the account. This

chapter discusses a new phase in which these academic discussions serve not only Sikhs, but a larger audience who may learn something of value from the janam-sakhis. This chapter demonstrates how participation in the janam-sakhis functions via the academic treatments of these narratives. By showing how the interpretative projects of the janam-sakhis continue through these scholars' works, a clear trajectory is set for later chapters of this project to examine and reflect upon the continued presence of the janam-sakhis.

### **W. H. McLeod: A Historian's Approach to the Janam-sakhis**

The first Western academic analysis of this Sikh literature was McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, which sought to discern what valid or factual historical data could be mined from the janam-sakhis. McLeod was, at heart, a historian, and this work strives to uncover how the history of the Sikhs and, in particular, the life of Guru Nanak, is recounted in the janam-sakhis. In 1980, he turned his attention to the historical origins and contexts of the janam-sakhi literature with the publication of *Early Sikh Tradition*, which examines the janam-sakhis as specific productions of those contexts and of the legacies of earlier Sikh tradition. These two works demonstrate McLeod's general approach to the janam-sakhis, namely, the history *in, of, and around* the janam-sakhis. Looking at the key points of analysis McLeod introduces and the conclusions he draws from them, it becomes possible to see how other scholarly approaches are, for the most part, responses to and critiques of McLeod specifically and the Western academic paradigm in general.

McLeod's search for History in the Janam-sakhis

McLeod seeks to make use of the janam-sakhis to understand the life of Guru Nanak. They are, reputedly, his biographies, and are thus the only available sources for such information. McLeod's concern is to locate the historical Guru Nanak as indicated by the janam-sakhis. Unlike previous treatments of these texts, McLeod looks to engage them using the tools of the emerging critical historical discipline, a technique closely following those of late 19<sup>th</sup> century historians who labored to unearth the historical Jesus from Biblical sources. To this end, he describes the "three-fold task" ahead of him:

In the first place, [McLeod's methodology] seeks to apply rigorous historical methodology to the traditions concerning the life of Guru Nanak; secondly, it attempts to provide a systematic statement of his teachings; and thirdly, it endeavours to fuse the glimpses provided by the traditional biographies with the personality emerging from the teachings.<sup>106</sup>

McLeod's attention focuses on discerning the history found in the janam-sakhis' presentations of Guru Nanak's life and his religious teachings in order to discern the man.

McLeod describes his intention to conduct "a reconstruction of the events of the life of Guru Nanak... to seek and apply means of identifying what may be affirmed, what must be rejected, and what falls between the two."<sup>107</sup> To accomplish this, he looks to examine the 124 sakhis about Guru Nanak found throughout the various janam-sakhi traditions<sup>108</sup> and proposes to classify them based on the quality of their historical content. To this end, McLeod analyses the individual sakhis and classifies them according to the

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<sup>106</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, n.p.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>108</sup> McLeod's complete list of sakhis is provided in Appendix 1.

following five categories: established, probable, possible, improbable, or impossible,<sup>109</sup> employing seven criteria to sort the sakhis into the above categories. These criteria reflect McLeod's positivist leanings very clearly:

- 1) McLeod first considers the “the incidence of the miraculous or plainly fantastic,”<sup>110</sup> in the sakhi, although he asserts that this need not invalidate the entire sakhi being historically possible. The miraculous, with no grounding in history or science, must be rejected outright.
- 2) McLeod then turns to sources external to the Sikh community to corroborate and verify the claims made and situations depicted in the janam-sakhis. Among the materials consulted were the sultanate's court records, and a Persian traveler's record of the Punjab in the early seventeenth century—the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*—that contained an outline of Sikh history as gathered from interviews he conducted.
- 3) Many sakhis report the instance in which a specific verse or hymn of Guru Nanak was first recited. Therefore, the janam-sakhis must also be in accordance with “Guru Nanak's own work as recorded in the *Adi Granth*.”<sup>111</sup>
- 4) Consideration must also be given to the janam-sakhi traditions and their record of these sakhis. At times, as McLeod points out, the various compilers of the janam-sakhis did not record the same thing, and the different views of the janam-sakhi traditions must factor into the analysis.
- 5) McLeod also calls into question the “relative reliability”<sup>112</sup> of the various janam-sakhi traditions themselves. Here he addresses later additions to the tradition of which no earlier record can be found.
- 6) Family ties are important in the Punjab, and McLeod takes this into consideration. He states that “it is reasonable to assume that at least the immediate family connexions [sic] of Guru Nanak would still be known at the

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<sup>109</sup> These classifications are the prime focus of McLeod's detractors, who see them as simple rejections of Guru Nanak's value, rather than empirical judgments of their positivist historical content. Some of the most vocal academic responses to McLeod's work can be found in Gurdev Singh, ed., *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1986).

<sup>110</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 68.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*



time when the older janam-sakhis were committed to writing [mid-seventeenth century].”<sup>113</sup>

- 7) McLeod’s final criterion is similar to the sixth in that he grants “a greater degree of confidence... in details relating to Guru Nanak’s life within the Panjab than to those which concern his travels beyond the province.”<sup>114</sup>

Such categorization of the sakhis, however, led McLeod to dismiss many sakhis held dear by Sikhs.

McLeod’s concern for the record of Guru Nanak’s life trumps other considerations: he rejects outright thirty-nine sakhis of a possible 124 (over thirty percent), including some of the most popular sakhis about Guru Nanak. Such rejections happened for several reasons.<sup>115</sup> First, many rejected sakhis are clearly later additions to the tradition; sakhis that are not included in Bhai Gurda’s *Var* or the earliest janam-sakhi traditions and are first found in Bala texts or their derivatives are excluded. He also rejects sakhis if the stories are obvious borrowings from other religious or popular traditions. McLeod identifies the appropriation of local legends and tales, i.e., instances wherein the janam-sakhis substitute Guru Nanak for an earlier Hindu or Muslim figure. Popular sakhis, such as 8 “The cobra’s shadow” and 122 “*Pañjā Sāhib*: the rock stopped,” were dismissed as impossible due to their being obvious borrowings from popular Hindu and Muslim legends. The Panja Sahib incident may have even earlier roots in Buddhist stories about a monk stopping the rock coming down the hill.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 77-83. See Appendix 1 for the full list of rejected sakhis.

Sakhis such as 3 “Instruction by the paṇḍit,” 4 “Instruction by the mullah,” and 5 “Investiture with the sacred thread” are rejected because of their apparent contrivance to show the young Nanak reciting hymns of the *Adi Granth*. Likewise, other sakhis constructed in order to explicate the hymns in a narrative setting are also rejected, as McLeod claims they do little to indicate the true setting of the hymns’ revelations. Some sakhis provide lessons that are incongruent with everything else known about Guru Nanak’s personality, teachings and beliefs; for this reason, McLeod rejects 103 “The coal and the thorn” because it “is based upon a naïve understanding of the doctrine of karma which would certainly not have accorded with Gurū Nānak’s concept. The incident is clearly spurious.”<sup>116</sup> His analyses are quite thorough in determining the historical value of the sakhis’ contents.

McLeod categorizes another eighteen sakhis as improbable,<sup>117</sup> including popular and doctrinally significant sakhis such as 16 “*Kharā saudā*: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqirs,” 29 “Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra,” and 124 “Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo.” The primary reasons for excluding these sakhis is McLeod’s judgment of them as later additions to the janam-sakhi records. 16 “*Kharā saudā*,” the sakhi in which Bhai Bala first appears as Guru Nanak’s travelling companion, is noted as improbable because of its close association with the Bala janam-sakhi. McLeod provides evidence to show that 29 “Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra” and many others, if not found solely in the Bala janam-sakhi, at least have their origins there, and were borrowed by later compilers. Essentially,

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 83-87. See Appendix 1 for the full list of improbable sakhis.

McLeod is dismissive of anything connected to the Bala janam-sakhis because of the sectarian motives many hymns exhibit and labels the whole Bala lineage “the least trustworthy of all the janam-sakhi traditions.”<sup>118</sup> McLeod’s concerns for accordance with the *Adi Granth* factor into his labeling the most popular janam-sakhi anecdote, 124 “Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo,” as improbable. He describes the evolution of the use of the words *ve lālo* (O beloved), in the hymn (*Tilāṅg* 5) addressing the suffering of those in Saidpur affected by Babur’s invasion, into a proper labeling of a person who endured similar oppression. McLeod contends, “This hypothesis does not completely destroy the tradition of a Saidpur carpenter called Lālo, but it does render it most improbable.”<sup>119</sup> Added to the thirty-nine impossible sakhis, McLeod has now set aside a total of fifty-seven sakhis, or over forty-five percent of the total, as being of no or limited substantive value in the pursuit of the true history of Guru Nanak.

McLeod then labels the possible sakhis and insists that these thirty sakhis<sup>120</sup> “be treated with a considerable degree of caution. They are sakhis which offer only limited opportunities for the application of our criteria, and which accordingly cannot be either affirmed or denied, even in terms of probability or improbability.”<sup>121</sup> These thirty fall into that nebulous space of historical uncertainty. Some have the feel of a story that is a fit description of such a saint’s life and teachings, such as 34 “Hardwār: the watering of his

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 87-92. See Appendix 1 for the full list of possible sakhis.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 87.

fields” and 114 “Dunī Chand's flags,” wherein Guru Nanak informs a rich man he cannot take it all with him. Many of these sakhis refer to specific places to which Guru Nanak may have travelled, but no evidence of his journeys to them is found outside of the sakhi itself, nor is there evidence of commemorations of the sakhi at those sites, which also leave the historical basis for such commemorations in doubt.

Thus far, McLeod has excluded eighty-seven sakhis, or seventy percent of them, leaving only thirty-seven as probable.<sup>122</sup> Some are confirmed elsewhere, such as those reporting Guru Nanak’s birth and death dates or those explaining various familial connections. McLeod’s acceptance of these as probable does not entail a complete acceptance of all aspects of these stories, even though some do include elements that are quite fantastic. With regard to some of Guru Nanak’s travels, McLeod insists that “The substance of the *sākhī* [46 “The country ruled by women”] must be rejected as a wonder story, but in this particular case we should examine the location ascribed to the incident in order to determine whether or not there may be an element of fact behind the legend.”<sup>123</sup> This same line of reasoning holds true for Guru Nanak’s adventures in Arabia, where, in sakhi 79 “Mecca: the moving mosque,” Guru Nanak’s retort to the *qāzī* (judge), angry at the Guru for putting his feet toward the Ka’bah, asks him to “point my feet in a direction in which God is not” and is unable to do so, as the Ka’bah appears at his feet wherever they are moved. Guru Nanak’s response is theologically sound, and the point is consistent with his teachings. The instance of the miraculous movements of the Ka’bah, however, open

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 92-145. See Appendix 1 for the full list of probable sakhis.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 110.

this sakhi to other criticisms, which, McLeod suggests, is why some versions eliminate the moving Ka’bah or modify the story to have it just be the *miharāb* in a mosque that moves, not the Ka’bah itself.<sup>124</sup>

This analysis leaves McLeod with a mere four paragraphs summing up what he can be sure of with regard to the life of Guru Nanak.<sup>125</sup> Unlike the many Sikhs who feel he has criticized their tradition, McLeod does not see this severe truncation of the stories as an impediment to their valuable contribution to the lives of Sikhs. The last two chapters of his study demonstrate the importance of the janam-sakhis’ doctrinal content and the portrait of Guru Nanak that they present. It is important to note that McLeod is not completely dismissive of the janam-sakhis’ value. He expands this examination in his follow-up work, *Early Sikh Tradition*, which explores the origins of the janam-sakhi traditions and reinforces the substantive value of the janam-sakhis in the lives of Sikhs.

#### Examining the History of the Janam-sakhis

The majority of McLeod’s *Early Sikh Tradition* is devoted to an explanation of the origins of the historical janam-sakhi manuscript traditions. McLeod forges new scholarly ground as he explores the composition of the janam-sakhis in the second section of *Early Sikh Tradition*. “Composition,” in this case, embraces a variety of meanings. First, he discusses the actual composing of the specific janam-sakhi manuscripts as written texts, constituted and assembled from the various oral and written traditions present. Second,

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 146.

McLeod offers descriptive analyses of the compositions, the narrative forms used to convey the sakhis found within the janam-sakhis. Finally, he offers a thorough examination of the janam-sakhi texts to discern the interplay of the story traditions behind the janam-sakhi narratives that give rise to the similarities and discrepancies between certain manuscript traditions and others, essentially examining the composition of the janam-sakhi traditions themselves.

### Compositions in the Janam-sakhis

As the development of the historical janam-sakhi traditions has been discussed, attention moves to the second of these notions of composition—the narrative forms found in the janam-sakhis. McLeod is not operating with the same story/ narrative distinction previously established in this study’s first chapter’s Procedures of Language and Terminology; he uses the term “narrative” to refer to specific presentations that embody a story in its common understandings. Any story is, in McLeod’s view, a narrative.

McLeod identifies five general categories and seven sub-categories to describe the structure of the sakhis presented in the manuscript traditions. These include:

- 1) Narrative Anecdotes
  - a. moralistic anecdotes
  - b. chimeric fairy tales
  - c. devotional legends
    - i. wonder stories
    - ii. apologetic anecdotes
    - iii. sectarian narratives
  - d. aetiological legends
- 2) Narrative Discourses
- 3) Didactic Discourses
- 4) Heterodox Discourses
- 5) Codes of Discipline

It is important to see the various forms employed by the janam-sakhi compilers as the tactics of their pedagogical foci. Each form suits the presentation of their interpretations of Guru Nanak's life and teachings. Stories must take a form in order to be communicated, and each of these forms demonstrates the deliberate choices made by the compilers to tell the story in specific ways. For McLeod, the "narrative anecdotes" indicate the ways Sikhs sought to tell the story of Guru Nanak, while the remaining four categories—discourses, for McLeod, but still narratives by this study's definition—represent a shift toward using the story to accomplish specific goals beyond just telling the story. The story elements of these sakhis are purely a means to reach these end goals, and each takes a different narrative approach to this process.

### *Narrative Anecdotes*

Stories that solely tell about an event in Guru Nanak's life are common. They relay the story of who he was and what he did. However, there are some notable differences in just how these are presented. McLeod identifies four types of narrative presentations used to convey the story of Guru Nanak's life and his religious message. The first type he identifies is the most common form, the moralistic anecdote that focuses on a particular moral point made simply by telling the story. McLeod points out that sakhis 16 "*Kharā saudā*: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqirs" and 124 "Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo" are good examples of this form. These are direct moral messages, addressing a key point of doctrine conveyed through a story about Guru Nanak's actions. These are a prominent feature of the Puratan janam-sakhis.

The second form McLeod identifies is distinguished more by the fantastic elements of the story than by the manner of its presentation. These chimeric fairy-tales incorporate witches (46 “The country ruled by women”), demons (58 “The cannibal's cauldron”), and other creatures of fantasy as foils to Guru Nanak. Obviously, through both his devotion to God and his cunning wit, they are easily dispatched. However, as a narrative form, these sakhis are indicative of the supernatural world in which Guru Nanak operated, setting him apart from ordinary human experiences. They can be seen to serve the promotion of Guru Nanak over all spiritual masters.

This emphasis is even more evident in McLeod’s discussion of the third type of narrative anecdotes, the devotional legends. These narratives make “explicit reference to the power possessed by the Gūrū, to the quality of his devotion, or to intervention by God on his behalf.”<sup>126</sup> These can further be delineated by the means whereby this power is expressed. The miracles of the wonder-stories such as sakhis 6 “The restored field” and 7 “The tree's stationary shadow,” demonstrate a greater power looking out for Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak’s own powers of argument and spirit are shown through apologetic anecdotes, as he triumphs over all challenges through the demonstration of his faith, e.g., sakhi 34 “Hardwār: the watering of his fields,” which is illustrative of both Guru Nanak’s wit and spiritual prowess. Specific conceptions or interpretations of Guru Nanak’s message are evidenced through sectarian narratives that convey the interests of disparate groups utilizing the story of Guru Nanak to their own ends. The strong appeal to asceticism evidenced by a variety of anecdotes found in the B40, the Adi-Sakhis, and the Miharban

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<sup>126</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 90.



janam-sakhi fall into this category, as well as sakhis promoting Baba Hindal found in the Bala janam-sakhi.

Another writing tactic employed by the janam-sakhi authors/ compilers was to use a story about Guru Nanak as a means of explanation of itself. Such aetiological legends serve as explanation of a variety of relationships and historical instances discussed in the janam-sakhis. Sakhi 95 “Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad” is an explanation describing the connection between Guru Nanak and his successor, Guru Aṅgad, using the Punjabi word for body (*aṅg*). The sakhi tells, via a line attributed to Gorakhnāth, that, “Nānak, he who is born from your body (*aṅg*) will be your Gurū.” Other sakhis simply insert Guru Nanak into local legends as a means to demonstrate his power and authority. This is clearly the case of sakhi 122 “*Pañjā Sāhib*: the rock stopped,” as the varied roots of this legend have already discussed.

### *Narrative Discourses*

McLeod argues that certain sakhis are essentially built to accomplish a doctrinal goal. These use a composition from the Guru to fabricate a conversation or discourse that seeks to explain how or the context in which that composition came to be revealed: “The basis is provided by a quotation from the works of Gūrū Nānak. This hymn (or series of couplets) provides the answers which Nānak is said to have given during the course of the discussion. A convenient interlocutor is then introduced and appropriate questions or leading comments are devised to match the answers which Nānak will give.”<sup>127</sup> While he

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 95.

does not identify sakhi 5 “Investiture with the sacred thread” directly in this part of his analysis, McLeod critiques this sakhi’s nature as reason for it to be rejected as historically unsound in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*.<sup>128</sup> The story seems to be an invention meant to provide context to Guru Nanak’s hymn criticizing the outward symbolism of the *janau* set in the account at the time of young Nanak’s own ceremony. It is doubtful that Nanak uttered the hymn at such a young age. It is still more doubtful that he recorded the hymn for posterity knowing he would need it as part of his religious writings later in his life.

#### *Didactic Discourses*

This third category is found most commonly in the Miharban janam-sakhis or in narratives borrowed from that collection. While not necessarily a separate form, this is the appending of an exegetical discourse onto a narrative discourse: after the narrative discourse is provided, the points of the story are subjected to further theological scrutiny. The Miharban manuscripts set off this added discourse by using the phrase *tis kā paramārath* (its sublime meaning), before elaborating upon that meaning for the reader. The later B40 janam-sakhi employs a similar structure but omits the specific phrase noting the transition into exegesis.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 77-83.

<sup>129</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 98.

### *Heterodox Discourses*

McLeod uses this category to account for the variety of ways the janam-sakhi compilers diverged from the (commonly accepted) tradition of Guru Nanak. He notes how much these sakhis, generally constructed to address and reach out to other religious communities, exhibit a “generally heretical nature”<sup>130</sup> that is far more accommodating to other beliefs and practices than the Guru’s hymns would indicate. Such sakhis are almost always discourses, making arguments for positions that are more amenable to Sufis or Nāth yogis. McLeod notes how sakhi 54 “Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the *Prāṇ Saṅgali*” can be seen to praise the Nāth text, the *Prāṇ Saṅgali*, in ways that do not mesh with Guru Nanak’s views on asceticism.

### *Codes of Discipline*

While the janam-sakhis do not offer the full-fledged guides to Sikh practice later collected in texts called the *rahit-nāmās*, they do provide what McLeod calls the “seeds from which the later codes were to grow.”<sup>131</sup> There are passages in the janam-sakhis, often nestled in other narrative forms, that tell Sikhs what to do or how act. One common refrain found in the janam-sakhis that is certainly indicative of this, is the repeated slogan *nām dān isnān* (devotion to the Name of God, charity, and purity) as a focus of Guru Nanak’s teaching and practice.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 105.

## The Evolution of Sakhis

McLeod envisions the janam-sakhi traditions coming together from both an older oral tradition and a written tradition that demonstrates origins and borrowings in a variety of manners. McLeod posits hypothetical sources, identified by common threads and legacies, called *Q1* and *Q2*, wherein *Q* stands for *Quelle* (German for “source”)—a convention familiar to scholars of the Christian New Testament.<sup>132</sup> McLeod’s concerns focus on how the oral traditions about Guru Nanak coalesced into written ones, and he acknowledges the fact that the manuscript record does not reach back to that time.

### *The Q texts and their janam-sakhi legacies*

The postulate or hypothetical text that McLeod calls *Q1* “must have been used by the compilers of the *Hafizābād* and *B40* janam-sākhīs”<sup>133</sup> and is a forerunner of the Puratan janam-sakhis. While the *Colebrooke* manuscript stands apart, McLeod suggests that it was used in conjunction with *Q1* to create the *Hafizābād* manuscript, which can be expressed as *Colebrooke* + *Q1* = *Hafizābād*. McLeod describes the compilation process: “The rule invariably observed by the *Hafizābād* copyist was to use his *Colebrooke* manuscript as his principal source and to resort to the *Q1* source only where it contained important material which *Colebrooke* lacked.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, *Q1* stands as part of the Puratan janam-sakhis, as the

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<sup>132</sup> The postulations about the *Q* source began in the early 1800s and found new life in the modern work of the Jesus Seminar. See their website <http://www.westarinstitute.org/> for details on their program and structure, or see Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels: the Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus: New Translation and Commentary*.

<sup>133</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 133

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

missing link explaining the related, but quite different manuscripts that are part of the Puratan tradition.

The narrative dubbed *Q2* stands in the line of the *B40* manuscript and the *Adi Sakhis*. There had to be some step between the oral traditions and these texts that accounts for the common features they exhibit. A *Q* source here would account for their similarities and account for why they differ so much from the other janam-sakhi traditions.

McLeod offers numerous illustrations, graphs akin to flow charts, to map the influences found in eleven select examples. Each shows the relative positions of oral elements and the transitional *Q* sources along with earlier janam-sakhi manuscripts in order to demonstrate how each individual sakhi (story in the broad sense) grew into its most developed forms as a later janam-sakhi (a specific narrative presentation).<sup>135</sup>

#### *Narratives I, Ia, Ib, II, IIb, IIc, IId, III*

McLeod offers a series of narrative threads that shed light on the means of transmission and selection in play in the compiling of the janam-sakhis. He starts by “postulating an early grouping of sākḥīs to form the first coherent traditions concerning the life of Nānak.”<sup>136</sup> This grouping then goes through a series of revisions/ divisions that reflect the intrusions represented by the developing textual traditions. McLeod’s goal is to dissuade discussion of an “original” janam-sakhi. By illustrating the patterns and programs of development, McLeod questions many of the traditional notions regarding the place of

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Chapter 9, 117-173.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 174.

the various janam-sakhi traditions in the lives of Sikhs—undermining the claims of, for example, Puratan as the oldest or the Bala as a witness’ record of Guru Nanak. McLeod ends the chapter with a thorough presentation of the sources of the B40, which he suggests is the most developed of the historical janam-sakhis, outlining the ways in which each postulated narrative branch or earlier manuscript contributed to the compilation of the B40 manuscript. The illustration that accompanies his discussion here, Figure 27,<sup>137</sup> looks more like a drawing of a circuit board rather than the outline of a text. Each interaction and source is noted to show how these earlier constituents influenced the development of this specific text.

### Reflecting on McLeod, a Calm Before the Storm

McLeod is often demeaned for his critical approach and the ease by which he dismisses traditional narratives and understanding in light of his so-called “textual evidence.”<sup>138</sup> It is important within the scope of the present study to understand the goals he set forth, and how he hoped to reach those. McLeod’s investigations offer examinations, through the comprehensive analysis of available texts, of how the janam-sakhis came to be

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>138</sup> McLeod’s detractors have very different, though often not well defined, criteria for evaluating historical evidence. They are generally reluctant to share their criteria, only telling us that McLeod’s evidence does not suffice. There are many diatribes available that are directed at McLeod. Building on the polemical arguments of Gurdev Singh’s *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition* is Bachittar Singh Giani, ed., *Planned Attack on Aad Sri Guru Granth Sahib: Academics or Blasphemy*, (Chandigarh: International Centre of Sikh Studies, 1994). This volume collects more vehement rebuttals of McLeod and also targets scholars who followed him, such as Pashaura Singh, by way of subsuming their individual contributions as being in line with McLeod’s “anti-Sikh” agenda.

in their present form. His concern is for the history *of* and the history *in* these texts. Others who approach McLeod's work must keep those constraints in mind.

### **Tradition and a Response to McLeod: Other Views of Sikh "History"**

The idea of history is as nuanced and diverse as the concept of religion. To that end, many Sikhs and Sikh-oriented scholars have sought (or seek) to present alternate arguments for the value of the janam-sakhis as historical documents, and to make a very different presentation of Guru Nanak's life than the one McLeod provides. J. S. Grewal, W. Owen Cole, Harbans Singh, and Kirpal Singh have all sought to focus their studies of the janam-sakhis, to varying degrees, on the contexts and traditions surrounding the janam-sakhis and, in some ways, to refute McLeod's strict positivist leanings in his search for the true account of what happened in history. While all of their studies have McLeod in their sights, it is possible, as the discussion progresses through these four authors, to see how their opposition to the positivist stance seems to grow as each presentation moves closer to traditional lines of understanding.

#### J. S. Grewal's *Guru Nanak in History*

J.S. Grewal's principal work regarding the life of Guru Nanak is, in some ways, a response to McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, but it represents a distinct view of scholarship on the life of Guru Nanak.<sup>139</sup> His analysis proceeds through an examination of the aspects of the Indian milieu(s) in which Guru Nanak's message originated and

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<sup>139</sup> J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, (Chandigarh: Panjab University Publication Bureau, 1969).

developed. Grewal considers, over the course of four chapters, the politics and society of the Punjab and the religious milieus of Hinduism and Islam in the region. The second part of his study focuses on Guru Nanak's response to these milieus, as indicated through his verses recorded in the *Adi Granth*. Grewal makes explicit both his goal—"This monograph, *Guru Nanak in History*, is a study of the role which Guru Nanak assumed for himself and the legacy which he left to his successors"<sup>140</sup>— as well as his separation from McLeod:

Our primary aim here is not to discover the Nanak of history behind the Nanak of faith, not even to distinguish the one from the other or to discuss all that came after him. Our limited aim is to consider, rather briefly, what Guru Nanak meant to the first few generations of the believers in his mission.<sup>141</sup>

Grewal is keen to point out the importance of the *janam-sakhis* in the spread of the Sikh message. He focuses attention on "the concept of the *Gurū*, which at once reconciled the uniqueness of Guru Nanak's positions to the authority vested in his successors to that office and which, at a different level, brought the *bānī* and the *panth* into parallel prominence with the personal *gurū*."<sup>142</sup> The *janam-sakhi* depictions were key to Sikhs accepting the teachings and traditions of Guru Nanak through the establishment of a connection to his tradition and to the lineage of Gurus who succeeded him. Grewal says that this project began before the *sakhis* were even collected into the written traditions passed down to us

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., vi.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 313.



today. These written traditions, then, reflect the situations and concerns of those transmitters wrestling with understanding their connection to the Guru.

Building on this, Grewal asserts, it is possible to discern “the ideals and values of those among whom they were popular.”<sup>143</sup> He identifies the importance of the janam-sakhis’ portrayal of Guru Nanak by acknowledging that, “[i]n a certain sense, therefore, the *Janam-sākhī* image of Guru Nanak is the more important [than the positivist historical record], for it is the more popular image.”<sup>144</sup> As such, Grewal contends that this image is important as it constitutes the popular image of Guru Nanak for Sikhs at the time of the janam-sakhis’ compilation, and he turns to examine how that image is to be understood by Sikhs who read the janam-sakhis later.

Grewal privileges the accounts of the Puratan and Miharban janam-sakhis. In his analysis of their doctrinal content, he makes note of their strong “opposition to notions of caste and ritual purity. There is also a strong opposition to ritualistic practices and customs, and to attachment to *māyā* [the illusory world].”<sup>145</sup> These points would certainly be part of the instructions about the faith, affirming Guru Nanak’s teachings and conveyed through the janam-sakhis, to Sikhs and to non-Sikhs as well, as part of a Sikh missionary project. He even goes so far as to quote McLeod, agreeing that these texts reflect “a developing

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 305-6.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 311.

self-consciousness, a growing awareness of the community's nature and function as a distinctive *panth*.”<sup>146</sup>

However, the depictions of Guru Nanak’s miracles are still troubling, as they do not sit well with the historical understanding of the world in which Grewal is operating. Grewal is able to both accept and dismiss the role of miracle in the *janam-sakhis*. He says that “[t]he supranatural powers of Guru Nanak are not unobtrusive in the *Puratān Janam-sākhīs* or the *Pothī Sach-khand* [a Miharban manuscript],”<sup>147</sup> which seems to convey the impression that they are obtrusive in other *janam-sakhi* texts, and thus less reliable for the historian’s endeavor. Grewal focuses on the role of miracle in these stories as a means of demonstrating Guru Nanak’s spiritual authority by using them to win arguments or as a sign of his compassion when he feeds or heals those in need. Grewal views these depictions as contrivances made by the authors of the tales because these actions are demonstrated elsewhere without resorting to miracles. As a writing convention, miracles are in the *janam-sakhis* for the readers, and since the *janam-sakhis* function as appeals to those readers, they are set in a world-view that this audience would understand. Grewal is thus able to dismiss these fantastic elements as being indicative of that fact that “a strong belief in the supranatural world was as much a part of the psychological makeup of the followers of Guru Nanak as of their contemporaries in general.”<sup>148</sup> The stories, therefore, do not need

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 313. Quoting W. H. McLeod, “The *Janam-sākhīs* as Sources of Punjab History,” (paper presented at the Punjab History Conference, Patiala 1969).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 306

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 306-7.

to be rejected as authentic history, but the contexts in which they were authored do need to be seen as a mitigating factor in the janam-sakhis' presentation of this "extraordinary man of God."<sup>149</sup>

This resort to an author's interpretation/interpolation somewhat begs the question about the historical authority of the janam-sakhis Grewal set out to address. He addresses this shift briefly when considering places in the janam-sakhis that deviate from Guru Nanak's message, e.g., promoting asceticism or a doctrine of karma, or where Guru Nanak is instantaneously transported across India with just a word. He claims that "[t]his is not to suggest, however, that in the *janam-sākhīs* deviations from the teachings of Guru Nanak are more marked than the positive acceptance of his ideals. In fact, departures are rather insignificant compared with the insistence upon the essential teachings of Guru Nanak."<sup>150</sup> The teachings that come down through the janam-sakhis are historically rooted in the stories of Guru Nanak's life. Thus we see Grewal's position made clearer; that is, the concept of the guru is reported via the teachings of that Guru. The heart of those lessons is what matters, not necessarily the narratives by which those lessons are conveyed. Grewal's approach to the janam-sakhis here is relatively inoffensive. It is a well-developed study of Punjabi society of that era and considers Guru Nanak's place in that society. It is not uncritical, nor does Grewal strive for a completely positivist analysis as McLeod does.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 311.

Grewal's later work, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*,<sup>151</sup> shows a turn away from the more stringent historical approach outlined above toward one more accommodating to "tradition," the position Macauliffe's Singh Sabha advisors presented as orthodox. Grewal goes on to dismiss the value of any critical textual studies. "Whatever the errors of the critical scholars and the limitations of their approach, their attitude towards the problem is scholarly. It is equally clear that textual criticism does not have the same kind of importance in Sikh studies as in Biblical studies."<sup>152</sup> He becomes far more critical and dismissive of the approach that McLeod, or others working in a similar vein, takes. It seems a bit difficult to digest this dismissal, however. Sikhism, with all its emphasis on texts, be they the *Adi Granth*, the *Dasam Granth*, or the *janam-sakhis*, seems to necessitate the critical understandings of texts.

W. Owen Cole's *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708*

Whereas Grewal's work focuses on placing Guru Nanak within the historical settings of the various milieus he describes, W. Owen Cole's *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708* strives to illustrate how Guru Nanak, as revealed in his verses and the *janam-sakhi* accounts, addresses that historical context. Cole feels that Guru Nanak's verses were beyond reproach. He states, "It is therefore possible to know with certainty what Guru Nanak taught."<sup>153</sup> This provides the basis for his analysis which begins by

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<sup>151</sup> J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1998).

<sup>152</sup> Grewal, *Contesting*, 260.

<sup>153</sup> Cole, *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708*, 3.

considering the Punjabi milieu and seeks “to define those religions or beliefs and practices which attracted the attention of Guru Nanak and then to examine his attitude towards them.”<sup>154</sup> Cole makes his way through the religions of the area (Hindu, Muslim, Nāth, and Jain), examines their influences on Guru Nanak, and then presents the Guru’s responses to each one. Cole first devotes attention to evidence found in the *Adi Granth*, then turns to the evidence of Guru Nanak’s teachings as found in the janam-sakhis. In this way, Cole limits his view of the janam-sakhis to what they say about, or how they depict, Guru Nanak’s religious encounters. This is a perfectly acceptable tactic, as Cole’s concern is focused on demonstrating how Guru Nanak fit into the history around him and how his lessons indicate the ways in which he approached the issues of his times.

Cole shows Guru Nanak’s place in these contexts, at least according to the evidence of the janam-sakhis, by first referring to Nanak’s birth. The special circumstances of Guru Nanak’s birth revealed the special character of the man he would grow into. Cole says,

These accounts of Nanak's early life are clearly intended to reveal a person who was born with deep spiritual insights. Indeed, the implication is that his birth was non-karmic, that he was sent by God to be the enlightener of his age.... the janam sakhis universally imply that the Guru's birth was non-karmic. He entered the world as an enlightened being, as people of spiritual insight clearly perceived. The river Bein incident was only one of assurance and commissioning.<sup>155</sup>

The course of Guru Nanak’s life and message is made clear to readers from the start of the janam-sakhis, which then serve as the elaboration of Guru Nanak’s role as a reformer and

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 176.

a unifier of Punjabi religious communities. Cole's work is the explication of that role through the encounters described in the sakhis themselves.

Cole identifies the origins of this developing role in the earliest oral traditions that note how the sakhis functioned to provide "concrete, flesh-and-blood contexts for the teachings of Guru Nanak which were contained in his hymns. They also brought his beliefs to bear directly upon particular issues of concern to the community. *In a sense they enabled Sikhs of later days to encounter the Guru personally.*"<sup>156</sup> Cole's last sentence here provides a clue to this studies' focus as explorations of how the janam-sakhis foster the encounter of Sikhs with Guru Nanak, though his attention was focused on the earliest engagements with the historical manuscript traditions only. The situations reported in the janam-sakhis, then, served as teaching materials – and not only within the Sikh community. The janam-sakhis were a means of outreach and contact; the stories of Guru Nanak's encounters could be used both "apologetically as well as for missionary purposes"<sup>157</sup> when encountering others' beliefs. The janam-sakhi narratives demonstrate how Guru Nanak's message applies to the world (or at least to the situations of the Punjab that they address). In this manner, Cole proceeds through an analysis of Guru Nanak's 'relationships' with Hindus, Yogis, and Muslims, while noting the absence of significant engagements with Jains, Buddhists, and Christians in the janam-sakhis

The dominant theme of Guru Nanak's life in the janam-sakhis, as identified by Cole, is his role as unifier. His journeys and encounters were all made for the purpose of

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 170, emphasis added.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 170.

bringing people together. Building from the Guru's claim, in the River Bein sakhi, that "There is no Hindu; there is no Musalman,"<sup>158</sup> Cole focuses on Guru Nanak's message as "defining a community in which Hindu and Muslim might be able to live together."<sup>159</sup> Thus, the Guru built his message from a pool of common tradition, expressing his developments and critiques in the language of the practices most familiar to those communities. Cole illustrates how the janam-sakhis reinforce this image of Nanak as a unifier yet still convey the unique nature of the Guru's message. He describes how "Guru Nanak accepted the religious language of Islam and Hinduism when it suited him, but that the truth which he wished to express was his own."<sup>160</sup> The janam-sakhis are, as viewed by Cole, settings in which the message of Guru Nanak is provided a human setting, reaching out to those communities:

One of their purposes was to provide the Guru's hymns with flesh and blood. That is to say, the author or the community exercising poetic license or using an historical reminiscence gave a particular hymn a socio-religious setting whether it were a disputation with siddhas on Mount Sumer or with brahmins at Hardwar. However, the *bani* provided the cue and consequently inhibited the community from the worst excesses of legend and hagiography.<sup>161</sup>

Obviously the sakhis are rooted in the message of Guru Nanak's verses, but it would be nice to know how Cole, and the Sikh compilers, conceived of and regarded those "excesses" which they want to staunchly guard against. Cole examines a few sakhis that

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<sup>158</sup> Nikky Singh, "Myth of the Founder," 334.

<sup>159</sup> Cole, 105.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 96

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

have already been presented in this study, providing ripe ground on which to see how he considers the janam-sakhi narratives in light of the Guru's mission to bring the Punjabi community together.

With regard to Guru Nanak's encounters with Hindus, Cole focuses on two key sakhis, 34 "Hardwār: the watering of his fields" and#29 "Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra,"<sup>162</sup> that strike, not at the general Hindu populace, but at "people who typify certain aspects of Hinduism,"<sup>163</sup> which, in these cases, are brahmins and the rituals they perform.

#### 34 Hardwār: the watering of his fields

The incident at Hardwar involves not only the throwing of water, but, as reported in the Miharban janam-sakhi, an incident later that night as well. Guru Nanak's travelling companion, Mardana (a Muslim), is rebuked for violating the cooking square of a brahmin and polluting his food. The brahmin had intended the food for Guru Nanak; not knowing that Mardana was his companion, he still gave it to Nanak, claiming it was pure. Guru Nanak refused, saying it was polluted. "Shocked, the Hindu replied that no chandala (low caste or outcast) had been near it, but the Guru replied that four chandalas had entered the square: perversity of mind, lack of compassion, desire and wrath."<sup>164</sup> Cole sees this sakhi

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<sup>162</sup> Cole refers to these stories, but does not utilize these labels for them. McLeod's titles for these sakhis are noted in order to remain consistent throughout this study, and to ease the common referencing to them.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 182.



as an “opportunity to distinguish between ritual pollution which has no justification and meaning and moral impurity which renders all sacrifices and worship void and unacceptable to God.”<sup>165</sup> The Sikh concept of *isnān* (purity) shines through here, and is demonstrated as applicable to everyone through the inclusion of a verse from the *Adi Granth*.

Make the practice of virtue your cooking square, make meditation upon God’s name the ceremonial washing of your body. Those alone shall be considered good and pure who do not walk in the path of impure conduct.<sup>166</sup>

Not only does this verse reference charity, but the appeal to devotion to God’s name (*nām*) also stands out as further rejection of the pointless nature of outward ritual, because it does not reflect a pure intent. Nanak’s appeal is to embrace the inner purity and to act in kind, which can be done by anyone, regardless of caste or community affiliation.

#### 29 Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra

The incident at Kurukshetra has Guru Nanak cook a deer to feed the poor during a solar eclipse, while all the rich people are busy attending to brahmins, preparing their rituals. Nanak’s actions are, in the eyes of the brahmin witnesses, atrocious, because the festival celebrations were to remain pure by adhering to a brahmin’s vegetarian diet. Cole sees this sakhi as emphasizing the doctrine of charity above all else, as Guru Nanak’s only concern was to feed the poor, not to observe meaningless ritual guidelines. Cole describes Guru Nanak’s response to the brahmins thusly:

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 182, Citing the *Adi Granth*, 91. No indication is given as to whose translation Cole is using; it is assumed to be his own.

The reply he [Nanak] gives is at three levels of argument: first, in Vedic times horses and other animals were sacrificed and brahmins ate them; second, all life is in essence flesh and is not to be shunned as unclean; third, it ill-behooves the greatest man-eaters of all, brahmins who suck the lifeblood of the poor, to condemn others as carnivores! Vegetarianism alone does not lead to the attainment of moksha, cruelty and hypocrisy must be banished from the mind and replaced by devotion to nam.<sup>167</sup>

Guru Nanak's wit and clarity of purpose shine through in this summation. He directly confronts the religious hypocrisy he sees and turns attention to the key issues of faith that, he claims, can bring the community together—*nām, dān, isnān* (devotion to the Name of God, charity, and purity). These can be done by and for anyone; there are no restrictions on these in the eyes of the Guru.

Cole describes Guru Nanak's confrontation with the Nāth yogis in Gorakhmata, relayed in sakhi 36 "Nānakmatā," as more of a re-writing of history, telling that the conversion of the yogis and the town's name itself may have more to do with the imaginings of later Sikhs than Guru Nanak's own actions. The story tells of Guru Nanak going to Gorakhmata, the primary center of the Goraknāth yogi lineage. When confronted by the yogis, Nanak uses his spiritual and conversational prowess to bring them all in line with his message. They convert and change the name of the town to Nānakmatā to honor their new spiritual leader. Citing evidence that the town was claimed by Sikhs during the reign of the Sixth Guru, Hargobind (1604-44), the establishment of Nānakmatā is more likely a latter invention justified through an assumed connection to Guru Nanak, rather

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 183. This sakhi gets a bit more complicated, as it depicts Guru Nanak also partaking of the deer he cooked. This depiction of a non-vegetarian Guru Nanak stands out against the generally understood portrait of him. Cole shows how the Bhai Mani Singh janam-sakhi tries to mitigate this by saying "the cooked food is found to be nothing more than boiled milk," from which they make *khir* (rice pudding) to share, thus completely obscuring the issue.

than an actual one.<sup>168</sup> Despite this historical discrepancy, Cole sees the story as valuable in showing how Sikhs sought to present what they knew about Guru Nanak's arguments against the yogis by showing "that he could beat the siddhas at their own game.... It is not surprising, therefore, that with the passing of one hundred years or more, the Guru who countered their miracles with the gurbani is depicted as one who can also use the yogi's own methods and defeat them."<sup>169</sup> Cole sees this as exemplifying Guru Nanak's rejection of ascetic practices, because in these sakhis confronting the yogis Guru Nanak's actions are more blatant, as "the yogi is humiliated, subdued and converted."<sup>170</sup> Therefore, the socially engaged program of Sikhism is reinforced by showing the ascetics in such a poor light.

Cole portrays Guru Nanak's encounters with Muslims in Baghdad and Pañjā Sāhib as indicative of later justifications for Sikh Shrines in these locations, connecting their origins to Guru Nanak. Sakhi 81 "Baghdad" tells of Guru Nanak rejecting the admonishments of a dastgir [leader of a Sufi enclave] for singing about the "lakhs of heavens."<sup>171</sup> Once again, Guru Nanak's spiritual prowess demonstrates how the two holy men are more closely aligned than one may think, and a gurdwara was built to commemorate the occasion. Cole suggests that, "[p]resumably this anecdote was included in the janam sakhis to explain how the gurdwara came to exist there and to provide it with

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 196.

an association with Guru Nanak.”<sup>172</sup> Cole argues that the true root of the sakhi may lie in Guru Nanak’s refutation of Muslims’ particular rejection of his hymns—that his verses are praising God and are not just secular music. This then justifies Muslim participation in the Sikh practice of *kirtan* (devotional singing) as they could join in giving praise to God.

Cole is not as forgiving in attributing the conversion of the shrine at Pañjā Sāhib to a Sikh one in the story of sakhi 122 “*Pañjā Sāhib*: the rock stopped.” He suggests, based on the long history of the place first as a Buddhist shrine and later as a Muslim one, that “an association with Sikhism was therefore contrived” in order to reinstate the prominence of Hasan Abdal as a place of pilgrimage.<sup>173</sup>

The key sakhi addressing Guru Nanak’s encounter with Muslims is #79 “Mecca: the moving mosque,” in which the local *mullah* (Islamic teacher) is angered by Guru Nanak having fallen asleep with his feet pointed toward the Ka’bah. Guru Nanak asks the *mullah* to point his feet in the direction where God is not. Each time the *mullah* moves the Guru’s feet, the Ka’bah appears in the same direction. The *mullah* concedes the point to Guru Nanak, and asks him to stay to teach them more. Cole takes McLeod’s dismissal of this sakhi to task for good reason. Guru Nanak did not, as McLeod asserts,<sup>174</sup> go to Mecca in full disguise, he went in as a holy man devoted to God. Cole argues that

Whether Guru Nanak could normally have gained access to Mecca or not is obviously unimportant to the janam sakhi authors. In all accounts, the point that the Guru is a Hindu is brought out in one way or another... Each account somehow makes the point that Guru Nanak is a holy man, someone

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>174</sup> See McLeod, *GNSR*, 122-25.

who has a right to be in Mecca, for he is a true Muslim. This, presumably, whatever its historical origin, is the reason for the popularity of the Meccan anecdote in the janam sakhis.<sup>175</sup>

As an encounter with Islam, on theological grounds, this sakhi shows Guru Nanak as a Muslim in the most devoted sense. Sikhism and Islam agree: God is everywhere. Guru Nanak seeks to bridge any divide by demonstrating the common bonds and he does so in the holy precinct of Mecca. At least, this is how the janam-sakhis' author/compiler chose to demonstrate the interplay, but this thought would hold true for any mosque in the Punjab as well and would serve to bring Muslims and Sikhs together.

In each of these cases, Cole seems to avoid making a direct assertion about the janam-sakhis as a narrative form of exegesis centered on Guru Nanak's verses and the stories that show him putting them into play. By presenting the historical setting for the revelation and instruction of the Guru's message, the janam-sakhis depict how Sikhs at various times and in various places conceived of the relationship between the Guru's message, his life, and the concerns of the janam-sakhi authors which guided their presentations of these issues. Cole seems to overlook the historical distance; he asserts that the contexts and issues noted in the janam-sakhis are those of Guru Nanak, rather than those of authors in later centuries as McLeod asserts. It is an important distinction that changes greatly how the janam-sakhis operate as historical texts.

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<sup>175</sup> Cole, 202.

## **Sikh Tradition as History**

Another approach to understanding and presenting the history of the janam-sakhis is one understood by religious Sikhs today. Such presentations try to reconcile traditional accounts and the traditions that have been handed down along with them, with the historical record. It is a balance of history and tradition that essentially reproduces the intentional programs of the early janam-sakhi compilers, specifically, writing the history of Guru Nanak in a manner relevant to contemporary audiences. Kirpal Singh's *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* stands out as much as a modern presentation of Guru Nanak's life as it is an analysis of the historical janam-sakhi traditions. In the grand scheme of this study, it is certainly possible, and appropriate, to call it a new janam-sakhi narrative.<sup>176</sup>

Kirpal Singh's *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* [73 sakhis]

Kirpal Singh's *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* focuses on the historical validity of the janam-sakhi traditions. It is his response to the perceived pressures on, and abuse of, the Sikh tradition by the critical-historical theories offered by J.S. Grewal and W.H. McLeod as applied to the study of the janam-sakhis. He states that “[o]f late the historical validity of this material has been called to question in the name of

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<sup>176</sup> In fact, Kirpal Singh admitted as much in a conversation I had with him in Chandigarh in the summer of 2008.

methodology."<sup>177</sup> Unlike the positivist historians, Kirpal Singh seeks a more sympathetic understanding of these texts in synthesis with other historical data.

*Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* is a translated and updated version of Kirpal Singh's 1969 Punjabi language volume, *Janamsakhi Parampara*.<sup>178</sup> The new English language text, published in 2004, is the most recent analysis focused solely upon the janam-sakhi literature, and it strives to follow a clear methodology by utilizing the janam-sakhis texts and other historical data to achieve a synthesis of the historical roots of Sikh tradition. Kirpal Singh seeks to understand the "historical imagination"<sup>179</sup> which authored these collections.

Unlike McLeod's or Grewal's earlier studies, Kirpal Singh illuminates the history of Guru Nanak as conveyed within the janam-sakhis which are taken to be an accurate depiction. Kirpal Singh contends that the janam-sakhis were written by "men of faith with desire for spiritual pursuits,"<sup>180</sup> and thus these texts reflect concerns of both history and faith equally. He sees no way to differentiate these aspects in studying the janam-sakhis, since to do so would be to utilize the very critical-historical methods he opposes. He suggests that "the miracles in the *Janamsakhis* should not be rejected or decried outright, rather their historical settings need to be studied" in order "to decipher the historicity of the

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<sup>177</sup> K. Singh, *JTAS*, 7.

<sup>178</sup> Kirpal Singh, *Janamsakhi Parampara* (Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1969).

<sup>179</sup> K. Singh, *JTAS*, 8.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

tradition of Guru Nanak.”<sup>181</sup> His aim then is to synthesize the janam-sakhi accounts and corroborating historical evidence into a coherent picture of the life and history of Guru Nanak.

Kirpal Singh’s claims provide sufficient ground to describe this work as a new janam-sakhi. Unlike previous janam-sakhi compilers though, Kirpal Singh lays out in great detail how he went about making his compilation. He makes clear his stance and outlines the distinct steps taken to assure the historical accuracy of his presentation in order “to measure upto [sic] the modern historical methodology”:

- (i) Critical examination of the extant *Janamsakhi* traditions in order to decipher earliest traditions and their affinity with historical events.
- (ii) The shrines dedicated to the memory of Guru Nanak vis-a-vis their connection with *Janamsakhi* tradition.
- (iii) Land and sea routes of the 16th century.<sup>182</sup>

As he tells his readers, "I have scanned all the *Janamsakhi* texts to find out events and areas of traditions closer to reality and truth with detailed end-notes with regard to rationale of the conclusions."<sup>183</sup> His goal is commendable, as he seeks to corroborate the four primary janam-sakhi accounts, along with Bhai Gurdas’ first *Var* and other historical data, in order to:

Identify the historical element that lay deep beneath Sikh tradition which developed round the personality, teachings and preachings of Guru Nanak. The modern methodology being applied to dig out the historical truth has been kept in view but it has not been applied with a bias to reject such

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 48.



happenings embedded in tradition that could stand the test which is applied keeping in view the contemporary situations.<sup>184</sup>

He seeks to examine and elucidate Guru Nanak's history as it is recorded in the janam-sakhis and corroborate this information with the location of shrines and gurdwaras along trade routes of the era to further the accounts' veracity. He contends that understanding the period's travel routes adds further credibility to the journeys made by Guru Nanak throughout India and Asia. He seeks to resolve these sources against one another to bring the history within the janam-sakhis to light. The results of Kirpal Singh's approach can be seen in his treatments of the sakhis themselves. Two of his presentations of key sakhis will be examined here as demonstrations of his methodology.

#### 25. Discourse with the qāzī<sup>185</sup>

This sakhi is set shortly after the River Bein incident and represents the first religious response to Guru Nanak's claim that "[t]here is no Hindu; there is no Muslim." The local qazi (Muslim judge) asked the newly installed Guru to explain himself. After refuting the qazi's interrogations with hymns, which are later recorded in the *Adi Granth* on pages 141 and 142, the qazi and Guru Nanak accompanied the local governor, Daulat Khan, to say the *namaz* (Muslim prayer). While the two Muslims said the *namaz*, Guru Nanak just watched them, and even laughed at them. The outraged qazi asked why Guru Nanak behaved in such a manner. "Nanak patiently replied, 'Your *namaz* has not been

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>185</sup> This is McLeod's identification of the sakhi. Kirpal Singh identified it by the title "No Hindu, No Musalman." I am paraphrasing the story that is presented in K.Singh, *JTAS*, 75-78.

accepted (in the Divine Court) because your mind was somewhere else. Since you yourself were not present in the namaz, I could not have been with you saying it.”<sup>186</sup> Guru Nanak pointed out that that qazi had been thinking of a newborn filly at home, rather than focusing on his prayers. The admonished qazi admitted that his thoughts had strayed, effectively acceding to Guru Nanak’s superior spiritual prowess.

While Kirpal Singh’s presentation is straight-forward in its story-telling, the footnotes reveal how he came to compile it this way, building on a general account reported in all four *janam-sakhis*—that Nanak joined in the namaz and pointed out the distraction of the qazi. The incident is taken as authoritative because “All the *Janamsakhi* versions agree that Guru Nanak went to the mosque, along with the qazi, to say the namaz. It has to be taken as correct.”<sup>187</sup> The questions of the qazi are drawn from the *Miharban janam-sakhi*’s account of this incident, because no other is as specific. Kirpal Singh notes, “The *Miharban Janamsakhi* records the dialogue that is presumed to have taken place between Guru Nanak and the *qazi*. There appears to be a distinct possibility of such a happening in the context of narration of this episode.”<sup>188</sup> In the eyes of Kirpal Singh, the fact that the primary *janam-sakhis* each report the incident makes it historically true. It is difficult to see how the acceptance via agreement actually reveals or yields to any of the criteria necessary to make a claim based on the criteria Kirpal Singh himself provided. What we

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 77n97.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 76n95.

see is the acceptance of a traditional presentation of history as valid because it is the history of the tradition.

#### 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped

Kirpal Singh's treatment of Guru Nanak's encounter with Wali Qandhari does offer some interesting information drawn from the various narratives found in the manuscript traditions. He notes that the Wali was a member of a Shia sect, the *Rafizis*, which marks Guru Nanak's only recorded encounter with a Shia Muslim. His focus turns quickly to the legacy of the encounter, namely, the boulder that Guru Nanak stopped and the gurdwara that was built around it. Kirpal Singh's arguments for the historical accuracy of this sakhi rest on the presence of these two items. He claims that, "[t]he same stone bearing the imprint of the open hand has been preserved."<sup>189</sup> The claim here is that the imprinted hand was Guru Nanak's, although McLeod and others have offered plenty of evidence to show that the handprint was not Guru Nanak's.<sup>190</sup> Kirpal Singh, in an effort to both brush aside these historical discrepancies and justify his historical reading of the janam-sakhis, states

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>190</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 78-79. In footnote #1 on page 79, McLeod notes other cases that call the *Pañjā Sāhib* incident into question. First, the *Gazetteer of the Rawalpindi District 1893-94* describes the "rude representation of a hand in relief," not the imprint of a hand that the sakhi (and now Kirpal Singh) claims. The second historical note McLeod cites is G.B. Scott's *Religion and Short History of the Sikhs 1469-1930*, published in 1930, which relays a conversation between Scott and a local who tells him, "That's where the Guru put his hand." To which Scott responded, "But, the mark of the hand would have been impressed into the rock, not carved outward."

Also, I have it on good authority, from a friend, Dr. Rashida Khatoon Malik, Head of Campus at Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science & Technology in Islamabad, Pakistan, who grew up just outside of Hasan Abdal, that the various stories of Buddhist monks and Muslim pirs who are also credited with stopping the rock, along with Guru Nanak, are still well known in the region.

that “[t]he current tradition regarding the Panja Sahib is not found in any *Janamsakhi*, but this does not mean that the Guru did not pay a visit to this place. The popular *sakhi* got its present form in the time of Ranjit Singh [r. 1801-39] when Gurdwara Panja Sahib came into being.”<sup>191</sup> Yet, Kirpal Singh inserts the account into his presentation of the history, as if all the texts and evidence showed this to be the case. This *sakhi* brings to light a shortcoming of Kirpal Singh’s methodology as an academic historian and assigns him to the role of a traditionalist historian. Finding other non-Sikh accounts or traditions similar to those depicting Guru Nanak, such as sadhus greeting Guru Nanak with the milk-filled bowl (*sakhi* 91 “Multān: the jasmine petal”) <sup>192</sup> or the miraculously moving Ka’bah (*sakhi* 79 “Mecca: the moving mosque”)<sup>193</sup> are seen to reinforce the Guru’s presence there, rather than stir further investigation. He sees these other stories as reflections of Guru Nanak’s experience and lasting influence on the locals. Kirpal Singh does not explore the origins or traditions related to these similar accounts but instead holds that they serve to reinforce Guru Nanak’s place in the local tradition and solidify his historical importance. One would think that if Sufis also have legends about the Ka’bah moving in order to bring one closer to God, then a scholar should ask if the *janam-sakhis* report a sincere version of this event or simply a modification of this local traditions in order to assert Guru Nanak’s authority and supremacy. Kirpal Singh’s avoidance of such questions certainly limits the scholarly and historical value of his work.

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<sup>191</sup> K. Singh, *JTAS*, 172 fn430.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-19.

Much of Kirpal Singh's work is based on the existence of gurdwaras along known trade routes at sites commemorating the travels of Guru Nanak as depicted in the janam-sakhis. But he never delves into the specific histories of these locations. He sees the presence of these gurdwaras during his own travels in the 1960s as sufficient indication that these gurdwaras are tied to the janam-sakhi accounts. There is no doubt a general connection, but Kirpal Singh mentions at one point that Guru Hargobind "initiated the steps to establish and preserve these shrines,"<sup>194</sup> focusing more on the preserving rather than establishing. Kirpal Singh provides no evidence that the gurdwaras were established *before* Guru Hargobind's efforts. It is possible that Guru Hargobind took some license matching the locations of the gurdwaras he established to those in the stories about Guru Nanak. Maybe the locals built the gurdwaras later to attract Sikhs, because they heard the story and thought it would be good for business in the area. It makes sense that appeals to the stories and the implied connection to Guru Nanak would be incentives that would draw visitors to these sites. These points would not necessarily imply or verify Guru Nanak's travels, only local traditions about the Guru, but Kirpal Singh does not examine connections beyond these. He sees that which is visible nearly 400 years later as "evidence" and relies heavily on local traditions and anecdotes, rather than presenting solid archaeological or textual evidence to corroborate those connections in the manner he promised when he outlined his methodology.

Kirpal Singh's poor regard for what qualifies as good evidence extends to his discussion of the historical janam-sakhis. He accepts that they are there and that they say

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 49.

things about Guru Nanak. He simply lists dates of manuscripts, provides brief histories of the traditions, and gives descriptions of the basic characteristics of these lineages. He does not take into consideration any possibility that earlier manuscripts may have, at one time, existed, nor does he acknowledge the existence of an oral tradition that may have been influential in the formation of these accounts, which were often used as homilies. Kirpal Singh takes the existing texts at face value and assumes that these are the only records of the janam-sakhi traditions. To him, these texts speak of the history of Guru Nanak, and they say everything that needs to be said. It certainly stands to reason that in a tradition where the editing process of the scripture is so evident,<sup>195</sup> a similar process may be at work in the sacred literature such as the janam-sakhis. His acceptance of these stories, in the face of the evidence noted above, is justified only by his faith. Thus, his work parallels that of the earliest janam-sakhi compilers; his study deserves attention as a contemporary janam-sakhi, not as the historical analysis that it purports to be. But in the eyes of the faithful Sikh, the janam-sakhis, and by extension Kirpal Singh's work, are the tradition Guru Nanak left behind.

### **Theological Presentations of the Janam-sakhis**

It is also possible, and completely reasonable from a position of faith, to present a theological analysis of the janam-sakhis. Two works stand out for the different ways their authors approach the place and role of the janam-sakhis in discussions of Sikh theology

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<sup>195</sup> One need only to do a quick review of how much has been written about and debated regarding the development of the Adi Granth to see the close attention being paid to the written word by early Sikhs.

and worldview. These two are intentionally aimed at the same goal, but arrive at it by nearly opposite routes. The first is Surjit Hans' *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*, which offers a discussion of Sikh theology as discerned from the janam-sakhis, and the second is Harbans Singh's *Guru Nanak and the Origins of the Sikh Faith*, which takes a slightly different approach in telling the story of Guru Nanak's life as a means of revealing the principal teachings of Sikh theology. Essentially, Hans disassembles the stories to reveal their religious content in light of their literary forms and historical contents, while Harbans Singh, taking up those same concerns, produces a new theologically-informed telling of the janam-sakhis.

#### Surjit Hans' *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*

Hans' text is a theological investigation of the important writings of Sikhs, ranging from the *bani* of Guru Nanak and the other Gurus to the later writings that commemorate those great men's lives—including Bhai Gurdas' *Vars*, the janam-sakhis, and *gurbilās* literature.<sup>196</sup> Hans focuses his treatment of the janam-sakhis on the elaboration of how the stories work “as homilies for educational purposes to inculcate the doctrines and moral lessons of Sikhism.”<sup>197</sup> Key to understanding their value as homilies is their promotion of Guru Nanak and his doctrinal message. In his characterization of the janam-sakhis, Hans describes their purpose as “to portray the 'wonderful exploits' of the Master who goes about

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<sup>196</sup> The *gurbilās* (literally, ‘the Guru’s delight’) literature is essentially the janam-sakhi tradition as applied to Guru Nanak’s successors, particularly the sixth and tenth Gurus, Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh, respectively.

<sup>197</sup> Hans, 190.

winning 'spiritual victories' over potentates, kings, other religious teachers, ascetics, miracle-workers, gods and demons to establish his 'religious paramountcy' over this world.”<sup>198</sup> He gives special attention to the goal of these texts, which is to show Guru Nanak’s teachings as supreme over others.

Hans promotes the status of the *Adi Sakhis*, the *B40 Janam-sakhi*, and the *Puratan lineage*, saying they represent the “Little Tradition,” which serves to supplement the “Great Tradition” expressed in the sacred literature by the *Bhatts*,<sup>199</sup> bards whose praise of the Gurus were included in the *Adi Granth*, and by *Bhai Gurdas*’ individual writings. Essentially he acknowledges the *janam-sakhis* as the popular literature of the masses, with the “Great Tradition” materials indicating the high tradition “in the socially structured pyramid of Sikhism.”<sup>200</sup> This should not be seen as a completely dismissive move on Hans’ part, as he admits that the *janam-sakhis* represent “the most detailed explication of the ideas found in the compositions of the Gurus.”<sup>201</sup> Therefore, the lessons of the *janam-sakhis* were essential to understanding the duties and practices expected of Sikhs in accordance with the doctrinal model established through the presentation of the life of Guru Nanak.

The stories serve as the explication of doctrines, with Guru Nanak’s message revealed through his superiority over all the religious arguments presented by others. Guru

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>199</sup> The *Bhatts* were, by profession, bards. There are 123 compositions by various *Bhatts* in the *Adi Granth*. Hans is particularly focused on the contributions by the pair of *Satta* and *Balwand* (*AG*, 1389-1409).

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.



Nanak is shown to out-think the great yogi, Gorakh Nath, and to stand on the moral high ground in the face of the conqueror, Babur. Hans points to all the leaders and learned men, listing forty-five various religious titles and professions, to whom Guru Nanak “gave boons.”<sup>202</sup> The boon in each of these cases was the enlightening experience of learning the error of their way through conversation with Guru Nanak. By extension then, as Sikhs follow the example and lessons of Guru Nanak, they too will overcome such obstacles. Hans asserts that “Thus, the spiritual superiority of Guru Nanak resulted in the superior virtue of the Sikhs.”<sup>203</sup> This superiority had to be demonstrated through the constant practice of *nām dān isnān* (remembering the Name, charity, and purity), as well as through service to the community, or *seva*. In this way, the janam-sakhis are proselytizing texts that reached out to the community of the Sikhs and beyond, to convey the new path which Guru Nanak’s glory made clear to his followers—a gospel of Guru Nanak, if you will.

That is not to say that it was a necessarily unified or doctrinally coherent message, though. Hans considered the variations of the janam-sakhis as indications of “sectarian interest,”<sup>204</sup> as in the case of the Miharban janam-sakhi’s Mina influence, or as a means of a heterodox program “employed to damage Guru Nanak and his religion,”<sup>205</sup> as in the Hindalis’ derision of Guru Nanak indicated through the Bala janam-sakhi. This is further

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 186. Highlights of this list include: *giani, jogi* (yogi), *sannyasi, bhagti* (bhakti), *faqir, darvesh, pir*, Hindu, Muslim, *udasi*, king, beggar, *khatri*, Brahmin, and pandit.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 206.

emphasized by Hans' discussion of the Miharban and Bala (and the Bhai Mani Singh) janam-sakhis being placed within his chapter titled, "The Unorthodox Janamsakhis."<sup>206</sup> He has clearly identified numerous homiletic agendas (a high and low tradition, as well as orthodox and unorthodox ones) at play in the wide tradition of janam-sakhis. Each of these agendas strives to present the Guru's supremacy in a way that advances the causes of the tradition as a whole, rather than establishing a historical biography of the tradition's founder.

Harbans Singh's *Guru Nanak and the Origins of the Sikh Faith* [71 sakhis]

Harbans Singh approaches a theological discussion of the janam-sakhis, not through an analysis of the stories, but via a re-telling of them. Harbans Singh acknowledges that "the Janamsakhis are far and away the only means of information about the life of Guru Nanak. The canonical sources may be used to authenticate the perspective in terms of the Guru's own sayings and teachings; they will yield no empirical facts."<sup>207</sup> Rather than establishing a biography, his focus is instead to demonstrate the importance and impact of the Guru's message for Sikhs and also for the world at large.

This lesson begins in the context of the late fifteenth century and the apparently fermenting ideological conflicts of religious division across the Punjab in particular, and throughout India in general. From the debates between Hindus and Muslims, Bhaktas and

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>207</sup> Harbans Singh, *Guru Nanak and Origins of the Sikh Faith* (Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 1969), 19 (hereafter cited as H. Singh, *GNOSF*).

Sufis, " [Guru Nanak] evoked from the situation then prevailing a new way of humane and meaningful living and made it the medium of bringing into the world of intimations fresh and holy."<sup>208</sup> This meant building bridges between the apparently disparate communities. Harbans Singh describes the focus of Guru Nanak's message as a direct response to this climate, saying "Affirmation and integration were the qualities of the religious prophecy he embodied. He presented a living and intensely realized ideal of faith and spiritual deliverance and of human equality and justice."<sup>209</sup> Therefore, it stands to reason that the historical janam-sakhis, and even Harbans Singh's own text, strive to make this project clear by showing that "The teacher who brought these truths into the light of day was Guru Nanak."<sup>210</sup> The remainder of Harbans Singh's text is devoted to elaborating upon how these stories evidence those lessons directly through their connection to the revealed *bani*, recorded in the *Adi Granth*.

In his concluding chapter, Harbans Singh offers a summation of the janam-sakhi project, which makes for an even better introduction to it, by building from his commentary on Bhai Gurdas' *Var I*, stanza 27. It is necessary to present both, as the combination so perfectly encapsulates his treatment. Stanza 27 emphasizes Guru Nanak's role as a teacher.

Guru Nanak appeared into the world;  
With his coming lifted the mist  
And there was light everywhere,  
As when the sun rises  
The stars vanish and darkness retreats,  
Or as when the lion roars

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 62.

The deer flee in panic.  
Wheresoever the Guru set his foot,  
That spot became sanctified.  
Spots once sacred to the Siddhas  
Do celebrate Nanak now.  
Every home is turned into a *dharamsala*  
And every day into a festival of praise to the Divine.  
The Guru redeemed all the four corners and all the nine realms of the earth.  
God's own witness appeared in the Kali age.<sup>211</sup>

The divine mission and teachings are made clear through this brief summary offered by Bhai Gurdas. However, Harbans Singh offers further insight into the mission of the janamsakhis by showing how they present a coherent life story that embodies that mission, in the same way the living Guru did. He says,

His [Guru Nanak's] appearance in the world was an act of providence. The truth he enunciated dispelled ignorance and sin. He wandered abroad preaching. Places of worship were set up where he visited. Religion was restored to the householder. His home became his temple where he practised prayer and adoration. The Guru's message was meant for all mankind. The purpose of his coming in the kali age, the least pious of the classical time-cycles, was to demonstrate the way of God. This sense of the transcendental and universal character of Guru Nanak's prophecy dominated Bhai Gurdas' insight. It was present among the Guru's immediate followers. This is how the writers of Janamsakhis had understood him and his is what they attempted to convey in their own style mixing myth, legend and history together. This style was the way of men of that time to say that they had encountered a charismatic being whose presence and words had revolutionized their world. The order of nature was reversed and so were the lives of many men. The crushed fields grew thick with grain, the murderous criminal turned a saint, the boiling cauldron was cooled. The very fact that myth and miracle were used becomes in this sense historical datum. The evidence is relevant to understanding Guru Nanak and finding the true measure of his genius.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 199. Quoting Bhai Gurdas' *Var I*, stanza 27.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 200.

The janam-sakhis, by this view, are recounting a miracle, and that miracle is Guru Nanak. The message he imparts to his followers via these stories is equally miraculous. Harbans Singh rejects the critical historian's piecemeal rejection of miraculous content, because doing so necessitates the complete rejection of Guru Nanak himself. The theological impact of such a rejection is practically beyond comprehension to a Sikh—the Guru is not to be dismissed. The miracle of Guru Nanak and his message are at the heart of the faith.

*Guru Nanak and Origins of Sikh Faith* presents the story of Guru Nanak's life as a miracle tale, and supports its status with appeals not only to the person of the Guru, but with strong reliance upon the Guru's *bani* as it connects the janam-sakhi narratives to the *Adi Granth*. To show just how he demonstrated this through his treatment of the stories, the three sakhis he mentions in his summation (#6 "The restored field," #60 "Sajjan the *thag*," and #58 "The cannibal's cauldron") will be discussed in more detail, as they demonstrate both Guru Nanak's lessons and their miraculous connections or authority.

#### 6. The restored field

This sakhi takes place when Nanak was a child, herding his buffaloes. The young Nanak fell into deep meditation and did not notice when his cattle trampled his neighbor's crops. His neighbor was obviously angered by Nanak's negligence, and believed his life to be as ruined as his field. "Nanak's heart was filled with pity to see what had happened. He tried to pacify the wrathful Bhatti proprietor and said that God would put a blessing on

his field.”<sup>213</sup> The spiritual assurance of a child did little to alleviate the concerns of the farmer, so he made appeal to the village chief/ landlord, Rai Bular, for compensation.

Rai Bular sent men out to examine and estimate the damage. They quickly returned saying that they saw no damage. “Not a blade had been injured and ‘the field seemed to proclaim that if any damage had been done it must be elsewhere’.”<sup>214</sup> Everyone was surprised. The farmer claimed he was not a liar, as “He had seen with his own eyes the whole crop ruined and the buffaloes sitting amidst it after they had heartily gorged themselves on it.”<sup>215</sup> Despite the farmer’s testimony and protests, the fact remained that crops now appeared in pristine condition.

The assurance made by young Nanak of God’s blessing is shown through the restoration of the field. It serves a dual purpose in affirming Guru Nanak’s lessons and authority. First, his word is true. He said a blessing would come, and it did. The lesson here is to trust the Guru’s words. This leads directly into the second purpose, affirming Nanak’s place as the instrument of that Divine will, thus ensuring the Guru’s words are (and will ever be) true. The Guru cannot lie or be led astray, because he is the Guru.

#### 60. Sajjan the thag

The story of Sajjan focuses on the miraculous power of the Guru’s *bani* to convert the black heart of a robber who preys upon travelers he lures into his complex. Harbans

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 80-1.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 81. Quoting the *Miharban Janam-sakhi*, as presented in Kirpal Singh, *Janam-sakhi Guru Nanak Devji* (Amritsar: Khalsa College, 1964), 23.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 81.

Singh's presentation of this sakhi conveys both the depravity of Sajjan's murderous thievery and the glorious redemptive quality of Guru Nanak's teachings:

He maintained mosque as well as a temple for use by Muslim and Hindu travellers [sic] and seemed to welcome anyone for a night's lodging and meal. Many a wayfarer felt relieved and grateful when, at the end of a day's journey, he was led into such a hospitable home. The sleeping guests were Sajjan's victims and their goods his property. After despatching [sic] the traveller [sic] with the help of his band of thugs, he would appear in the morning with his pilgrim's staff and rosary and spread out a carpet to pray.

In Guru Nanak's lustrous face the far-seeing Sajjan read the signs of affluence. The guest was therefore all the more welcome and entitled to more than usual courtesy. But at night the Guru tarried long before going to bed. Sajjan who had been waiting got impatient. At last, he came near the door to see inside the room. Mardana was playing on the rebeck and the Guru was singing a hymn in enraptured devotion. The sight held Sajjan. The sweet music thrilled him. It calmed the agitation in his heart and he felt a new consciousness welling up in him. He fell at the Guru's feet and confessed remorsefully how sinful he was. The Guru assured him that he could yet hope for God's grace and forgiveness if he confessed and repented. Sajjan owned his sins and prayed the Guru for pardon. One condition was laid upon him: he must deliver all of his possessions which he had collected by impious means. 'Then,' says *Puratan Janamsakhi*, 'Sajjan obeyed. He brought out all the things and gave them away in God's name.' He converted his house into a *dharamsala*, or place of worship and charity, and became a zealous disseminator of the Guru's teaching.<sup>216</sup>

This presentation works at two levels: it first affirms the transformative quality of the Guru's *bani*, and second, conveying that transformative *bani* to readers of the sakhis (although no *bani* is related through this narrative, it is in others), which should, in accordance with this sakhi, have a transformative effect upon the reader as well.<sup>217</sup> While not every sakhi narrative cites hymns from the *Adi Granth*, it is understood that the same

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 109-10.

<sup>217</sup> This play on the transformative power of *bani* harkens back to the *phalashruti* passage relayed at the beginning of the *Adi Sakhis*, and discussed in Chapter One. Hearing the sakhi is enough to convey the transformative power of the Guru's teachings and grace.

divine impetus is behind each one, motivating both Guru Nanak in the story and the reader as well toward the spiritual goals Guru Nanak laid out as part of his tradition. Harbans Singh's presentation of this anecdote conveys the power of the Guru's hymns without even having to relate one.

#### 58. The cannibal's cauldron

Harbans Singh's portrayal of the spiritual impact of the Guru's words is taken a step further in his presentation of the following *sakhi*.

On his way back [from a distant journey to East India], Guru Nanak passed through the tribal areas in Central India ministering to communities primitive in their ways. In this country Mardana once wandered out in search of food and was seized by a marauding giant. His name, as mentioned in the *Bala Janamsakhi*, was Kauda.\* He was the leader of a clan of cannibals and always kept an oil-cauldron sizzling for man or beast that might fall into his hands. Mardana would have met the fate of Kauda's many other luckless victims but for the Guru's timely appearance. The Guru uttered the greeting, "Sat Kartar—the Creator is the eternal truth." The ring of his words startled Kauda. When he turned to look towards the Guru, his heart was touched as never before. He had not known such benignity and tenderness, nor such calm and tranquility. He released Mardana and fell at the Guru's feet. He was, says the *Bala Janamsakhi*, converted and charged with the rescuing of his companions.<sup>218</sup>

The transformative power of the Guru's words is effected through the expression of greeting, *Sat Kartar*, which expresses the Divine One as both the creator and true. The miracle is worked via an appreciation of this phrase's scope— truth is the essence of the world. Thus the Guru's truths are to be recognized because they are the key to salvation

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<sup>218</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 131. Harbans Singh's footnote, noted by an asterisk, is provided below: "The story occurs in all of the four major *Janamsakhis*, but the accounts differ in details as well as in the locale. The version given here coincides more with the later tradition."



and offer the “calm and tranquility” that Kauda saw revealed in the Guru himself. It does not even require a hymn to be heard; the simple two-word greeting that expresses the power behind all hymns is sufficient.

Harbans Singh’s entire presentation is devoted to the revelation of the miracle behind the sakhis, namely, the truth that is Guru Nanak’s mission. These three sakhis each reflect the way Harbans Singh seeks to make this presentation clear. He is capitalizing upon the power of Guru Nanak’s words, in the *Adi Granth* and the sakhis themselves, to convey the spiritual mission to readers. This becomes evident in his final chapter, “Continuing Reality.” Instead of offering a presentation of the janam-sakhis, it operates as a theological analysis of Guru Nanak’s message, as discerned from his hymns in the *Adi Granth*. Harbans Singh outlines the description of the divine purpose laid out in Guru Nanak’s teachings. He discusses major themes of equality, service, and honest devotion to God, citing their scriptural bases at length. The hymns indicate the divine mission as Guru Nanak expressed them to his followers.

The addition of this analysis at the end of Guru Nanak’s life story makes perfect sense. It is a review of the lessons to be discerned from the stories that were just read. A reader cannot help but make connections between these points and the issues described in the sakhis. Harbans Singh has provided a guide to a theologically-informed reading of the sakhis. It works so well in this volume because it is structured in accordance with the story contained in the volume. Whereas Surjit Hans sought to distinguish the theological underpinnings of the sakhis in the specific contexts of their creation and sectarian characteristics, Harbans Singh has set out a theological presentation of the Guru’s life that

both tells the story and provides the necessary exegesis of the *bani* that motivates the sakhis in order to provide a doctrinally coherent and understandable representation of Guru Nanak and his mission. Surjit Hans characterized the janam-sakhis as missionizing texts; Harbans Singh wrote one.

### **A Socio-cultural Presentation of the Janam-sakhis**

Some of the authors considered so far in this chapter have focused on how the various janam-sakhis can be read to indicate the sectarian divisions present in the early Sikh community. McLeod, W. Owen Cole, and Surjit Hans stand out in this regard. Harjot Oberoi's *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*<sup>219</sup> reverses this stance and presents an examination of the historical contexts that give rise to these different representations of the Guru Nanak's life. Oberoi shifts the focus from the janam-sakhis as passively sectarian Sikh identities to understanding them as constitutive or contributing factors, that is, the varied presentations of the historical janam-sakhi traditions actively construct Sikh identities.

Harjot Oberoi's *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*

Harjot Oberoi brings the question of multiple discourses in Sikh history to the fore. His concern is to explore how categories such as Hindu, Muslim and Sikh were formulated and used as markers of identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Oberoi's

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<sup>219</sup> Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

intention is to study competing (though not necessarily mutually exclusive) definitions of Sikhism—such as Udasi, Nanak-panthi, Khalsa, and others—and to describe how the Singh Sabha movement “usurped the right to represent others within this singular tradition,” by which “[i]ts ethnocentric logic subsumed other identities and dissolved alternative ideals—such as asceticism—under a monolithic, codified and closed culture.”<sup>220</sup> Prior to the Singh Sabha, as Oberoi describes it, “most Sikhs moved in and out of multiple identities grounded in local, regional, religious and secular loyalties,” which contributed to the multiple identities being considered.<sup>221</sup> Oberoi’s work is concerned with how these various religious identities were conceived, embraced, and continued; therefore, he must account for “the whole historical process by which a cohesive community of believers comes to be produced, consolidated and reproduced through a cultural fusion of texts, myths, symbols and rituals with human bodies and sentiments, often under the aegis of religious personnel.”<sup>222</sup> Texts are a constitutive element of the structures that come to be indicative of a specific mode of identity. Texts construct and reify the activities embedded in the everyday life of Sikhs—human agents who engage a tradition in a variety of ways, rather than simply being molded by it.<sup>223</sup>

Oberoi shifts his analysis back a few hundred years as he attends to the role of the *janam-sakhis* in this process of identity construction. He describes the texts as “mythical

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 23.

narratives,” which, while “instructing and entertaining,” also “simultaneously express the state of the Sikh Panth in the seventeenth century.”<sup>224</sup> It was the concern of the janam-sakhi authors, whom Oberoi consistently refers to as “mythologists” or “myth-makers,” to explain how Sikhs were to live their lives according to Guru Nanak’s message and example. Oberoi is uniquely aware of the hermeneutical circle in which these myth-makers were trapped: “A major impulse in the writing of the Janam-sakhis is to make seventeenth-century Sikhs cast their lives in the mythical image of Nanak. But the converse is equally true. Guru Nanak's mythical life is in part fashioned after the universe of seventeenth-century Sikhs.”<sup>225</sup> The meaning of Guru Nanak’s lessons, presented in these janam-sakhis, had to conform to contemporary understandings of lessons that were part of a larger tradition including these texts and other traditional sources that worked together to inform the narrative’s desired outcome of Sikh identity.

Traditions informed the presentation, as did the desire to create new interpretations of those traditions. All had to be rooted in the diverse conversation that was the Sikh tradition of that era. Each voice and disparate presentation contributed its own evaluation to the mix, giving rise to and offering commentary on the extant variety of Sikh expressions of Guru Nanak’s life. Oberoi equates the expansion and popularity of the janam-sakhis to “a growing awareness of issues of identity”<sup>226</sup> in both producers and readers, as many people chimed in on this motivating question. The multiple identities these authors

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 53.

considered are reflected through the various janam-sakhi traditions and other related interpretations of Guru Nanak's message. The Bala, Miharban, and other janam-sakhi traditions are each indicative of the diverse understandings of Guru Nanak's message and its implications for Sikhs.<sup>227</sup> There is no stable image of the Guru during the period of the historical janam-sakhis—no singular definition, no fixed image of the Guru or his message. Oberoi is quite clear about his dissatisfaction with the claims of these myth-makers to present the truth of Guru Nanak's life: he declares that, "If the overall objective of the Janam-sakhi mythologists was the construction of an autonomous Sikh worldview, they could not possibly have done a worse job."<sup>228</sup> Each presentation results in a new trajectory for Sikh expression. The duty of scholars of the janam-sakhis, then, is to acknowledge how the janam-sakhis work better to fence in general conceptions or ideas about Guru Nanak and his meaning, rather than to try to pin down a specific expression that is historically true or valid.

This is not a comforting position for people of faith to acknowledge. It is not surprising, then, to note how Sikhs later revisited these varied conceptions and tried to reinterpret them in order to construct a singular narrative that offers a coherent expression of Guru Nanak's message that is still supported by the authority of the janam-sakhi

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<sup>227</sup> Hardip Singh Syan's recent work examines these various voices and conceptions of Guru Nanak's mission as he juxtaposes the Miharban and "orthodox" traditions (Adi Sakhis, and Puratan Janam-sakhis), to "elucidate the alternative images of Guru Nanak and Sikhism that had currency in the seventeenth century."(76) From these he infers different political circumstances and conceptions presented in sakhis relating Guru Nanak's meeting with Babur and reflecting the Guru's authority over the conqueror. "From these variations we can glean the manner in which debates in the organization of the Sikh community, its ideologies and the shift towards militancy had become a subject of great importance to the fraternity"(83). Hardip Singh Syan, *Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century: Religious Violence in Mughal and Early Modern India* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2013), 75-88.

<sup>228</sup> Oberoi, 56.

traditions. This comes to the fore in the late nineteenth century and is confronted in the project of the Singh Sabha reformers, as clearly demonstrated by Macauliffe's presentation of the janam-sakhis, discussed in the previous chapter. Oberoi's focus for the remainder of his text is the various ways these questions about Sikh identity are addressed and settled (primarily by the apparent victory of the Singh Sabha in promoting a specifically Khalsa-centered Sikh identity and vision of Sikh history).

Oberoi's analysis of the goals and role of the janam-sakhis in the Sikh Panth is the most nuanced of the scholars reviewed here. His focus on the instructive nature and reception of these texts is noteworthy, and his approach provides a model of how the janam-sakhis can be seen in a larger project of the negotiation of Sikh beliefs and identity. Additionally, Oberoi identifies an important change affecting the janam-sakhis in the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century; specifically, the differences of historical janam-sakhis are pushed aside, in favor of a singular orthodox vision of Guru Nanak in line with the reforms led by the Singh Sabha.

### **Pedagogy and the Janam-sakhis: A Third Order Discourse**

If the janam-sakhis represent the first-order discourse about the life of Guru Nanak as stories rich in metaphor and symbolism, then scholarly attempts to interpret and apply these stories (in a variety of ways) constitute a second-order discourse seeking clarity and confirmation of historical or theological points via analyses of the janam-sakhis. This study now proposes a third-order discourse—one that considers academic studies of the janam-sakhis as their own pedagogical projects that seek goals similar to the source

material but strive to develop new meanings and applications for it. Each new interpretation of the janam-sakhis promotes a new way to engage the stories and the doctrines and practices derived from them.

Each presentation, new telling, or academic analysis of Guru Nanak's life is made to convey an interpretation of his teachings. In order to consider the variety of these treatments, it is necessary to identify and distinguish how these new works go about their interpretations of the janam-sakhis. This author contends that these pedagogical projects are indicated through elements of the narrative's construction in relation to the accompanying commentary on the text; moreover, by careful examination of the scholarly methods and tools employed in investigation and critical representation of the janam-sakhis, each new work on the janam-sakhi stories can be seen to present, in its own way, a specific understanding of the Guru's life (in very much the same way Oberoi argued).

As scholars debate the nature of the janam-sakhis and assert specific views of this literature, they often fail to consider the ways in which their treatment sets a tone for the specific engagement of the janam-sakhis. Just as each telling of these stories about Guru Nanak seeks to convey features of his teachings, so too does each discussion of these stories structure understandings of the relationship between these texts and their audience. Therefore, discussions *about* the janam-sakhis are as instructive as the discussions *within* the janam-sakhis.

Scholarly analyses of the janam-sakhis have been categorized in this study according to the definitions these scholars applied to these traditional texts: history, myth, hagiography, and homily. Classifying the janam-sakhis by designators like these makes

new relationships to this literature possible. This is also where controversies of studying the janam-sakhis become evident. Descriptions of the janam-sakhis that rely on a specific academic genre have been an impediment to further discussion and engagement with others who assert the janam-sakhis belong to a different genre. For example, McLeod's use of the janam-sakhis as a source for verifiable historical evidence about the life of Guru Nanak conditioned how his readers would engage the janam-sakhi narratives. He set a new pattern for the critical engagement with this literature by way of his assertions about genre: history is to be investigated and evaluated by specific criteria, as set out in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. These criteria had not been applied previously to the janam-sakhis, and thus McLeod's treatments of them were seen by traditional Sikhs as judgments against their historical validity, not as investigations looking to discern historical content. This failure to recognize how McLeod engaged these texts denies opportunity for further exchange and continued discussion. McLeod had to endure many years of such criticisms that failed to see, much less engage, his specific goals for investigating the janam-sakhis as a verifiable source on the life of Guru Nanak.

Whereas Sikh tradition presents them as the true history of Guru Nanak's life and journeys, others focus on the janam-sakhis' moral lessons, which elaborate on the Guru's teachings to give them a memorable real-world context that helps to instill these lessons in the lives of all those who hear them. Direct engagement between these positions is complicated (if not impossible), as they do not regard the source material of the janam-sakhis in the same way. Authors of these positions can only speak to their view on the literature; they have not yet sought to engage different views on their own terms.



### A Comparative Pedagogical Model

The demonstration of pedagogical engagements with the janam-sakhis requires a modeling scheme capable of illustrating specific approaches to these narratives. Drawing from works in literary criticism, it is possible to demonstrate how this modeling scheme can help identify key aspects of these pedagogical projects. It will then be possible to see how traditional understandings of the janam-sakhi literature are expressed through this model, before showing how three key academic treatments of the janam-sakhis (history, hagiography, and homily) can be modeled as well. These three treatments characterize the ways that scholars have defined the literary focus of the janam-sakhis based on positions noted in the previous sections. These academic interpretations hinge on the application of these genre designators to condition the particulars of their engagement of this literature. This in itself is a pedagogical project that extends from the narrative to the discourse about the narrative (the shift from a first-order to a second-order discourse). By choosing and applying a genre designator, such as history or hagiography, a specific relationship to the narrative is constructed. In this way, each treatment of the janam-sakhis is a teaching text, as it presents, analyzes and evaluates the source materials in specific manners that condition the reader's understandings of the texts.

The first step of this re-imagined framework of the discourse on, and meta-discourse about, the janam-sakhis needs to provide a foundation whereby each successive presentation can be compared. Seymour Chatman, in his work *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, provides a model of a narrative text that can help

shed light on the issues raised in a study of these varied interpretations and representations of the janam-sakhis.<sup>229</sup> Chatman has devised a model that illustrates the two sides at work in both the writing and the reading of a text. The author and reader stand outside of the text, and the text mediates their interaction via a narrative communication between the two parties. Unfortunately, such a distinction between a text's "sender" and "receiver" is not so simple. Chatman showed that, within the text itself we can see created or "implied" identities which operate around and within the narrative to aid these parties in the presentation and reception of the narrative. Chatman posits that texts are basically a form of "mediated narration"<sup>230</sup> between the three personages he identifies within the larger aggregate of "sender" and "receiver." The sender consists of the following: 1) the real author, outside the text; 2) the implied author, as suggested by/ within the narrative; and 3) the narrator, the voice that speaks within the text. Meanwhile, the receiver is composed of: 4) the real reader, holding the book; 5) the implied reader, which Chatman describes as "the audience presupposed by the narrative itself"<sup>231</sup> or the intended audience; and 6) the narratee, "a 'device' by which the implied author informs the real reader how to perform as implied reader, [that is] which Weltanschauung to adopt."<sup>232</sup> It is the "receiver" to whom the narrator speaks in the text. An illustration of how these personages would be arranged in relations to one another is provided in Figure 3.1. The two sides of the sender and

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<sup>229</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.



Figure 3.1 Chatman's Model of a Text

receiver are shown with the narration, the actual story being told bridging the two (the central line leading from narrator to narratee). This illustration will help map the varied interpretations of the janam-sakhis to facilitate our comparisons in the analysis at hand.

A couple of caveats need to be made here. In the thirty-plus years since Chatman presented this model, understandings of Chatman's model in narrative studies and literary criticism circles have turned more towards a focus on reader response rather than the will employ his model.<sup>233</sup> So a slight re-configuration of a few base definitions in Chatman's model is necessary to distinguish this work's focus on the texts specifically. Also,

<sup>233</sup> I was introduced to Chatman's work by Vivian-Lee Nyitray, who employed it in her study "Mirrors of Virtue: Four Shih Chi Biographies" to examine the direct communication of moral exemplars within a narrative and "describes the process by which readers learn to judge the moral content of the subjects' actions." Vivian-Lee Nyitray, "Mirrors of Virtue: Four Shih Chi Biographies" (PhD diss, Stanford, 1990), iv.

consideration must be given both to how readers engage fictional narratives as Chatman described and to how religious narratives are understood in these works.

Before proceeding, one important point must be made clear: the focus of this study is on the construction and presentation of the *janam-sakhis* and the later interpretations of them. It is a constrained focus on the specific presentation that is the text and the narrative it conveys or interprets. As a heuristic device, Chatman's model serves to illustrate the active nature of the author's presentation; the authority of the implied author, which "is responsible for the world-view emanating from a narrative"<sup>234</sup> and gives credibility to the story being told; and the narrator as the active voice in the text that does the storytelling.<sup>235</sup> As Chatman seeks to focus discussion about the implied author on the "agency" that "guides any reading of it,"<sup>236</sup> it is helpful to adjust this presentation of Chatman's categories in order to further clarify the intentions and agency expressed through the creation of the *janam-sakhi* narratives being discussed in this study. These adjustments not only clarify the structures within the narratives to be examined, but also better address the important function of these presentations of religious narratives that convey religious authority to a

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<sup>234</sup> Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 17. This world-view is created by the literary techniques utilized by the author to present the narrative; including, but not limited to, word choice, humor, and introducing characters.

<sup>235</sup> This is quite different than the reader-response focus given to this facet of Chatman's model by those engaged in the fields of narrative studies and literary criticism. These positions are expressed in a variety of works and specific manners by scholars such as H. Porter Abbott, Patrick Colm Hogan, and James Phelan. The reader-response view of the implied author and the implied reader is actually an inference reached by the reader, not an implication. Chatman addressed this shift, saying "We might better speak of the 'inferred' than of the 'implied author'." Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press 1993), 77.

<sup>236</sup> Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 74.

specifically intended audience known as the community of believers. To better serve those ends, the following adjustments are proposed:

1. Change the implied author to the “implied *authority*,” as this is a feature that is both constructed and referenced by the narrative to affirm the social importance of the tale being told. It is the authority behind the telling that gives it credibility.
2. Change the implied reader to “intended audience” because religious narratives are written for specific audiences. These stories are specifically intended to communicate their message in a precise way to a specific community or group.

These two changes will also help distinguish the religious narratives that are the focus of consideration here from the fictional narratives that Chatman discussed.<sup>237</sup> The specifically didactic nature of communicating an authoritative position to an intended audience in need of religious education is at the heart of the pedagogical projects to be examined.

In a similar vein, literary scholar Angela Moger characterizes this instructive aspect of narrative<sup>238</sup> and asserts that “to tell a story is to do something to the somebody who listens to it, to affect that listener.”<sup>239</sup> She contends that this reflects the “ultimate relationship between the process of narration and the process of instruction.”<sup>240</sup> This relationship is echoed in the textual model being created here. Narratives are more than a

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<sup>237</sup> This also avoids the confusion of implication and inference on the part of the reader-response positions. I was able to discuss these changes with Seymour Chatman at the 2012 meeting of The International Society for the Study of Narrative in Las Vegas, Nevada. He saw no troubles with my reconfiguration, nor could he explain what led to the odd reinterpretations of his works shifting from implication to inference.

<sup>238</sup> Angela S. Moger, “That Obscure Object of Narrative,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 63 (1982): 129-138. Moger provides an analysis of Maupassant’s “Une Ruse” to demonstrate the didactic quality of writing.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

manner to convey a chronological ordering of events, they are a tool to condition specific responses to those events, to evoke a response in the intended audience. To reiterate a distinction Moger notes that “[p]eople often tell stories to persuade others of something; narrative and its techniques are constantly used to impart some form of knowledge.”<sup>241</sup> Narratives are not emotionless chronicles; they draw the reader into a world both imaginatively and emotionally. Religious texts like the janam-sakhis demand such instruction. The reader’s eyes are opened to new teachings and new horizons, and the readers—the audience—are led through the story, relying on the narrator’s presentation and authority on which the narrative is grounded. The text of any janam-sakhi is certainly a discourse, as Chatman describes it, and with these modifications one can better see how it is also a significant and instructive one. All of this provides the following structure, shown in Figure 3.2, representing the modified textual model incorporating the varied interpretive schema.

Traditionally, interpretation is the act by which the real reader ‘moves’ into the text to take up the position of implied reader and make the text relevant or applicable to their life. The reader builds a relationship not only to the text, but to the implied authority – often ascribed to the narrator or the implied author (but which really resides in the real author) who provides the conditions of the narrative which are to be understood as meaningful. Figure 3.3 shows the real reader taking the position as the intended audience, and then taking their worldview, or *Weltanschauung* as Chatman says, from the intended audience and applying it to their lives in the real world. This is the most literal and literary

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 131.

SENDER: Real Author  
Implied Authority  
Narrator

NARRATION-----  
Narratee  
Intended Audience

RECEIVER: Real Reader



Figure 3.2 Modified Model

SENDER: Real Author           not relevant  
Implied Authority   Guru Nanak  
Narrator               Guru Nanak

NARRATION----- TEACHINGS & DOCTRINES  
Narratee               Sikhs  
Intended Audience   Sikhs

RECEIVER: Real Reader       Sikhs



Figure 3.3 Traditional Interpretation

interpretation of a text to be explored, as it assumes the texts were specifically intended for the Sikh reader, whomever he or she may be.<sup>242</sup> In the case of the *janam-sakhi*, Sikhs read these accounts as having a special significance to them as Sikhs because these are the stories of their founder, Guru Nanak. Sikhs traditionally understand the narration (which bridges the narrator and the narratee) as directed to them (as the intended audience), with lessons to be learned and embraced because they are the important doctrines of Sikhism. The *janam-sakhis* bear witness to the three primary tenets of Guru Nanak's teachings: *nām*, *dān*, and *isnān*. Guru Nanak fulfills two roles in this model. He is the implied authority behind these stories, as the *janam-sakhis* are, reportedly, his life story that he passed on to Sikhs. Guru Nanak is also often assumed to be the narrator within these stories, as his hymns are an important facet of these stories. It may not be his voice in which the narrative is relayed, as he is often referred to in the third person. However, within the larger scope of Sikh traditions, as the *janam-sakhis* narrate the Guru's life and his revelation of *bani*, they all harken back to his words and the oral tradition that he began. He sang the *bani* and outwitted those who stood in his way. It was the lessons he taught that made all these stories possible. So while the voice of the narrator in a *janam-sakhi* may or may not be revealed, the one who first narrated the lessons they contain is known, and he is the Guru. In this way, Guru Nanak's role as narrator buttresses the specific narrative construction of the narrator, lending further authority and prestige to the teachings which are carried on through the examples of his life. These tenets are conveyed through the narration to the

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<sup>242</sup> See Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 259-261, for an explanation of this type of traditional reading.



reader, who understands the text to be addressing all Sikhs throughout time as Guru Nanak's message is sustained by the community that holds it dear.

For traditional interpretations of the *janam-sakhis*, the specific author who put pen to paper is irrelevant, as is any interceding narrator within the text, because the *janam-sakhis* are acknowledged to be the coalescence of an earlier oral tradition that originated with Guru Nanak himself. It was his story to tell first, and it is to his account of his life that the *sakhis* are connected.

A common trope in the *janam-sakhis* is that of Guru Nanak convincing someone of his superior position, followed by their conversion to the Guru's way. This is particularly effective in *sakhi* 60 "Sajjan the thag" wherein Guru Nanak convinces a murderous robber, Sajjan, to give up his evil ways and follow the true path of charity and devotion. Sajjan goes on to be a good Sikh and sets an example for readers everywhere—they too can work towards the good, despite their previous shortcomings. If the murderer Sajjan can be forgiven and accepted by the Guru, so too can the average person for their lesser transgressions. The pedagogical lesson here is multi-vocal: it is first aimed at Sajjan in the narration, then at the Sikh narratee to whom this story was told by the Guru, then at the Sikhs (current and future) who are the implied audience in need of this instruction, and ultimately to the real reader who is the one holding the book, or hearing this tale so many years removed from Guru Nanak.

Chatman's model of a text is especially helpful in identifying this aspect of these narratives. As the direct speech of Guru Nanak which relates his teachings works to draw readers into the textual roles as the narratee to whom those lessons are being told. The

Guru's dialogue in the narratives is not only directed at other characters within the narrative, but to the reader, as they have already committed themselves to the projects that the Guru laid out. His hymns presented evoke their communal recitations, kirtan. Sikhs are already devoted to the Guru's message, therefore, the janam-sakhis present another way to engage the Guru directly, as a person. The janam-sakhis foster direct communication from Guru Nanak to Sikhs, as the stories are being told for their benefit so they may continue to learn from him directly. The sakhis show how Guru Nanak taught others these lessons, and the audience gets to (literally) sit in.

#### Internal v External Hermeneutics: an Illustrative Model

It is important to notice how the traditional interpretation of the janam-sakhis is most concerned with features and relationships within this text model. In this way, it can be called an *internal hermeneutic model*. In this interpretative relationship, the focus is on engaging the elements noted within the narrative text. Sikhs are drawn into these narratives as direct participants fulfilling the narratee and implied audience roles. As demonstrated in the previous chapter and sections in this chapter as well, Sikhs are not generally concerned with who authored these accounts; only the stories matter because they convey the personality and tradition of the founder through the ages.

However, as the primary concerns of this study are pedagogy and genre in the consideration of the janam-sakhis, it is necessary to account for more than just what is found in the story. Academic discussions about the janam-sakhis are indicative of an *external hermeneutic model* that accounts for the interpretative relationship that posits the

text as something in the world. An external hermeneutic seeks to posit the relationship between three aspects in our model, specifically, the real author and reader as well as the text that connects them. The text is not to be construed as an active participant in this relationship, rather it is a mediator between the active ends of our model. The narrative is the medium for the transmission of authority and for the authoritative transmission of a story that is significant to the religious community. External hermeneutics are able to engage contexts of authorship, dissemination, production, as well as their meaning and applicability for readers. The application of a genre designator is an external hermeneutic, as it defines and conditions a manner to engage the text. We can see the respective foci of these two hermeneutic models noted in Table 3.1. This is not to say that these two methods cannot overlap. A robust examination

<b>Table 3.1</b>	
<b>Internal and External Hermeneutics</b>	
<p><b><u>Internal Hermeneutics</u></b></p> <p>Engages elements within the narrative text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implied Authority</li> <li>• Narrator</li> <li>• Narratee</li> <li>• Intended Audience</li> </ul> <p>Considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content of the Narration</li> <li>• Its meaning and applicability</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>External Hermeneutics</u></b></p> <p>Explores relationships between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real author</li> <li>• Real reader</li> <li>• The text as mediator</li> </ul> <p>Considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contexts of authorship</li> <li>• Dissemination</li> <li>• Production</li> <li>• Reception (Content, Meaning, and Applicability)</li> </ul>

of any text would consider both internal and external factors, but the limitations of a solely internal interpretation, like that discussed as the traditional view of janam-sakhis, should

be obvious. The inability to engage the actual reader and contexts relevant not only to the story, but also to its dissemination, production, and reception is a severe handicap when trying to make sense of an external hermeneutic investigation. It is no wonder that Sikhs and scholars have been talking past one another in regard to their methods for so long.

The three genre designators (history, hagiography, and homily) employed in academic treatment of the janam-sakhis provide specific foci for the discourses that follow from these definitions.<sup>243</sup> The remainder of this chapter provides a heuristic device illustrating these approaches in light of the modified textual model. These studies structure specific understandings of internal components as they propose a specific function of the text externally as defined by the genre assigned.

It is fitting to re-examine McLeod's critical historical approach. His research foci can be seen now in relation to the text model created here; moreover, just how these foci frame his discussions of the janam-sakhis are clear. McLeod's studies can be seen to employ two distinct approaches to the janam-sakhis. *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* focused on the history revealed through the janam-sakhi accounts, while his later volume, *Early Sikh Tradition*, looked to examine the historical contexts of the janam-sakhi literature's development to discern how those contexts conditioned the presentation of Guru Nanak's life and message. In terms of the genre designators we have been using, these approaches look to examine the janam-sakhis first as history, then as hagiography.

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<sup>243</sup> Like any standardization or categorization there is variance and the boundaries separating these can and will blur at times. History blends into hagiography. Homilies are often rooted in history. Separating these genre designators, as points of analysis, highlights the most salient features of the arguments for discussing the janam-sakhis in these manners.

### History as an External Hermeneutic Model

McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* is most concerned with discerning what viable and verifiable material within these texts could be used to construct a historically accurate biography of Guru Nanak. Not trusting the miraculous material within the janam-sakhis, McLeod seeks to place them in a historical context where,

All such works will reflect, to some extent, the context in which they evolved, a context which will include not only current beliefs and attitudes but also current needs... It can be safely assumed that the Janamsakhis will express in some measure the beliefs of the community during this period, its more insistent needs, and the answers which it was giving to questions which confronted it.<sup>244</sup>

McLeod's focus is on the purposeful nature of these texts, addressing the situations of the authors' historical community and the structured depictions and intentional imagining of Guru Nanak's life. In this way he seeks to evaluate the traditional Sikh view of the janam-sakhis as the true history of Guru Nanak originating with the Guru himself. McLeod whittles the vibrant corpus of the janam-sakhi accounts of Guru Nanak's life down to that "which can be affirmed concerning the events of Guru Nanak's life"<sup>245</sup>— which he provides to his readers in just under one page. Most individual sakhis are three to four times as long as what McLeod classifies as "authentic biographical material!"<sup>246</sup>

Mapping McLeod's concerns onto the textual model (Figure 3.4) reveals that while he is not directly examining the context of the real author specifically, he is looking to examine the relationship of the narrative to the real-world historical situations of Guru

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<sup>244</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 12.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

Nanak's life that the janam-sakhis convey. In terms of the interpretative methods described earlier, he clearly engages in an external hermeneutic, as he considers both internal and external sources. This illustration shows how McLeod's focus on the narration's historical

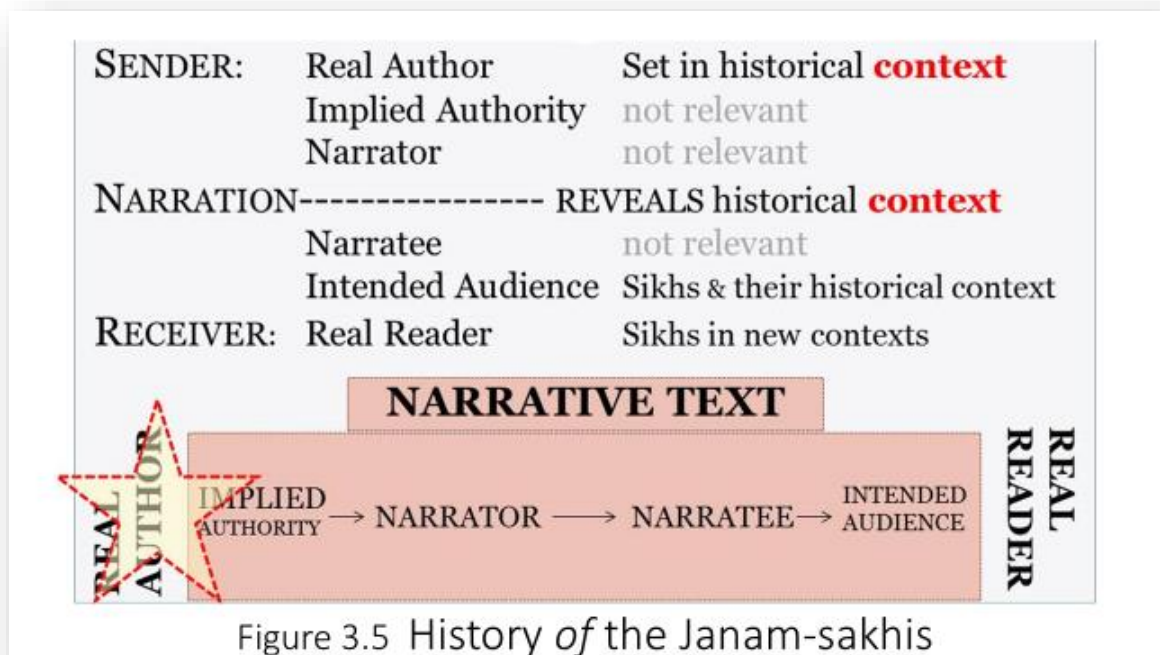


Figure 3.4 History in the Janam-sakhis

content is evaluated against external evidence that surrounds the contexts of authorship. This approach works in harmony with McLeod's continued research in *Early Sikh Tradition*, in which he examines the history of the janam-sakhi literature and the contexts in which the various manuscripts were compiled. The janam-sakhis derived from an earlier oral tradition about the life of Guru Nanak that was popular throughout the Punjab in late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. McLeod builds on a distinction he first delineated in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* identifying these early constituents of the

janam-sakhi traditions.<sup>247</sup> The contexts in which such constituents came about are of utmost concern for McLeod in viewing how the janam-sakhis came to be.

McLeod’s historical approach seeks to discern how the authors’ construction of the life of Guru Nanak (the narration) reflects the concerns of their (the authors’) lives and historical contexts. These relationships are then illustrated in Figure 3.5. Two examples of this concern stand out in McLeod’s work here—in his consideration of the *Miharban Janam-sakhi* and in that of the *Bala Janam-sakhi*. These two janam-sakhi collections have dubious origins,<sup>248</sup> to say the least, and McLeod contends that this should certainly



influence the way we regard these janam-sakhi traditions. McLeod’s concern is with

<sup>247</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two of this study.

<sup>248</sup> Also discussed in Chapter Two of this study.

examining the act of creating a text that reflects the author's concerns. He contends that these authors, Sodhi Miharban and Bhai Bala, were firmly rooted in the situations of their lives and their received traditions, which influenced how these authors sought to construct their depictions and would thus be indicated in their depiction of Guru Nanak's life. McLeod's analysis seeks to identify the contexts that conditioned the janam-sakhis' accounts of Guru Nanak in order to portray his message in a very specific manner to address contemporary and local concerns.

McLeod may stand out as the first, but he is not the only scholar of Sikhism to consider the janam-sakhis in this way. J.S. Grewal's *Guru Nanak in History*<sup>249</sup> takes a similar approach to the janam-sakhis. Grewal is keen to point out the importance of the janam-sakhis in the spread of the Sikh message, stating that this project began before the sakhis were even collected into the written traditions passed down to us today. The janam-sakhis reflect the situations and concerns of these transmitters. Building on this, Grewal asserts, we can discern "the ideals and values of those among whom they were popular."<sup>250</sup> His analysis proceeds through an examination of the aspects of the milieu in which Guru Nanak's message originated and developed. Grewal considers the politics and society of the Punjab and the religious milieus of Hinduism and Islam in the region during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and then addresses Guru Nanak's response to these milieus as indicated through his verses and through the accounts of his life, the janam-

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<sup>249</sup> Nor is this to say that McLeod and Grewal are the only two to have taken this approach. See also: Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>250</sup> Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, 305-306.



sakhis. Grewal's is a well-developed study of both Punjabi society in that era and a consideration of Guru Nanak's place in that society.

McLeod also saw that the history and these contexts must be examined along with the narratives of the janam-sakhis themselves. He engaged in what was referenced before as a robust analysis that considered both the internal and external factors as classified throughout this chapter. The approaches of McLeod and Grewal outlined here evidence a concern, not for the content of message within the text, but for the historical contexts that influenced that message and its representation. Taken together, the work of McLeod and Grewal provides clear models of historical concerns mapped as external hermeneutic engagements.

#### Life Model Writing as an External Hermeneutic Model

Another key approach to the janam-sakhis characterizes the stories as either sacred biographies or hagiographies. These portrayals and descriptions emphasize Guru Nanak's virtuous life and his own spiritual attainment with regard to the foundation of a larger tradition. Scholarly treatments of the janam-sakhis have employed a variety of designators to describe the form the narrative takes. Whether or not the janam-sakhis fall in line with the definitions set out by Reynolds and Capps hinges on one's view of Guru Nanak's (and Sikhism's) place in relation to the larger picture of Indian religious expression. Designating the janam-sakhis as sacred biographies applies most clearly to analyses that emphasize Guru Nanak's role as the founder of a new tradition. If viewed in terms of Nanak's place in the lineage of Sants and other holy figures, the appellation of

hagiography, noting the attainment of an already recognized religious ideal, would instead be appropriate. Regardless of which view is taken, both forms aim toward a similar goal—each presents a paradigmatic “life model” of Guru Nanak, a “life” to be understood and emulated. Therefore, it is best to simply proceed discussing “life model writing” as a collective body, encompassing both categories and the common goal they share.<sup>251</sup>

The narration of Guru Nanak’s life and his teachings as a religious paradigm is the focal point of both sacred biography and hagiography. This message of this life model can be boiled down to the specific concerns of salvation through the teachings Guru Nanak expressed as *nām*, *dān*, and *isnān*. It is a message of liberation directed to all Sikhs, a message that McLeod summarizes as “the promulgation of a particular way of salvation [which] constitutes their conscious intention...through an acceptance of Baba Nanak as Master.”<sup>252</sup> An examination of the janam-sakhis as life model writing posits, the contexts of both the real author constructing the message and those of the real readers, who were, at the time of authorship, the intended audience as well. Life model writing is most concerned with the direct presentation of its message to the audience. This direct engagement is illustrated in Figure 3.6. The specifics of the story being told, in the case of life model writing, are reflective of the historical contexts, as outlined in the historical model (Figure 3.5), but the focal point for this type of discourse and the inquiries that follow is the intentional application of the teachings to the lives of the audience.

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<sup>251</sup> These were first delineated in Reynolds and Capps’ *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, and discussed in Chapter One of this study.

<sup>252</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 240.



Figure 3.6 Life Model Writings

This is how Peter Brown's work on Christian saints' lives considers hagiography (which can be extended to all life model writing) as the means to make present the example of these saints for later generations in a manner that allows it to be adopted and followed.<sup>253</sup> The exemplary saint is a teacher, both in the narrative, and through it, instructing readers to learn and follow the message of the story. Guru Nanak operates in a similar manner in the janam-sakhis. The janam-sakhis' message is narrated to have an effect on the lives of readers, which is to instill faith and teach the principles of devotion, charity and purity via

<sup>253</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981); "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80-101; "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 353-376; "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations*, no. 2 (1983): 1-25.

the story of his life, which is then understood to be relevant and applicable to all Sikhs in all conceivable times— because the message is universal.

The example of sakhi 22 “Immersion in the river: his call,” presented by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh’s “The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsakhis and Sikh Tradition” and discussed in Chapter One, focuses on the direct presentation of the Guru’s message through the janam-sakhis. While she did not use these specific classifications, Nikky Singh clearly classifies the janam-sakhis in a manner similar to what is being considered here when she discusses how they “underscore the importance and uniqueness of the birth and life of Guru Nanak in terms of the personal beliefs and proclivities of their authors.”<sup>254</sup> Her focus is on the transmission of Guru Nanak’s “vision of Ultimate Reality”<sup>255</sup> as presented in and through the janam-sakhis. She emphasizes the significance of this vision by asserting that the experience of Ultimate Reality, as depicted in the myth of Guru Nanak’s disappearance in the River Bein, is actually transmitted through the story to the reader as a shared experience in Guru Nanak’s moment of darśan that provides him and readers “with a spontaneous recognition of absolute knowledge.”<sup>256</sup> In Nikky Singh’s view, the life model being presented in this sakhi is the *actual means* to convey Guru Nanak’s experience and recognition of Ultimate Reality as well, not simply another narrative presentation. The message of the story is, therefore *a direct transmission of the Guru’s teachings to any audience that reads this specific sakhi.*

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<sup>254</sup> N. Singh, “Myth of the Founder”, 329.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

While Nikky Singh's theological vision of the janam-sakhis in this way may not align in many ways with that of some other scholars' conceptions of hagiography and the like, it certainly reflects the understanding of those who first saw value in the continued transmission of these stories. No other scholar is as explicit in focusing on the janam-sakhis narratives' conveyance of Guru Nanak's message *and* his religious experience. McLeod's citation of the closing declaration of the Adi Sakhis tradition demonstrates this active role of the janam-sakhis' message in the lives of Sikhs, a point reinforced by Nikky Singh's argument.

He who reads or hears this sakhi shall attain supreme rapture. He who hears, sings, or reads this sakhi shall find his highest desirer fulfilled, for through it he shall meet Guru Baba Nanak. He who with love sings of the glory of Baba Nanak or gives ear to it shall obtain joy ineffable in all that he does in this life, and in the life to come salvation.<sup>257</sup>

A reader is enjoined to live like Guru Nanak and be saved. This is not a passive action. The text both enjoins belief and motivates the reader to action, saying “*Use* the text to achieve this goal.” This is describing an active engagement between agents, though one's presence is manifest as a text. The janam-sakhi authors wrote the stories this way in order to spur people to action, to act like Sikhs in accordance with Guru Nanak's teachings as expressed by the example provided in the life model.

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<sup>257</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 243. This is the *phalashruti* (*phala*-‘fruit’; *shruti*-‘hearing’) passage of the *Adi Sakhis*; first introduced and discussed in Chapter One.

### Homily as an External Hermeneutic Model

One can also look to examine the theological content of the janam-sakhis from within a Sikh perspective, examining how these texts serve as instructive homilies. Surjit Hans' *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*<sup>258</sup> approaches the janam-sakhis in this way as the author seeks to examine how issues of faith are accommodated by modern audiences and how the narration is to be applied to the audience's modern context. He characterizes their purpose as "to portray the 'wonderful exploits' of the Master who goes about winning 'spiritual victories' over potentates, kings, other religious teachers, ascetics, miracle-workers, gods and demons to establish his 'religious paramouncy' over this world."<sup>259</sup> Hans' assertion about this function of the janam-sakhis' rhetoric is a theological position itself, just like that noted within the janam-sakhis themselves. The janam-sakhis are the lessons of Guru Nanak, and Hans implies that they should still be used that way.

Hans' task is to present an "understanding [of] the Sikh past with all its complexities and nuances."<sup>260</sup> This means that he does not dismiss the fantastic elements found in the janam-sakhis as McLeod does. In fact, Hans views them as necessary to the project of promoting the Guru's position. He describes how this material fit into the world of the janam-sakhi authors:

During the period in question people were universally taught that supranatural events took place. They were more likely to see them. But the

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<sup>258</sup> Hans, *Reconstruction of Sikh History*.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

supranaturalism of the janamsakhis had a positive function to perform in establishing the spiritual paramountcy of Guru Nanak, and consequently in the task of conversion.<sup>261</sup>

The janam-sakhis are missionizing texts that reached out to the community of and around the Sikhs to convey a new path which Guru Nanak's glory made clear to his followers. These are homiletic lessons using the craft of story to convey the Guru's teachings and message of liberation. Such a view of the janam-sakhis can be illustrated by the text model shown in Figure 3.7. The authority of Guru Nanak conveys a narrative comprising his teachings. While Surjit Hans understands that these stories were directed towards Sikhs in a specific historical context (as evidenced by his volume's title), the message of the text is understood to be timeless and applicable to all people wishing (and needing) to hear the



Figure 3.7 Homily

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 189.

Guru's message. This two-fold realization is noted by the two arrows bridging from the narration to both the intended audience and the real reader.

In this chapter, I have sought to begin a discussion *about* the discourse on the janam-sakhis. The models presented in this chapter provide a means to visualize how the different approaches, as conditioned by genre definitions, can be examined as part of this larger meta-discourse. Each of these analyses is, to borrow a phrase from David William Cohen, a production of history, the discourse of a moment.<sup>262</sup> And none of the studies discussed here present the janam-sakhis in the same way. The pursuit of this new re-imagined framework requires that we consider what unites those various moments of reflection on and analysis of the janam-sakhis. This chapter has, in a sense, mapped the discourse about the janam-sakhis based on genre designation to see how they are being considered. It is possible to see points of direct engagement between varied approaches in the models. Viewing the debate at a distance, each position can be seen for its own merits and the goals it pursues. Each discussion of the janam-sakhis is a teaching text in its own way, just as the janam-sakhis are; each presents its view on the literature and engages readers to follow the course it lays out for understanding the texts.

### **A Final Consideration Regarding the Historical Janam-sakhis**

The shift from various janam-sakhi traditions to an apparently singular, or at least a single heavily homogenized conglomerate mode of expressing the life of Guru Nanak is

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<sup>262</sup> David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 244. Cohen sets out a program which clarifies how to examine the process by which history is created.



a bit of a shame when considering the literary diversity of the narratives. It is this vivacity that all of the scholars discussed in this chapter have examined. Yet, their considerations of only the historical sources, primarily as historical sources, has effectively closed the canon of the janam-sakhis, reifying a diverse body of literature to its historical antecedents. Today, the situation has changed, and now new concerns about the manner and mode of janam-sakhi presentations must be addressed. This is the challenge that lies ahead in the next chapters— examining how modern janam-sakhis build from the foundation of the historical janam-sakhis, and bringing the scholarly treatment of the janam-sakhis up to date to address recent developments in the literature.

## 4. The Janam-sakhis' Continued Presence

"The janam sakhis remain almost untapped sources from which to learn about the religious ideas of the communities for which they were written." –W. Owen Cole<sup>263</sup>

Cole's sentiment innocently captures the collective failing of previous janam-sakhi scholarship. Janam-sakhi *narratives* were written in specific times and addressed the contexts of those times. But the janam-sakhi *stories* that inspired those narrative instances not only addressed Sikhs during the times of the living Gurus, they continued to reach Sikhs who come to read and heard these in much later times, and, ultimately, these stories still address audiences today as new narrative instances continue to be produced. Sikhs continue to make use of, learn from, and produce janam-sakhi narratives. These stories were written for the Sikhs of today and tomorrow as much as they were written for Sikhs hundreds of years ago. The janam-sakhis are as influential today as they have been throughout Sikh history, and they will probably continue to be as the years go by because they continue to present the life of Guru Nanak. New janam-sakhi narratives work just like the old texts do to present the life of the founder in a manner to be apprehended, understood, and embraced, so readers can learn from the exemplary life and teachings of Guru Nanak. The lessons of the janam-sakhis, essentially the lessons of Sikhism itself, are not so historically rooted as to be incompatible with or incomprehensible to a modern audience. The stories are as alive today as they were when they were first put to the page.

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<sup>263</sup> Cole, *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708*, 285.

The present chapter examines the variety of ways the janam-sakhis continue to be presented to the Sikh community and foster interaction with these stories in new ways quite different in form, but not necessarily in substance, from the historical janam-sakhis. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate and examine the ways in which the janam-sakhi program continues, ways that represent the broad spectrum of stories being produced today. These newest janam-sakhi presentations are indicative of a variety of processes of pedagogy and production that demonstrate the continued engagement of Sikhs with these stories.

At this stage, it is necessary to embrace a more expansive definition of the janam-sakhis as a body of literature with a variety of characteristics which are to be outlined throughout this chapter. This necessitates a shift from examining the specific presentations of janam-sakhis to a discussion of their value as both the record of a cultural tradition and as a means of outreach and education that is intended to foster and expand that tradition. The janam-sakhis are the foundation of Sikh tradition, but their key role as social narratives has to be explored.

It is first necessary to examine the shift from the historical janam-sakhis to their contemporary iterations. Contemporary janam-sakhi narratives are found in a variety of presentation modes and are intended for specific audiences. General considerations of these new engagements will be presented along with analyses of specific janam-sakhi presentations. It is also important to consider the new media forms being embraced, as video and internet presentations, for example, bring new audience and interaction considerations to light. These “new media” iterations are only new to presentations of the

janam-sakhis, not necessarily newly developed media forms. They represent a shift away from traditional textual expressions to engage the audiences that are more conversant in these other media formats.

### **Toward a Study of Modern Janam-sakhis**

The ways in which the janam-sakhis are “alive” today are quite different from their lives during the colonial era and earlier. Many are directed to new audiences across the world by way of presentations that are using English instead of Punjabi as their focal language, and are being communicated via a variety of print media formats, as well as through the internet via personal and organizational websites.<sup>264</sup> These new iterations are informed by both the historical janam-sakhis and the collective traditions of the Sikh community as expressed by the individual author of the specific janam-sakhi narrative presentation. The janam-sakhis today, though, constitute a body of literature (and related media)<sup>265</sup> which has evolved beyond both the oral tradition of the Punjab and the historical manuscripts in which these traditions were first assembled in writing, especially when we consider their role in diasporic communities.

Just because Sikhs have moved abroad does not mean that they are beyond the reach of the janam-sakhis’ influence. The lessons of these stories are carried along with

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<sup>264</sup> Materials presented to and for audiences in other diaspora communities will be presented in other languages to match the needs of those communities. This study focuses on the English language branch of this outreach from the traditional core stories in Punjabi.

<sup>265</sup> I will refer to the greater collection of the janam-sakhis as texts or literature for convenience’s sake throughout the remainder of this work. This convention is intended to include the variety of media forms employed to present the stories derived from the historical janam-sakhi narratives.

immigrants into the diaspora and then shared with later generations that need to be taught who Guru Nanak was and why his life is important to the Sikh community. The fact that so many new janam-sakhis are presented in English simply addresses the increased need to reach Sikhs who have moved, or later generations born, into these places where Punjabi is not the primary language of instruction or even family communication.<sup>266</sup> Despite a change in language, the intentions motivating their production and use have changed little. The newest janam-sakhis still do all the same things as the historical forms of these stories. These janam-sakhis are geared to teach audiences about Guru Nanak and his tradition in a variety of ways. They may be used to reinforce family teachings within a Sikh household, aid in the presentation of the Guru's message to new neighbors unfamiliar with his legacy and the Sikh community, or even present his life to the academic world to place Guru Nanak among the great religious figures in human history.

This pedagogical task is aided by the variety of means by which modern janam-sakhis are presented. Along with presentations geared towards the shelves of popular booksellers, the lessons of the janam-sakhis are presented in videos and cartoons, via internet databases and missionary websites, and in prominent school books and storybooks. These new forms of the janam-sakhis deserve attention as the continuation of the pedagogical process that began so long ago, even before the first sakhis were being put to folio. They are especially valuable for this endeavor, as these represent the furthest reach

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<sup>266</sup> This is a basic fact of marketing, if there were not an audience for this material, it would not be readily available in as many diverse forms as it is. No publisher would invest in making these books if they could not sell them. This is confirmed by the fact that many of the texts to be examined have been reprinted numerous times since their initial publication. Mala Singh's *The Story of Guru Nanak* from Hemkunt Press was released in its seventeenth impression in 2007. Mala Singh, *The Story of Guru Nanak* (1969; New Delhi: Hemkunt Press, 2007).

of the pedagogical project of the janam-sakhis—reaching beyond the Punjab and its rooted traditions to those who are living in very different cultural milieus and trying to hold fast to their heritage and explore new horizons with Guru Nanak an integral part of their journey.

It is necessary to describe some general thoughts about these new janam-sakhi presentations before moving into specific descriptions. Two key points of consideration that must be addressed are their relation to the historical textual tradition and the role of miracles in their presentations. Other issues, such as considering the specific forms of the presentations (such as McLeod's characterizations of the various narrative forms found in the janam-sakhis and the specific focus toward history or theology) will be revealed as needed in the individual treatments that follow from these general concerns.

### The Characteristics and Form of Modern Janam-sakhis

The first key feature to note with regard to the modern janam-sakhis is their development from the historical janam-sakhis—developing from them, not extending them. The modern presentations have, effectively, eliminated the divisive features of the respective janam-sakhi traditions. They have been blended into something new and yet oddly familiar. The differences between the Bala, Miharban, and the Puratan janam-sakhis are relegated to the discussions of historians and academics and are no longer part of the janam-sakhi narratives themselves; the partisan stories are gone. There are no references to Prithi Chand's claims to the Guruship or claims that Guru Nanak's own teachings will be eclipsed by Baba Hindal, save for a footnote or two in the academic presentations. New

janam-sakhis reach out to the audience with a largely homogenous voice, telling a similar story for the good of Sikhs and the tradition to which they belong.<sup>267</sup> Interpretations and exegesis may vary in these new narratives, but there is no wavering on the focus on the importance of Guru Nanak and his message.

The magic and miracles of the stories are tempered, but they have not been completely excised. These elements are generally regarded as appeals to fantasy and as demonstrations of supernatural dominion that is separated from the modern world yet still a part of the Sikh worldview. J. S. Grewal described a modern view on the miracles of the historical janam-sakhis by focusing on the role of the miracles in these stories. In many sakhis, miracles are the final blow Guru Nanak deals to make his point, the clincher to his argument that demonstrates his superior position and reveals the divine presence. This was necessary, in Grewal's view, in order to allow Sikhs to conceive of their own connections to the Divine One. Guru Nanak was, and still is, a bridge to that greater something that is beyond the grasp of ordinary people—unless the Guru guides them to it. Grewal describes this notion by saying that, "[t]he believer's faith in the *Gurū* as an extraordinary man of God, combined with the belief in the existence of a supranatural world, enables him to visualize a meeting between Guru Nanak and God himself."<sup>268</sup> The miraculous content of the janam-sakhis reflects this underlying supranatural worldview, a view that requires the presence of the Divine in all things.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> This is the legacy of the Singh Sabha reforms to which Harjot Oberoi devoted his attention and analyses in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

<sup>268</sup> Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History*, 307.

<sup>269</sup> This is regarded as the immanent presence of the Divine in Sikh theology.

Therefore, the miracles cannot be completely excised from modern janam-sakhi texts, as doing so would effectively excise the confirmation of the Divine presence motivating Guru Nanak's lessons. Harbans Singh offers a similar take on the issue, noting that the ultimately disruptive (to the complacent world) presence of Guru Nanak was conveyed as miraculous and thus had to be expressed in a similar idiom.

The order of nature was reversed and so were the lives of many men. The crushed fields grew thick with grain, the murderous criminal turned a saint, the boiling cauldron was cooled. The very fact that myth and miracle were used becomes in this sense historical datum. The evidence is relevant to understanding Guru Nanak and finding the true measure of his genius.<sup>270</sup>

Imagine how removing the miracle of Jesus feeding the crowd with a five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14:17-21, Mark 6:38-44, Luke 9:13-17, and John 6:9-13) would change Christians' understanding of how the miracle confirmed Jesus as God's messenger (John 6:14-15). The same principle holds true with regard to miracles in the janam-sakhis. Miracles serve to reinforce the supranatural (to borrow Grewal's terminology) underpinnings of the whole theological scheme. The task of any janam-sakhi is to demonstrate and convey this connection, not to dismiss it. These new presentations try to do this in a manner that corresponds with modern sensibilities but still enlivens the Divine connection via Guru Nanak's lessons.

It is important to keep these points in mind as focus now shifts to a discussion of these modern janam-sakhis. These issues are part of the connective tissue holding together the textual tradition of the janam-sakhis. By examining the characteristics of the newest

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<sup>270</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 200, with reference to sakhis 6 "The restored field," 60 "Sajjan the *thag*," and 58 "The cannibal's cauldron."



janam-sakhi presentations, we can see how far those bonds can be stretched and still retain their connection to the tradition, all while still working to accomplish the same goals as the historical janam-sakhis.

### Construction and Categorization of Modern Janam-sakhis

To avoid any confusion, a word must be said about how the term *modern* is being employed to describe the works that follow. A number of comparable terms could be used to distinguish these, and “post-colonial” and “post-Partition” stand out as possible options. However, it may be more valuable to think of these as “post-McLeod,” as the intersection of Western academic and cultural paradigms encountered by an ever-increasingly international Sikh community marked a shifted focus to the diaspora, and spurred productions that addressed new cultural milieus and modalities. Modern, in the sense as it is to be employed throughout the remainder of this study, describes the state of Punjabi stories being produced to engage audiences whose horizons are spread far beyond the Punjab. This includes not only those living in the diaspora, but also those whose lives in the Punjab are encountering more and more international cultural productions and exchanges; this essentially acknowledges that the Sikhs’ world extends far beyond the Punjab and that the cultural divides between the Punjab and the rest of the world have collapsed to make cross-cultural interactions an everyday occurrence.

Every presentation that is to be considered from this point on is made in English. That too is indicative of the modern era of janam-sakhi production. The narratives are now constructed in a language that can reach a far wider audience; when considered on an

international scale, Punjabi operates as a regional dialect. English offers an appealing opportunity to reach audiences around the world in ways not possible with the historical janam-sakhi traditions presented in Punjabi.<sup>271</sup>

It is important to note that using English does not mean these presentations are directed to those who are not Sikhs. Many diaspora Sikhs are not learning Punjabi, but they are still Sikh. The presentation of Sikh literature in English is one means used to engage this growing population.<sup>272</sup> Of special concern for this study is how the use of English and the various modes of publication represent the furthest extent of the janam-sakhis' pedagogical project, to reach those who are the furthest from the core narratives of the historical janam-sakhis. In this way, this study seeks to present how the modern janam-sakhis continue the project set out so long ago. Examinations of these presentations will focus on the expressed intentions of the author, as well as the format and discursive mode of its compositions. It is essential to consider how these works strive to present the life of Guru Nanak and the means employed to convey that to an audience.

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<sup>271</sup> This author will leave the debate about this specific shift in language as the imposition of Western hegemony or the growth of Sikhism to engage worldwide audiences in the lingua franca of mass communication and digital media to others. What matters in this study is the fact that the janam-sakhis are being told in English, and that represents a new phase of their development, growth, and direction.

<sup>272</sup> The ethnographic work of Charles Townsend has highlighted the difficulty of American Sikh youth in learning the hymns of the Adi Granth and participating in *kirtan*, the communal singing of the Adi Granth. They do not know the Punjabi in which the hymns are sung or are unfamiliar with the complex musical modes of the hymns they do comprehend. Some commented that the "feel of the music" mattered more than the actual words. Despite this difficulty of interacting with the Guru's hymns directly, these youths still proclaim themselves Sikhs. So there must be another way that these youth have been introduced to and instructed in these lessons and traditions that help those new generations born in the diaspora identify with Guru Nanak's message and the Panth. They had to learn the stories and goals of the tradition somehow, and since they do not know Punjabi, that instruction would have come in English. This would be sufficient indication of the value of presenting Sikh literature in English. See Charles Townsend, "Gurbani Kirtan and the Performance of Sikh Identity in the Southern California Diaspora," in *Sikhism in Global Context*, ed. Pashaura Singh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208-27.

The following analysis utilizes four general categorizations to help delineate different modes and intended audiences of these new janam-sakhi presentations. The focus of these descriptions is on the presentations as they are presented to audiences, not the audiences or their reactions to those presentations. First to be considered are the Academic and Popular Press Editions, which are readily available through booksellers around the world and over the internet. These are generally for adults and try to balance their presentations with a critical eye to history as well as tradition, however those may be conceived of by the individual author. The second category of presentations to be scrutinized consists of Schoolbooks. A few volumes have been released that were specifically created to be part of a curriculum model that includes moral and religious education in Indian schools, but they are distributed worldwide. The third and most diverse category to be examined includes the wide variety of Children's Books telling the life-story of Guru Nanak. Within this category, special attention will be given to two Comic Book presentations which raise a few unique issues that need to be addressed and hold a special place in the heart of the present author. The final category, New Media Expressions, considers the shift from print to new media formats, including video and the internet, and examines how these new formats impact both the production and reception of these stories.

The variety of narrative compositions employed by the janam-sakhis is far more limited in these modern expressions. The elimination of the heterodox discourses in the janam-sakhis being published today is another result of the Singh Sabha reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Janam-sakhi presentations are far more homogenized today, generally incorporating various types of narrative anecdotes and

discourses into a singular “orthodox” presentation of the life of the Guru. Despite this relative homogenization, new janam-sakhi iterations demonstrate their own agendas for conveying the life and message of Guru Nanak. This is then set out as a model for emulation and aligned with the “codes of discipline”-esque moralistic nods directed at the reader in a variety of ways some of which are explicit in their direct address of the audiences as they elaborate goals for the particular iteration. These may be noted by the author or the publisher or communicated as part of the narrative. This pedagogical project is then supplemented by the narrative itself, through the sakhis chosen for (and those omitted by) the specific narrative this iteration provides.

#### Academic and Popular Press Editions<sup>273</sup>

The following academic and popular press presentations all benefit from the fact they are intended for older, more knowledgeable audiences who have decided to read these texts.<sup>274</sup> Therefore, they can examine elements of these stories in detail, aligning their narrative to traditional understandings and historical records. These narratives construct a more coherent and complete picture of the life of Guru Nanak as they strive to match the modern notion of a biography as a historical record of a life yet still convey the Guru’s religious significance. These texts are to be found in school libraries and popular

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<sup>273</sup> Please note that each of the works to be discussed in these next sections has been listed with the number of sakhis it presents. Appendix Two provides complete listings of which sakhis have been identified in these works. The focal concern of the examinations that follow is on the specifics of these individual productions, not on comparisons between them or with the historical janam-sakhis. That is a discussion to be saved for Chapters Five and Six.

<sup>274</sup> These materials are not generally “forced” upon an audience in the ways that schoolbooks are chosen for students or parents decide which books to buy for and read to their children.

bookstores, exactly the places that people wanting to read detailed narratives and analyses would be looking. By reaching out to these audiences, these presentations make clear their pedagogical focus to present a mature and rational account of Guru Nanak's life and his teachings.

Harbans Singh's *Guru Nanak and the Origins of the Sikh Faith* [71 sakhis]

Harbans Singh is most concerned with “[t]he significance of the Janamsakhis in capturing the image of Guru Nanak and mediating it to succeeding generations.”<sup>275</sup> His focus is on making the janam-sakhis’ “language of myth and legend” understandable to a new audience. This involves getting past the later interpolations, arbitrary copying errors, and deliberate distortions made by schismatic and heretical sects. By doing this, he has crafted a new image of Guru Nanak (couched in the vision of the historical janam-sakhis) and presents it, along with a historically-informed interpretation of its meaning, just as (he contends) the original janam-sakhi compilers had done in constructing their “amalgam of fact and meaning.”<sup>276</sup>

It seems clear that Harbans Singh's endeavor is carried out in the same spirit as the original janam-sakhi compilers. He states that they were “men of faith” who “wrote for the faithful—of a theme which had grown into their lives through the years as a real, vivid truth.”<sup>277</sup> It is certainly within Harbans Singh's expertise as a historian to provide his own

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<sup>275</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 19-20.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

interpretation of this theme, as first presented in the historical janam-sakhi texts, to new audiences confronted by the challenge of (McLeod's) modern critical-historical analysis. In a clear parallel to his own analysis of the historical janam-sakhis, Harbans Singh's account can be seen to also bear "within it testimony to the depth and charity of Guru Nanak's life, which depth revealed to his followers the presence of God in him."<sup>278</sup>

While somewhat distancing himself from the mythic and legendary depictions of the historical janam-sakhis, Harbans Singh uses his insights into the janam-sakhi traditions, the Adi Granth, and Indian history to present an interpretation of the janam-sakhis that is as commensurate with his understanding of Sikh faith and tradition as it is with modern sensibilities of how the people of the past wrote about the past. His treatment of the sakhis focuses on the connections of these stories to the Guru's *bani* as recorded in the Adi Granth. Therefore, as discussed previously, he demonstrates a necessarily theological stance affirming the validity and spiritual authority of the Adi Granth. Yet it is how Harbans Singh makes these connections, and what he claims they mean, that is of interest here.

His presentation of the sakhis is grounded in the *bani* recorded in the Adi Granth. In telling the story of young Nanak's *janeu* ceremony (sakhi 5 "Investiture with the sacred thread"), he makes no reference to any specific historical janam-sakhi, only to the hymn the guru-to-be recites (AG, *Asa*, 471).<sup>279</sup> The story is taken as a given, as it surrounds and relates to the hymn, in which Nanak declares:

Let compassion be thy cotton!  
Spin it into the yarn of contentment;

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 76-78.

Give it knots of continence  
and the twist of truth.  
Thus wilt thou make a *janeu* for the soul.  
If such a one thou hast,  
put it on me.  
The thread so made will neither snap,  
nor become soiled.  
It will neither be burned nor lost.  
Blest is the man, O Nanak,  
who weareth such a thread around his neck!<sup>280</sup>

The applicability of this hymn in this instance of a young “Hindu” boy’s life is significant. Harbans Singh is not concerned with dissecting this sakhi. Rather, he promotes a vision of the story in which a young Nanak identifies the deficiency of the *janeu* as an outward symbol of purity. The story’s message, criticism of this Hindu tradition, is the ultimate concern. As it suits the purpose of the verse, the pairing of this sakhi with the hymn is taken at face value.

There is no other point in Guru Nanak’s life in which this criticism could be set and still have the same poignant impact. He could have easily composed this hymn-as-critique at his children’s ceremonies or when he was questioned by new followers joining him at Kartarpur. However, the story makes its greatest impact when the verse is conveyed by a boy of eleven. The image of faith presented rests upon the inspired understanding of a young boy who speaks with the wisdom of a guru many years his senior. Harbans Singh’s attention to the hymn here indicates his concern for the presentation of Guru Nanak’s message, not a history of the Guru’s life.

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

This is further affirmed by his assertion that “The Janamsakhis record long discourses between father and son in which the latter, in verses of deep piety and sublimity, gave expression to his trust in the Transcendent.”<sup>281</sup> The key word here is “record.” The acknowledged record of the Guru’s words is the *Adi Granth*. Not only does Harbans Singh’s assertion promote the close relationship between these two sources of Sikh tradition, he also privileges the *janam-sakhis* as firsthand accounts of the Guru’s life. The testimony of faith to which Harbans Singh refers does not simply mean an *interpretation of the janam-sakhis*, but as a *witness to the events of the sakhis themselves*. He buttresses this position in his discussion of Guru Nanak’s meeting with Bhai Lalo and Malik Bhago in Saidpur (saksi 124) when he claims that “What happened in Saidpur was illustrative of the manner in which he took his message to the people and changed the lives of those who came in touch with him. Thus his gentle ministry progressed.”<sup>282</sup> Who first made this illustration of Guru Nanak’s manners? Such a claim is either: A) the result of firsthand knowledge of the situation, or B) built upon the inferences of later interpretations offered as explanation. Again, no concern is given by the author to how this informative illustration came to be.

The general focus of the volume is directed toward fostering an understanding of the *sakhis* in light of the overall message of Guru Nanak as expressed through his *bani*. Harbans Singh’s final chapter focuses on the “Continuing Reality” of the Guru’s message.<sup>283</sup> In it, he reviews key points of Guru Nanak’s teachings: the rejection of

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<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.



religious and caste distinctions, the role of women, and the promotion of dedicated service, as well as his critiques of dishonest and/ or routinized ritual, vanity, and magic or superstition.<sup>284</sup> Harbans Singh characterized these teachings as “Guru Nanak’s scheme of reform,”<sup>285</sup> and each point is discussed in terms of examples from both the sakhis and the Adi Granth. There is no separation of the sakhis from the hymns here; they encompass the full scope of the Guru’s teachings.

Kirpal Singh's *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* [73 sakhis]

Kirpal Singh’s *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* presents an interesting case as a modern janam-sakhi. It is, in essence, an attempt to prove the veracity of the janam-sakhis’ account of Guru Nanak’s life (and thus Sikh history) by making a janam-sakhi that is based in the “record” of traditional historical accounts. It is an assertion of the traditional image of Sikh history, thereby confirming the image of Guru Nanak presented by the janam-sakhis as a historical event. Thus, the life model of the Guru is made applicable to this image of history, and the stories then affirm its applicability to all Sikhs through their connections to the traditions of the Guru as presented in these stories. Kirpal Singh’s *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* is presented as a straightforward historical account of Guru Nanak’s life, supported by the evidence of Sikh traditions. His

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 209-213.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 209.

historical focus and methodology were discussed at length in the previous chapter. It is how he presents the sakhis in accordance with that methodology that is of concern now.

Kirpal Singh presents the most comprehensive collection of sakhis available in a modern source.<sup>286</sup> He draws upon his work in *Atlas Travels of Guru Nanak* to delineate the Guru's life by the path of his travels and organizes the stories in accordance with it.<sup>287</sup> Many sakhis are presented by place names, helping readers follow Guru Nanak's journey. Upon his commission as Guru at the River Bein, Guru Nanak heads to "Sayyadpur" and encounters Bhai Lalo, and Sajjan was encountered in Makhddoompur in the Multan district on the road between Lahore and Multan. The Guru's next stops include Pakpatan, Kurukshetra, Haridwar, Nanakmatta, Tanda, Ayodhya, Prayag, and Benares.<sup>288</sup> By labeling the sakhis by place names, Kirpal Singh reifies the connection between the traditional story about Guru Nanak's visit and these locations. He provides detailed discussions of these locales to establish the credibility of the janam-sakhi accounts. Readers may feel as if they are being led on a tour of sorts, literally following in the footsteps of Guru Nanak as he made his way around Asia teaching others his new message of devotion.

This 'walk with the Guru' reveals far more than just a travel itinerary, though; Kirpal Singh does his best to convey the personality and teachings of Guru Nanak through

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<sup>286</sup> Only the Divan Buta lithograph of the Bala janam-sakhi and Macauliffe's presentation include more individual sakhis (74 and 81, respectively). See McLeod, *GNSR*, 73-76.

<sup>287</sup> Fauja and Kirpal Singh, *Atlas Travels of Guru Nanak* (1976; repr., Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau, 2004).

<sup>288</sup> These place names are given as titles of sakhis and are all presented in order. See K. Singh, *JTAS*, 83-111.

these sakhis as well. While he makes no pretension to create dialogue for Guru Nanak, Kirpal Singh makes extensive use of citations from the Adi Granth to make the Guru's points clear and to lend its authority to the accounts presented. Kirpal Singh had said that his motivation for this volume was Guru Nanak's assertion that his Sikhs were to hold true to his bani and his tradition.<sup>289</sup> These two foci serve to delineate the pedagogical program of Sikhism that Guru Nanak left for his followers. Kirpal Singh's *Janamsakhi Tradition* is a further codification of those ideals, as the "spirit" of the Guru shines through via the inclusion of bani, while the significance of the guru is affirmed by his historical legacy. Instruction and tradition are thoroughly entwined by his presentation of the janam-sakhis as the true history of Guru Nanak and his legacy.

Roopinder Singh's *Guru Nanak: His Life & Teachings* [39 sakhis]

Roopinder Singh's text is a beautiful, full-color rendering of Guru Nanak's life. It is replete with gorgeous illustrations, including miniature-style paintings of Guru Nanak, maps delineating his travels, and photographic examples of Sikh scriptures and texts, as well as of Sikhs themselves, living out the message of the Gurus. He asserts that his "book is a small window to the world of Guru Nanak Dev and his teachings."<sup>290</sup> He divides his presentation of Guru Nanak's life into eight chapters<sup>291</sup> before offering analyses of "Japji,

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<sup>289</sup> Conversation with Kirpal Singh, August 1, 2008 in Chandigarh, India.

<sup>290</sup> Roopinder Singh, vii.

<sup>291</sup> One chapter is devoted to each of the following topics: Guru Nanak's early life, to his call/ "Revelation," his early journeys, and then the four longer journeys (in the cardinal directions), and finally to his settling at Kartarpur "Establishing a Religion." Ibid., v.

the Morning Prayer,” “*Sangat and Pangat*,” and a chapter “Speaking of Women,” which are all understood to be presentations and elucidations of Guru Nanak’s message and its applicability to the Sikh community. These latter chapters serve to demonstrate how the lessons of Guru Nanak have been and continue to be put into practice.

Roopinder Singh is well aware of the issues regarding the “fidelity” of the historical janam-sakhis as a record of Guru Nanak’s life. He states that he understands their role as “hagiographical accounts” and offers his text “based both on scholarly works, most of which have been listed in the bibliography, and on absorbed oral tradition which is very much a part of a Sikh’s life.”<sup>292</sup> He draws upon and cites the works of W. Owen Cole, J. S. Grewal, Harbans Singh, Kirpal Singh, and others throughout his presentation. This is all done with his hope that this text will succeed “in making the life and the teaching of the founder of the Sikh religion more accessible, and in, hopefully, whetting the reader’s appetite for more.”<sup>293</sup>

His presentation of the sakhis is clearly focused more on Guru Nanak’s travels, discussing thirty sakhis that occur after the Guru’s call in the River Bein. Most of these involve Guru Nanak’s interactions with Hindus. The Guru’s “Fourth Journey” west to Arabia brings him into contact with Muslims. In that one chapter, Roopinder Singh provides accounts of Guru Nanak’s travels to Mecca, Baghdad, and his return home via Hasan Abdal (the site of the Pañjā Sāhib sakhi) and Saidpur where Guru Nanak conversed with Babur after his army sacked the town. The only other Muslim Guru Nanak

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., ix.

encountered, other than Bhai Mardana, his travelling companion, was Sheikh Ibrahim (a descendant of Shiekh Farid), whom the Guru met while passing through Pakpattan twice on earlier journeys.

Harmand Singh Thind's *Sakhian from Sikhism* [26 sakhis]

The text of Harmand Singh Thind's *Sakhian from Sikhism*<sup>294</sup> presents brief accounts of the lives of all ten Gurus, as well as brief histories of the Guru Granth Sahib and Siri Harimandir Sahib (the Golden Temple).<sup>295</sup> It is a relatively short text, using only one hundred pages to cover all of this material. Eighteen pages are devoted to telling the story of Guru Nanak. The twenty-six sakhis presented are, obviously, quite short. The sakhis themselves are terse, brief paragraphs in a somewhat choppy style, more suited to a bullet-pointed list rather than prose. The only sakhi to include a citation from the Adi Granth is his discussion of Guru Nanak attending "Jagan Nath Puri."<sup>296</sup>

While the majority of this volume is devoted to sakhis about Guru Nanak's travels (nineteen sakhis), the two sakhis given the most attention (each over a page in length) deal with Guru Nanak meeting and selecting Bhai Lahiṇā to succeed him as Guru Aṅgad.<sup>297</sup> Only four sakhis tell of Guru Nanak's life before his incident in the River Bein, and these

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<sup>294</sup> I was given my copy by one of the librarians at the Singh Sabha Gurdwara in Southall, Middlesex, UK. This volume may not really fit the commercial description of a popular press edition, as it was freely distributed by the publisher, but its presentation of the sakhis has more in common with the other volumes discussed in this section than it does with any of the other categorizations to be considered in this chapter.

<sup>295</sup> Harmand Singh Thind, *Sakhian from Sikhism* (Ludhiana: Somalia Printers, 2004).

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 13. The hymn quoted is from page 663 of the Adi Granth.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 15-18. This emphasis is understandable in a volume dedicated to telling the stories of all ten Gurus. Obviously the need for and importance of picking a successor has to be discussed and explained.

sakhis seem to emphasize his charity and honesty (sakhis 6, 16, 21), with sakhi 8 “The cobra’s shadow” serving to denote his special status. The sakhis highlighting Guru Nanak’s trip to Mecca and Baghdad are covered in roughly one page, while the remaining sakhis detail his travels throughout India. Most of the people he encounters are Hindus: those at Kurukshetra, Hardwār, and the yogis of Mount Kailash, Achal Baṭālā, and Multān (sakhis 29, 34, 72, 90, and 91). Eventual converts to the Guru’s path, such as Bhai Lālo and Dunī Chand, are introduced (124 and 113, respectively). The more fantastical sakhis are omitted in favor of noting Guru Nanak’s interactions with Bābur (83 and 84) and the Wali’s rolling stone at Pañjā Sāhib (122), which offer more substantive historical and physical evidence in support of the stories’ claims.

### Schoolbooks

These next texts are all directed at school-age children and are specifically meant to be used in the instruction of those children. These are not casual readings. They are lesson plans intended to instill moral behavior through religious instruction. The first two texts to be considered are both from Hemkunt Press and serve the “moral and religious instruction”<sup>298</sup> component allowed in Indian schools by the recommendation of the University Education Commission in 1960.<sup>299</sup> Ganda Singh, in his foreword to Kartar

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<sup>298</sup> Kartar Singh and Gurdial Singh Dhillon, *Guru Nanak Dev*, Stories from Sikh History 1, 39th ed. (1971; New Delhi: Hemkunt Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>299</sup> The University Education Commission determined that religious and moral education was a critical subject needing attention in the schools, just as mathematics and literature were. “In the home,” the committee report asserts, “the rituals and the outward forms of religion are usually emphasized, and the young folk in such an atmosphere, saturated with such ceremonials are bound to attach too much importance to this aspect of religion to the neglect of ethical teachings and spiritual values.” Thus, it emphasized a role for

Singh and Gurdial Singh Dhillon's *Guru Nanak Dev*, argues that "there is no denying the fact that religious and moral education has a very useful function to serve."<sup>300</sup> He supports the story-oriented focus of the volume by saying, "Moral instruction, I feel, is better given by example than by precept," and goes on to call Guru Nanak "one of the great saviours of Indian history."<sup>301</sup> While the text of the "Stories from Sikh History" series was put together for use in Indian schools, the more recent "Sikh Studies" series was developed for Sikh Public schools in India that follow this curriculum and is "also aimed at meeting the needs of Sikh children settled abroad by giving them graded tools for study at home or in Sunday school."<sup>302</sup> The texts to be discussed here come from both of these series and are intended for primary school audiences.<sup>303</sup>

Another set of texts discussed here is published by The Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.) in Southall, Middlesex. These were commissioned to address the educational concerns of Sikh youth in the United Kingdom, and have since gained distribution to Australia, Canada, the United States, and throughout Europe.<sup>304</sup> These are meant for

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values-focused education, and acknowledged the foundation of those values in the variety of religious teachings found in India. The implications of the *Report of the Common Religious and Moral Instruction* by the Ministry of Education are discussed at length in R. S. Misra, *Hinduism and Secularism: A Critical Study* (Delhi: Motilala Banarsidass Publishers, 1996), 143.

<sup>300</sup> Singh and Dhillon, 3.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Singha and Kaur, *Guru Nanak Dev*, 3.

<sup>303</sup> Latter volumes in each series advance with material directed to secondary school audiences.

<sup>304</sup> G. S. Sidhu, G. S. Sivia, and Kirpal Singh Rai, *Guru Nanak (For Children)*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (1969; Southall: The Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.), 2008), 3.

religious school settings in places that do not include moral instruction in public school curricula.

The final text to be considered is book three of *The Essence of Sikhism* series from Madhubun Educational Books, a division of Vikas Publishing House in New Delhi.<sup>305</sup> Madhubun's website lists the eight "coursebooks" of the series under the heading of "Value Education and Life Skills."<sup>306</sup> Series author Tejinder Kaur Anand is the former Principal and Senior Supervisor for Guru Nanak Public School and Guru Harkrishan Public School, respectively. She says that the series is "especially designed for school children the world over..." and contends that the series, "[c]onveys the right message through simple language."<sup>307</sup> The right message in this case, extends over the eight volumes of the series, with the third book devoted solely to Guru Nanak.<sup>308</sup>

Taken together, these schoolbooks demonstrate approaches to presenting the life and lessons of Guru Nanak specifically in educational settings. They are to be used in classroom settings and supplemented with instruction by a teacher as part of a Sikh-focused curriculum that presents the life of Guru Nanak via the stories of the janam-sakhis. The pedagogical programs of these schoolbooks are clearly denoted by the presence of the many review activities and direct examinations on what is learned from the narratives about

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<sup>305</sup> Tejinder Kaur Anand, *The Essence of Sikhism- 3: The Lives and Teachings of the Sikh Gurus* (1996; New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 2008).

<sup>306</sup> Madhubun Educational Books, "The Essence of Sikhism," accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.madhubunbooks.com/series-details/value-education-life-skills/276/the-essence-sikhism/471>.

<sup>307</sup> Tejinder Kaur Anand, *The Essence of Sikhism- 3*, back cover.

<sup>308</sup> The first two books set out a brief overview of Sikh history and practice. Guru Nanak's first eight successors receive attention in books 4, 5, and 6, with book 7 devoted to Guru Gobind Singh. Book 8 in the series focuses on the *Guru Granth Sahib*.



Guru Nanak. While some of these are meant for specifically Sikh audiences and others more generally, as part of moral instruction in the schools, each makes clear the importance of learning about Guru Nanak and his teachings.

The authors construct their presentations to highlight the Guru's teachings in narratives that are easily read and understood by school-aged children. These are manageable readings for such an audience. Connections are made to historical events by way of places of commemoration, rather than detailed historical analyses. This focus on addressing a younger, less-educated audience is indicated by these texts' use of fewer and fewer direct citations of Guru Nanak's hymns, and a greater focus on the story elements and conveying doctrines through illustrated examples of his actions, literally and figuratively.

Kartar Singh and Gurdial Singh Dhillon's *Guru Nanak Dev* [20 sakhis]

As the first volume in Hemkunt's "Stories from Sikh History" series, Kartar Singh and Gurdial Singh Dhillon's *Guru Nanak Dev* sets out to establish the life of the founder of Sikhism in accordance with the University Education Commission's recommendations for moral instruction. The authors have divided the life of Guru Nanak into nineteen chapters with review exercises (both fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions) and a "Model Test Paper" built from those exercises.

The life story of Guru Nanak presented in this volume serves to fill in a lot of the (previously) undiscussed areas of young Nanak's life. The second chapter goes into great detail about Nanak's childhood, his favorite games, and singing of hymns with his friends.

No other presentation considered in this study provided these details, but as this text is meant to reach young schoolchildren, showing Nanak engaged in many of the same activities they enjoy would establish a connection to the Guru and help build a rapport with him.

Popular sakhis stand out as the titles to various chapters, such as “The Good Bargain,”<sup>309</sup> “Bhai Lalo,” “Sajjan the Robber,” “Duni Chand of Lahore,” “Kauda the Man-Eater,” and Guru Nanak’s conversations with the new Mughal Emperor are presented in the chapter “With Babar.” Every chapter is accompanied by full-color illustrations depicting key scenes from the sakhis, such as young Nanak’s rebuke of his Muslim teacher or his rejection of the sacred thread, the *janeu*.

Five chapters stand out in terms of depicting direct confrontations with Muslims and their beliefs, while only two directly call into question Hindu practice. The titles of these chapters are noted in Table 4.1. The five listed in the column on the left relate sakhis

Table 4.1 Confrontational Sakhis in Singh and Dhillon’s <i>Guru Nanak Dev</i> (by chapter # and title)	
9. All Men are Brothers	4. The Sacred Thread
10. The True Prayer	13. At Hardwar
16. God is Everywhere	
17. A Haughty Fakir	
18. With Babar	

<sup>309</sup> Interestingly, this sakhi tells that it was young Nanak’s sister, Nanki, who intervened to stop their father Kalu from beating Nanak in anger after Bala told him about how Nanak used the twenty rupees he had given him. The text describes that “Guru Nanak’s cheeks became red because of the hard slaps.” No other version of this sakhi presented in materials discussed in this study are as explicit about Kalu’s anger in this way. The text goes on to alleviate some of the shock of this by saying, “But the beating did not make Guru Nanak angry or sad. He was quite happy in spite of the beating. He had done a good deed. He had fed the hungry. He had helped the poor. He had done this in the name of God.” Singh and Dhillon, 27-28.

where Guru Nanak is confronted by Muslims and he provides a rebuke of their limited view about the world and religion. Chapters 9 and 10 relate incidents following Guru Nanak's call to service<sup>310</sup> and the reactions of his neighbors and the qazi to his assertion that "There is no Hindu and no Musalman" (sakhi 22 and 25). Chapters 16 through 18 depict Guru Nanak's journey to Mecca, his return through Pañjā Sāhib, and his meeting with Babar (79, 122, and 83 and 84, respectively). Only chapters 4 and 13 offer direct critiques of Hindu rituals—the *janeu* ceremony and ritual bathing at Hardwār (5 and 34). This is certainly a reversal of an observed trend in these depictions of Guru Nanak's encounters, as most modern presentations have set Guru Nanak against a predominantly Hindu world, not a Muslim one.<sup>311</sup>

H.S. Singha and Satwant Kaur's *Guru Nanak Dev* [26 sakhis]

Hemkunt Press' "Sikh Studies" series is intended for use in specifically Sikh settings—Sikh Public Schools, home, Sunday school, and "in summer camps for Sikh

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<sup>310</sup> As this text makes no mention of Nanak's darśan experience or disappearance in the River Bein, I decided that these omissions warranted not including sakhi 22 "Immersion in the river: his call" in the listing of sakhis included in this text. Having Guru Nanak simply say, "There is no Hindu and no Musalman" did not seem to sufficiently convey the content of this sakhi. Also, if Nikki Singh's arguments for the importance of this sakhi (discussed in chapter One) are taken into consideration, these alterations present a significant gap in the volume's presentation of Sikh religious understanding.

<sup>311</sup> This observation leads to a variety of questions about the authors' concerns for depicting moral behavior. Are Muslim beliefs less valid? Is this a legacy of post-Partition hostilities and the violence of the 1960s? Is the more favorable treatment of Hindu practices an act of appeasement to show that Sikhs are not that different from Hindus and have pointed critiques about specific practices, not blanket condemnations of their beliefs as a whole? Though this view of Guru Nanak's "conflicts," if you will, would certainly abate many difficulties arising in an Indian classroom where this text is employed to teach both Hindus and Sikhs. Ultimately, this volume, more so than any other to be considered, is a legacy of a different era, the early 1970s, and does not address itself well to the more inclusive and open discussions about Sikh integration, polity, and migration in the latter decades of the twentieth century. These are questions for another study that would, unfortunately, draw us away from the focus on the presentation of the sakhis in this volume.

children studying in other schools.”<sup>312</sup> In this way it differs from the “Stories from Sikh History” series’ approach to religious and moral education depicting Sikhism as part of the larger Indian tradition. The authors provide a brief overview of the Sikh Studies series in the “Note for the Teachers and Parents” at the beginning of these volumes. The first two books “are meant as a launching pad for a study of Sikhism by junior children,” and serve to introduce “the basic facts about Sikhism for beginners.”<sup>313</sup> Books three through six provide sakhis about Guru Nanak, as well as all of Gurus and later Sikh heroes like Banda Singh Bahadur and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Book seven “is a formal culmination of the series for adolescent children. It introduces [*sic*] them formally to Sikh theology, ethics, psyche etc. after tracing the evolution of Sikhism.”<sup>314</sup> The goal of the series is to inform and instill Sikh teachings; it is a comprehensive lesson working from the basics to a systematic treatment in the last volume.

Book three of this series is devoted entirely to Guru Nanak and presents twenty-six sakhis over the course of twenty-eight chapters, while offering review questions and a sample test at the end of the text. Every chapter, save for one, is highlighted by a full color illustration, depicting a key moment in the sakhi.<sup>315</sup> The sakhis are relatively short; none are longer than three pages, and many fit on just one page along with the accompanying

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<sup>312</sup> Singha and Kaur, *Guru Nanak Dev*, 3.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> Chapter 19, titled “Some Angry Ascetics,” is more illustration than story, as Guru Nanak’s discourse with the followers of Gorakh Nath (generally presented in sakhi 36 “Nānakmatā”) is reduced to four sentences that convey nothing of the Guru’s convincing speech that wins them over, only that these ascetics threw rocks at him and the Guru was unharmed. There is nothing of the actual story here, so this was deemed insufficient to be included in the count of sakhis portrayed.

illustration. Many sakhis are tied to specific locations through their association with the commemorative gurdwaras that now stand at these places. The first five chapters narrate eight sakhis prior to Guru Nanak's darśan experience as presented in chapter 6, "Universal Brotherhood." The remainder of the text is devoted to the Guru's travels, with chapters 26 and 27 illustrating Sikh life in Kartarpur, and chapter 28 telling of the Guru's passing and his followers' reactions. Surprisingly, none of these latter chapters mention Bhai Lehna or, as he comes to be known, Guru Aṅgad.

Only three of the sixteen sakhis set during Guru Nanak's travels bring him into contact with Muslim teachings—incidents in Mecca, Medina, and at Pañjā Sāhib (sakhis 79, 80, and 122)—and four sakhis relate Guru Nanak's direct confrontation of Hindu ritual and belief (29, 34, 48, and 72). The remainder of the sakhis presented are general moral tales espousing lessons of charity and honesty, such as in the stories of Bhai Lālo and Malik Bhāgo (124) or the story of Sajjan (60).

Sikh Missionary Society Publications [18 sakhis total]  
*Guru Nanak (For Children)* by G. S. Sidhu, G. S. Sivia, and Kirpal Singh Rai  
*The Guru's Way (For Children)* by G. S. Sidhu, G. S. Sivia, and Kirpal Singh

These two texts are produced by The Sikh Missionary Society (U.K), which has put together a series of twenty-seven short texts to be used "to enlighten the younger generation of Sikhs as well as non-Sikhs."<sup>316</sup> These volumes are numbers two and three in the series, respectively, and follow an *Introduction to Sikhism*, written by the same author, G. S.

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<sup>316</sup> Sikh Missionary Society, U.K, "Aim and Activities," accessed July 18, 2014, <http://sikhmissionarysociety.org/sms/>.

Sidhu.<sup>317</sup> The first volume offers only a brief description of Guru Nanak's life, which is not the story as conveyed by the sakhis. That treatment is left for the two texts to be considered here: *Guru Nanak (For Children)* and *The Guru's Way (For Children)*.

*Guru Nanak (For Children)* was actually the first volume published by The Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.) in 1969 and has been released in seven subsequent printings; it is now available online at the society's website.<sup>318</sup> The authors of this text were concerned first and foremost with commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> birthday of Guru Nanak in 1969, though they also acknowledged:

[T]hat our younger generation, in English schools and at home, is being totally starved of even a basic knowledge about the Sikh Gurus and the culture from which we have sprung. It is a sad fact that we are not providing any Sikh literature for our children. This negligence on our part may well result in an abhorrence of their moral and cultural heritage and total religious bankruptcy when they grow up.<sup>319</sup>

In order to rectify this negligence, the society set out to produce a series, aimed at an audience in the seven- to nine-year-old range, that introduces Guru Nanak to this younger generation.

This text sets out seventeen sakhis about Guru Nanak in a surprisingly balanced presentation of Nanak's life both before and after his call, with eight sakhis leading up to

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<sup>317</sup> I did not have access to the print version of this text. The text of this volume is available online at the website of The Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.).

Sikh Missionary Society, U.K., "Introduction to Sikhism," accessed July 18, 2014, <http://sikhmissionarysociety.org/sms/smspublications/introductiontosikhism/>.

<sup>318</sup> Publication data printed in the eighth impression (2008) indicates that a total of 55,000 copies of this volume have been printed and freely distributed. Sidhu, Sivia, and Singh Rai, *Guru Nanak (For Children)*, 8th ed. (Southall: The Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.), 2008).

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

his call, and nine sakhis that relate his life afterward. They are all relatively brief, as the whole text is only twenty-eight pages long. Critiques of specific religious practices are addressed in five sakhis; Hindu practices are discussed in sakhis about the janeu ceremony and ritual bathing at Hardwār (sakhis 6 and 34), while Muslims' practices are discussed in sakhis about the *namaz*, the veneration of God solely at the Ka'bah, and the Muslim ban on the singing of music as addressed in Baghdad (25, 79, and 81). The remaining sakhis discuss honesty, hospitality and charity, as well as introduce Bhai Lehna and his elevation to the Guruship.

Four sakhis have illustrations accompanying their text, each lending themselves to poignant imagery. The first image, "Mother with Baby," precedes the text of the first chapter, "The Birth of a Star,"<sup>320</sup> and shows a haloed baby Nanak in his mother's arms. Other illustrations depict the cobra shading Nanak as he slept (sakhi 6), Nanak distributing food to the "hungry saints" (16), and Nanak famously squeezing milk and blood from the breads of Lālo and Bhāgo (124), respectively.<sup>321</sup> A simple map is included to illustrate "Guru Nanak's journey to Mecca,"<sup>322</sup> and near the end of the text, a photo depicts Gurdwara Janam Asthan, which commemorates Guru Nanak's birthplace, now known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 10, 13, and 19.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 26.

While the third text in this series, *The Guru's Way (For Children)*, is primarily devoted to the stories about Gurus Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, and Arjan, the text begins with one last sakhi about Guru Nanak. It is significant here as it sets up the continuation both of the text series and of the Sikh tradition. The text begins with a chapter titled "The Guru's Way" and relates the story of Guru Nanak challenging the wealthy Dunī Chand to take a needle with him into the afterlife (sakhi 114). As neither the needle, nor his wealth, will go with him, Dunī Chand acquiesces to Guru Nanak who tells him, "Give away all your money to poor and the needy. You haven't earned it by honest labour... One can expect to receive in the next world only that which one earns by honest labour and gives away in charity to the needy in this world."<sup>324</sup> The narrative continues to tell that Dunī Chand followed the Guru's advice and "helped many others to follow the Guru's Way."<sup>325</sup> This sakhi shows an individual coming to the path of Sikhism and leads into the discussion of the other Gurus who continue to preach this message and draw others into the fold. The story of Dunī Chand clearly shows how Dunī chose to follow the Guru's way, as did Guru Nanak's successors, whose stories are related in the remainder of this text. In this sense, one can view the presentation of this sakhi as a coda to the previous volume in the series, as well as to Guru Nanak's mission; it brings one movement to an end and begins the next—the lives of the other Gurus and their own stories.

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<sup>324</sup> G. S. Sidhu, G. S. Sivia, and Kirpal Singh, *The Guru's Way (For Children)*, 4th ed. (1970; Southall: The Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.), 1996), 5.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.



Tejinder Kaur Anand's *The Essence of Sikhism- 3: The Lives and Teachings of the Sikh Gurus* [21 sakhis]

The ten chapters of book 3 in *The Essence of Sikhism* series lay out a combined twenty-one sakhis. Nearly the first half of the text is devoted to Guru Nanak's life before his call, which is presented in chapter 5, titled "His Youth," and this then leads directly into the Guru's confrontation with the *qazi* about the *namaz*.<sup>326</sup> This volume offers brief treatments of the Guru's engagements with the various men of faith he met along his journey; rather than relaying any of the content of those discussions, these treatments generally state that there was a discussion (in which Guru Nanak was, of course, convincing).

Each chapter ends with a set of questions asking: "How Much Do You Remember?"<sup>327</sup> These questions consist of direct inquiries about elements in the narrative: people's names, places, asking what did Nanak do, and more. These are presented as both short answer and fill-in-the-blank exercises. Four chapters (2, 5, 6, and 9) also include a "Something to do" exercise that suggests a more creative activity.<sup>328</sup> Following chapter 5, in which the "Sacha Sauda" story is related, the text suggests that, "[t]he teacher should encourage the students to collect money and organize a small langar [community meal] for the needy,"<sup>329</sup> while the end of chapter 9, in which Guru Nanak's travels conclude, suggests

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<sup>326</sup> Anand, *The Essence of Sikhism- 3*, 27-30.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 14, 18, 23, 30, 40, 48, 54, 59, and 64.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 31, 41, and 60.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

preparing “a chart depicting the places visited by Guru Nanak Dev ji during his four journeys.”<sup>330</sup>

### Children’s Books

This section presents the largest sampling of modern janam-sakhi iterations as the trend of simplification continues from the schoolbooks; these iterations focus more on story elements than on scriptural or historical ties. A few key issues regarding children’s literature should be discussed to see how these iterations of the janam-sakhis are set apart from the others being discussed throughout this study. While some may be quick to dismiss the significance of children’s books as being valuable presentations of the story of Guru Nanak in comparison with the historical janam-sakhi traditions, it may behoove those naysayers to consider these presentations as introductions to the stories that are valued by Sikhs. Kimberley Reynolds’ *Children’s Literature: A Very Short Introduction* describes this crucial role:

Because children’s literature is one of the earliest ways in which the young encounter stories, it plays a powerful role in shaping how we think about and understand the world. Stories are key sources of the images, vocabularies, attitudes, structures, and explanations we need to contemplate experience; because when directed to children they are often bound up with education of one kind or another, they can be important carriers of information about changes in culture, present and past.<sup>331</sup>

Stories for children about Guru Nanak and the origins of Sikh tradition would be among the first explanations given to describe the world in which Sikh children find themselves.

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>331</sup> Kimberley Reynolds, *Children’s Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

Not every parent has the janam-sakhis memorized, so many may rely upon these books to supplement their own recall for the instruction of their children— precisely because these texts are crafted to speak to that audience directly. The works to be examined throughout this section were crafted with this young audience in mind, to engage them in a way that is sensible to their understandings. They lay out key doctrinal teachings in simple terms and give the examples of Guru Nanak’s life to support those principles.

Yet, these texts are insufficient to teach all this by themselves. They both reflect and serve as part of a larger education program; therefore, these versions of the janam-sakhis, generally, necessitate participation in a manner not required of other forms. Children do not, for the most part, read children’s books—parents, or other elders, generally act as storyteller. In his article, "Children's Literature and the Traditional Art of Storytelling," Hans-Heino Ewers affirms this special relationship as he characterizes the genre of children’s literature as “a type of literary culture in which stories are told, recited at social gatherings, or read aloud.”<sup>332</sup> A good storyteller does not simply read; a good storyteller builds on the framework of the text and handles the questions of an inquisitive child. This serves to explicate “the images, vocabularies, attitudes, structures, and explanations” first mentioned by Kimberley Reynolds.<sup>333</sup> Good readers will make the text

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<sup>332</sup> Hans-Heino Ewers, "Children's Literature and the Traditional Art of Storytelling," *Poetics Today* 13, no. 1 (1992): 169.

<sup>333</sup> Reynolds, 4.

sensible for the audience—explaining the story to young children and elaborating upon it for older children.<sup>334</sup>

In the case of these *janam-sakhi* presentations, it is possible to discern features within their presentations that foster learning about and the emulation of Guru Nanak. It must be noted that two categories of influence can be easily identified within these presentations. The first category is of a moral quality, the exemplary behavior which is set by the Guru in the stories. This represents the foundations of Sikh thought and belief. The second category can be identified as a material aspect, focused on the manner in which the Guru goes about his moral behavior. It is the reflection, or manifestation, of the first category (the moral example) in the world around the Guru, who operates as a character in the story.

Taken together, this yields the life model described earlier in Chapter One and discussed at length in Chapter Three. This is quite appropriate when one remembers that the audiences involved with these stories lack developed critical reasoning skills and need additional help to unpack the life model being presented. For example, in *sakhis* that speak about the importance of family and the life of a householder,<sup>335</sup> the second category is

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<sup>334</sup> Another level of analysis presents itself when considering the interaction of the elder-reader, the young listener, and the text being communicated. This interaction is not within the purview of this study, as it would necessitate apparatuses that can evaluate these interactions. This would require a study of a very large population in order to garner any specific trends or modes. It would also detract from the focus of this study on the specific presentations being conveyed by these narrative presentations. The reader/listener/text interaction creates a new iteration of the story that only lasts through the act of the reading/telling. It has no substance beyond the moments of the interaction. Therefore, we must return attention to the static narrative that is found in these published texts.

<sup>335</sup> These *sakhis* would include 9. “Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī,” 10. “Betrothal and marriage,” and 14. “Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand.” The social significance of these *sakhis* is discussed in greater length in Chapter Five.

evinced in the depictions of family life—the family, their dress, identification of family roles, etc. To a child, these pictures are worth more than a thousand words, because they convey a whole world. The young reader/listener is led to the life model, and it encompasses more than just the life of Guru Nanak. It reveals the world into which Guru Nanak brought his message and the lasting impact of that legacy, which, in a Sikh household, is likely to surround the child to some degree. Thus the application of the life model in the story is made sensible, as the connection to the child’s world is emphasized.

These facets of the life model are far more explicit in children’s books, because these narratives both affirm a connection to the Sikh Panth (through the example of Guru Nanak) and promote the agenda of instilling these lessons in a child. Ewers asserts that children’s literature like this is “an aid to clarifying doctrines and codes of behavior for children.”<sup>336</sup> Ultimately, if this instructive literature works as intended, children’s behavior will be conditioned by the lessons learned and this, in turn, would form a religious basis for the children as they become adult Sikhs. While the specific course of how that happens will be discussed in later chapters, the following analyses will stress how the life model of Guru Nanak is both constructed and made applicable to the young readers in ways that are far more explicit and direct than in any other janam-sakhi iterations.

The category of children’s books includes materials as diverse as the children who may read these texts, approaches range from narratives designed to be the first introductions to Sikh history and teachings that explain both in terminology children can understand with little assistance from others to those that prompt detailed theological

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<sup>336</sup> Ewers, 175.

discussions that even some adults may be unprepared to engage. All of these texts are intended to convey the life story of Guru Nanak to audiences at home. They are, for the most part, meant to be introduced in Sikh households to supplement the family traditions and connections that parents may have difficulty conveying on their own. These texts also mark the visible presence of the Guru's story in the lives of their young audience, operating as places to turn for guidance from the Guru and for help understanding his message.

In another important way, these are truly the children's books. Children take ownership ("These are my books!"). Thus, they also take ownership of the message, choosing when and how to read these stories. They may begin to recognize Guru Nanak through his image as presented in the illustrations in their books and in conjunction with other public displays. Connections between what they read and what they see around them are made through their understanding and application of the stories. In previous generations, it may have been common for parents to be able to relay the sakhis to their children without external support like these texts, but today, the abundance of such materials should suffice as an indication of a significant audience that does indeed make use of these supporting texts.

Ajit Singh Aulakh's *Illustrated Life Stories of Guru Sahibs'* [43 sakhis]

This 486 page tome, devoted to an illustrated presentation of the lives of all ten Gurus, presents the largest sampling of sakhis about the life of Guru Nanak outside of the academic volumes discussed earlier. There is no preface or introduction to the sakhis; the text simply begins with the image of Guru Nanak and a painting of "Gurdwara Panja Sahib,

Now in Pakistan.”<sup>337</sup> Guru Nanak’s life is presented over the course of ninety-five pages, with roughly one-half of every other page including a full-color illustration.<sup>338</sup>

The sakhis presented cover a broad range of Guru Nanak’s life, with nearly a quarter of them (ten) set before his call at the River Bein. The sakhis devoted to Guru Nanak’s travels present a fair balance between Guru Nanak’s engagement of Hindus and his engagement of Muslims. Guru Nanak’s spiritual triumphs over witches (sakhi 46), a cannibal (58), a murderer (60) and the inhospitable (106) are presented along with stories that elaborate upon his teachings of honest living (sakhis 23, 114, 120, and 124).

Irpinder and Gautam Bhatia’s *The Proud Sikh Fun & Learning Pack Fun Magazine* [4 sakhis]

*The Proud Sikh* is a multimedia enterprise about Sunny, the Proud Sikh, told across a website, a DVD movie, and the *The Proud Sikh Fun & Learning Pack Fun Magazine*.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Ajit Singh Aulakh, *Illustrated Life Stories of Guru Sahibs'* (Amritsar: B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, n.d.).

The most recent version of this text is available at the publisher’s website. That volume is listed as “Volume 4,” and I think it is safe to understand “volume” in this case as “edition,” because the text described and pictured is very similar to the text in my collection. The website does not provide any dates of publication for these volumes. The ISBN noted on the text does not correspond to any text listed with <http://www.isbnsearch.org/>. B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Publishers, “Illustrated life stories of Guru Sahib Deluxe,” accessed July 22, 2014, <http://www.csjs.com/productDetail.asp?prodId=2610>.

<sup>338</sup> The treatment of Guru Nanak continues ten pages into the chapter about Guru Angad in order to establish their relationship and the importance of Guru Angad as his successor. The four sakhis presented there (92. “First meeting with Lahiṇā,” 93. “Lahiṇā’s clothes ruined,” 94. “Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse,” 95. “Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad”) are not discussed as part of this text’s presentation of Guru Nanak.

<sup>339</sup> SG Martin Infoway, “The Proud Sikh,” accessed July 23, 2014, <http://www.theproudsikh.com/index.html>.

Irpinder Bhatia, “Sunny, The Proud Sikh,” directed by Rahul Singh (New Delhi: SG Martin Animations, n.d.), DVD.

Irpinder and Gautam Bhatia, *The Proud Sikh Fun & Learning Pack Fun Magazine* (New Delhi: SG Martin Animations, n.d.).

The learning pack contains materials to supplement the website and movie. Sunny is a seven year old boy whose inquisitive nature is the impetus for the account of the *Fun Magazine*; he demands a story about Guru Nanak, which is provided in the magazine and further supplemented by the inclusion of a map of Guru Nanak's travels.<sup>340</sup> While only four sakhis are presented in detail, the magazine does a fair job of explaining the religious significance of Guru Nanak's life.<sup>341</sup> The sakhis presented in the magazine are all set prior to Guru Nanak's travels, emphasizing the appeal to young readers as these sakhis each present a clear point to which Sunny can connect—young Nanak at school, Nanak's rejection of the janeu ceremony, and the charity of the Sacha Sauda story. The final sakhi given detailed attention is the River Bein incident, which, in the context of this presentation, leads into the overview of the Sikh religion that is the latter portion of the magazine.

Guru Nanak's teachings and the remaining portion of his life are presented in a series of summaries; some are direct explanations, while others are presented as part of the magazine's premise of Sunny's father telling him about Guru Nanak. These short supplemental summaries (roughly one-page each) within the magazine cover various topics, including Guru Nanak's composition of hymns (though none are cited), two discussions of the Guru's missionary travels (which focus on how the Guru dressed), a very

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<sup>340</sup> *The Fun & Learning Pack* also includes a wall-scroll telling "The Story of the Khalsa," a board game about the Five K's, a reproduction of the "Nisan" or signatures of Gurus Tegh Bahadur and Gobind Singh, and a poster of Sunny, the Proud Sikh.

<sup>341</sup> The additional synopses of the Guru's travels, provided on the accompanying map, give very brief accounts of another four sakhis (46, 54, 72, and 79), but these are relayed in two lines or so each, and are not developed narratives.



brief outline of Sikh teachings (emphasizing diligent work, sharing, and reciting the name of God), a listing of Guru Nanak's nine successors, and the story of Guru Gobind Singh's establishment of the Khalsa.

Arpana Caur's *Nanak: The Guru* [23 sakhis]

Arpana Caur's text is an elegantly illustrated telling of Guru Nanak's life.<sup>342</sup> Vibrant pastel drawings stand out against the brightly colored pages. The textual contents are the most simplistic presentations of the sakhis noted throughout those discussed in this chapter. Many sakhis are but one-half page in length, about ten lines of text, while many others are even less than that. The longest presentations (ranging from one to one-and-a-half pages) focus on the Sacha Sauda story, as well as Guru Nanak's visits to Hardwar, Mecca, and Pañjā Sāhib. Other sakhis receiving this extended treatment include his meetings with Bhai Lālo, Sajjan, and Bābur. Interspersed between specific sakhis are more topical pieces that address Guru Nanak's behaviors, ideas, and intentions. For example, the section titled "Spreading the Message" tells that, not how, (Bhai) Bala came to join Guru Nanak and (Bhai) Mardana, as well as describing Guru Nanak's attire as a mix of Hindu and Muslim styles. The facing page then illustrates the three in their respective attire for the young reader.<sup>343</sup> Other "summary" sections of the text lay out Guru Nanak's love of nature, his youthful questioning of the world around him, his daily prayer regimen, his view on caste distinctions, his general rejection of ascetic practices (which borrows

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<sup>342</sup> Arpana Caur, *Nanak: The Guru* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2005).

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

elements from a variety of sakhis), and “The Position of Women” in his community at Kartarpur.<sup>344</sup>

Anita Ganeri’s texts [3 sakhis total]  
*The Milk and the Jasmine Flower and Other Stories*  
*Sikh Stories*

The two texts authored by Anita Ganeri warrant being discussed together, as her *The Milk and the Jasmine Flower and Other Stories*<sup>345</sup> retells two of the three sakhis presented in her earlier *Sikh Stories* volume for Picture Window Books.<sup>346</sup> The two volumes are directed to audiences of different ages and present quite different narratives, despite the commonality of the sakhis being relayed.

Ganeri’s *Sikh Stories*, originally published in 2001 in the U.K and then in 2006 for American audiences, presents three sakhis about Guru Nanak and five stories about his successors. The text is geared towards older children and provides a single paragraph to introduce the major tenets of Sikhism and a listing of the ten Sikh Gurus.<sup>347</sup> The individual sakhis are accompanied by “Did you know?” text boxes that provide background information and/or elaboration about a point of Sikh doctrine. The story of Dunī Chand is accentuated by text boxes that summarize Guru Nanak’s darśan experience and connect

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 10, 16, 22, 24-25, 34-35, 44-45.

<sup>345</sup> Anita Ganeri, *The Milk and the Jasmine Flower and Other Stories*, Stories from Faiths (London: QED Publishing, 2007).

<sup>346</sup> Anita Ganeri, *Sikh Stories*, Traditional Religious Tales (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 2001; Minneapolis: Picture Window Books, 2006). Citations refer to the Picture Window Books edition.

<sup>347</sup> Ganeri, *Sikh Stories*, 4.

Dunī Chand’s story to the Sikh practice of *sewa* (or *seva*, service).<sup>348</sup> The presentation of the sakhis themselves is relatively short; none of these presentations are longer than two-and-a-half pages. Each, however, is accompanied by full-page illustrations into which the text is incorporated, creating a pleasant integration of text and image. Key to this volume are its inclusion of a glossary to define Sikh terminology, as well as brief details about historical figures, and the final “To Learn More” page suggests further readings about world religions and directs audiences to “age-appropriate” websites and texts.<sup>349</sup>

Ganeri’s *The Milk and the Jasmine Flower* is simply four stories, two for Guru Nanak and one each for Guru Hargobind and Guru Har Rai, lushly illustrated with no supplemental materials or interjections for the readers. The sakhis are presented in simple sentences, indicating that a much younger audience is intended. The inclusion of “Notes for Parents and Teachers” confirms this with its instructions for the guided reading of each narrative, as well as a few suggestions of “Further things to do” to elaborate on the themes of these stories.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>349</sup> Sadly the only Sikh-specific item brought up by the search code provided is the very text that directed the reader to the search. The other seven items brought up in the search include three websites, including one dead link, a link to an online lesson about Western Religions from *MrDowling.com* (which has no specific material on the Sikhs at its website <http://www.mrdowling.com/605westr.html>) and *The World Almanac for Kids Online* (a subscription service [http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/WAKI-Chapter.aspx?chapter\\_id=11](http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/WAKI-Chapter.aspx?chapter_id=11)), and four books from Capstone Press’ Exploring the Galaxy Series on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. *Facthound.com*, “Results for Religion,” accessed July 24, 2014, <http://www.facthound.com/CategorySearch.aspx?ISBN=1404813144>.

<sup>350</sup> Ganeri, *The Milk and the Jasmine Flower*, 36.

Santokh Singh Jagdev's *Bed Time Stories-2: Guru Nanak Dev Ji* [25 sakhis]

*Bed Time Stories* is a ten-volume series authored by Santokh Singh Jagdev and published by the Sikh Missionary Resource Centre of Birmingham (England). The second volume in the series is devoted to Guru Nanak.<sup>351</sup> The author's goal for this text, and the series in general, is noted in his Acknowledgements, where he states, "[t]hese twenty-five stories [that] form the life of Guru Nanak can unite us with the teachings of the spiritual guide, if we read them carefully and try to mould our lives upon these."<sup>352</sup> To this end, he addresses as wide an audience as possible by presenting these stories in both English and Punjabi. The text of these twenty-five sakhis is fairly dense, yet each narrative is still contained on two pages (one each for the Punjabi and English versions). Each sakhi is then accompanied by a full-page line drawing depicting a moment from these stories.<sup>353</sup>

Roughly one-quarter of the included sakhis are set prior to Guru Nanak's darśan experience, with eighteen set after his call to the guruship. There is a fair balance in the presentation of Guru Nanak's confrontations with both Hindus and Muslims (about six

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<sup>351</sup> Santokh Singh Jagdev, *Bed Time Stories-2: Guru Nanak Dev Ji*, 3rd ed. (n.d; Birmingham, England: Sikh Missionary Resource Centre, 1996).

The other volumes in the series are devoted to: 1. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, 3. Guru Arjan Dev Ji, 4. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, 5. Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Dass, (and) Guru Ram Dass Ji, 6. Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, (and) Guru Harkrishan, 7. Sikh Martyrs, 8. Khalsa Raj, 9. Sikh Warriors, and 10. Honoured Saints.

The first edition of volume 1 was released in 1991 and was reprinted in 1994, 1997 and 2000. The first edition of volume 4 was released in 1994. Therefore, while further publication data is not available, the indication that the 1996 date for the third edition of volume 2 would indicate an original publication date somewhere between 1991 and 1994, with two reprint editions following shortly by 1996.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>353</sup> The author even encourages children to "use suitable colours of their own choice to paint the black sketches in their own books." *Ibid.*, 9.

each), with the other sakhis hitting the popular highlights of Bhai Lālo, Sajjan, and “Kauda the Cannibal.”<sup>354</sup> Only three sakhis have direct quotations from the *Adi Granth*, though these are haphazardly handled in the text itself. The first instance occurs during Guru Nanak’s janeu ceremony as a line from *Raag Asa* page 471, and this citation is presented in both the Punjabi and English texts.<sup>355</sup> The second quotation appears in the story of Dunī Chand and is properly cited in the Punjabi text, but no indication of the hymn’s location is noted in the English version on the following page.<sup>356</sup> Guru Nanak’s convincing appeal to Sajjan is the third instance of a citation from the *Adi Granth*. Oddly, the hymn is only provided in the Punjabi version of the narrative. The English version says that “Guru Nanak started the recitation of the hymn” at the end of the third paragraph, and the fourth paragraph begins, “When Sajjan heard the hymn and understood the meanings, he suspected that Guru Nanak had come to know his black deeds.”<sup>357</sup> The English reader is given no clue about the specifics of the Guru’s words that stirred Sajjan from his evil ways. Despite these idiosyncrasies, the inclusion of three direct citations from the *Adi Granth* sets these presentations apart from most of the other children’s books that do not establish or elaborate upon the connection between the janam-sakhis and the *Adi Granth*.

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 33-34. The selection comes from one of Guru Nanak’s one-line compositions placed near the end of the *Adi Granth* in the section noted as “Shaloks in Addition to the Vars.” *AG*, 1412.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 59 and 61. The Punjabi citation indicates the lines are from *Raag Suhi*, page 729 of the *Adi Granth*.

Inni Kaur's *Journey with the Gurus*, 3 vols. [28 sakhis total: 15/3/10]

Three volumes of *Journey with the Gurus* have been released as of August 2014.<sup>358</sup> They are colorful hardback books presenting “‘Retold’ stories based on the life and travels of Guru Nanak Sahib.”<sup>359</sup> Inni Kaur says her narrative, *Journey with the Gurus*, was inspired by Bhai Vir Singh's work, *Guru Nanak Chamatkar*.<sup>360</sup> The series is “Dedicated to Sikh children everywhere”<sup>361</sup> and is certainly geared to an audience that is thoroughly entrenched in the Sikh tradition.

The sakhis presented are not simple introductions to Sikh principles via the stories about Guru Nanak. These “teaching stories” include “discussion points at the end of each chapter for the family to learn and grow from.”<sup>362</sup> It is this inclusion that really sets these volumes apart from the other children's books, as the points to be discussed require a substantial knowledge of Sikh history and theology in order to direct such a discussion. While the series' website says the target audience age range is seven years and up, the assistance of an (knowledgeable) adult reader is needed to utilize all that these volumes have to offer. For example, Kaur's narrative tells that after Guru Nanak's darśan

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<sup>358</sup> Inni Kaur, *Journey with the Gurus*, 3 vols. (Norwalk, CT: Sikh Education & Cultural Foundation, 2010-2014).

<sup>359</sup> Sikh Education & Cultural Foundation, Inc, *Journey with the Gurus*, accessed August 13, 2014, <http://www.journeywiththegurus.com/>.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid. Bhai Vir Singh's *Guru Nanak Chamatkar* was initially serialized in *Nirguniārā*, a publication of the Khalsa Tract Society, a major voice of the Singh Sabha reform movement. See *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, s.v. “Vir Singh, Bhāi.”

<sup>361</sup> Inni Kaur, *Journey with the Gurus*, vol. 1, ii.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., iv.

experience and “participation” in the namaz with Daulat Khan and the qazi, the Guru recited the *Mul Mantar* (Basic Credal Statement):

There is only One God.  
God is True.  
God created the Universe.  
God does not fear anyone.  
God does not hate anyone.  
God is forever.  
God is not born.  
God does not die.  
God is Pure Light  
By Guru’s Grace,  
God can be known.<sup>363</sup>

The first discussion point listed at the end of that chapter asks the reader to, “[e]xplain the entire *Mul Mantar* to the children. Tell them that in *Sikhi*, God is considered to be a non-judgmental, loving, gender-free, eternal Creator.”<sup>364</sup> This is no easy task, as Sikhs and scholars have devoted a lot of attention to this first stanza of the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>365</sup> The second discussion point that follows is no less of a challenge, asking parents to “[h]elp them to understand that the same Divine Light exists in all Creation, in everyone and everything.”<sup>366</sup> If the reader is a well-trained teacher of the tradition, this might not be an unreasonable request, but it is not something that a young reader is going to pick up on immediately. These two issues are major theological principles that are only hinted at in

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>365</sup> A traditional Sikh saying/ understanding is that *Japji*, the first chapter or hymn of the Guru Granth Sahib (of which the *Mul Mantar* is a part), is an elaboration of the *Mul Mantar*, and that the rest of the Guru Granth Sahib is an elaboration of *Japji*. This is a herculean task to set at the feet of parents who just wanted to read their children a story about the Guru.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid. Also, see the previous note.

the narrative, but the reader is expected to bring much more to the discussion than what this text provides.

The second and third volumes introduce another important Sikh concept, *hukam*, defined in the glossary of both volumes as “decree, order, command, or sanction. In Sikhi, it refers to the Divine Will or to the reading of a Shabad from the top of a left-hand page chosen randomly from the Guru Granth Sahib.”<sup>367</sup> The concept of *hukam* occurs as part of Guru Nanak’s explanation for why he must leave his family and village to spread God’s message. The Guru tells his friend Rai Bular, “Raiji, it is *Hukam* that I am following.”<sup>368</sup> In the next chapter, Guru Nanak is forced to explain his departure to his own father, saying that, “I am following God’s *Hukam*.”<sup>369</sup> It is not until Guru Nanak returns home, in chapter seven of volume three that any lengthy description of *hukam* is provided to readers. Guru Nanak explains the concept, by way of understanding *Ik Oankar*, to his father over the course of two pages. Guru Nanak’s explanation draws his father into the all-encompassing presence of *Ik Oankar* as he tells him, “[b]y constantly remembering *Ik Oankar* in everything you do, your mind will gradually awaken. When this remembrance becomes a part of you, the distance between you and *Ik Oankar* vanishes. Feelings of lust, anger,

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<sup>367</sup> Inni Kaur, *Journey*, vol. 2, 167; and Inni Kaur, *Journey*, vol. 3, 157.

<sup>368</sup> Inni Kaur, *Journey*, vol. 2, 15.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



greed, attachment and ego disappear.”<sup>370</sup> His father accepts this and even tells the Guru’s mother that “It is Hukam that he [Guru Nanak] leaves.”<sup>371</sup>

Despite the revelation of this understanding, there still exists a large gap in the narrative from the concept’s first introduction in chapter one of volume two until this elaboration is offered in the seventh chapter of the next volume in the series. Any parents who may have purchased volume two when it was first released in 2012 were left in a lurch until the third volume was released in 2014, unless the readers were already well-informed about traditional understandings and detailed theological concepts. However, that cannot (or should not) be expected or assumed of an audience. While being advertised as family storybooks, the content level and directions for adult readers in these volumes necessitates a trained audience unlike those for any other texts discussed in this study.

Despite the advanced theological discussions prompted by these discussion points, the heart of these volumes is a narrative about the life of Guru Nanak. These are well-developed presentations of the sakhis, including detailed dialogue to establish connections with Guru Nanak’s family, friends, followers, and for his spiritual debates—heightening the connection to readers via the Guru’s direct speech. The first volume presents eighteen sakhis across its ten chapters, ending with Guru Nanak’s leaving Sultānpur on his missionary journey after receiving his call from *Ik Oankar*. Most of these sakhis focus on Nanak’s life as a young boy growing into his spiritual path and starting his family, as well as his famous confrontation with the qazi during the namaz.

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<sup>370</sup> Inni Kaur, *Journey*, vol. 3, 89.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

The second volume spends a lot of time developing the family connections in light of Guru Nanak's mission, as he spends the first two chapters back at his home village, Talwandi, discussing his mission and detailing how his family will be taken care of while he is gone. These are issues not addressed in any other presentation of the sakhis, but it may be comforting to a child to know that the Guru continued to take care of his family while he was gone.<sup>372</sup> The sakhis about Bhai Lalo and Sajjan are each told over the course of two chapters, spanning forty-seven and thirty-four pages, respectively. Not only are the sakhis presented in extensive detail, but they are then followed-up with a discussion of how Guru Nanak's lessons were enacted by these men—establishing a *sangat* (a congregation) and singing *kirtan*—after the Guru continued on his way.

Inni Kaur's third volume presents another leg of Guru Nanak's journey—not its end, which leaves readers waiting for volume four and, in all likelihood, a fifth volume, too. The sakhis presented in the third volume represent Guru Nanak's confrontations with many various aspects of traditional Indian/Hindu culture. He confronts yogis, pandits, the biased caste system, the greed of merchants, and the idea of untouchability and wins out in every instance, gaining more followers devoted to *Ik Oankar*. To this point, the three volumes have only included three sakhis (sakhis 25, 91, and 112) in which Guru Nanak confronts Muslims and their traditions.<sup>373</sup> None of these presentations offer the detailed theological debates that are offered in other chapters. The major portion of Guru Nanak's

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<sup>372</sup> This may even serve to reinforce the current transnational quality of Sikh families, as many have relatives living abroad who support the family from afar.

<sup>373</sup> Inni Kaur, *Journey*, vol. 1, 133-141; and vol. 3, 95-107, and 147-153.

travels to Arabia and back, which traditionally present his most detailed debates with Islamic thinking, have yet to be presented.<sup>374</sup>

Gurbakhsh Singh's *Sikh Sakhis for the Youth* [5 sakhis]

The sakhis of Guru Nanak presented in Gurbakhsh Singh's *Sikh Sakhis for the Youth* were compiled during a Sikh youth camp in 1986 and became the impetus for the volume which has been expanded over three subsequent editions to include stories about the other Gurus, Sikh martyrs, and important women in the tradition.<sup>375</sup> The first section of the text is devoted solely to Guru Nanak and introduces him by explaining five important teachings:

- 1) Sincere Love For God, *Nam Japna*.
- 2) Honest Earnings, *Dharam Di Kirt*.
- 3) Sharing Earnings, *Wand Ke Chhakna*.
- 4) Accepting The Will of God, *Bhana Mannana*.
- 5) Goodwill For All, *Sarbat Ka Bhala*.<sup>376</sup>

The sakhis that follow serve as elaborations of these principles. They are put together in this way to facilitate young campers' requests to "read the sakhis not just as a story to please him or her, but as a lesson for becoming a better person."<sup>377</sup> To that end, each sakhis is followed by a two to three line summary directly connecting the narrative with these

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<sup>374</sup> Inni Kaur may be saving brunt of Guru Nanak's confrontation with Islamic teachings and practices for its own volume.

<sup>375</sup> Gurbakhsh Singh, *Sikh Sakhis for the Youth*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Vancouver, Satnam Education Society, 1988; Vancouver: Canadian Sikh Study & Teaching Society, 1994). Citations refer to the Canadian Sikh Study & Teaching Society edition.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

teachings. For example, the Sacha Sauda narrative is followed by the rejoinder, “[t]he true bargain of life is sharing one’s earnings with the needy and helping them in whatever way we can.”<sup>378</sup> Another example is Guru Nanak’s rebuke of the Hindus bathing at Hardwar, which is presented in a chapter titled “Hollow Rituals Have No Value,” and is summed up in the direction to “Serve your parents and others when they are alive. Hollow, mindless rituals after their death, have no value to them at all.”<sup>379</sup> The short narratives and their quick and applicable summaries are well suited to the target audience that first spurred this collection—summer camp youth. These sakhis raise good points for discussion and do not require further elaborations to be sensible.

Mala Singh's *The Story of Guru Nanak* [24 sakhis]

*The Story of Guru Nanak* was first released by Hemkunt Press in 1969, has been reprinted a number of times, and is still available on the company’s website.<sup>380</sup> The original publication coincided with the commemoration of Guru Nanak’s 500<sup>th</sup> birthday. The text is a standard storybook, with no introductory material, no review questions or direct address to readers, and just a few color illustrations to accent key anecdotes. There are no specific citations of or reference to the Guru’s hymns. There is no discussion of the importance of the janam-sakhis. This is simply the life of Guru Nanak, and it is the most simple and straight-forward presentation of Guru Nanak’s life of any of the materials

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>380</sup> Mala Singh, *The Story of Guru Nanak* (1969; New Delhi: Hemkunt Press, 1990).

presented in this chapter, which may very well account for its being in print for forty-five years now.

The story sets ten sakhis prior to Guru Nanak's immersion in the river, ten sakhis narrate his travels, and three tell of his settling at Kartarpur and choosing his successor. The only sakhis that call out specific religious rituals are Guru Nanak's critiques of the janeu ceremony and the incident at Hardwar. No direct critique of Islamic practice is offered; only the sakhi about the moving Ka'bah offers a challenge to Islamic belief. Otherwise, most of the sakhis presented focus on Guru Nanak's challenges to dishonesty, people's lack of compassion, or their focus on worldly rewards rather than those achieved by true devotion to God.

Mridula Oberoi's *The Sikh Gurus (Life and Times)* [17 sakhis]

*The Sikh Gurus* is presented as part of series from Vikas Publishing' Madhuban Children's Books line "that traces the lives and times of great religious masters who have made and moulded history. The aim is noble enough: to promote religious tolerance, reduce prejudice and impart valuable information.... The result is a book as informative as it is enlightening."<sup>381</sup> The text provides short chapters on each of the ten Gurus and a

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<sup>381</sup> Mridula Oberoi, *The Sikh Gurus (Life and Times)* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1992), back cover.

This text is from Vikas' Madhuban Children's Books division. At some time between the 1992 publication of this title and the 1996 publication of the *Essence of Sikhism* series, Vikas changed the way they transliterated the book division's name, because later materials and the website are all spelled as Madhubun, not Madhuban, as printed on Oberoi's text.

Oberoi's text is not currently listed in the online catalog available at the Madhubun website, <http://www.madhubunbooks.com/>.

set of “Comprehension Exercises” with a glossary for that chapter and anywhere from five to twenty review questions.<sup>382</sup> A very brief history of Sikhism is provided before the chapter presenting the story of Guru Nanak, in order to provide some context for the Guru’s critiques of Hindu and Islamic practices. This brief section establishes the significance of each Sikh’s relationship to the Guru, saying that “he is the link who connects man with man and ultimately with God. Since the Guru is the bridge between man and God, he must be perfect in all respects. The Sikh Gurus were perfect and are considered as such in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.”<sup>383</sup> With that in mind, the text then sets forth an account of the Guru’s perfect life.

Oberoi’s presentation of the sakhis is accented by two line drawings (for “The cobra’s shadow,” and the incident at Hardwar). The text itself is a straight-forward story, with four hymns of the Guru interspersed, but not cited.<sup>384</sup> The narrative presented draws equally from sakhis set before and after Guru Nanak’s darśan experience. This could be seen as a means to emphasize the child Guru’s moral actions, which would be relatable to the text’s target audience and something to which they could, hopefully, aspire.

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 115-122.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>384</sup> These hymns supplement the presentation of the following sakhis: 3. “Instruction by the paṇḍit,” 22. “Immersion in the river: his call,” 124. “Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo,” and 84. “Discourse with Bābur.” These selections can be found on pages 12, 15-16, 19, and 24, respectively.

Baljit Singh and Inderjeet Singh's *Travels of Guru Nanak (Activity Book)* [31 sakhis]

Published by the Sikh Foundation of New Dehli, the *Travels of Guru Nanak (Activity Book)* combines elements of a storybook, a coloring book, and a school book in order to address itself to a wide spectrum of Sikh youth.<sup>385</sup> The sakhis presented are relatively short; only one is longer than a full page. The sakhis are presented on the left hand page (verso) with a corresponding line drawing on the facing page (recto) for children to color. The text sets out its focus saying that,

The best way to know Sikh history is to imagine oneself in it; and one can't expect children to do it themselves, whether it is the importance of Mool-Mantar or the Creation of Khalsa. When a child has absorbed the basic facts about Sikh history, and [been] given a chance to draw, paint and experience the fun and fascination of the Sikh history, he can easily relate it to his own life and realize the importance of the Sikh way of life.<sup>386</sup>

The sakhi presentations, then, lay out the way for readers to imagine themselves in the life of Guru Nanak. This text is explicit in its desire to draw readers in and asking them to participate in its message. To this end, the text provides a detailed picture of the Guru's life. Seven sakhis are set prior to Guru Nanak's darśan experience, with twenty set during his travels, and three introducing his successor, Guru Angad.

The last five pages bring the reader to make their own connections to Guru Nanak in a section of questions that ask for some review of and reflection upon the sakhis in the text. The section is titled "Feelings about Guru Nanak," and the first "question" directs

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<sup>385</sup> Baljit Singh and Inderjeet Singh, *Travels of Guru Nanak (Activity Book)* (2004; New Delhi: Sikh Foundation, 2009).

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

readers to “Write your feelings about Guru Nanak Dev ji? [*sic*]”<sup>387</sup> Other questions ask for development upon ideas from the sakhis, such as asking “Which sacred thread did Guru Nanak want the Pandit to prepare, which he can willingly wear?” in response to the Guru’s critique of the janeu ceremony, or directly asking the reader, “How [does] the Sakhi of Bhai Lalo relates [*sic*] to your individual life?”<sup>388</sup> Other questions ask for a level of historical and theological reflection that may be a bit more than the audience focused on coloring the pictures of Guru Nanak may be capable of doing. A question such as “What do you feel is the Arti and how is it going on eternally?” is asking for development of Guru Nanak’s critique of Hindu rituals displayed as part of Jagannāth Purī (sakhi 48).<sup>389</sup> Another question asks readers their feelings “about Guru Angad Dev being appointed the successor instead of Guru Nanak Dev’s own sons?” forcing a critical evaluation of the Guru’s choice of successor.<sup>390</sup>

Vaneeta Vaid's *Tell Me About Sikh Gurus* [10 sakhis]

*Tell Me About Sikh Gurus* tells stories from the lives of all ten Sikh Gurus; winding the text of the narratives around beautiful full-color illustrations on nearly every page.<sup>391</sup> The life of Guru Nanak is presented over thirty-two pages and is followed by a one-page

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 63. This question references the presentation of the sakhi on page 30 of the text.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 64. This author has to wonder what sort of answer is expected of this question. Is it a litmus test for determining sympathies for the ascetical sect founded by Guru Nanak’s eldest son, Sri Chand?

<sup>391</sup> Vaneeta Vaid, *Tell Me About Sikh Gurus* (New Delhi: Nita Mehta Publications, 2007).



summary of the “Teachings of Guru Nanak.”<sup>392</sup> The specific presentation of the sakhis here are different than the other volumes considered in this chapter. Three sakhis are set in Nanak’s youth; one of these describes his birth. Guru Nanak’s travels are reduced to meeting Dunī Chand and Sajjan, before heading off to Mecca and returning through Pañjā Sāhib. Once home the narratives focus on sakhis establishing the place of Bhai Lehna as the Guru’s successor, leading into the chapter on Guru Aṅgad.

While general moral practices are addressed in these sakhis, none of the narratives present any critique of Hindu practices. This is certainly an interesting view, as most other texts at least mention the critique of the *janeu* or ritual bathing (via the Hardwar sakhi). But in Vaid’s text, no mention is made of Hindu practices other than the consultation of the horoscope at the time of Nanak’s birth. Nor is there mention of his *darśan* experience, saying only that he earned the title “Guru” because it was used for “A person who is respected for his knowledge.”<sup>393</sup> Thus, there is no mention of the Guru’s famous contention that “There is no Hindu, There is no Muslim,” which is often included in that famous sakhi. Rather, the narrative tells that “Guru Nanak began to travel. He wanted to spread the philosophy of love, peace and harmony, everywhere.”<sup>394</sup> This sentence stands out as indication of the author’s understanding of Guru Nanak, a worthy teacher of a tradition to be discussed. This work is not authored from a position of faith, as the others are. This text establishes some distance between the subject and the reading audience. The

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

overview of this text offered on BarnesandNoble.com confirms this separation by clearly stating, “The Sikhs are the followers of the progressive religion Sikhism. The book tells the story of the ten Sikh Gurus and the rise of Sikhism to become the fifth largest religion in the [world].”<sup>395</sup> Whereas other texts have sought to bring the reader closer to Guru Nanak by emphasizing connections to the Sikh tradition as something different than Hinduism and Islam, Vaid’s text seems to account for Sikhism without accounting for the beliefs that make Sikhism what it is.

Even the summary of Guru Nanak’s teachings offers a superficial and Indian/Hindu-ized ecumenical reading of Sikh principles, leaving any specific Sikh understandings out. The list is six simple points:

- God is One. He belongs to all of us.
- Be honest and hard working [*sic*] and never be devious and idle.
- Share your earnings and help the weak.
- Never forget God’s grace.
- The paths to happiness and contentment can be only found if you adopt a loving and giving attitude towards all.
- Believe in a sense of brotherhood and unity amongst all beings.<sup>396</sup>

It is doubtful any Sikh would disagree with this presentation of their faith, nor would any be satisfied with this as a full description of their faith. This is pabulum—religiously inoffensive and lacking nourishment. The depth of the Sikh tradition is overlooked at the expense of making accommodations so as not to offend Hindu sensibilities. That is why there is none of the critique of Hindu practices that feature so heavily in other presentations,

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<sup>395</sup> *BarnesandNoble.com*, “Tell Me About Sikh Gurus,” accessed July 26, 2014, <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/tell-me-about-sikh-gurus-anurag-mehta/1030031451?ean=2940012193766>.

<sup>396</sup> Vaid, 40.

and there is no detailed explanation of the Guru's mission and his sacred connection to the divine, shared via his sacred hymns. In this text, Sikhism is a philosophy that fits into a larger Indian context and does not rock the boat of traditional Hindu religious expression.

Rosetta Williams' *Sikh Gurus* [15 sakhis]

In contrast to Vaneeta Vaid's presentation, Rosetta Williams provides a text described on its dust jacket as being "written in praise and love of the Sikh traditions."<sup>397</sup> While the introduction makes clear that "This book is intended to inculcate habits of compassion and love in daily rituals in the minds of the young readers to equip them to face life courageously inspite [*sic*] of fearsome odds. May this humble effort bestow the blessings of the Gurus on its readers, help them follow their teachings and enable them to serve the society and country better."<sup>398</sup> The text is intended for Sikh children; though not written by a Sikh, it does at least acknowledge the value of the Gurus' teachings in their own systems of meaning.<sup>399</sup> The narrative itself presents Guru Nanak engaging Hindus and Muslims and meeting friends like Dunī Chand and Bhai Lālo, as well as saying that Nanak "received divine knowledge from God" during his three-day-long disappearance in the river. The text is one coherent narrative linking the individual sakhis together in

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<sup>397</sup> Rosetta Williams, *Sikh Gurus* (2002; New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2008), jacket.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>399</sup> Rosetta Williams' website lists her many publications including the following children's titles: "Stories from Bible," "Mahabharata," "Ramayana," "Gita," "Panchatantra," "Sikh Gurus," "Mahavir," "Holi [*sic*] Quran," "Gautam Buddha," and "Arabian Nights" (no specific publication data is provided). *RosettaWilliams.com*, "Writer," accessed July 26, 2014, <http://www.rosettawilliams.com/>.

running prose, not separate anecdotes. Full color illustrations of key moments cover roughly half of each of the twenty-three pages of Guru Nanak's chapter.

Shyam Dua ed., *The Luminous Life of Guru Nanak* [30 sakhis]

Tiny Tot Publications' website lists one hundred and eleven titles in their Printline Books imprint "The Luminous Life of..." series.<sup>400</sup> The "Publisher's Note" in the Guru Nanak volume highlights the series' focus on "some of the most well known [*sic*] and remarkable personalities born in India," placing Guru Nanak among such luminaries as Ashoka, Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sachin Tendulkar.<sup>401</sup> The text is printed on paper just a bit better than newsprint and is bound in a laminated cardstock cover. Cover price is listed at twenty-five rupees on the Guru Nanak text, though the website now shows prices have increased to forty.<sup>402</sup> Simple line drawings accompany many anecdotes in the text, and a few paintings are reproduced in the text as accent pieces.<sup>403</sup>

The narrative within the text is a bit odd. It is obviously directed toward children, but the presentation of Guru Nanak's life is set up by a discussion of his early years that

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<sup>400</sup> TinyTotPublications, "Book List," accessed July 26, 2014, <http://tinytotpublications.com/lpage.asp?word=luminous+life>.

<sup>401</sup> Shyam Dua, ed. *Guru Nanak, The Luminous Life of* (2004; Dehli: Tiny Tot Publications, 2007), 3.

That the publisher's website lists volumes dedicated to Jesus Christ, Adolf Hitler, Ricky Martin, and Madonna may call this Indian focus into question, yet it does show that the series presents the lives of those who are famous—for whatever reason.

<sup>402</sup> This represents a shift, at current exchange rates to U. S. Dollars, from about forty cents to sixty-five cents.

<sup>403</sup> An example of an accompanying illustration was provided in Chapter Two as part of this text's presentation of sakhi 124 Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo.

references various scholars' views of Nanak's educational background and speaks about "the *Janamsakhi* (biography)" before launching into the story of young Nanak's rejection of the *janeu*.<sup>404</sup> The appeal to the *janam-sakhis* is not common, but it does stand out in each of its three instances of the narrative. The introduction to the *sakhi* about Guru Nanak's *darśan* experience begins: "The *Janamsakhis* narrate that Guru Nanak went to bath[e] in the neighbouring river called *Baeen*,"<sup>405</sup> ceding the authority of this narrative account to an unspecified authority—simply, the *Janamsakhi*. Later, during the *sakhi* set at *Jagannāth Purī*, the authority of *the Janamsakhi* is brought into question as a discrepancy over how Guru Nanak's travels are organized and presented in both the *Puratan* and "Mehtarban version of the *Janamsakhi*" is introduced, with unnamed "Others" and "Many writers" referenced in a means to allay the discrepancy.<sup>406</sup> The third instance citing a historical *janam-sakhis* occurs within the narrative of *sakhi 87* "Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh *Ibrāhīm*," which uses the *Puratan* as a means to affirm which hymn Guru Nanak used in his debate with "Sheikh *Brahm*" (*Ibrāhīm*), saying "According to [the] *Puratan Janamsakhi*, the first nine *pauries* (stanzas) of *Asa di Var* were uttered by the Guru during the discussion with Sheikh *Brahm*."<sup>407</sup> This citation of a *janam-sakhi* to make the connection to the hymn is unique among the materials presented to children. None of the

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<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

other volumes considered in this chapter, nor even the other eight citations in this same text, explicitly use the janam-sakhis as the source for the recitation's use in a sakhi.

### Comic Books

The final two janam-sakhi texts to be described warrant special attention, because they employ another medium, the comic book, in order to convey the life story of Guru Nanak. Comics are not simply a sub-genre of children's literature. Comic books are a medium that relies on a combination of words and pictures (both representative and abstract) to present the content in a manner quite different from simply adding an illustration to the text. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* offers a definition of comics that has become an industry standard used by comics professionals and scholars.<sup>408</sup> McCloud suggests that comics, as a medium, are best described as “[j]uxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.”<sup>409</sup> The pictorial and

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<sup>408</sup> Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993; New York: HarperCollins, 1994). First published in 1993 by Kitchen Sink Press.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. McCloud's text is itself a comic, reflecting this juxtaposition of images and words. Unfortunately, my citations of McCloud will only present his words and not the images, as my concern here is his explanation of the medium, not necessarily the demonstration of it. Even the panel in which he presents this definition presents the text laid out as if it were in a dictionary:

**com.ics** (kom'iks)**n.** plural in form, used with singular verb. **1.** Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

In this way he plays off the pictorial representation of the text in a way that conveys all the associated meaning and authority of a dictionary, without having to explicitly say so but still elicits the aesthetic response (accepting the meaning and authority of this “dictionary” definition) from the reader.

other images used in comics range from photo-realistic imagery to graphic abstractions of line and color to the words on the page (which are themselves icons). Together, these “words, pictures and other icons are the **vocabulary** of the language called **comics**.”<sup>410</sup> This vocabulary, like any, strives for coherence, and in the case of comics this is achieved by understanding the relationship between the component parts (words and images) that are generated most often by two participating parties—the author(s) and the artist(s) of the comic.

The children’s books discussed in the previous section simply augment the words on the page with an illustrated depiction of a scene in the narrative. The image is, somewhat, superfluous to the narrative on the page—there to hold a young one’s attention while another reader recites the text. One could easily remove the pictures from those texts and it would do little damage to readers’ understandings of the narrative. Comics, on the other hand, reflect the integration of both, often to the point of them being inseparable if one wants to retain their communicative value. McCloud suggests that,

When pictures are more abstracted from 'reality' they require greater levels of perception, **more like words**. When words are bolder, more direct, they require *lower* levels of perception and are received *faster*, **more like pictures**. Our need for a unified **language** of comics sends us toward the center where words and pictures are like two sides of *one coin*! <sup>411</sup>

Comics put all this together to create an integrated presentation that can, depending on its construction, engage any point on the spectrum between the two ends of art and words.

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 47. Terms in bold in citations from McCloud reflect a stylistic convention of comic book lettering, which uses bolded and italicized words to convey emphasis instead of doing so through more developed narrative techniques which would take up too much space in a comic panel.

<sup>411</sup> McCloud, 47.

While the two comics to be described here strive for more realistic depictions of Guru Nanak and the people and places around him, each employs plenty of representational imagery and techniques that can only be achieved through the medium of comics. For example, the Diamond Comics' *Sikh Gurus* depiction of sakhi 79, "Mecca: the moving mosque," consists of three panels. In the first (Figure 4.1), a reclining Guru



Figure 4.1 *Sikh Gurus*, page 32

Nanak is looking up at a qazi standing above him (though only this qazi is shown from the calves down) The qazi inquires, "Don't you know the Holy Kaba is the House of God[?] And you were pointing your feet in that direction."<sup>412</sup> Guru Nanak responds by saying, "Then please turn my feet towards the direction which is not the dwelling place of God."<sup>413</sup> The next panel simply shows a disembodied hand descending from the top of the panel and

<sup>412</sup> Gulshan Rai, ed., *Sikh Gurus* (Noida, Uttar Pradesh: Diamond Comics, 1999), 32.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.



grabbing ahold of two disembodied feet as well as a third leg standing to the right of where the hand descends. The panel need not depict the complete bodies of the qazi and Guru Nanak in this panel; the readers' minds fill in the rest, assuming that the rest of the Guru is attached to those feet and that the qazi has a complete body as well. A text box accompanies this panel, setting up the action to be shown in the next panel: "Both the qazis held his feet and turned them to the other side but surprisingly Holy Kaba's directions also changed accordingly.[*sic*]"<sup>414</sup> (Keep in mind that the image of this panel only shows one hand and foot taking action against the Guru; the participation of the second qazi is only indicated by the accompanying text.) The crucial element of the sakhi, the movement of the Ka'bah in conjunction with the movement of the Guru's feet, is depicted in three interrelated and interdependent ways in the third panel.

First, the central foci of the panel are the reactions of three Muslims and the shocked looks on their faces. The fact that the central figure is dressed in the same green as the disembodied legs of the qazi in the previous two panels leads the reader to believe that this is his reaction. The significance of what these figures see is affirmed by their reaction to it. The second key feature is the depiction of what these Muslims saw—four inset images showing the Ka'bah against varying abstracted backgrounds and little abstract depictions of crowds (circles for heads, with a few with of those heads placed on arches of shoulders) surrounding the Ka'bah. The buildings and crowds blend together as black lines on a green field, and even the depiction of the Ka'bah varies in each of these insets; the line work and

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 33. The cited text is grammatically unsound, so much so that marking the individual errors with *sic* would be overwhelming. Hence, the single *sic* notation at the end of the sentence.

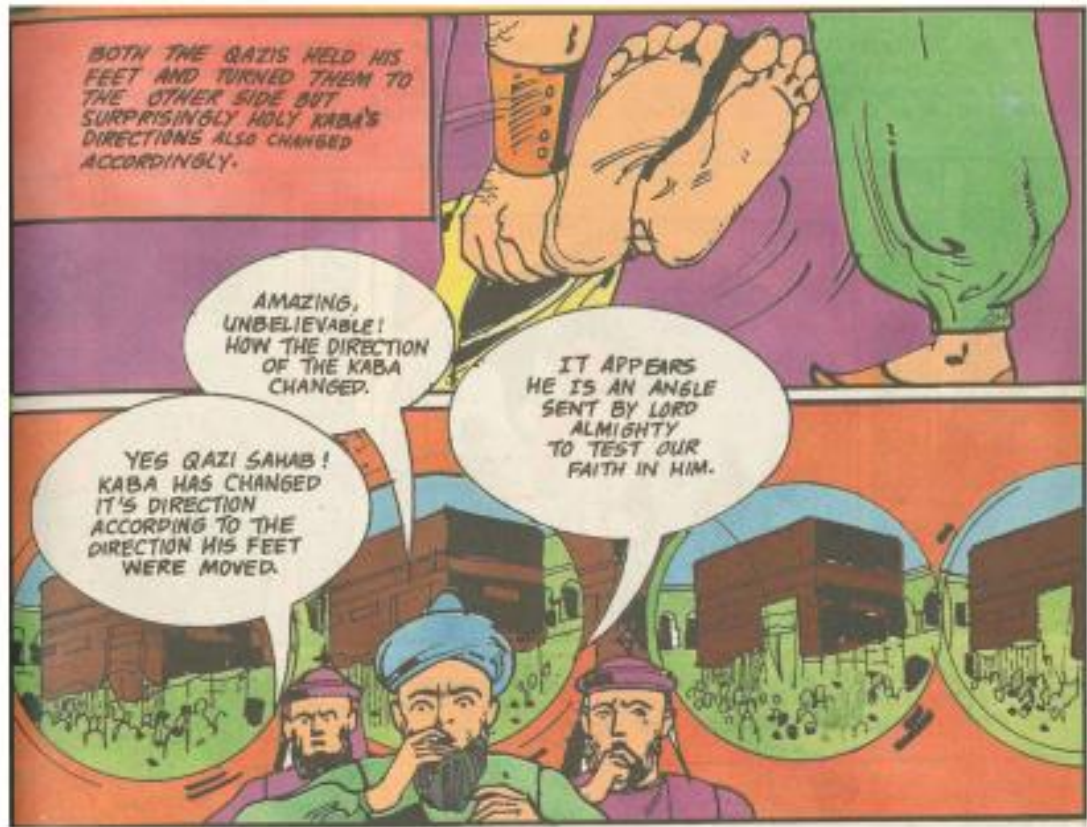


Figure 4.2 *Sikh Gurus*, page 33

colors of it are different in each, yet readers understand that this is the Ka'bah in each, and it has moved, as the shifting background indicates. Finally, this panel also incorporates the verbal reactions of those three Muslims witnessing the moving Ka'bah in word balloons above their heads and interspersed between the insets depicting the Ka'bah. The central figure's reaction is placed above the others. A word balloon actually overlaps the previous panel, providing an easy visual transition between the two panels. In that panel, the main

agitator of the last two panels, the qazi in green, declares, “Amazing, unbelievable! How the direction of the Kaba changed.” The two men with him then chime in saying:

MUSLIM ON LEFT. Yes qazi sahab! Kaba has changed it’s [*sic*] direction according to the direction his feet were moved.

MUSLIM ON RIGHT. It appears he is an angle [*sic*] sent by Lord Almighty to test our faith in him.<sup>415</sup>

Despite the egregious spelling and grammar errors of the text, these three declarations add another dimension to the panel, providing the vocal component to their reaction—both a description of what they saw and how they felt about it. The panel efficiently organizes and conveys all the necessary information of the sakhi through the interplay of the pictorial images and text to create the narrative of this sakhi. The images alone are not sufficient, unless the story is already known. Nor is the text alone sufficient, as it fails to describe the scene and its impact on the Muslim observers fully. This is the difference between showing their reaction through the combination of the pictures and words and just telling about it through a simple textual presentation.

Comics, as a medium, engage both elements to create a new vocabulary of the two, rather than simply acting as a derivative. The abstracted depictions of incomplete bodies and of the Ka’bah itself reflect McCloud’s assertions about the representational power of “cartooning” employed in comics: “When we *abstract* an image through *cartooning*, we’re not so much *eliminating* details as we are *focusing* on *specific details*. By *stripping down* an image to its essential *'meaning,'* an artist can *amplify* that meaning in a way that a

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

realistic art *can't*.”<sup>416</sup> None of these images are realistic, but they tell the reader enough about real things that they are understandable and focus attention on what is necessary to know about the image. And this same principle holds true for the textual component of a comic, as the textual narrative is essential-ized, telling what is necessary to complete the picture of the panel as a whole—the integrated telling via picture and words, in the vocabulary of comics.

In an American and European context, this vocabulary of comics has been employed primarily for entertainment purposes. This is not necessarily the case with the two companies that have produced the texts to be considered here. The *Amar Chitra Katha* (ACK) comic series, beginning in 1967, marks a very different approach and sets the stage for the latter *Sikh Gurus* from Diamond Comics. *Amar Chitra Katha* means “immortal picture stories,” and the comics strive to present Indian history and mythology in a way that promotes an inclusive view of the variety of Indian traditions.<sup>417</sup> Karline McLain examines the formation and foci of the ACK line, saying that “these comics seek to immortalize India's own heroes-- its mythological gods and historical leaders-- as their protagonists.”<sup>418</sup> These comics aim to inspire and convey religious teachings, just as other religious works would, but they do it via the medium of comics and within a framework of

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<sup>416</sup> McCloud, 30.

<sup>417</sup> Karline McLain, *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and Other Heroes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*

an Indian national identity that built upon the motto “Unity in diversity” instituted in many educational programs of the 1960s and 70s in India.<sup>419</sup>

Key to this presentation was its focus on a new type of Indian audience—the English-speaking, middle-class, urban Indian that embraced the global outlook of the era.<sup>420</sup> It was to this new middle-class Indian that the ACK books were directed and their purpose was two-fold. They were, as McLain suggests, “not considered primarily an entertainment product by their creators or their consumers; instead, they are regarded-- often even revered-- as foundational texts for the religious and national education of their young readers.”<sup>421</sup> They were not produced, marketed, and received as typical comic books, like Batman or Superman were. The ACK books were considered religious texts presented as comics in order to reach their audience.<sup>422</sup> This religious emphasis/ authority then “helped this generation develop a national consciousness through their focus on historic figures from the various regions of India and from its many religious communities;

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 6. McLain’s analysis indicates a heavily Hindu-centric focus, which is understandable, considering the composition of the general Indian audience to whom these comics were marketed. Nevertheless, the Hindu-centric focus has and still does overshadow the contributions of the other traditions that are presented in the ACK line—such as Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and even Christianity. These other traditions are acknowledged as relevant to the history of India and its identity today, but it is clear that Hindu traditions are the main motivator for all of this, or at least that is McLain’s argument. She does not devote much time to considering the ACK titles about other traditions in light of their own meaning and history, only in relation to other Hindu traditions, characters, and tropes.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>422</sup> This view was embraced by the creators and editors of the series, as well as by readers. McLain’s text includes many interviews with readers confirming this view. One that stands out was a resident of Mumbai who raised his two children in the 1960s and 70s on ACK books. McLain notes “that he and his wife viewed the ACK comic books as ‘accurate and authentic’ products that are ‘loyal to the original’ Hindu scriptures.” Ibid., 9.

they encouraged this generation to embrace English-language education, science, and globalization while retaining a uniquely Indian sensibility and identity.”<sup>423</sup> While McLain’s analysis emphasizes the Hindu focus of this “sensibility and identity,” the individual volumes devoted to other traditions’ religious figures certainly do the same within their more limited scope—the specific religious audience for whom these comics are accurate and authentic. In these ways, then, the following texts are expressions of *Sikh comics*. They present the story of Guru Nanak for specifically devotional purposes, using the vocabulary of comics which grants them a new way to engage their audience.

Amar Chitra Katha’s *Guru Nanak* [30 sakhis]

“Amar Chitra Katha comics are like family heirlooms, passed down from generation to generation,” or so claims the preface inside the front cover of ACK’s *Guru Nanak* issue.<sup>424</sup> First published in 1973, and most recently reprinted in February 2011,<sup>425</sup> the *Guru Nanak* comic may not strictly qualify as an heirloom in itself, but it does serve as an acknowledgment of ACK’s role in perpetuating “timeless” stories in their line of “illustrated classics” that certainly respects and emphasizes the rich history and traditions

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>424</sup> G. S. Mansukhani, Naniki Mansukhani, and illustrated by Devender, *Guru Nanak*, Amar Chitra Katha, no. 590 (1973; New Delhi: India Book House, 2006), inside front cover.

<sup>425</sup> Publication date obtained by ISBN search of the online offering of the text by the publisher. Amar Chitra Katha, “Guru Nanak,” accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.amarchitrakatha.com/ack/books/234-234-AmarChitraKatha-AMARCHITRAKATHA-Singles-VISIONARIES-GuruNanak>.

ISBN Search, “Guru Nanak (590),” accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.isbnsearch.org/isbn/9788190599092>.

from which this story is drawn.<sup>426</sup> This is further affirmed by a notation made on the back cover noting that the Mansukhanis' script was "approved by the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar," more commonly known as the SGPC (the organization of elected Sikh representatives that oversees gurdwaras, as well as many educational outreach programs including schools, colleges, and publications on Sikh history and religion).<sup>427</sup> This stamp of institutional authority validates the role of the ACK comic as a devotional text conveying approved religious teachings.<sup>428</sup>

The general narrative depicted in the comic is relatively simple and straightforward, though seriously truncated in order to be conveyed across thirty-two illustrated pages (averaging just 3.75 panels per page). The comic presents twelve sakhis set prior to Guru Nanak's disappearance in the river, and another seventeen sakhis are set after it. This balance is not reflected in the number of pages and comic panels devoted to these sakhis. The first twelve sakhis occupy just over half of the comic (16⅓ pages of 32). Guru Nanak's disappearance is presented over the course of another 2 pages. This leaves only one panel on page 19 through the end of the text (12⅓ pages) to convey the rest of the Guru's life. The treatment of these remaining sakhis is, obviously, very brief. Only four sakhis are given lengthy treatments extending over one full page (25. "Discourse with the qāzī," 34. "Hardwār: the watering of his fields," and the combined presentation of sakhis 83. "The sack of Saidpur" and 84. "Discourse with Bābur"). Some sakhis are reduced to a single

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<sup>426</sup> Mansukhani, Mansukhani, and Devender, *Guru Nanak*, inside front cover.

<sup>427</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, s.v. "Shiromaṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee."

<sup>428</sup> No other text encountered in this study has this stamp of approval.

panel, or a combined panel; such is the case of the comic's depiction of the stories of Sajjan (60), the cannibal Kauda (58), and Nurshah (sakhi 46. "The country ruled by women"), which are all presented under a text box saying "During his wide travels, he enlightened and reformed many souls. Among them were Sajjan, the thug; Kauda, the cannibal; and Nurshah."<sup>429</sup> The important information is there, noting that these three were reformed, but nothing more specific than calling one a "thug" and another a "cannibal" is provided.<sup>430</sup> The stories have been excised, and this narrative simply tells that these evil-doers converted; nothing more is needed, as the panels show each of them submitting to the Guru's teachings.

The comic's summary (on the back cover and on ACK's website) says that Guru Nanak "laid down simple rules of conduct through which man could lead a humane and meaningful life and find his own fulfilment. Hindus and Muslims revered him alike. His life is an inspiring example of the practice of truth, love and humility."<sup>431</sup> The comic's narrative then elaborates on the basic tenets of Sikhism throughout, often presenting essential teachings as direct quotes from the Guru. As a child, Nanak suggests to his tiring playmates "[c]ome, let's sing the Name of God."<sup>432</sup> This is an obvious appeal to the

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<sup>429</sup> Mansukhani, Mansukhani, and Devender, *Guru Nanak*, 25.

<sup>430</sup> Nurshah's guilt can only be explained by association, unless one has more information to supplement to the narrative. It is generally understood, from numerous other tellings of this sakhi, that Nurshah and the women who ruled with her were witches who used their magic against Guru Nanak to no avail. For a presentation of this sakhi, as well as analysis of its manuscript origins, see K. Singh, *JTAS*, 120.

<sup>431</sup> Mansukhani, Mansukhani, and Devender, *Guru Nanak*, back cover. And Amar Chitra Katha, "Guru Nanak," accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.amarchitrakatha.com/ack/books/234-234-AmarChitraKatha-AMARCHITRAKATHA-Singles-VISIONARIES-GuruNanak>.

<sup>432</sup> Mansukhani, Mansukhani, and Devender, *Guru Nanak*, 4.



practice of kirtan, and is repeated throughout the comic in four other places.<sup>433</sup> Other statements of faith stand out in the comic as well. At Nanak's janeu ceremony, after the young Guru offers his critique, one of the other attendees speaks out, saying "[m]ere rituals mean nothing."<sup>434</sup> The Sacha Sauda story is summed up by the explanation the young Guru offers his father: "There is nothing more profitable than feeding the poor."<sup>435</sup> The major focus of the Guru's mission is revealed after his darśan experience, when he tells those amazed to see him after his disappearance that, "I have received a divine command to go out into the world and teach men the path of love and tolerance."<sup>436</sup> Guru Nanak shares that wisdom throughout his travels, telling those who gather to hear him to "[r]emember God and be honest and truthful," as well as during his elaborate explanations relayed in his encounters with Malik Bhāgo, the devotees at Hardwār, and with the conqueror, Babar.<sup>437</sup> The comic makes the teachings easy to understand, both by keeping the message simple and by depicting the Guru actually doing the things he is instructing. The "action" of the comic's images allows the narrative to be more easily understood as the illustration of the religious example that best finds expression in the person of Guru Nanak.

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 7, 23, 28, and 30.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 23-25, and 29.

Diamond Comic's *Sikh Gurus* [19 sakhis]

“On the joyous occasion of the Tercentenary (1999 A.D.) Birth anniversary of The KHALSA Warm Wishes and hearty Congratulations To The Whole Mankind.”<sup>438</sup> So reads the back cover of Diamond Comics’ *Sikh Gurus*, a comic book devoted to depicting the lives of all ten Sikh Gurus, with Guru Nanak receiving the most extensive treatment in this volume (32 pages).<sup>439</sup> This comic presents nineteen sakhis, eleven of which take place prior to Guru Nanak receiving his call and the remaining seven set after he begins teaching. The comic balances Guru Nanak’s confrontations with Hindu and Islamic practices by presenting three direct challenges to each: sakhis 5, 34, and 48 address Hindu rituals,<sup>440</sup> while sakhis 25, 79, and 122 challenge Islamic conceptions and practices.<sup>441</sup> Despite this balance in number of stories, the attention given to Guru Nanak’s “Discourse with the qāzī” right after emerging from the river is the lengthiest presentation of any sakhi in the comic, stretching across four pages. This detailed focus is understandable when viewed as the launching pad for Guru Nanak’s spiritual journey. The Guru’s explanation/ rebuttal of the qazi’s protests focuses on Guru Nanak’s message of honest devotion, saying, “He who doesn’t say his prayers in full devotion is only pretending to do that. One is neither a true Hindu nor a true Muslim who does not pray with full devotion.”<sup>442</sup> The next panel tells

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<sup>438</sup> Gulshan Rai, ed., *Sikh Gurus*, back cover.

<sup>439</sup> Twenty-six pages are devoted to Guru Gobind Singh, with the other Gurus ranging from eight pages (Guru Har Krishna, 118-126) to sixteen (Guru Hargobind, 90-106). *Ibid.*

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 25, and 29.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-24, 32-33, and 31.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

that Guru Nanak and Mardana set off on their journey, and the next panel then brings them to Hardwār, where Guru Nanak points out the fallacy of ritual without said devotion.<sup>443</sup> The rest of the Guru's life (in this narrative, this amounts to just five sakhis) is then presented over the course of the next six pages. All of this then sets the stage for the following chapters on the Guru's successors.

### New Media Expressions: Webpages

When a book is printed, there is a static, tangible object to be held and used. When a webpage is published, it is ethereal, open to editing and expansion.<sup>444</sup> It can include a variety of media forms: text, image, sound, and video. The development of Sikh websites on the internet marks a new stage of janam-sakhi presentation, one no longer bound by the same rules and restrictions of print media. Anyone with a computer can contribute to the materials to be found and discussed on the internet. They may develop a website, contribute to a wiki, or just participate via comments on a discussion board.

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>444</sup> These sites were located by using various search terms entered into Google. All of the websites and the videos noted in this section appeared in the top ten search results of one or more of the following search terms: Guru Nanak, Guru Nanak Dev ji stories, Guru Nanak life, and Guru Nanak life story. Searches for the janam-sakhis brought up analyses and academic works, not actual presentations of the sakhis. These sites and videos were first located by searches conducted in the fall of 2009, and the sakhi counts noted represent their content at that time. If changes to these websites have been made, adjusted counts will be noted. Many more sites have been created since the sakhi counts were first noted, and keeping a running total would be nearly impossible with the fluid nature of the internet, but the sites noted remain consistently at the top of Google's searches. This section, then, offers a snapshot of what was available over the last five years, with the most recent visits to these sites made in the summer of 2014 as this section of the dissertation was being composed.

The janam-sakhis presented via websites structure new relationships between content producers, texts (the website), and audiences. The distance separating these three is diminished as readers, or consumer-viewers, engage these sites as both users of the website and as interpreters of what they read there.<sup>445</sup> Content creators try to predict and then condition the users' interactions with their site by structuring the website in a manner that directs the reader through its pages. This is accomplished through hypertext links interspersed throughout the text and by providing pages determined sequential order, anticipating a reader's engagement and ensuing textual dialogue. However, skilled internet users can navigate sites in ways that do not necessarily follow the path prescribed by the content creator, and others may simply stumble upon pages through the happenstance of a lucky search engine hit. Therefore, the pedagogical focus of these sites hinges upon the attention of the reader engaging the totality of the content, or at least as much as they can. This puts additional pressure on page creators to be as precise and clear about their content as they can, as it may be viewed in a piecemeal fashion, not as a unified presentation.

Other key points to keep in mind as these websites are described is their availability to everyone with an internet connection around the world and the relative ease by which these sites are created. Ultimately, this opens the field of janam-sakhi presentations to many more voices than has ever been feasible, or even possible, before the advent of the

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<sup>445</sup> Sonia Livingstone discusses this at length in "The Changing Nature of Audiences: From Mass Audience to the Interactive Media User." She lays out a critique of media theories that do not hold up in light of the changes brought about by the new means of production, access, and interaction with digital media formats such as websites and discussion boards. Sonia Livingstone, "The Changing Nature of Audiences: From Mass Audience to the Interactive Media User," in *Companion to Media Studies*, A. Valdivia, ed., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 337-359.

World Wide Web. For these reasons, the internet sites represent a new and quite sizeable (in terms of potential audience) voice in the chorus of janam-sakhi presentations, despite the academic shortcomings presented by some of these websites.

*www.info-sikh.com* [28 sakhis]

The website *Sikh Information* bills itself as the “guide to Sikhism, its social and spiritual roots, its history, beliefs and philosophy.”<sup>446</sup> It offers detailed presentations of a wide range of topics related to Sikhism. Despite the website’s focus on Guru Gobind Singh,<sup>447</sup> it does offer three interesting lines of discussion about the life of Guru Nanak and the janam-sakhis. The first of these is the narrative presentation of the Guru’s life, six pages of dense text.<sup>448</sup> The second discussion links the places of note in those janam-sakhi stories to commemorative gurdwaras or markers at these spots today (primarily Pañjā Sāhib, the Baghdad inscription, and Lake Manasarovar in Tibet).<sup>449</sup> The third line of discussion is about the janam-sakhis themselves.<sup>450</sup> The site offers quick descriptions of

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<sup>446</sup> *Sikh Information*, accessed July 29, 2014, [www.info-sikh.com/index.html](http://www.info-sikh.com/index.html).

<sup>447</sup> Ibid. The first line of text on the website is “Guru Gobind Singh Ji was the Enlightener who dispelled delusion and brought awareness.” The central image on the page is a painting of Guru Gobind Singh. A section devoted to Guru Gobind Singh’s military prowess is placed in the center of the mainpage with a rejoinder: “Guru Gobind Singh Ji was first and foremost the spiritual leader of the Sikhs, but here we analyze Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s role as a brilliant military commander.”

<sup>448</sup> *Sikh Information*, “Siri Guru Nanak Dev Ji,” accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.info-sikh.com/PageNan1.html>.

<sup>449</sup> *Sikh Information*, “Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s third Udasi (journey),” accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.info-sikh.com/NNGPg1.html>.

*Sikh Information*, “Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s udasi to the west,” accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.info-sikh.com/BhagPage1.html>.

<sup>450</sup> *Sikh Information*, “Guru Nanak Dev Ji and the Jana-sakhi [*sic*] tradition,” accessed July 29, 2014,

the historical manuscript traditions, acknowledging only four (Puratan, Miharban, Bala, and Mani Singh's). So it is within a presentation of these historical sources and landmarks that the narrative of Guru Nanak's life is made.

The website presents eight sakhis prior to Nanak's commissioning as Guru and nineteen after he accepts his call. Six of the sakhis set during his travels tell of Guru Nanak's critiques of Hindu practices; as he calls out Brahmins, paṇḍits, and yogis alike. Three sakhis address Islamic teachings (25, 79, and 122), while two more narrate Guru Nanak's encounter with Bābur and his army. The website also makes use of a sakhi that presents Guru Nanak's encounter with a Jain (118 "Anabhī the Jain").<sup>451</sup> *Sikh Information* does make extensive use of selections from the Adi Granth to reinforce the anecdotes' presentation. Ten selections, noted in disjointed block quotes set off from the text columns, accompany sakhis 3, 5, 11, 22, 36, 48, 60, 71, 72, 84, and 118. Three of these selection are set prior to Nanak's darśan experience, one during it, and the remainder as accents to his convincing words to others he encountered on his travels.

*www.panthic.org* [1 sakhi]

Panthic.org sets out a goal "to provide accurate Panthic oriented news and analysis to our worldwide audience."<sup>452</sup> Primarily a contemporary news site, it does offer in-depth

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<http://www.info-sikh.com/JanamPage1.html>.

<sup>451</sup> Per McLeod's analyses (see McLeod, *GNSR*, 76), only the Puratan janam-sakhi and MacAuliffe's *The Sikh Religion* presented this meeting between Guru Nanak and the Jain. Only one modern source presents this sakhi—Kirpal Singh's *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study*. This leads one to wonder about the sources that the website's authors consulted in order to make their presentation.

<sup>452</sup> Panthic.org, "About," accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.panthic.org/about.php>.

pieces about Sikh history and tradition. That depth does not extend to an explication of Guru Nanak's life, however. A search of the site only uncovers one discussion of a sakhi in a piece titled, "The Story of the Real True Bargain- Sacha Sauda."<sup>453</sup> This article, more than any other text discussed, is an interpretation of the story, offering the story and a specific way to understand it side-by-side. The specific implications of the author's unique views on this sakhi will be discussed in the next chapter.

*www.realsikhism.com* [7 sakhis]

The website *Real Sikhism* is devoted to "to help people get close to God and attain salvation."<sup>454</sup> Though the site presents a view on the Sikh faith, its authors assert that, "[o]ur mission is not to convert people to Sikhism. We are simply displaying information about Sikhism and the people interested in joining the Sikh faith are welcome."<sup>455</sup> The site offers a section on "Sikh Stories," which includes links to different narratives about Guru Nanak's life and a few about other prominent Sikh figures. These are relatively simple presentations: a few paragraphs of text with an illustration or two. None of these narratives include the Guru's hymns or specific reference to the *Adi Granth*. Only the narratives set

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<sup>453</sup> Panthic.org, "The Story of the Real True Bargain- Sacha Sauda," posted December 18, 2005, accessed July 29, 2014, <http://www.panthic.org/articles/3309>.

<sup>454</sup> *Real Sikhism*, "Sikhism: About Us," accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.realsikhism.com/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1192339326&ucat=11>.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*

at Hardwār and Pañjā Sāhib lay out Guru Nanak's critiques of specific religious practices, and the others promote the Guru's social teachings about honest work and true devotion.

*www.sikh-history.com* [11 sakhis total]

This website first offers a biography of Guru Nanak and conveys very short narratives of three sakhis in its first five paragraphs before launching into a lengthy discourse on explaining the significance of the Guru's message.<sup>456</sup> The terseness of the biography's presentation may be indicative of the assurance on the part of the site's creator, Sandeep Singh Bajwa, that "This site is a serious effort on my part to understand the Sikh history from the available evidence. I have deliberately [*sic*] kept out the myths that have crept [*sic*] into Sikh society owing to other major communities that surrounds [*sic*] most of the Sikhs."<sup>457</sup> Bajwa's focus is on presenting the points of faith, which he lists as seven "chief features of his [Guru Nanak's] work"<sup>458</sup> that justify the Guru's travels and his need to engage the various religious communities in India at the time.

Another section of the website offers eleven sakhi narratives, each drawn from Santokh Singh Jagdev's *Bed Time Stories-2: Guru Nanak Dev Ji*. The narratives appear to have been simply copied from the Jagdev's text and his citations from the Adi Granth but this section does not include the illustrations that are featured in the book.

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<sup>456</sup> Sandeep Singh Bajwa, "Guru Nanak Dev ji (1469-1539)," *History of the Sikhs*, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://www.sikh-history.com/sikhhist/gurus/nanak1.html>.

<sup>457</sup> Bajwa., "Frequently Asked Questions about This site," *History of the Sikhs*, accessed July 31, 2104, <http://www.sikh-history.com/faq.html>.

<sup>458</sup> Bajwa, "Guru Nanak Dev ji (1469-1539)."



*www.sikhiwiki.org* [38 sakhis]

*SikhiWiki* touts itself as “A web based encyclopedia of the Sikh Way of Life written collaboratively by many of its readers.”<sup>459</sup> The website creates its presentation through the collaborative effort of countless contributors, with varying degrees of scholarly knowledge, stating that, “[w]e all have the experience of what it means to live as a Sikh. Now's the time to share our wisdom, insights and experiences with each other.”<sup>460</sup> The website offers a wide selection of sakhis and even has them collected into a text box that accompanies each sakhi to aid readers finding more narratives about Guru Nanak.

The wiki has a variety of individual pages devoted to specific sakhis, periods of Guru Nanak’s life to which sakhis are related, summaries of Guru Nanak’s travels that link sakhis together into a more coherent narrative, and even a section titled “Sakhis of Guru Nanak” that reprints The Sikh Missionary Society’s *Guru Nanak (For Children)* in its entirety.<sup>461</sup> One interesting aspect of the website’s collection of sakhis is the presentation of twelve sakhis that directly address Hindu practices or specific ascetic leaders and their followers, while six sakhis present Guru Nanak confronting Islamic practices and Muslim holy men. This is one of the few modern sources that so heavily emphasizes the critique of Hindu practices.

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<sup>459</sup> *SikhiWiki*, “SikhiWiki: About,” accessed, July 31, 2014, <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/SikhiWiki:About>.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>461</sup> *SikhiWiki*, “Sakhis of Guru Nanak,” accessed July 31, 2014, [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sakhis\\_of\\_Guru\\_Nanak](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sakhis_of_Guru_Nanak).

The specific presentations of these sakhis differ, as different authors have made input at different times. Pages will often include images of scenes from the sakhi or photos of places that commemorate the events in the narrative. Scriptural citations are common and often include links to the passages being quoted in the narrative. Many of these presentations include a “See also” category linking this sakhi to other relevant articles on *SikhiWiki*, and/ or a listing of “External links” directing readers to other websites that discuss this sakhi or the ideas presented by it. For example, the sakhi about Bhai Lālo includes links to articles about *seva* and langar, among others.<sup>462</sup>

*www.sikhlionz.com* [10 sakhis]

*Sikh Lionz* claims to be “The first Miri-Piri website” but offers no clear explanation of what that entails. The lone indication of the site’s emphasis on the temporal (*Miri*) and spiritual (*Piri*) authority is use of separate navigation tabs for these categories on the site that serve to organize its presentation of material.<sup>463</sup> The two categories are further distinguished by their association with the name of the site: the spiritual section that introduces the tradition, its gurus, practices, and stories is labeled the “sikhsection,”<sup>464</sup> while the temporal, “lionz,” section contains articles on Sikh history, martyrs, and current affairs, and is headlined by a section describing the “Sikh Holocaust” of the latter twentieth

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<sup>462</sup> *Sikhi Wiki*, “Bhai Lalo’s honesty,” accessed July 31, 2014, [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bhai\\_Lalo%27s\\_honesty](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bhai_Lalo%27s_honesty).

<sup>463</sup> *Sikh Lionz*, accessed July 31, 2014, <http://sikhlionz.com/>.

<sup>464</sup> *Sikh Lionz*, “Spiritual Section,” accessed July 31, 2014, <http://sikhlionz.com/sikhsection.htm>.

century which led up to Operation Blue Star and the ensuing difficulties.<sup>465</sup> By placing the discussion of “Sikh Stories” in the Spiritual tab, the site’s authors have, in a way, differentiated the sakhis’ spiritual function from their view as histories of the Guru. It is not surprising, then, that the website only presents sakhis set after Guru Nanak’s call, which demonstrates his spiritual mission to the world around him.

*www.sikhnet.com* [15/5 sakhis]

“SikhNet Stories for Children” offers multi-media presentations of over one hundred stories from Sikh history and assorted morality tales.<sup>466</sup> Each narrative is given its own webpage containing the text, an illustration from the sakhi, and an audio recording of the sakhi. The audio content is available to stream directly through a web browser and also as an mp3 file that can be downloaded to a personal media player and played anytime and anywhere. The illustrations presented with these sakhis also have a downloadable component. On the webpage, the illustration is presented in full color, but a black line drawing of the same image is presented so parents can print it out for their children to color. These added elements highlight the new ways audiences can engage materials via the

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<sup>465</sup> The Indian military’s Operation Blue Star laid siege to the Sri Darbar Sahib complex (the Golden Temple) June 3-5, 1984 in order to root out Sikh dissidents who had taken refuge there. The attack on the holy precincts spurred a Sikh response that culminated with the murder of the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, by one of her Sikh bodyguards in October 1984. This further fueled a cycle of violence that spread touching off sporadic and spontaneous riots and violence directed at Sikhs which continued into the early 1990s. *Sikh Lionz*, “Temporal Section,” accessed July 31, 2014, <http://sikhlionz.com/lionzsection1.htm>.

<sup>466</sup> *SikhNet*, “SikhNet Stories for Children,” accessed July 31, 2014, <https://www.sikhnet.com/stories>.

The two numbers listed as part of the sakhi count indicate that, at the time of the initial recording, November 2009, fifteen sakhis were available on the website. Five more sakhis have been added to the site since then. These later additions are noted in italics in the Appendix listing.

internet. SikhNet has brought together a variety of media modes to help audiences engage these narratives in more ways than just reading it; the stories are now to be heard and something young children can help create by telling the story about the picture they colored.

The site presents six sakhis set prior to Guru Nanak's call, thirteen discussing his travels, and one to introduce his successor, Lahiṇā. Two sakhis present direct challenges to Muslims (25 and 122), while four address Guru Nanak's contentions with traditional Hindu practices (5, 34, 48, and 72). The presentation of sakhi 48 "Jagannāth Purī" is a bit odd, as it is not set in the celebration of the Hindu festival to Vishnu, but the way by which Guru Nanak outwits the prideful ascetic is the same as the more conventional tellings of this sakhi.<sup>467</sup> The other sakhis presented on the website do not vary their presentation to this degree and are far more recognizable to audiences who have read more than one or two janam-sakhi sources.

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<sup>467</sup> The more common formulation of sakhi 48 "Jagannāth Purī" is presented on page 129 of Harbans Singh's *Guru Nanak and Origins of Sikh Faith* or at *SikhiWiki.com*, "Guru Nanak Dev and Kaljug Pandit," accessed July 31, 2014, [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Guru\\_Nanak\\_Dev\\_And\\_Kaljug\\_Pandit](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Guru_Nanak_Dev_And_Kaljug_Pandit). In these narratives, a yogi claims to see all of creation, but could not see that the Guru, sitting behind him, had moved the yogi's donation bowl. The website's version tells of a yogi who disparaged the travelling Guru and sought to show off his great powers. Using a flying carpet he flew to meet the Guru, but the yogi could not see the Guru sitting in front of him, while the crowd that had gathered could. Then the yogi tried to fly away, but "None of his tricks worked and he had to walk back on foot carrying his carpet under his arm." The yogi returns despondent and confused as to why he could not see Guru Nanak. The Guru later reveals himself and says that the yogi's pride had blinded him. The gist of the Guru's critique of the yogis in each case is the same, but the manner by which the yogi acts and the Guru responds is different.

*www.sikhs.org* [12 sakhis]

Launched in December 1994, Sikhs.org claims to be the “Worlds [*sic*] First Sikh Website.” The site’s goal is to present Sikh teachings and history “while respectfully remaining within the parameters of The Sikh Rehat Maryada which is The Official Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions.”<sup>468</sup> The site presents a biography of Guru Nanak under its “Origins & Development” section. The biography is relatively short, about five printed pages, yet it manages to include brief accounts of twelve sakhis. For example, young Nanak’s rejection of the janeu is presented in two sentences and is accompanied by a stanza from the Adi Granth:

At age 13 it was time for Guru Nanak to be invested with the sacred thread according to the traditional Hindu custom. At the ceremony which was attended by family and friends and to the disappointment of his family Guru Nanak refused to accept the sacred cotton thread from the Hindu priest. He sang the following poem;

"Let mercy be the cotton, contentment the thread, Continnence the knot and truth the twist. O priest! If you have such a thread, Do give it to me. It'll not wear out, nor get soiled, nor burnt, nor lost. Says Nanak, blessed are those who go about wearing such a thread" (Rag Asa).<sup>469</sup>

This anecdote is woven into the larger life-story of Guru Nanak. Similarly, other anecdotes are presented in such shortened forms. The narrative of Bhai Lālo is conveyed in just six lines of text. The emphasis of this biographical presentation is to show how the events of Guru Nanak’s life conveyed his teachings, which are then elaborated and interpreted in other sections of the website.

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<sup>468</sup> *Sikhs.org*, “About Sikhs.org,” accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.sikhs.org/about.html>.

<sup>469</sup> *Sikhs.org*, “The First Master Guru Nanak (1469-1539),” accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.sikhs.org/guru1.htm>.

### New Media Expressions: Video

The last three presentations to be discussed in this section are video productions, which tell the Guru's life story through a new medium. Videos about Guru Nanak represent an entirely different type of interaction with the life model as presented in the video's narrative. Watching a video is a receptive act centered on taking in the images on the screen and hearing the words of the script. This is unlike any of the other media forms discussed in this chapter that require a more active reader to engage a text or website.

Watching a video does not involve the audience (both children and adults) in the same ways that that the schoolbooks or children's books do. However, videos do offer a multi-sensory experience accentuated by seeing and hearing the narrative being performed. This further highlights the potential for direct speech, as the narrators and characters in the video can "break the fourth wall" and speak directly to the audience in ways unavailable in textual sources.

#### Animated World Faiths' *The Life of Guru Nanak* [7 sakhis]

"The Life of Guru Nanak" is a stop-motion animation production from Studio Jiřího Trnky directed by Zenni Yukishige, with a screenplay by Sally Humble-Jackson.<sup>470</sup> This presentation of Guru Nanak's life uses the sakhi of his death as a framing device, allowing Bhai Mardana to reflect upon the Guru's life as a means of entering the story through his

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<sup>470</sup> Sally Humble-Jackson, "The Life of Guru Nanak," *Animated Word Faiths*, directed by Zenni Yukishige, (Prague: Studio Jiřího Trnky, 1997; Woodland Hills, CA: Entertainment Programs, 2002), DVD. The video was also posted to Youtube.com: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JavKCE2FAf0>.

recollections.<sup>471</sup> Bhai Mardana's narrative highlights just seven sakhis over the course of the fifteen minute short. A lot of attention is given to Guru Nanak's youth, as nearly half of the video leads up to his darśan experience. After emerging from the river, and proclaiming that there is neither Hindu nor Muslim, Guru Nanak says, "I shall follow God's path," and the narrator's voice over says, "So Nanak followed God's path from India to Arabia to Persia," as the image fades to a map of South Asia, with the dotted trail of Guru Nanak's travels marked out to all these places. Immediately following this is the narrative of Bhai Lālo, which incorporates a key teaching from sakhi 114 "Dunī Chand's flags," as Guru Nanak admonishes Malik Bhāgo's exploitation of others' labors and says, "You can't take your money with you, but you can take your good deeds. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the poor."

The kind and compassionate nature of Guru Nanak's teachings is then contrasted to the cruelty of Babur's invasion. The Guru chides the conqueror, who falls to his knees weeping and is said to have released a thousand prisoners after asking the Guru to have mercy on him, to which Guru Nanak responded, "Then show us [mercy]." Guru Nanak's request for Babur's faithful action, reflects his own desire to show his teachings more than just saying them and leads to the founding of the village Kartarpur, where the Guru's message is lived by the community that follows him.

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<sup>471</sup> This is an odd choice of voices to utilize, as Bhai Mardana is generally understood as having died prior to Guru Nanak.

BBC Learning Video's "The beginnings of Sikhism" [2 sakhis]

Class Clip 4822 in the BBC's Learning Zone website is a short video titled "The beginnings of Sikhism," introducing the major tenets of Sikhism by way of showing children practicing *kirtan* and a couple of animated sakhis.<sup>472</sup> The BBC's website describes the video as an "Explanation by Sikh children about what Sikhs believe, followed by cartoon-style story about Guru Nanak. It covers the beginning of Sikhism and the commandments that were handed down."<sup>473</sup> That is a bit of a stretch, as the *Mul Mantar* is sung, but that explanation of it is limited to simply translating the expression *Ik Oankar* as meaning "there is only one God."<sup>474</sup> The two sakhis presented highlight Guru Nanak's divine connections (his protection and his call) and serve to establish his role as Guru for the Sikh community. After the sakhis are presented, the video returns to the children, who lay out major tenets of the faith through a series of statements, all beginning with "Guru Nanak said..." While this effectively ties the teachings to the Guru, it does little to explicate their connections to the sakhis presented in the video.

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<sup>472</sup> BBC, "The beginnings of Sikhism," Learning Zone Class Clip 4822, posted May 21, 2007, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/the-beginnings-of-sikhism/4822.html>. The video itself is now region-locked and is no longer playable in the United States. I last viewed the video in early 2010. My thanks to Richard Irvine, a colleague at Cambridge University, for helping to verify that the content is still active in the UK as of August 5, 2014.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.



Geethanjali's *Story of Guru Nanak* [21 sakhis]

This DVD presents a simple, if not crude, animated telling of Guru Nanak's life.<sup>475</sup> The sixty minute video presents nine sakhis set before Guru Nanak received his call, nine set during his teaching travels, and two set in Kartarpur that introduce Bhai Lehna and set him up as Guru Nanak's successor. The animation is two-dimensional, with no real attempt at color variance or shading, and the scripted dialogue and narration are as stilted and flat as the images on the screen.

The short-comings of this presentation are worth noting, as the *Story of Guru Nanak* is no longer listed among the titles available on Geethanjali's website.<sup>476</sup> But the low quality of the piece itself may not have been the only factor contributing to its removal. The narrative presented in this DVD makes a few changes to the conventional tellings of a few sakhis that are quite disruptive when compared with the other presentations considered in this study.

The first change made from the conventional tellings of these sakhis alters the basic timeline of Guru Nanak's life. This DVD presents Guru Nanak's janeu ceremony (sakhi 5) after the Sacha Sauda story (sakhi 16). This is quite odd, as the janeu ceremony is typically the transition into adulthood that would then precipitate Guru Nanak's father

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<sup>475</sup> Neraimathi D., *Story of Guru Nanak*, directed by A. A. Pillai (Chennai: Super Audio (Madras) Pvt, Ltd., 2008), DVD.

<sup>476</sup> Geethanjali, "Video>Animation," accessed August 10, 2014, [http://www.musicandchants.com/animation-c-12\\_16.html?page=1&sort=1a&view=list](http://www.musicandchants.com/animation-c-12_16.html?page=1&sort=1a&view=list).

I first found this video through YouTube.com, but that link is now dead. I was later able to obtain a copy of the DVD via an independent retailer selling through Amazon.com.

sending him off to make a profit in his first real job as an adult. More shockingly, the DVD depicts young Nanak as having his full beard during the janeu ceremony, a fact that would move this event into a much later part of his life than the pre-teen years in which this story is typically set (as is the tradition).

The second of these changes was made to Guru Nanak's travelling companion, Mardana. The narrative in this DVD says that Bhai Mardana was a Sufi. That is a major change from the traditional understanding of Bhai Mardānā, which is that he was the son of a Muslim Mirāsī, "a caste of hereditary minstrels and genealogists,"<sup>477</sup> who chose to join Guru Nanak in his travels and accompany the Guru's hymns by playing his rebeck. Saying Mardana was a Sufi entails a much more explicit religious heritage than just being a Muslim minstrel does. Had Mardana been a Sufi, he would have been part of an order, such as the Chistis and, as was the practice in those times, would probably have lived at or near his pir's *khanqah* (complex). Since it was common for khanqahs to include, not only a mosque, but also residences for disciples and their families, as well as a "kitchen, hospice for visitors, and school,"<sup>478</sup> it would have been unlikely that Bhai Mardana would set off to join Guru Nanak in his travels, as, by being a Sufi, he would have been quite invested in the devotional practices of his order and in being a student to his pir.

The third disruption occurs in the latter part of Guru Nanak's life when the DVD's narrative combines the lives of two significant Sikh figures, Bhai Buddha and Bhai Lehna (Guru Anḡad), into one. Chapter eleven of the DVD, "Guru Nanak's successor,"

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<sup>477</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, s.v. "Mardānā, Bhāi."

<sup>478</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 105.

introduces a young boy concerned with escaping the cycle of lives. This child, Buddha, approaches the Guru, and pledges himself to the Guru's cause, because he knew the Guru was "capable of setting [him] free from it."<sup>479</sup> The Guru recognized the child's devotion, and, the DVD tells, "That day Buddha became Bhai Lehna, an ardent disciple of Guru Nanak."<sup>480</sup> This telling completely discounts the facts of Bhai Buddha's life, as well as those of Bhai Lehna's early days.<sup>481</sup> These drastic changes to the conventional forms of these sakhis, combined with the aforementioned sub-standard production values, may certainly have been factors that led to the DVD's removal from Geethanjali's catalog, but the specific reasons will probably remain with company executives. Regardless, this video production is on the market and marks another presentation of the janam-sakhis to audiences, albeit an assuredly sub-standard one.

### **Today's Janam-Sakhis**

The janam-sakhi iterations described throughout this chapter reflect the most recent stage of janam-sakhi development—profusion. These narratives represent the numerous ways authors have sought to present and convey the story of Guru Nanak to a wider audience than has ever been possible before today. When people go into a bookstore or

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<sup>479</sup> Neraimathi D., "Guru Nanak's successor," *Story of Guru Nanak*.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> As the DVD relates, Bhai Buddha (1506-1631) was a young convert to Guru Nanak's message. What the DVD fails to mention, considering that it merges Bhai Buddha's life with Bhai Lehna, is that Bhai Buddha was a prominent Sikh who lived at Kartarpur with Guru Nanak, and continued to serve the Gurus until his death. He participated in the installations of Guru Aṅgad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, and Guru Arjan, anointing each during their respective ceremonies. Bhai Buddha was appointed by Guru Arjan to oversee the instruction of his son, Hargobind. He, along with Bhai Gurdas, was later commissioned by his former student to construct the *Akāl Takht* (The Throne of the Timeless). *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, s.v. "Buddhā, Bābā."

online to look for the story of Guru Nanak, they will find the materials described throughout this chapter, or something very similar, as new material continues to be produced. All of these build from the old manuscript traditions of the janam-sakhis or derivative texts, but these have taken new approaches to telling the story of Guru Nanak that suit their own ends and reach audiences via a variety of media. All of these are meant to inform readers about the life of Guru Nanak and guide those readers toward the moral and spiritual goals he set forth.

The point that remains to be reaffirmed is why these new iterations are necessary. The texts, websites, and videos discussed in this chapter represent the furthest reach of the janam-sakhis' influence—to audiences whose horizons extend well beyond the Punjab. These are international, cross cultural, and even multi-cultural presentations of Guru Nanak's life that are meant to convey his life and teachings in ways that the earliest janam-sakhi compilers could never have dreamed possible. With these, the janam-sakhis are available to anyone anywhere in the world. Texts can be ordered online. The websites and videos can be viewed on computers, televisions, and phones—access to the janam-sakhis is unparalleled. At no other time in their history have these stories been so readily available to so many.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> A search made September 1, 2014 via Google India ([www.google.co.in](http://www.google.co.in)) of the term janam-sakhis yielded 9960 results, while using the Punjabi interface and the Punjabi search term (ਜਨਮਸਾਖੀ) only yielded 1720 results. That is less than a fifth of the results available in English. This could be reflective of a need or desire to discuss the janam-sakhis in settings outside of the Punjabi sphere of cultural influence. What need is there to present these stories in a region so saturated by their presence and influence? Sikhs in the diaspora may feel more inclined to create such materials in order to reaffirm connections to the janam-sakhis or as educational aids for others in their community.

The Punjabi source material (the historical manuscripts) is not easily accessible to Sikhs today for reasons ranging from the lack of mass produced editions readily available to audiences worldwide to the need for materials in languages other than Punjabi. Yet access to the sakhis is only one aspect of the growing importance of these new janam-sakhi iterations. These materials aid those who do not have full recall of the traditions in which they were raised. It is easy to forget that religious devotion is itself a spectrum of knowledge and action; some adherents possess or recall more knowledge about their tradition than others. It is doubtful that every Sikh remembers the full story of Guru Nanak's life, and some need help to recall his life in detail. The preponderance of materials discussed in this chapter confirms such needs. Taking market factors into consideration further supports this claim, as major publishers would only produce and reprint such materials as long as they remain profitable. The fact that many of the texts discussed here have been reprinted numerous times can be seen as confirmation of this. Unwanted books do not get published in the first place or reprinted later. There is clearly demand for these materials well beyond the minute scholarly community that studies modern janam-sakhis.

The final two chapters demonstrate how the presentations of these modern janam-sakhis continue to serve the Sikh community by connecting them to the life of Guru Nanak, his teachings, and the traditions of the community itself. These next chapters lay out how these proposed relationships are constructed and conditioned by the specific presentation of janam-sakhi narratives as foci for the interpretation of Sikh doctrine, history, and, ultimately, Sikh identity.

## 5. The Participatory Function of the Janam-sakhis

The janam-sakhi presentations described in the previous chapter share a common purpose. They are meant to give meaning to and inspire moral and social action as depicted in these narratives. They are inherently religious narratives, prescribing a path of moral devotion as well inspiring as a course of action in accordance with those principles. Action is meant to follow the instruction received from these stories. Stories about the lives of religious founders/ leaders are especially effective at this dual function of instruction and impetus to action, or, in keeping with the terminology employed throughout this study, pedagogy and participation.

Stories about the founders are required to do a few things more explicitly than stories about other religious figures. Most importantly, these stories must provide a clear elaboration of what the new teachings are, as they are literally the foundation upon which the new tradition is built. This often involves presentations of how the founding figure “actually” went about living in accordance with these new teachings and how they were spread to others who eventually followed suit in participating in the new religious tradition (pedagogical program). Guru Nanak is the exemplary Sikh; he set the course and is, therefore, the primary reference for believers who wish to follow the tradition. Guru Nanak’s message of devotion, charity and purity is taught through the janam-sakhi literature<sup>483</sup> and is intended to be received, understood, and then lived by the reader. This

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<sup>483</sup> This author is not making that claim that the janam-sakhis are the sole source for this instruction, only that the modern janam-sakhis have a distinct focus toward audiences in a manner unlike the scriptural passages of the Adi Granth. Thus, these stories serve as part of a larger program of instruction in the Sikh tradition. The janam-sakhis, in whatever form they take, play a crucial role in this instruction.

is a specifically instructive relationship conceived of by, and practiced through, the janam-sakhi literature. This chapter examines the processes of pedagogy and participation operating directly through janam-sakhi presentations, and demonstrates the variety of contributing factors (functions) that play into the construction of a religious identity by way of the pedagogical and participatory program of the janam-sakhis' structuring of specific relationships within the community and with its founder, Guru Nanak.

Discussions about the function of the janam-sakhis emerged early in the field of Sikh Studies, and this study begins by addressing those before moving to broader concerns of participation in general and the privileged relationship the Sikh community has with its own social narratives. Conversely, it is necessary to account for how these narratives and, ultimately, this privileged relationship are produced. Attention must be given to the processes of production that formulate and condition how these relationships are conceived and sustained through these narratives. All of these elements, when put together, provide the foundations for a commonly used, but often poorly supported, theory about the scriptural relationship structuring the interactions between a text, a community, and its understanding of the transcendent divine to which it is devoted. With this all in place, it is possible to see how the notion of Sikhs' community identity is actually the expression of cooperative adherence to Guru Nanak's message and goals, necessitating relationships with the Guru directly and with the larger faithful community as well.

## Sustaining a Community of Learners

ਸਿਖਣਾ *sikhna*, the Punjabi verb meaning “to learn”

Sikhs are literally “the learners.” They follow the spiritual instruction of the lineage of the ten Gurus. Stories about Guru Nanak’s life, recorded and re-presented in the *janam-sakhis*, play a very important role in this learning process.

Religious narratives are meant to give meaning to moral and social action that is then incorporated into people’s lives. Narratives about the lives of religious figures provide an example for their communities. All such stories have staying power because they work through communities—guiding and molding them over generations.

It is important to examine how these stories fostered lasting devotional relationships. How an audience learns from and uses the life model presented in the *janam-sakhis* is at the heart of the relationship created here. The construction and conditioning of this relationship is the pedagogical goal of the *janam-sakhis* and the theme of this chapter. Each iteration of the *janam-sakhis* presents its pedagogical focus differently through its distinct narrative. Each engages readers in its own way, stressing certain points over others and steering audiences to specific understandings or interpretations of Guru Nanak’s life.

These narratives are, in the parlance of the academy, discourses, and those who utilize them are members of discursive communities. The grand pedagogical project of the *janam-sakhis* is discourse about Guru Nanak and what he means to and for Sikhs. However, each *janam-sakhi* narrative presents its own agenda. Michel Foucault was one of the first to present an ‘inter-discursive’ model which sought to account for the varied ways people engage such conversations. He considers how these discourses seek to engage



social structures and power relations within them, but Foucault is only concerned with their forms and structures. He seeks a neutral ground between discourses where the speakers (and the content of their speech) falls to the wayside and only the power structures of the discourse remain.<sup>484</sup> Paul Ricouer is strident in his criticisms of this focus, as he says Foucault's approach "is not hermeneutic of intentions and motivations, only a listing of specific forms of articulation."<sup>485</sup> Foucault seems to be oblivious to the content of these discourses. This is an oversight that cannot be tolerated in a discussion of social narratives, life model writings, and the janam-sakhis. To dismiss the contents, in essence the doctrines and motivations for action, is to neuter these narratives of their social value and the entire reason for participating in their projects—the reason for any power behind these narratives. It is the contents that the community holds dear, so a better course of action for discussing the discourses involved in the production, interpretation, and study of the social narratives, like the janam-sakhis, is needed, and it must account for the variety of the discourses involved. This chapter examines the interplay of these various discourses about Guru Nanak and relate those to the history and actions of the Sikhs that adhere to or follow from them.

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<sup>484</sup> This critique is leveled in Hayden White, *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 35.

<sup>485</sup> Paul Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 201.

### Learning about Guru Nanak and his Message

The janam-sakhis construct and nourish the relationship with Guru Nanak and his moral tradition in a variety of ways.<sup>486</sup> The implications of the janam-sakhis' pedagogical project are too often overlooked. The janam-sakhis are the source for the life-story of Guru Nanak. They provide a glimpse of who the Guru was (or at least was thought to be) by showing him in action. Guru Nanak's hymns, as recorded in the *Adi Granth*, give no record of their origin or their application. No clues are provided as to what the Guru was like on a regular basis. The hymns are simply his devotional lyrics, not a record of his devotional acts—that is to be found in a few select sources, and the janam-sakhis are the most prominent and popular of those!

Sikhs, since the early days of janam-sakhi composition, have engaged with a vision of Guru Nanak presented in these narratives. While rooted in the history of the tradition, it is primarily a vision of faith—one that challenges modern notions of history and crosses into myth. Such distinctions matter little in a worldview where the miraculous can and often does happen. Guru Nanak's story of devotion is ripe with the fantastic because the relationship he shared with the divine, for whom he was a messenger, was fantastic as well. His life, as reported in these narratives, was supernatural and transcendent from the beginning. Most religious figures' lives are. That seems to be a requirement of religious life—a connection and relationship to something else that is beyond the scope of the normally perceived world. Some call it *Akal Purakh*, *Ik Oankar*, the divine, etcetera. The

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<sup>486</sup> Chapter Three discussed these in a broad sense—ranging from histories of the Sikh Panth or historical depictions of Guru Nanak, to life model writings' more interpretative foci, and the use of janam-sakhis in homilies. Each approach operates differently, but each also serves to introduce the message of Guru Nanak to the reader or audience.

faith of Guru Nanak in his relationship with *Akal Purakh* stirred him (at the behest of *Akal Purakh*)<sup>487</sup> to share this message and to help others foster the same relationship with the transcendent divine to whom his hymns are devoted. Each sakhi gives a setting and context to this vision of Guru Nanak's message that can be used and applied in other situations. Sikhs are those embracing this message, learning, and living analogously to Guru Nanak.

When W. H. McLeod tried to classify this vision of Guru Nanak in terms of cleaving the Guru Nanak of history from the "Nanak of both legend and faith," it caused quite a stir.<sup>488</sup> Faithful Sikhs vociferously decried the appellations "legend" and "myth," seeing them narrowly as pejorative. They construed McLeod as belittling the value of Guru Nanak's life and being dismissive of the value reported by and through the janam-sakhis' stories of their tradition's founder. While this was not McLeod's intention, as he addressed the janam-sakhis' value in numerous works, his use of the term "legend," as valuable as it was to the discussion, was hindered by his positivist inclinations. McLeod, as a strict historian, did not (could not?) take a more open approach to embrace the religious implications and understandings of myth as a viable and necessary component of a faith tradition.

It is to this vision of faith, or life model in the parlance of this examination, that attention now turns. The specific goals of the varied janam-sakhi presentations need to be considered as well as the evidenced results of those endeavors. This is an ongoing process

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<sup>487</sup> See the discussion of sakhi #22 "Immersion in the river: his call" in Chapter One.

<sup>488</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 6. The scholarly responses to McLeod's work were discussed in Chapter Three. The non-scholarly responses do not warrant a review, for they are polemics decrying an apparent colonial denial of Sikh agency and validity. None sought to engage McLeod on the grounds of his evidence and analysis.

of pedagogy and participation that has demonstrated many successes (continuing Sikh tradition as well as the sustained production of the janam-sakhis) along its trajectory, while trying to further these goals at each instance of success, too. Many of the janam-sakhis presented in Chapter Four provide simplistic images of Guru Nanak because they are directed toward very young audiences. Some others offer more nuanced and elucidated presentations that clearly elaborate upon how this image is structured and what an audience should take from the reading. As this is a specifically theological project, it warrants further discussion of janam-sakhi presentations which stand out for their forthrightness in this manner—making clear the point of the image of faith (life model) they present. Harbans Singh’s *Guru Nanak and Origins of Sikh Faith* stands out here, as does Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh’s essay, “The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsakhis and Sikh Tradition.”<sup>489</sup> Each of these presentations seeks to demonstrate how the life of Guru Nanak matters to understanding the scope of his teachings. The stories of the janam-sakhis are necessary components of the theological project of Sikhism. This represents a shift from the discussion of the janam-sakhis’ treatment as homilies in Chapter Three to the direct use of the janam-sakhis as homilies.

Whereas the previous discussion related to a scholarly view of the janam-sakhis (an external hermeneutic scheme) it is now imperative to examine a similar, if not parallel, internal hermeneutic scheme—the interpretation of the faithful that works to directly

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<sup>489</sup> The strong connections evidenced by these projects indicate far more than just the lasting traditions of the janam-sakhis’ pedagogical project. As these two authors are father and daughter, it can also be seen to show how general views, if not specific ones, about the janam-sakhis and their role in Sikh traditions are passed on through family ties.

convey the spiritual teachings of Guru Nanak through the stories. This shifts attention back to the specific narrative constructions and presentations that work to convey this life model of Guru Nanak to readers. Harbans Singh was keen to point out this operation in the historical janam-sakhis, saying that “The significance of the Janamsakhis in capturing the image of Guru Nanak and mediating it to succeeding generations is evident.”<sup>490</sup> It is understandable that Harbans Singh would be hesitant to ascribe a similar significance to his own work, but when viewed as a part of the continuing janam-sakhi project, it is hard to say that *Guru Nanak and Origins of the Sikh Faith* does not operate with the same goal in mind and succeeds in reaching that goal in its own way.

It is helpful to identify how each Harbans Singh and Nikki Singh sought to convey the image of Guru Nanak through their presentations. Each of them focuses on a key facet of the janam-sakhis to direct the audience to a specific, if not new, understanding of Guru Nanak and his teachings. Harbans Singh focused on Guru Nanak’s integration of individual devotion and social concerns, saying that “Guru Nanak’s teaching took in man as a whole and sought in his improvement the advancement of society in general.”<sup>491</sup> While Nikki Singh focuses her treatment on the religious action of darśan that serves to connect Guru Nanak with Ultimate Reality, expressed as *Ik Oankar*, and then extend this experience of darśan to an audience learning about the Guru’s experience. These two premises structure the entirety of the presentations made by Harbans Singh and Nikki Singh. It is possible to see in each how the lessons conveyed allow the audience to share in the goals

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<sup>490</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 19-20.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

of those lessons. These projects are further indication of the participatory nature of the janam-sakhi tradition and set up discussions about participation in social narratives and the special relationship a community has with these, which constitute the latter portions of this chapter.

Harbans Singh's treatment of Guru Nanak, the vision of faith or life model he presents, is properly set within a well-informed historical milieu—rife with ferment and conflict between the “culture-forms” of Hinduism and Islam.<sup>492</sup> Yet Guru Nanak and his teachings are not confined by these contexts. The Guru embraces these situations and finds a way past to overcome the challenge they present. Harbans Singh focuses attention on the connections between personal devotion and social betterment in Guru Nanak's message. Harbans Singh asserts that “[Guru Nanak] evoked from the situation then prevailing a new way of humane and meaningful living and made it the medium of bringing into the world of intimations fresh and holy.”<sup>493</sup> The sakhis convey how Guru Nanak translated spiritual teachings into social practices that served a community that encompassed both Hindus and Muslims.

By making this presentation in English, Harbans Singh engages a broader community and shows that the lessons of Guru Nanak remain applicable. Harbans Singh emphasizes the janam-sakhis' (and, covertly, his) presentation of “a living and intensely realized ideal of faith and spiritual deliverance and of human equality and justice.”<sup>494</sup> The

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 57.

sakhis lay out understandings of “existential reality and the principles of belief and of moral and magnanimous action. In this lay the seed of a vital religious and social revolution.”<sup>495</sup>

The continuing project of the janam-sakhis embraces this tacit acknowledgement of the need for further revolution, a renewal of the Guru’s teachings to right the social order in the ways only the Guru can guide one to.

The Sikh mission is the continuation of the work Guru Nanak started. The sakhis are the lesson plans, setting clear procedures and explanations for the tasks that lay ahead on this spiritual path. Through telling of young Nanak’s work as the commissariat of Daulat Khan, Harbans Singh describes the Guru’s *modus operandi* by reference to one of his verses, “the secret of religion lay in living in the world without being overcome by it.”<sup>496</sup> Harbans Singh follows this with a depiction of Guru Nanak’s life where he navigates through the worldly concerns of those around him by way of his spiritual insights.

This course had been previously established by stories about young Nanak’s spiritual proclivities outmatching those of his teachers (both Hindu and Muslim) and his rejection of the *janeu* thread. Nanak’s mission, as Guru, came to fruition during his experience of *darśan*, during which he is given his commission as the representative of the divine presence into which he was elevated. Guru Nanak is reported to have burst into a “song of praise,” a hymn recorded in the *Adi Granth* and included in the telling of this

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<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. Harbans Singh does not provide the scriptural citation for this line.

sakhi related in Chapter One.<sup>497</sup> Then, according to Harbans Singh's account of this sakhi, the conversation continues between the divine and its selected voice to the people:

Thereupon, the Voice spoke; "Nanak, thou discerneth My will." Nanak recited what became the preamble of the first Sikh prayer, the *Japuji*, which constituted the core of his doctrine. It read:

There is but one God. He is all that is.  
He is the Creator of all things and He is all-pervasive.  
He is without fear and without enmity.  
He is Timeless, unborn and self-existent.  
He is the Enlightener  
And can be realized by his grace alone.  
He was in the beginning; He was in all ages.  
The True One is, was, O Nanak, and shall forever be.

The Voice was heard again: "Who is just in thine eyes, Nanak, shall be so in Mine. He who receiveth they grace shall abide in Mine. My name is Supreme Lord; thy name is divine Guru."<sup>498</sup>

By connecting the first Sikh prayer, *Japuji*,<sup>499</sup> with the transitive property of grace through the Guru, Harbans Singh has clearly established the teacher, Guru Nanak, as the means to spiritual liberation, thus giving a clear impetus for an audience to follow the life model of the Guru himself. What unfolds through the rest of the sakhis he presents outlines how the audience is meant to understand and follow the example of Guru Nanak "living in the world without being overcome by it."<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Adi Granth, 14. Nikki Singh's version of this sakhi, which is provided in full in Chapter One, cites Harbans Singh's translation from *Guru Nanak and Origins of Sikh Faith*, 96.

<sup>498</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 96-97, citing the Puratan janam-sakhi.

<sup>499</sup> *Japuji* is the opening composition of the Adi Granth, and is recited daily as part of a Sikh's morning prayers. The whole composition of *Japuji* is much longer than the portion quoted here, which is generally referred to as the *Mūl Mantra*. This "basic statement of creed" outlines or introduces the Sikh conception of the Transcendent Divine, expressed as *Ik Oankar* in the first line of the *Mūl Mantra*. *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, s.v. "Japu."

<sup>500</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 90.



Guru Nanak had emerged from the river after a three day disappearance. He spent the first day in reflective silence. On the next day, he proclaimed, “There is no Hindu and there is no Musalman,” asserting his focus on true path which encompassed both communities and all of humanity. It is not surprising that the next sakhi to follow Nanak’s disappearance in the river and his commission as Guru, rebukes a challenge to the Guru’s assertion that “There is no Hindu and there is no Musalman.”

#### 25. Discourse with the qāzī

Those of the ruling race were specially cross that anyone should equate Hindus with Muslims or say that there existed no Musalman. Accusations were laid before Nawab Daulat Khan, but he dismissed these and made the remark that Guru Nanak was a faqir whose words they did not easily understand. The Qazi, expounder of the Muslim law, who was present, supported the complaints and urged the Nawab to summon Guru Nanak. When he came with the footmen who were sent to bring him, the Nawab showed his affection by offering him his homage and seating him at his side.

It was now the time for the Muslim afternoon prayer. All arose and went to the mosque. The Guru also accompanied them. As the Qazi conducted the service, the Guru remained standing and did not kneel. This gave the Qazi ground for further complaint and he spoke to the Nawab, “Thou has seen thyself, Khan, that he did not join the prayer, although he proclaims that there is no difference between the Muslims and the Hindus.” “What prayer was I expected to join?” asked the Guru. “The Qazi’s own heart was not in the words he was repeating. His mind constantly wandered to his new-born foal which he had loosened in his yard before coming to the mosque. He remembered that there was a well in the enclosure and feared lest the foal should fall into it.”

The Qazi admitted that the Guru had spoken truly.

The Guru then recited the following *shabad*:

It is not easy to be called a Musalman:  
If there were one let him be so known.  
He should first take to his heart the tenets of his faith  
and purge himself of all pride.  
He will be a Muslim who pursues the path

shown by the founder of the creed;  
who extinguishes anxiety about life and death;  
who accepts the will of God as supreme;  
who has faith in the Creator and surrenders  
himself to the Almighty.  
When he hath established his goodwill for all, O Nanak,  
he will be called a Musalman.<sup>501</sup>

This story indicates Guru Nanak's questioning the validity of ritual being done for the sake of the ritual. It was more important to the qazi to pray, because it was the time to pray, than it was to focus his attention on the nature of his prayer and not his concern for the foal. The worldly concerns intruded into the spiritual act of prayer and voided any sense of devotion being expressed by qazi's actions. Further authority is granted to Guru Nanak's message here by Harbans Singh's inclusion of a line from the Puratan janam-sakhi asserting that "All the people, Hindus and Muslims, began to say to the Nawab that God spoke on Nanak's lips."<sup>502</sup> This surely places the focus on God, separate from the divisions imposed by the communities—putting true religious devotion ahead of sectarian concerns. This is the principle of *nām*, true devotion to the Name of God, something that aims toward the ultimate reality of the Transcendent Divine (*Ik Oankar*) behind the diverse trappings placed upon it by its worldly adherents.

Harbans Singh's depiction of this message is clearly constructed with the ideas of "affirmation and integration" in mind, as Guru Nanak "presented a living and intensely realized ideal of faith and spiritual deliverance and of human equality and justice."<sup>503</sup> The

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 97-99; citing *Adi Granth*, 141.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 99; citing *Puratan*, 22.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 57.

sakhis he chooses to discuss at length clearly indicate this, as chapters are devoted to the stories of Lalo (Chapter VII which corresponds to sakhi 124 “Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo”), the “Reclamation of Sajjan” (Chapter VIII, corresponding to sakhi 60 “Sajjan the thag”), and the “Impaling Stake Reduced to a Thorn” (Chapter IX, corresponding to sakhi 103 “The coal and the thorn”).<sup>504</sup> These chapters include other sakhis to fill in the narrative, but by placing the readers’ focus on these three, Harbans Singh lifts these to a place of prominence. The lessons of these sakhis are emphasized, and the coherent message of true devotion and a turn away from the focus on worldly rewards dominates this portion of the presentation.<sup>505</sup> The intent is clear: focus on the divine message of Guru Nanak’s teachings, not on petty notions of caste, wealth, or karma. Grace, *nadar*, is bestowed from the Divine, as it sees fit to benefit those who show true devotion. The beneficiaries of the Guru’s teachings in these stories include a Muslim village chief, Malik Bhāgo; a murderous thief, Sajjan; and an adulterous (Hindu) shopkeeper. The Guru’s message worked to steer all of them from their worldly concerns and toward a path of true devotion. Harbans Singh’s presentation of the Guru’s message in this way demonstrates the intentional focus of his interpretation of the janam-sakhis and their role. This is how he cast the life model of Guru Nanak and makes it applicable to his audience.

Guru Nanak is presented as one who saw past the concerns of the mundane world, and revealed deeper truths that brought people together in new ways. The village head,

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 100-130.

<sup>505</sup> Each of these sakhis have been presented earlier in this study. Sakhis 103 and 124 are in Chapter Two, while 60 is in Chapter Three.

Malik Bhāgo, was humbled by the honest work of lowly carpenter, Lālo. The wealthy Dunī Chand was told that he could not take his fortune (seven lakhs or 700,000 rupees, a huge sum in those days) with him into the next life to make him comfortable, “nor would the victuals ritually offered to the Brahmans... The Guru said to him, ‘Give in the name of the Lord. Put food in the mouth of the needy. Thus wilt thou have something to go with thee [into the next life].’”<sup>506</sup> The intention of this focus for an audience is clear—these stories are meant to jar them from their own focus on these same worldly concerns and turn toward the divine.

By emphasizing the principle of *nām*, Guru Nanak’s program of devotion is laid out as the means to get past these worldly concerns and find the true path which was both revealed to and revealed by Guru Nanak. His actions become the model for his and the janam-sakhis’ audience to follow. Harbans Singh even goes as far as summarizing the point of his presentation of Guru Nanak’s life in his concluding chapter, saying,

Contrary to the prevailing notion of piety, the emphasis was not on turning away from reality but on a willing, even joyous, acceptance of it. In one of his hymns Guru Nanak said:

Real are Thy realms and real Thy universes,  
Real are Thy worlds and real the created forms.  
Real are Thine acts and real Thy purposes.  
Real is Thy fiat and real Thy court,  
Real is Thy order and real Thy word.  
Real is Thy mercy and real Thy mark of grace.  
Millions call upon Thee as True Reality.  
Real is the energy Thou hast created.  
Real is Thy name and real Thy praise.  
Real is Thy Nature, Eternal Sovereign!

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid., 141; citing Puratan, 83. This anecdote is part of sakhi 114 “Dunī Chand's flags.”

Guru Nanak thus proclaimed the world to be the creation of God, reflecting the divine being and divine purpose. By placing a positive value on the natural order, he brought worldly structures—the family, the social and economic systems—within the orbit of religious concern. Human life was considered an opportunity for an individual to develop personally by practicing piety and by devoting himself to the service of his fellowmen thereby improving man's condition as a whole.<sup>507</sup>

Devotion here is extended to encompass action, or piety as Harbans Singh refers to it in this passage. It is only logical to see how an audience is spurred to action, being so moved by the manner in which the lesson has been revealed. Guru Nanak's message, as seen here, ultimately incorporates all action. All action in the world is given over to or directed toward the divine, thus every act done in this manner becomes an act of devotion for the betterment of society as a whole. The divisive concerns of various religious communities are rendered moot, as a more applicable and uniting truth is revealed through Guru Nanak's message. The mundane world is set aside in favor of a devotional one in which the Guru's truths pervade.

This is the conceptual life model of Harbans Singh's presentation of the *janam-sakhis*. He presents a means to understand Guru Nanak's theological view of the world. By revealing the religious, and devotional, nature of the world, as well as Guru Nanak's program for piety within that world, a clear example is set for the audience. The point, impact, and significance of Guru Nanak's message are all laid bare for readers to understand and follow.

Nikki Singh takes a much more focused approach to examining the *janam-sakhis* and presenting her interpretation of Guru Nanak as a life model for readers. While her

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<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-205; citing *Adi Granth, Raag Asa*, 463.

father's approach made the whole world religious around its readers, Nikki Singh strives to demonstrate the revelation of the Transcendent Divine, *Ik Oankar*, through a specific moment in the sakhis. Her focus on Guru Nanak's moment of darśan is key here, as she posits that through the telling of this sakhi about darśan—darśan occurs for the reader too! She says that, "This 'seeing' provides him [Guru Nanak] with a spontaneous recognition of absolute knowledge. 'Seeing' and 'knowing' in the intrinsic sense are one, as *darśana* in Sanskrit denotes both seeing and philosophical speculation."<sup>508</sup> As the Guru then expresses his understanding in poetic form, as it is the only means to convey such wonder, these hymns themselves "bear witness to such a 'seeing' of the Transcendent as the source of Knowledge."<sup>509</sup> So then, it stands that the revelatory experience would be conveyed by those hymns, hymns Guru Nanak composed and shared throughout his journeys, hymns that are collected in the *Adi Granth*. More important for this analysis, is that these same hymns are found in the stories of the *janam-sakhis* and continue to pass along this revelatory experience to their audience. The stories affirm Nanak's role as Guru, the teacher given a mission by the Transcendent to lead others from their darkness (ignorance). Therefore the *janam-sakhis* are another avenue of revelation. No *phalashruti* statement is needed to convey how this message is to benefit the reader; the Transcendent nature of the Ultimate Reality, *Ik Oankar* itself will be revealed as the stories unfold through Guru Nanak's teachings and hymns. The life model presented here conveys or interprets the teachings of Guru Nanak as a revelatory experience that directly impacts the readers. Truth

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<sup>508</sup> Nikki Singh, "Myth of the Founder," 334.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

is passed through story of Guru Nanak and his mission. The experience and understanding of that truth is developed through the emulation and continuation of the Guru's work.

Nikki Singh's argument for this revelatory life model view of the janam-sakhis leads to another key assertion about how Guru Nanak's message, conveyed by the janam-sakhis, created a new religious tradition. After his experience in the river and his commission as Guru, Nanak spent the next twenty-four years travelling and teaching others about this conception of the Transcendent. He shares his revelation through poetic verse, the only medium capable of conveying its majesty, and gathers to himself a following that becomes a community which, to this day, is sustained by the continued presence of these teachings—recorded in both the *Adi Granth* and the *janam-sakhis*.<sup>510</sup>

It was mentioned earlier in Chapter One that Nikki Singh contends, "It is my thesis that to this sakhi the Sikh tradition owes its very identity and individuality. It vividly presents Guru Nanak's vision of Ultimate Reality as a totally formless and transcendent being."<sup>511</sup> To reiterate once more, the foundations of Sikh theology, conveyed as Guru Nanak's message, began with his discussion of these principles upon the river's banks and all that is Sikhism follows from it.

It is now time to examine how the Sikh tradition grew from one little story. But it is not the focus of this study to elaborate on the historical development of the Sikh tradition; rather, an examination is due of how a story can gain such influence and operate in the

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<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-2.

manners that both Harbans Singh and Nikki Singh contend. Stories matter to people and to communities, and the relationship between these needs some elaboration in order to see how the devotional models presented by the janam-sakhis actually serve the pedagogical projects they intend.

### **Social Narratives, Public Memories, and a Relationship with the Janam-sakhis**

The last three chapters illuminated the specific forms janam-sakhi narratives take, now it is necessary to step back and look at the operational principles working behind or motivating the janam-sakhis and discussing them in light of their functions as stories and narratives, not as specific religious texts. This opens the discussion here to address concerns that range beyond the scope of the janam-sakhis in some ways, but this will also help further clarify how the life models presented in the janam-sakhis come to demonstrate their power to hold together the Sikh tradition across time by connecting audiences to its founder, Guru Nanak, as well as to all audiences that have shared in the projects set forth by the Guru and conveyed by the janam-sakhi narratives.

This shift in attention marks an interesting, if not predicted, departure from typical treatments of the janam-sakhis. McLeod devotes two chapters of *Early Sikh Tradition* to the function of the janam-sakhis and it amounted to little more than six pages of the volume. “Function” in his view “concerns the role which they [the janam-sakhis] have played in the history of the Panth. This role accords only partially with the conscious intentions of the narrators and their later editors.”<sup>512</sup> He argues that “The primary function which they

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<sup>512</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 238.



served from the late sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century must be construed in terms of panthic cohesion, a role which the narrators and compilers would never have suspected."<sup>513</sup> McLeod's analysis of the janam-sakhis function focuses solely on the pre-Khalsa period (up to 1699 CE). Once the Khalsa was established, it was the focal point for the direct instruction of how to be a (Khalsa) Sikh, but the lessons of Guru Nanak and loyalty to him as the founder were still best conveyed by the janam-sakhis. McLeod concludes that,

The person and the teachings of the acknowledged founder provide the common loyalty and the common ideal. As new situations develop they raise new questions and demand different responses. The authentic person and teachings of Nanak provide a convenient core to which are added theories and conclusions emerging from subsequent experience.<sup>514</sup>

This is a great assessment of the janam-sakhis' diverse pedagogical potential, as well as an indication of the variety of ways Sikhs engage (participate with/in) these stories. Unfortunately, he stops there in the early Khalsa period and views this summary of the janam-sakhis as sufficient. McLeod hits upon a key feature of the pedagogical and participatory project of the janam-sakhis, but he fails to acknowledge it as a continuing legacy, as active in the ensuing centuries and in today's modern world as it was in the historical windows he examines, because it operates differently today. Had McLeod, or any other scholar of the janam-sakhis, given credence to the sustained presence of the janam-sakhis in Sikh tradition, this study may not be venturing into such territory now. No

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 246.

one has tried to account for how the stories still work to accomplish the ‘panthic cohesion’ for which McLeod argues.

It is the contention of this study that this oversight can be addressed with help from some theoretical borrowings from philosophy and narrative theory, as well as a little bit of historiography thrown in for good measure. It is necessary to bridge the gap between the life model presented in the janam-sakhis to their collective function as social narratives that yields the participation demonstrated throughout this work. The processes of transmission and acceptance that foster participatory relationships must be examined. The remainder of this section will lay out a coherent, if not comprehensive, discussion of how a community like the Sikhs could come together around stories like the janam-sakhis that both create and confirm specific understandings of the group, its history, and its future as a group.

### The Janam-sakhis as Social Narratives

Chapter One introduced the theories of David Carr regarding the function of social narratives and the “prospective-retrospective principle” of historical narratives. A critical step in his association of these was not discussed at that time, and it is imperative to consider it now in relation to how the janam-sakhis actually work within a community, not simply for individual readers. The collaborative pedagogical project of Sikhs with regard to the life model of Guru Nanak conveyed by the janam-sakhis is acknowledged in nearly every scholarly treatment of the janam-sakhis. Previous examinations take for granted that the community has responded to and acted upon the message provided by the stories of the

janam-sakhis. Guru Nanak brought together a community; it has been sustained by the later gurus, his bani, and the janam-sakhis which stood in for the personal presence of the founder and his wisdom. Sikhs have worked together to see the Guru's teachings realized, as a community, not simply as a group of individuals. The early community became Sikhs, united with each other not only through their bond with Guru Nanak and his teachings, but also by their collaborative actions based upon that message. By *being* Sikhs, they embraced projects and goals (often expressed in and by the janam-sakhis) that were truly collective projects, not attributable to any one Sikh or a few, but to the whole community, as a community—the Panth.

Carr describes this shift from the individual's appropriation of a narrative to that of a group subject who is the irreducible agent involved in the project of the narrative. He says that "Collective or collaborative endeavors gives us examples of action whose true subject is not an individual but a group."<sup>515</sup> This involves far more than just changing the pronouns involved. It necessitates consideration of a group-subject, a plural *we* or *they* that acts in accordance with the narratives—a synchronic connection between all those acting in this way. Carr insists that this new collective subject is generally not reducible to an individual subject, because these social narratives address "experiences and actions usually not properly attributable to me alone, or to me, you, and the others individually. They belong rather to us: it is not my experience but ours, not I who act but we who act in concert."<sup>516</sup> Choosing to participate in such a social narrative is buying into the collective

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<sup>515</sup> Carr, *TNH*, 130.

<sup>516</sup> Carr, "Narrative and the Real World," 127.

projects that the narratives promote and acting upon them in accordance with the group's mutual or accepted understandings of them. Action in this case stems from collective retrospection; just as an individual is motivated by their own projects, so too is a community stirred to act by its understandings of the narratives that draw it together. Carr describes this process thoroughly, "The group looks 'backwards' (in a perhaps metaphorical rather than strictly temporal sense) to its own origins in the individuality and cross-purpose of its members, which have been surmounted by their mutual recognition and reconciliation."<sup>517</sup> In this way, adherence to the group can involve participation in projects and narratives which extend well beyond the scope or lifetime of any individual participant: "the we [community] with whose experience the individual identifies can both pre-date and survive the individuals that make it up."<sup>518</sup> And conversely, the group, Carr argues by its association with and participation in a social narrative, "is posited by its members as a subject of experiences and action in virtue of a narrative account which ties distinct phases and elements together into a coherent story."<sup>519</sup> Their history, as a group or community, is created through the collective and collaborative regard for the significant pattern of the past events as they relate to the present values of the group's desires for the future. The community works together to engage the projects laid out in the past, while trying to understand both their past and present in light of the future toward which both are aimed.

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<sup>517</sup> Carr, *TNH*, 148.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-34.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

In the case of the janam-sakhis, Sikhs have embraced the message of Guru Nanak's teachings and emulated his actions in a collaborative effort to reach the social and spiritual goals to which he aspired himself and thusly inspired the community as well. The janam-sakhis become the history of the group, revealing the life of Guru Nanak as well as his role as teacher to the community. His lessons are made clear and laid out in contexts that can be understood (for the most part) across the years. Whereas an individual looks at their past to make sense of the future (Carr's prospective-retrospective principle), a Sikh can look to this collectively shared past—the janam-sakhis showing Guru Nanak as a teacher to them all—and find direction today. The commitment to the meaning, values, and goals does not diminish. It may change over generations and be open to interpretation, but it remains as a tether between the community and the story of the narrative. Carr describes this as a collective act of retrospection and striving, which creates a transhistorical community, expressed through these social narratives. The Panth serves as a connection across time (diachronically) to the founder and his message (expressed in the janam-sakhis), and to the community of all of his followers brought together by that connection and sharing in its history and in its present expression as the observable community today (a synchronic connection).

Two qualifications are warranted here: first the community's actions are not necessarily a particularly uniform activity, and secondly, these social narratives only matter in these ways to members of the community in question—it is a relationship of privileged participation. The vibrant history of the janam-sakhis, and of Sikhs themselves, certainly highlights the variety of ways Sikhs have tried to engage the Guru's message. There have

been sectarian rivalries (Hindalis, Minas), caste rivalries (Jat v. Khatri), and even the promotion of the Khalsa Sikh as the ideal expression of Sikhism.<sup>520</sup> Each of these positions, in its time, represented a distinct view of the Guru's message and its goals. The resultant presentations of the janam-sakhis, informed by these views, represent how certain voices have sought to depict Guru Nanak and condition the way other community members regard that image.<sup>521</sup> This leads directly into the second qualification—only those within the community have a stake in or are committed to the projects the social narrative lays out. The relationship between a community and its social narrative(s) is a privileged one. Not only does it give community members a sole claim to the narratives' veracity and validity (in specific ways), but also further conditions how community members seek to engage and interpret these narratives.<sup>522</sup> The stories therefore orient readers within the community and provide "social location, meaning, and direction."<sup>523</sup> The social narrative,

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<sup>520</sup> These positions were all introduced in discussion of the historical janam-sakhis, or in the case of the promotion of the Khalsa ideal, the Singh Sabha reforms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>521</sup> This line of argument echoes the work of Christian Novetzke and his recent work on Namdev, an Indian Sant who lived roughly two hundred years prior to Guru Nanak. Novetzke sought to address the concept of "public memory" in narratives about Namdev and made a distinction between this public memory and the idea of history. He asserted that "Memory presupposes at least a latent social knowledge." This social knowledge is similar to the retrospection laid out by David Carr. A community is drawn together through the act of memory, in this case reflection on the life of Namdev and participating in the projects of Namdev's work. Christian Lee Novetzke, *Religion and Public Memory: A Cultural History of Saint Namdev in India* (New York: Columbia, 2008), 39.

<sup>522</sup> This notion builds from claims made by Ellen Charry in her article, "Literature as Scripture: Privileged Reading in Current Religious Reflection." Charry proposes that certain communities develop specific relationship with their literature. While she focuses on traumatized communities' attempts to come to terms with their traumatic history, I think that the concept of 'privileged reading' she develops is useful to any literature with a specific community appeal. She posits privileged reading as "the view that membership in the community of the traumatized gives the community and its representative critics a singular claim upon its own literature." Thus we see a specific interpretative community established through this claim and which "provides individuals with the ethos by which to interpret and benefit from its literature." Ellen Charry, "Literature as Scripture: Privileged Reading in Current Religious Reflection." *Soundings* 74.1-2 (1991): 70.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

and participation in it, need only be sensible to those within the frameworks that their relationship has established. Ellen Charry describes this aspect of privileged interpretation by suggesting:

The whole community is present in each interpretive act. The interpreter and the casual reader are taken up into the life of the whole group in the act of reading... It [the text] is rather like an alter-ego—an other against which one can measure oneself, or try out one's own coping mechanisms and test out new ones.<sup>524</sup>

To put this another way, consider the validity of Hindus asking, “What would Jesus do?” The response doesn't matter too much, because the narrative to which the appeal is directed (the Gospels) are not the narratives of the community doing the asking. But when Christians, of any variety, ask the question, they have an interpretative stake in the answer, because it is their narrative (and thus community project) that is being brought to task. The Sikhs' stake in the *janam-sakhis* is evident. These stories are their memories and theirs alone in this regard.

### Social Narratives as Productions of History

As the *janam-sakhis* are specifically historical in nature, setting the life of Guru Nanak as the Sikh community's origin. It is necessary account for factors of production that influenced these narratives specifically and in general terms of their operation as social narratives. Concern here is not with what these really say about the past, but as David William Cohen suggests “how these texts, and the knowledge within them, came to be.”<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>525</sup> David William Cohen, *The Combining of History*, xv.

Focusing on the production of history, as he calls it, allows for a better accounting of the ways in which people are “themselves producing, using, and actively debating their pasts.”<sup>526</sup> This is the discourse of history, the active engagement in making the past sensible and applicable. This is the interpretative project by which every (discursive) community engages its own social narratives. In essence, this is the root of participation, as the interpretations spur collaborative action in line with the interpretation.

Cohen outlines a few tactics that can help the historian consider the process of production, yet he does not overlook the contents and results of the product. This requires an acknowledgement of the situations surrounding the production as much as it does the resulting interpretative product, or reinterpretation as the case may be. This portends to view the nature of the constructive and interpretative project at play in these narratives to be far more involved and deliberate than simply worthy of noting at the first moment of their authoring. Cohen considers the discourses as subjects of analysis alongside the contents of those same discourses because sometimes scholars overlook these essential elements of the interpretations being offered. He warns that, “Many historians work, knowingly and unknowingly, on the representation and presentation of a story of a story of a story.”<sup>527</sup> Studying a narrative as indicative only of its moment of production leads one to overlook all the intervening time wherein that narrative has been discussed before it reaches the modern reader today. It is imperative that the varied “ways knowledge is

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 21.



rendered, marked with authority, and transformed into literature"<sup>528</sup> are acknowledged. Therefore, any study of the general discourse regarding a historical narrative must account for the subsequent discourses seeking to understand, interpret, apply, act upon, and then reinterpret it.

In the case of seeking to understand the janam-sakhis in this way, attention must be given to the origins of these stories and to the varied ways Sikhs and scholars have engaged and employed them since their first use. Debates that arise within the arc of history are to be seen as moments of “production and consumption” that must be situated in the overall analysis. Debates are about controlling the product that is the historical narrative, therefore, the debates are about controlling the representation and interpretation of that history. The debates about the janam-sakhis, the varied approaches to presenting the life and message of Guru Nanak have been the majority focus of Chapters Two, Three and Four. Each iteration and analysis of the janam-sakhis, every different approach and conception of these stories’ goals, is an argument offered up in the debate about these texts and their impact. Each instance posits its own intentions, limits, and goals for why the narrative chose to present Guru Nanak’s life in this way. Each is setting conditions upon, or more drastically, conditions for the relationship to be constructed and sustained via one’s participation with the janam-sakhis. This all means that careful consideration must be given to the parameters that condition the relationship of the Sikh community with its narratives.

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 234.

## A (Scriptural) Relationship with the Janam-sakhis

This study has (rightly) avoided using the term scripture to describe the janam-sakhis, because they are not employed in a liturgical sense in Sikh practice. The janam-sakhis serve a variety of functions in Sikh traditions, all of which supplement the focal liturgical text, the *Adi Granth*, which clearly holds the position of reverence and is the focus of devotional practice in gurdwaras. But the *Adi Granth* lacks the personal connections and contextual rootedness that the janam-sakhis offer. It can only reveal the Guru's thought on spiritual issues, it does not convey how he spoke with his parents or conducted himself in business. These personal insights are the foundations of the relationship Sikhs have with Guru Nanak as *their* guru, and they are all rooted in the janam-sakhis.

The first academic discussion of the janam-sakhis as scriptural texts can be found in a 1979 conference proceeding where W. H. McLeod identifies five collections of Sikh scriptures.<sup>529</sup> Along with the obvious choices of the *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth*, McLeod lists the janam-sakhis as well as the works of both Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal Goya, pointing out that the janam-sakhis "testify vividly to the impact of Nanak on later generations of disciples and constitute an important corpus of Punjabi folk literature."<sup>530</sup> He contends that,

The true value of a janam-sakhi can be appropriated only if we read it in the context of the particular period which produced it. Each testifies to the

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<sup>529</sup> W. H. McLeod, "The Sikh Scriptures: Some Issues." *Sikh Studies Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition*, ed. Mark and N. Gerald Barrier Juergensmeyer (Berkeley, California: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), 97-111.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

attitudes and circumstances of its own times and if read in this light a janam-sakhi can contribute usefully to our understanding.<sup>531</sup>

Unfortunately McLeod limits the operational value of the janam-sakhis as scripture. The previous chapters and the previous sections of this chapter have shown numerous ways that this limited view of the janam-sakhis falls short of appreciating their scope and impact. If, as previous discussions in this study indicate, the janam-sakhis represent a continuing relationship between these stories and the community which has endured over the centuries and as one that has changed throughout the life of the relationship, then a more encompassing view of the janam-sakhis and their scriptural influence must be considered.

It is helpful here to build from the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith.<sup>532</sup> Smith's 'theory of scripture' posits that it is the engaged relationship of people with a text that establishes the text *as scripture*. These relationships cannot be studied if the analyses of the janam-sakhis are confined only to a specific instance of history. Therefore a study of the janam-sakhis as part of a scriptural relationship requires consideration of a more extensive view of Sikhs' interaction with these narratives, which the previous chapters have provided. Smith's description of scripture *as a textual category*,<sup>533</sup> defined by the relationship between a community and a text (or narratives in this case), certainly applies

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>533</sup> Please note that Smith does not claim that texts in the scriptural relationship have to be primary liturgical materials. Secondary and even tertiary, quaternary, or quinary texts (as McLeod ranks the janam-sakhis) can participate in such a relationship and still condition the understanding and actions of a community in significant ways.

to the janam-sakhis. He argues that a text is not a scripture, nor can it be, without a relation to a group of people. It is the interaction of people and text that elevates a text to scripture.

He said of this,

"[S]cripture" is a bilateral term. By that we mean that it inherently implies, in fact names, a relationship. It denotes something in a particular relation to something else... Fundamental, we suggest, to a new understanding of scripture is the recognition that no text is a scripture in itself and as such. People—a given community—make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way. I suggest: *scripture is a human activity*.<sup>534</sup>

The engagement of a people with a text, though, does not necessarily make a text scripture. This interaction must be directed towards a specific end or goal. Otherwise, any commonly used text would be understood as scripture. What makes the scriptural text important is the way in which a people cultivate this relationship through their interaction with the text and in pursuit of this goal. This study has examined the special ways Sikhs have cultivated and sustained their relationships by way of their pursuits of the goals presented by the life model of Guru Nanak. Smith asserts that a religious community elevates a text to scripture because the text serves to relate the community to a transcendent beyond. It is only necessary to review the discussion of Harbans Singh and Nikki Singh's interpretations of the janam-sakhis to see two instances of this elevation in action. The elevation to which Smith refers, could be seen as the prospective project or goal of the narrative being enacted

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

by the community of believers. Participation in the story is key to its elevation as scripture.<sup>535</sup>

### Breaking Down and Expanding Smith's Scriptural Relationship

Because Wilfred Cantwell Smith's theories about scripture have dominated discussions about these issues, it is worth noting the limits of his conceptual model and examine the ways by which a more open and encompassing, and thus more functional, definition of the scriptural relationship can be demonstrated. This subsection will work through the underlying issues and assumptions of Smith's model before providing a new model that better expresses the ultimate goal of illustrating scripture as a "human activity."<sup>536</sup>

The first hurdle to be addressed is the assertion that "scripture is a bilateral term."<sup>537</sup> Smith, as quoted earlier, is thoroughly ensconced in his scholarly analysis and thus only considers the two visible components involved: the people and the text. This is all well and good for scholarly analyses, but it fails to consider a participant that is assumed to be present by and manifest in the other two—the universe or the transcendent. Smith contends that "at issue is the relation between a people and the universe, in the light of their

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<sup>535</sup> The ways in which Sikhs use and relate to the janam-sakhis should be evidence enough of this, but the hang-up lies in the fact that the janam-sakhis are not the liturgical center of community participation. They serve in a more specific individual capacity, as well as in a far more encompassing transhistorical community manner.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 17.

perception of a given text."<sup>538</sup> Thus a text becomes scripture as it serves to relate the people to their transcendent understandings of the universe. Therefore, Smith elaborates upon this initial bilateral relationship, and concedes that "it is best characterized as, rather, trilateral: referring to a relation– an engagement– among humans, the transcendent, and a text."<sup>539</sup> This trilateral engagement can be illustrated in a variety of ways. No one illustration is perfect, but they can help visualize the relationship and the implications of his claim. Figure 5.1 offers a few illustrations of Smith's Trilateral Engagement. The first illustration, **A**, offers the truly tri-*lateral* relationship, emphasizing the equal footing of the three participants in the relationship. Yet, this fails to grasp the positions to which the scriptural text and the transcendent/ universe that it reveals are elevated by their consideration as scripture. Hence, illustration **B** is better suited to reflect the ascendant qualities of these two participants, because the community involved assumes them to be something 'special' and separate from the ordinary stuff of the world in which they normally operate.<sup>540</sup> Unfortunately, illustration **B** does away with the lateral-ness of the relationship and imposes a hierarchy on the participants by separating the sacred from the mundane.

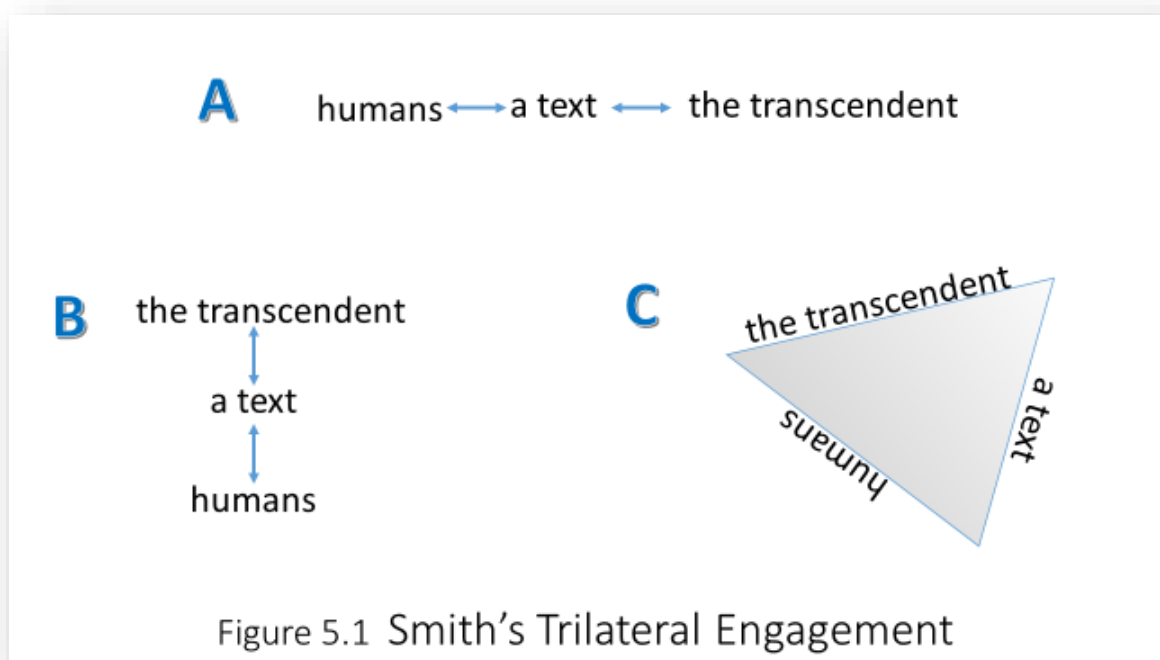
Illustration **C** is this author's attempt to express the relationship in a manner that overcomes the obstacles identified by the two previous illustrations. Illustration **C** is best viewed as a flat object, as if the triangle were lying atop a desk, which would undo any imposed hierarchy and allow its rotation to place emphasis upon whichever side is needed

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<sup>538</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>540</sup> One could ride this tangent into a lengthy discussion of conceptualizing the division between the sacred and the profane, but that is not necessary here. It is sufficient to keep in mind that scriptures and the transcendent universe on which they report are regarded, generally, as sacred by their community.



for the current discussion. The scriptural relationship in illustration C is not indicated by arrows, as in the other two, but by the shaded area in the middle of the three participants.<sup>541</sup> This better reflects the variety of interactions that may occur circumscribing the area of the relationship, rather than imposing a direct or linear trajectory for it. The need for this accommodation is evidenced by the fact that the relationship of scripture to a community is far from stagnant or fixed. William Graham sheds light on the dynamic nature of the scriptural relationship. He contends that, "A text becomes 'scripture' in active, subjective relationship to persons, and as part of a cumulative communal tradition."<sup>542</sup> This conforms

<sup>541</sup> An even better illustration would allow for variations of the size of each side of this triangle, because at times certain facets of the relationship tend to dominate and need to be emphasized as doing so. The static image on the page here cannot convey this aspect.

<sup>542</sup> William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

to this chapter's discussion of the way social narratives work both synchronically and diachronically, as the janam-sakhis are constitutive of Sikh tradition and the focus of Sikhs' relationship with both Guru Nanak and his teachings. Graham's claim also provides more theoretical flexibility that can better account for the shift between individual engagements and community-wide collaborative ones with regard to the specific uses and understandings of the scriptural texts.

William Graham suggested that we can describe the changing relationship as indications of the "contextual or functional quality"<sup>543</sup> of a scripture. This is what the last three chapters provide by taking the shifting relationships and understandings of the janam-sakhis evidenced by Sikh and scholarly treatments into account. Graham elaborates on the importance of such an approach and insists that,

The study of a text as scripture...focuses upon its contextual meaning, interpretation, and use- that is, the ongoing role the text has played in a tradition, not only in formal exegesis, but in every sector of life. To put it succinctly, "scripture" is not a literary genre but a religiohistorical one, and it must be understood as such.<sup>544</sup>

This makes it quite clear that to study scripture must focus on the relationships which are rooted in history, which change a mere text into scripture and have a lasting impact on all participants. Therefore, study of scripture is a study of a process, changing relationships over time, through history, and understood and expressed in a variety of manners throughout that history. This requires attention to more than one historical moment or period, and must, in the case of examining the janam-sakhis, address the continuing legacy

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 6.

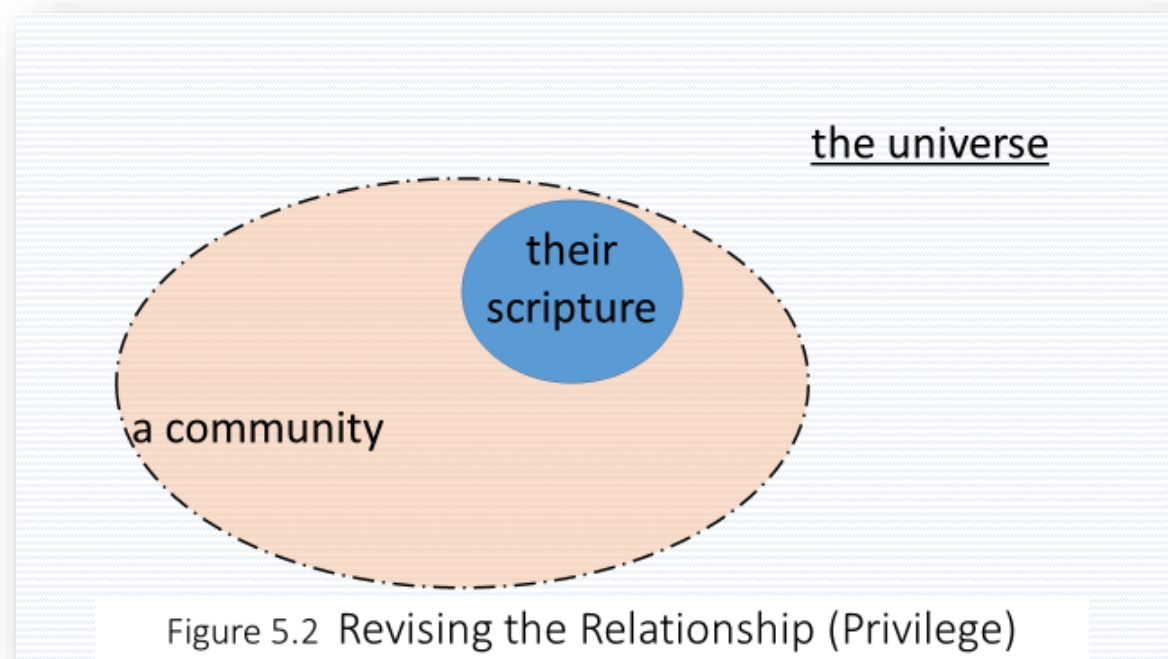


and impact of these stories. The notion of examining the janam-sakhis as social narratives presupposes this dynamism and has provided a framework on which this model can find the support of evidence it needs.

Even with all this additional theoretical support and clarification, Smith's trilateral engagement evidences some limitations in the ways he asks readers to conceive of the relationship (and placement, if you will) of the three constituents. While Smith's theory is certainly buttressed by the elaborations offered by considering the implications of social narratives and participation, it clearly fails to consider one key element of these—their privileged nature. Again, his use and discussion of the relationship being trilateral gets in the way of understanding this key feature of the relationship. His usage of the term implies that the community, text, and universe are separate and distinct entities that can be observed and aligned alongside one another by scholars to promote analysis of the relationship. The idea of privilege, discussed earlier through Ellen Charry's work and reinforced here by that of William Graham, complicates this arrangement, because it clearly (and correctly) asserts that a community's relationship with their social narratives exists only within the parameters of the community's own understandings of the text as theirs and theirs alone. It is *their* scripture. The possessive pronoun here is indicative of the problem. The scriptural text, or social narrative, only operates as such within the community. A scholar's view of the text as scripture still has to account for this privilege. For example, the Gospels (life models for/of Jesus of Nazareth) can be viewed and studied by anyone, but Christians are the only ones who embrace the Gospels as their social narratives, as scriptural, and participate in a relationship with the texts of the Gospels and the community around that

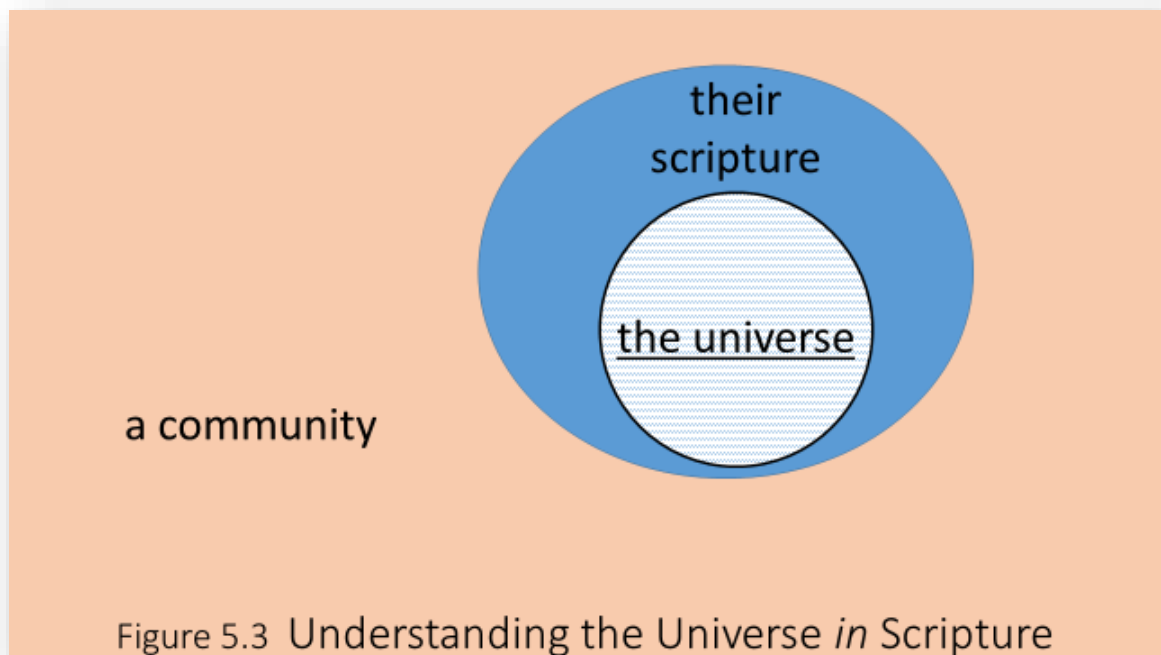
holds them dear both synchronically and diachronically. The janam-sakhis are no different. They only *act as* social narratives and/or scripture for Sikhs, because Sikhs are the ones participating in the relationship. Others can observe this, but they remain outside the privileged relationship of the scriptural relationship.

As all three of the illustrations previously offered in Figure 5.1 fail to capture this crucial aspect of the scriptural relationship, a new model must be put forth that can demonstrate this clearly. A shift to Venn diagrams is incredibly helpful at this point. Figure 5.2 shows the community, who exists within the larger universe, enveloping the text, because is it *their scripture*. This image perfectly illustrates the privileged nature of the scriptural relationship, because the text only functions as scripture within the boundaries of the community. The scripture's role as a social narrative only works through



the collaborative engagement of the community's members with the doctrinal contents (pedagogical project) and collaborative action taken in accordance with the goals laid out in the narratives (participatory project).

Unfortunately, Figure 5.2 does not address the inclusion of the transcendent that is revealed through the community's engagement with their scripture. To account for this shortcoming, a more focused illustration is needed. Figure 5.3 zooms in on the community



and its scripture to reveal what the text actually conveys to the community—an understanding or vision of the universe. Scriptures lay out how members of the community are supposed to understand the world around them. These understanding exist within and

are conveyed by the scripture.<sup>545</sup> This is precisely the pedagogical project which has been discussed in this study. It is found by engaging the contents of the scriptural text.

The pedagogical project informs not only the community's understanding of the universe, but also their place in it. If it were possible to zoom in further into Figure 5.3's image of the universe, it would recreate the image of Figure 5.2 placing the community and their text within the understanding of the universe that was initially conveyed by the scriptural text in the first place. This would then foster another trip down this rabbit-hole, and evidence the reemergence of Figure 5.3, and the continuing cycle of interpretations that such a privileged relationship yields as the scripture become the conduit for understanding all of the participants in the scriptural relationship. This is the ultimate hermeneutic circle, one that, if animated, would depict a mesmerizing journey from the macrocosm of the universe and the community, to the microcosm of the universe to be found within the text that exists as such only for the community, and thusly, reveals the macrocosm of the entire universe within the microcosm of the text. This affirms the truly privileged nature of the relationship evidenced by a scripture and the community that holds it dear.

In abstract terms this seems plausible enough, but a specific example or two would help demonstrate the specific ways this relationship operates in the case of Sikhs and the *janam-sakhis*. The works of Harbans Singh and Nikki Singh are incredibly helpful as each has argued for relationship as it has been defined here, just not necessarily in the same

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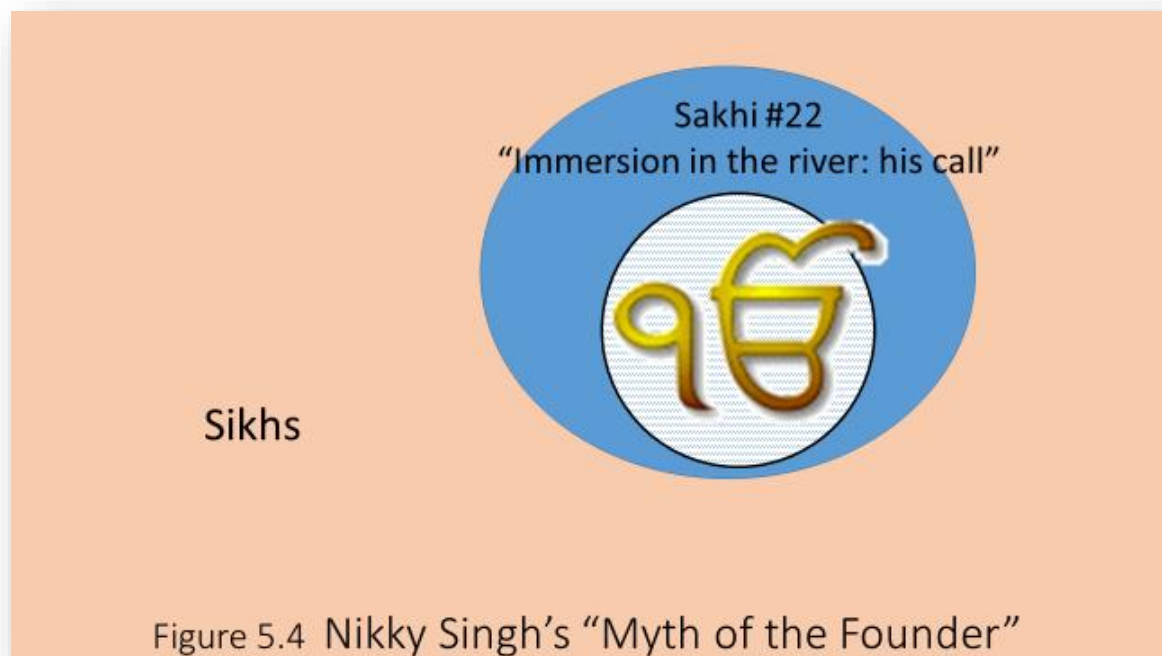
<sup>545</sup> The content of these discourses is important. If these specific understandings were available elsewhere, there would be no need for the special religious teachings of scriptures. The *janam-sakhis* maintain their place of importance because of their content—the life model of Guru Nanak—that is not found in any other Sikh literature.

terms. The key aspect of the janam-sakhis that Harbans Singh looked to convey through his presentation of their stories was the way that Guru Nanak “presented a living and intensely realized ideal of faith and spiritual deliverance and of human equality and justice.”<sup>546</sup> The janam-sakhis are a means to understand the Guru Nanak’s theological view of the world. By revealing the religious and devotional nature of the world as well as Guru Nanak’s program for piety within that world, a clear example is set for the community to follow and enact. Harbans Singh declares that the janam-sakhis reveal a special way to understand the universe and Sikhs’ place and duty in it, through the message conveyed by the exemplary life-model of Guru Nanak. This accounts for both the pedagogical and the participatory projects of the janam-sakhis as the social narratives (scripture) of the Sikh community.

Nikki Singh’s focus on the revelatory experience of darśan conveyed through the sakhi (22 “Immersion in the river: his call”) describing Guru Nanak’s disappearance in the River Bein and his experience of Ultimate Reality can be easily illustrated on the new scriptural relationship model. For the community of Sikhs, the sakhi, she argues, reveals the true expression of Ultimate Reality, which Guru Nanak chose to convey as *Ik Oankar*. Figure 5.4 shows this clearly as the Sikhs possess their story of Guru Nanak, sakhi 22 “Immersion in the river: his call,” and from that springs forth the expression of *Ik Oankar* to be understood and embraced. Her claim about the transference of darśan is clearly

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<sup>546</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 57.



logical when considered this way. The Ultimate Reality is laid out for Sikhs, and the model for understanding what it means is Guru Nanak and the rest of his message.

The janam-sakhis' offer, in these cases, far more than simply the life model of Guru Nanak. In these it is possible to see universe-models that establish the Sikh community's understandings of Ultimate Reality, social order and history, religious action, as well as the exemplary life of the founder, Guru Nanak. The most important element to emerge from all these factors is a sense of identity for the community and its members—as Sikhs. Their identity is constructed in relation to the structures learned from the narratives and conveyed through the life model of Guru Nanak.

## **Learning Identity Through the Relationship**

Identifying that a narrative, such as a janam-sakhi, offers a life-model or even a universe-model does not necessarily build the relationship described. It identifies a piece used in the construction of the scriptural relationship. How a community uses the life- or universe-model is what leads to the relationship. It is an active engagement, not an inert state. The engagement is structured around the life- and universe-models and, in turn, acts both to create and build upon the relationship as well as offering a doctrinal core that establishes the community's view of acceptable belief and practice.

In a way, it is necessary to return to an argument laid out in Chapter One to demonstrate the janam-sakhis' role in the formation of the scriptural relationship being discussed here. Sikhism, as a religious tradition, begins with Guru Nanak. Stories about Guru Nanak's origins and his work establishing the community are the creation stories of his community. Every Sikh afterward has a tie to this origin through acceptance of these stories about the Guru as *their* history and they evidence this connection by *their* participation in the traditions that follow from the actions depicted in those stories. This works by taking into account how the janam-sakhis act as social narratives to spur collaborative action based upon the principle features of the stories themselves. Such action is initiated by the community's own need for historical understanding and relies upon Carr's "prospective-retrospective principle" to make the history of the narrative understandable and applicable to the current experience of the community. Carr elaborates upon this by saying that, "A community in this sense exists by virtue of a story which is articulated and accepted, which typically concerns the group's origins and its destiny, and

which interprets what is happening now in the light of these two temporal poles.”<sup>547</sup> A community’s view of its past makes their (hopeful or intended) future sensible, and both of those have to be relatable to the situation in which the community currently finds itself.

In the case of the janam-sakhis, it is Guru Nanak that both provides the creative moment and the future goals to which the community subscribes. He is the touchstone for understanding what it means to be a Sikh. He was so in the earliest days of the tradition and continues to be so today. A Sikh’s relationship with the community of Sikhs rests upon their connection to and with Guru Nanak. The janam-sakhis are key to this as they provide the most comprehensive picture and understanding of Guru Nanak (the life-model).

This claim is in no way meant to disparage the role of the Adi Granth in the lives of Sikhs. But like any relationship, one needs to engage more than a single aspect of a person in order to establish lasting bonds. Knowing Guru Nanak only through his verses in the Adi Granth is not sufficient for a personal engagement with him as a person. If a parent only spoke to their child in mystical poetry and song, the child would be adrift without direct and empathic engagements. The janam-sakhis fill in the gaps of Guru Nanak’s personality and life story, making him a real person in the world. More detailed sakhis tell about what the Guru did and how he did it. The contexts provided by the janam-sakhis make him into something more than the voice behind the mystical utterances.

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<sup>547</sup> Carr, "Narrative and the Real World," 128.



Thus Guru Nanak is humanized to a degree by being shown to actually live in the world, just as his Sikhs do, and he has to deal with the typical issues of daily life as well. Stories about the Guru’s family relations, his concerns for that family and his friends, and his work in the community emphasize his presence in a world much like Sikhs in every age. Table 5.1 lists some exemplary sakhis of this nature that stand out for the direct attention given to these concerns. Those under the heading of “Family Relations” tell the basic details about Guru Nanak’s family life, naming his parents, wife, and children. They emphasize Guru Nanak’s connection to a social world—the community to which he

<b>Table 5.1</b>		
<b>“Humanizing” Sakhis: Showing Daily Life Issues of Guru Nanak</b>		
<b>Family Relations</b>	<b>Concerns for family and friends</b>	<b>Guru Nanak’s community work</b>
1. The birth of Gurū Nānak	86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with parents	16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī	92. First meeting with Lahiṇā	21. Work in Daulat Khān’s commissariat
10. Betrothal and marriage	96. Death of Makhdūm Bahāuddin	23. Nānak accused of embezzlement
14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand	97. Death of Mardānā	89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur
	98. Death of Kālū and Tipārā	

belonged. He is not a renunciate who left his family behind to pursue spiritual goals. While he did venture out into the wide world, he came back, checked in on them before heading out again to spread his message. Sakhis in the second category noted in the table demonstrate Guru Nanak’s sustaining his connections to his community, as he continues to check-in on family and friends, welcoming new members into the community, and bidding farewell to those who have passed away. The final category illustrate Guru Nanak’s direct service to the community: his honest work at the commissariat, his charity, and his creation of Kartarpur as the homestead for the community he established. All of

these stories give clues to Guru Nanak's social life and concerns. These foci on family life and social bonds are, in the case at hand, especially relevant to the audience that supposes itself an extension of that family—Sikhs of the Guru.

Presentations of the *janam-sakhis* in children's books make these family-focused elements sharply apparent through the illustrations contained within those volumes. These pictures teach about Guru Nanak as a family man, depict daily life, and, ultimately, affirm a Sikh identity. Three such images from those texts stand out. Mala Singh's *The Story of Guru Nanak* includes the image provided here as Figure 5.5. It shows Guru Nanak as a householder before he headed off on his long missionary journeys. A young Nanak is seated with his wife and children in their home. The boys, Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand, are playing with toys at their father's feet, while their mother, Sulakhni, sits nearby engaged in her work. It is doubtful that any artist could paint a more serene Punjabi family seated for an afternoon together. It may not be possible to ascertain what type of father Nanak is, but he looks gentle and the children are happy and well behaved—clearly affirming the bond between Nanak and his family and respect for his role as father. This point is echoed

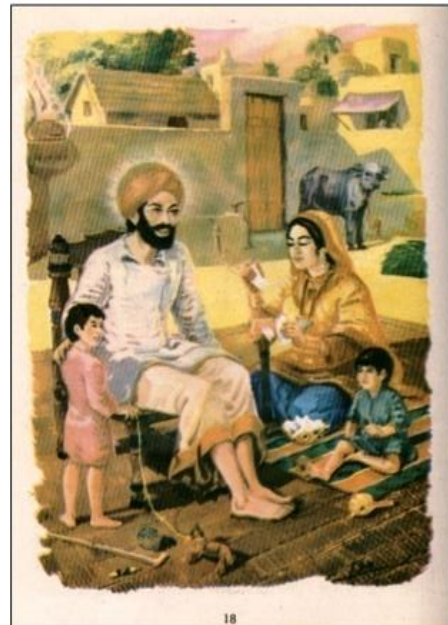


Figure 5.5 Mala Singh,  
*The Story of Guru Nanak*, 18.

in other depictions of Nanak later in his life as the Guru settled at Kartarpur leading the first community of Sikhs. The same family-like setting is repeated in both of the images from the Amar Chitra Katha comic book, *Guru Nanak*, included in Figure 5.6. In each, Guru Nanak is seated as the head of a family with the whole community as his children. The young audience of these presentations are shown a familiar setting, the family, and have its meaning and the known relationships involved in it extended to the Sikh community as a whole. It is not a difficult leap to make, nor is out of the scope of a young child’s understanding. The Guru is even shown calling the assembled gathering “my sons” in the first image! Guru Nanak could be explained in much the same way as a grandfather that is known to visit once every few years—he is often distant, but he is family. With such a simple connection, readers, young and old alike, are able to establish that Guru



Figure 5.6 G.S. and Naniki Mansukhani, *Guru Nanak*, 30 and 31 respectively.

Nanak is to be respected like an elder relative. Therefore, the Sikh children have to listen to what he says! In this manner, Guru Nanak, is not only the subject of the story, but also in a roundabout way, the narrator. If children are learning about Sikhism here, Guru Nanak is the source of that knowledge. Parents can easily defer to Guru Nanak's authority on these issues, because he is the Guru. Guru Nanak's authority is at the root of the story and the telling and in the answers to all of a child's questions about the story.

There is a reason for the janam-sakhis' success being presented as children's stories. They are clearly geared towards instilling these ideas in the formative years of a child's development, because they are forming community bonds—the ties to tradition, the establishment of a family history that goes back to the great father, if you will, Guru Nanak, or more precisely Baba Nanak. This is the diachronic element of the family connection, now a connection to a tradition; the community extends back in time to the moment of its creation, to its foundation, or more precisely to its founder, Guru Nanak. The community is then sustained by the continued presence of and engagement with the Guru, best found and related to via the presentations of him found in the janam-sakhi accounts.

### Identity is More Than Emulation

The formation of this participatory relationship is far more than the general view that life-model writings simply convey a religious model to be copied.<sup>548</sup> What can be seen working throughout this relationship is the embrace of Guru Nanak as more than just the

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<sup>548</sup> Consider the functionalist theories regarding sacred biography and hagiography put forth by: Peter Brown, Patrick Geary, Chase Robinson, and even Frank Reynolds and Donald Capps.

prime example of what a Sikh should do or how s/he should act. Participation involves the acceptance of the exemplary model, and leads the restructuring of the participant's life around not only the life-model provided, but also the collective "public memory" of the exemplar as conveyed throughout a trans-historical agreement upon and devotion to the social narratives that have served to draw the community together and regulate its continuation. Membership is a process involving the constant reevaluation of the root premise of devotion and the actions that demonstrate adherence to the goals set out by the model. This is a principle of action, done by the reader/community, not something passively absorbed by them through the process of reading.

This active principle is the declaration that a choice has been made to be a part of the community that follows Guru Nanak, to take his lessons as one's own, and to believe in the universe and the community that he revealed and brought to realization. Participation in a social narrative, like the *janam-sakhis*, rests on an individual's identification with not just the exemplar, but with the projects he set out, the community he created, and to the future to which all of that is oriented. This leads to participation in the collaborative projects that Guru Nanak laid out. McLeod calls this goal "panthic cohesion," but he never elaborates on how this was accomplished.<sup>549</sup> It is important to see that the relationship with Guru Nanak is, by definition, akin to that of a student to a teacher—follow the teachings, do the lessons, and show up for class. But class in this case has a social significance that unites the community into a group that wants to work together for the

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<sup>549</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 238.

benefit of the community, not simply for an individual's grade.<sup>550</sup> The lessons create the social cohesion, the social cohesion creates a community, a community creates its own identity as those who follow these lessons, and all of this hinges on how Sikhs relate and respond to Guru Nanak.

#### A Participatory Example: Identifying as Sikh Through the Janam-sakhis

Claiming an identity for oneself is a simple enough thing. A simple declaration claims, "I am (insert whatever is desired)," and the claim is made. But most people will not grant credence to such a claim unless it is acted upon, and the one who made the declaration exhibits attitudes and behaviors commensurate with an understanding of what the declared identity entails. Participation in the activities of the community affirm membership and association with that community. Taking the community's stories as one's own draws together the diachronic and synchronic associations of tradition and community that are expressed by those stories. In the case of Sikhism, exhibiting the lessons of the Guru is the best identifier of a Sikh. As Sikhs enact the lessons of the Guru, they claim and sustain their identity as members of the community the Guru founded. Enacting a story involves more than just repeating it, or using it as a guide for decision-making. Enacting the story is a public claim about the significance of the story, saying that this matters to me and my community for these reasons. Every interpretation about what a sakhi means is an attempt to clarify (and maybe codify) how the community is supposed

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<sup>550</sup> Or at least, this is the pro-social message of Guru Nanak's lessons promoting charity.

to understand that sakhi and the way that they are meant to enact its lessons in accordance with the lessons laid out by Guru Nanak, whose imprimatur authority lies behind each action. Therefore, examining how Sikhs have used and regarded a sakhi gives evidence of the participatory relationship outlined throughout this work. This section will lay out a brief example of how some have sought to engage the “Sacha Sauda” story [16 “Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqirs] to demonstrate the variety of ways Sikh demonstrate their adherence to the community goals elaborated by the sakhi and the example of the Guru that it provides.

As the “Sacha Sauda” sakhi is one of the most prominent sakhis it makes a logical choice for this example. The variety of presentations of the sakhi shows the numerous ways Sikhs have engaged and participated in its message, relating not only to Guru Nanak via the story, but to the historical community of Sikhs who have also embraced his teachings in these ways. The use of this sakhi as a reference point for Sikh discourse about its practices denotes the lasting impact of the janam-sakhis in the lives of Sikhs today—their relationship with Guru Nanak and his tradition, expressed by the trans-historical community of Sikhs.

One instance of Sikh use of the “Sacha Sauda” sakhi to warrant attention is a video posted by the University College London Sikh Society (using the account name UCLsikhs) to YouTube that shows highlights from their *Guru Ka Langar* (Guru’s free kitchen) event held on February 5, 2008.<sup>551</sup> The langar is the communal meal served at gurdwaras;

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<sup>551</sup> UCLsikhs, *Guru Ka Langar*, video, from YouTube.com, 2:59, posted November 19, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LK87JwHDPjk>.

however, in this case the University College London Sikh Society used langar as an opportunity to introduce the university community to this cherished Sikh practice. The primary narrator in this short video, an unidentified young Sikh from the nearby School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), describes the event and the origin of langar to viewers. He relates the “Sacha Sauda” story to illustrate the first example of Guru Nanak’s attitude towards charity and compassion. The narrator tells how Guru Nanak saw “people who were hungry” and “being the kindly soul he was, he spent all his money on making food for them and left nothing to sell or trade. And from that story that’s where this whole



Figure 5.7 UCLsikh’s *Guru Ka Langar* Video.



idea of langar and the concept has come from.”<sup>552</sup> It should be clear to see how the “Sacha Sauda” story is used to explain the Sikh practice of langar, as Guru Nanak’s emphasis on charity is evident through the explanation of the narrator.

But this is not just an exercise in telling how langar came from the “Sacha Sauda” story. It is the public enactment of the Sikh community’s tie to Guru Nanak through the langar, which serves as an act of commemoration and a statement of their identity as those who follow the Guru.<sup>553</sup> The University College London Sikh Society, a specific community, chose to hold this event to inform a the larger university community of their presence and, in doing so, convey an essential aspect of their community’s traditions, the focus on *dān* (charity) that undergirds the langar by way of a story about their community’s founder who first set this practice into motion by demonstrating charity to the “people who were hungry.”<sup>554</sup>

Another interesting example of the Sacha Sauda story being tied to langar can be found in a popular children’s book. *The Proud Sikh Fun & Learning Pack* published by Singh Brothers of Amritsar included a magazine which tells a slightly different version of the story. The magazine’s version of this sakhi is titled “Saccha Sauda: A Story of Twenty

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<sup>552</sup> Ibid. This assertion does not take into account that langar kitchens were common in Sufi enclaves throughout North India for years before Guru Nanak, though they were not public kitchens. Guru Nanak’s actions reflect a shift in focus for this practice, not its origin.

<sup>553</sup> It may be a stretch here to claim, as Eliade did, that ritual reenactments actually bring about the primordial time state they commemorate. But the langar continues to connect Sikhs to the moral lesson set forth by Guru Nanak as referenced by the narrator in the video. This demonstrates the diachronic or transhistorical nature of the community ties fostered by the janam-sakhis.

<sup>554</sup> UCLsikhs, *Guru Ka Langar*, video.

One Silver Coins.”<sup>555</sup> This telling of the story is very explicit in asserting that the feeding of the holy men was the “first LANGAR [sic].”<sup>556</sup> The story tells of Nanak’s father giving him twenty silver coins so that he could turn a profit. Nanak responds to his father’s criticisms by saying:

Father, you told me to make a true bargain. I did just that. I spent very little. But I got back much more in return. I gave just a little food to them. And just look at what I got back. I satisfied the hunger of the holy men. I got their blessings. And I got their teachings. This is the best profit father. It is the best bargain. This is a Saccha Sauda, a true trade.<sup>557</sup>

But the magazine does not just simply tell the story of the first langar; on the next page it offers a challenge in the form of a question to its young readers, “Where is the twenty first coin?” The magazine ensures its young readers that if Guru Nanak had had twenty one coins; he would have spent them all on the hungry holy men. To spur readers to action, the magazine comes with an actual coin (shown in Figure 5.8). It is about the same size as an American fifty cent piece; on the obverse is a picture of Guru Nanak and on the reverse is the phrase “Saccha Sauda” along with the Punjabi expression of *Ik Oankar*, and then asks readers to “Think of the best bargain YOU can make with this coin.”<sup>558</sup> The coin is to act as a tangible reminder of the story and its lesson about Guru Nanak’s compassion and charity.

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<sup>555</sup> Irpinder Bhatia and Gautam Bhatia, *The Proud Sikh Fun with Learning Fun Magazine*, 20.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.



Figure 5.8 The twenty-first coin.

Such a tangible reminder further denotes participation in the story. Why else would someone carry such a reference to Guru Nanak's teachings, then but to follow them? The young audience to which this presentation is directed are given a clear sign of their participation in the sakhi, by being included in the story itself. The tale is not finished, as there remains one coin, entrusted to a young Sikh (the reader) who is encouraged to act in accordance to the Guru's teaching about charity. Readers are drawn into the story and directed to make a choice about how they would act, not only in the Guru's stead, but in their own lives to follow. The Guru's message is put forth as a challenge to them an aspirational goal to live up to his standard that he set and also a standard to which the community adheres in their devotion and allegiance to the Guru.

Popular Sikh websites also devote attention to the “Sacha Sauda” story. Sikhism.com adds a subtitle to the story, “Doing good to the people is the way of a Sikh. Sharing with the needy makes the day of a Sikh.”<sup>559</sup> The website’s account of the story is unclear on the recipients of Nanak’s charity, but it mentions that both holy men and the needy (possibly one and the same) received his donations. The website ends its account of the story with:

Let us resolve today that we will share a part of our earnings with anyone who needs our help. This is the true bargain of life, and it will not ruin our financial success. The true bargain of life is sharing one's earning with the needy and helping them in whatever way we can.<sup>560</sup>

The author’s emphasis is clearly on the notion of Guru Nanak’s lesson of charity and implores Sikh readers to do so as well.

This emphasis is echoed in an article posted in the *Panthic Weekly* section of the website Panthic.org. Titled “The Story of the Real True Bargain –Sacha Sauda,” the anonymous author seeks to present “the factual story of ‘Sacha Sauda.’”<sup>561</sup> The author clearly has engaged in a historical study of the sakhi and is aware of some of the difficulties of its association with the Bala Janam-sakhi tradition. In this version of the sakhi, Bhai Bala is disparaged and replaced by Bhai Mardana, the Muslim travelling companion of Guru Nanak. The recipients of Guru Nanak’s charity are not sadhus, but a village that was

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<sup>559</sup> *Sikhism.com*, “Sacha Sauda, or The true Bargain,” accessed February 14, 2009, <http://www.sikhism.com/sakhis/1>. Unfortunately this link is no longer functioning in 2014.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>561</sup> *Panthic.org*, “The Story of the Real True Bargain- Sacha Sauda,” accessed August 22, 2014, <http://panthic.org/articles/3309>.

“affected by disease, where the people were thirsty, hungry and sick due to lack of water and an outbreak of disease.”<sup>562</sup> The article draws on a verse<sup>563</sup> found in the *Adi Granth*, “Instead of wearing these beggar's robes, it is better to be a householder, and give to others.” The author implies that the Guru would not give charity to sadhus, because the Guru rejected their ascetic practices and advocated the responsible life of a householder. This article ends with the same lines noted as the subtitle on the Sikhism.com article as well as its final line, “Doing good to the people [sic] is the way of a Sikh. Sharing with the needy makes the day of a Sikh. The true bargain of life is sharing one's earning with the needy and helping them in whatever way we can.”<sup>564</sup> What is important to note here is that we see a consistency of thought in these presentations of the ethics underlying the “Sacha Sauda” anecdotes. While these two websites may go about their presentations of this sakhi quite differently, they reach the same conclusion as to its importance in the lives of Sikhs and expect Sikhs to act upon it.

The lessons about charity conveyed by these presentations of “Sacha Sauda” are evident. A fundamental lesson of Sikhism is presented in each of these examples and is used to provide the basis for an important Sikh institution—the langar meal. Sikhs participate in this institution because of their connections to Guru Nanak, his example, and the tradition of the community which follows him. But is this sakhi the historical basis of

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid. M3. *Vadahans Ki Var*, 1 (4), AG, 587. This hymn noted in the *Adi Granth* as M3; therefore it was composed by the Third Guru, Amar Das, not Guru Nanak as the author of the article contends.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid. The Sikhism.com page was updated more recently, but no indication is given as to when it was originally posted, so I cannot readily determine which site initially posted the lines.

the langar tradition? Is the sakhi the true starting point for this practice? There is plenty of evidence that it may not be,<sup>565</sup> but that does not deter Sikhs from using the sakhi as a means to establish and justify their practice by connecting it to the actions of Guru Nanak presented in the sakhi and taking their lead from his example. Guru Nanak's verses are the best record of his teachings, yet none of these discussions of "Sacha Sauda" have referenced the Adi Granth to affirm the story's presentation of the Guru's teachings about charity through the langar kitchen. While many of Guru Nanak's verses speak of charity, none specifically mention the term langar.<sup>566</sup> It is the bards, Balwand and Satta, who make the only specific reference to langar in the Adi Granth, as we read in the following verse:

The Langar - the Kitchen of the Guru's Shabad has been opened, and its supplies never run short. Whatever His Master gave, He spent; He distributed it all to be eaten...

Balwand says that Khivi, the Guru's wife, is a noble woman, who gives soothing, leafy shade to all. She distributes the bounty of the Guru's Langar; the kheer - the rice pudding and ghee, is like sweet ambrosia.<sup>567</sup>

This verse mentions Mata Khivi, wife of the Guru Angad, who succeeded Guru Nanak.

Yet, we hear a hint of the Sacha Sauda tale in, "Whatever His Master gave, He spent; He

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<sup>565</sup> Neither *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, nor Avtar Singh's *Ethics of the Sikhs* cite the "Sacha Sauda" story in their descriptions about the origin of the langar in Sikhism. Each of these influential texts contends that the practice of langar began much later in the life of Guru Nanak, after his many years of travel and the founding of Kartarpur, where the Sikh Panth or community has its beginnings. It was here, these sources note, that Guru Nanak founded the communal kitchen open to all. See: *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, ed. Harbans Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau, 1996), s.v. "Guru ka langar," and Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs* (Patiala: Punjabi University Publication Bureau, 1996), 166.

<sup>566</sup> Guru Nanak's hymns discuss charity and sharing at length, but he doesn't directly mention the practice that has come to be known as the langar.

<sup>567</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, s.v. "Mata Khivi." and *Sikhs.org*, "Sri Guru Granth Sahib English Translation: Balwand and Satta, *Ramakali ki Var*, 2, AG, 967," accessed July 22, 2007, <http://www.sikhs.org/english/eg93.htm#p966>.

distributed it all to be eaten.” Was the sakhi influenced by this verse? It certainly sounds like it. The timeline indicates that the verse preceded the written sakhi. Balwand and Satta performed in the court of Guru Arjan, almost half a century before the first known Bala Janam-sakhi manuscript containing the Sacha Sauda anecdote. It is reasonable to assume the sakhi is exposition on this verse, placing the emphasis within the life of Guru Nanak to convey the importance of the ethical lesson that carries through to Sikh audiences today. Despite these connections, the primary evidence offered in the accounts above is the sakhi itself, the story is all the proof needed to make their case.

These examples demonstrate a sampling of the variety of ways Sikhs have employed the “Sacha Sauda” story to explain the underlying ethics of charity in the langar practice. The sakhi does not operate in the classical sense of a hagiographic example to be simply emulated by readers, but as an exposition of Guru Nanak’s ethical teachings in which Sikhs operate and live. They, as members of the community of devotees, are entrenched in the teachings and express them through their actions. They participate in the ethical project of langar, which according to the sakhi was initiated by Guru Nanak. They act together as a community to hold the langar, with an eye to how the Guru did it himself. Any questions about the veracity of Bhai Bala’s history or intentions for first recording this sakhi are tangential concerns. The focus is on the formative role of charity and the langar play in defining Sikhs by their actions; which ultimately affirm their connections to the Guru through the use of the sakhi.

## **Social and Personal Connections to a Religious Identity**

This all comes back to the nature of community identity as a product of the social narratives to which the community is devoted. David Carr emphasized that “such narratives may serve to organize and make sense of the experience and action of their authors and their readers, focusing their attention in certain directions and orienting their actions towards certain goals.”<sup>568</sup> The stories of Guru Nanak organize the lives of Sikhs along the principles of Sikhism set forth by the Guru in the *janam-sakhis*. Nikki Singh’s focus on the River Bein *sakhi* as the moment of revelatory *darśan* that is shared through the story can and should be extended to encompass more than just a doctrinal understanding or the universe-model suggested earlier. What this shows is the absolute acceptance of a new religious worldview by an audience that has chosen to follow the Guru’s teachings. This experience links all Sikhs to the specific moment (real or fictive, it does not matter) where *Ik Oankar* was revealed to Guru Nanak and he was instructed to share that message with the people—his Sikhs. This shared experience is what unites the community.

However, simply describing Sikh identity by way of participation in a social narrative overlooks a key element in the community—the individuals who constitute it. How an individual chooses to collaborate in these social actions rests on their specific engagements with the narratives. The fact remains that there has to first be a personal connection to those stories, which then build the foundation for the collaborative action that follows. That connection rests in the person or, more precisely, in the personality of

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<sup>568</sup> Carr, *TNH*, 71.



Guru Nanak that is presented in these stories. The janam-sakhis play an essential role in the construction of Sikh identity and in defining the Sikh community in regard to their association with Guru Nanak.

The janam-sakhis' presentations of Guru Nanak bring the experience of him closer both literally and symbolically to an audience that may not have had the opportunity to meet him. Put another way, the janam-sakhis allow Sikhs to take darśan of the Guru and savor his presence in highly nuanced ways through the depictions of his personality and the presentation of his teachings. The janam-sakhis are key in assembling and presenting Guru Nanak as a person. Devotion to the Sikh mission is cultivated through the direct relationship with the Guru made possible through these informative stories. In the janam-sakhis, Guru Nanak has a personality, habits, and aspirations, all in addition to the lessons he shares with the audience through his exemplary life.

It is to these personal features conveyed by the janam-sakhis that Sikhs actually relate. This can be shown by reformulating the janam-sakhis' focus in the language of this study. Guru Nanak, by being shown to have a personality, a family, a community of followers, as well as teachings which he shared with his community, is actually shown as being a member of the social narratives he is promoting. Guru Nanak, by (being and) living in accordance with the teachings he shared is actively participating in the stories he shares. He is the first mover in the collaborative actions of the community. Generally the sakhis that tell of Guru Nanak outwitting or outmatching another in religious debate, ending up with that vanquished foe coming over to the Guru's side and following along with his teachings—teachings that still guide the community today. This need not only involve

opponents as there were plenty of people in the sakhis who encounter the Guru and simply come to learn from him. This study has provided a variety of select sakhis that show this to be the case. The Guru's community grows as he shares his message with those around him. Sakhis about his youth show hints of the wisdom of the Guru, yet to be revealed. Upon his own experience of darśan, Guru Nanak begins to engage and challenge the thinking of Hindus and Muslims alike. His followers join him in enacting the new spiritual message he received; foremost among them was Bhai Mardana, the Muslim minstrel who accompanied Guru Nanak on his far-ranging journeys. People such as Daulat Khan, Bhai Lālo, Dunī Chand, Bawa Walī Qandhari, and even the murderous Sajjan become participants in the social narrative being constructed—first by Guru Nanak, then reconstructed by every later presentation of the Guru's life in a janam-sakhi narrative. Readers are joining in the stories with the Guru himself. He undertook these endeavors to share the message, to initiate the social narrative, to build the community, and to set it on a path for future success.

The affective bonds that stir collaborative effort in the community today, tied to its historical founder as it is, actually connect, by way of the story itself, to Guru Nanak as a member of the community in the same way. He is as much a member of the community, as he is its teacher and purpose. The bonds of shared devotion connect the Guru to the Sikhs, as they connect Sikhs to the lessons he set forth. This becomes even more evident in the sakhis that introduce Guru Nanak's eventual successor—Lehna, who comes to be known as Guru Angad. Key to these sakhis is their demonstration of Lehna's acceptance

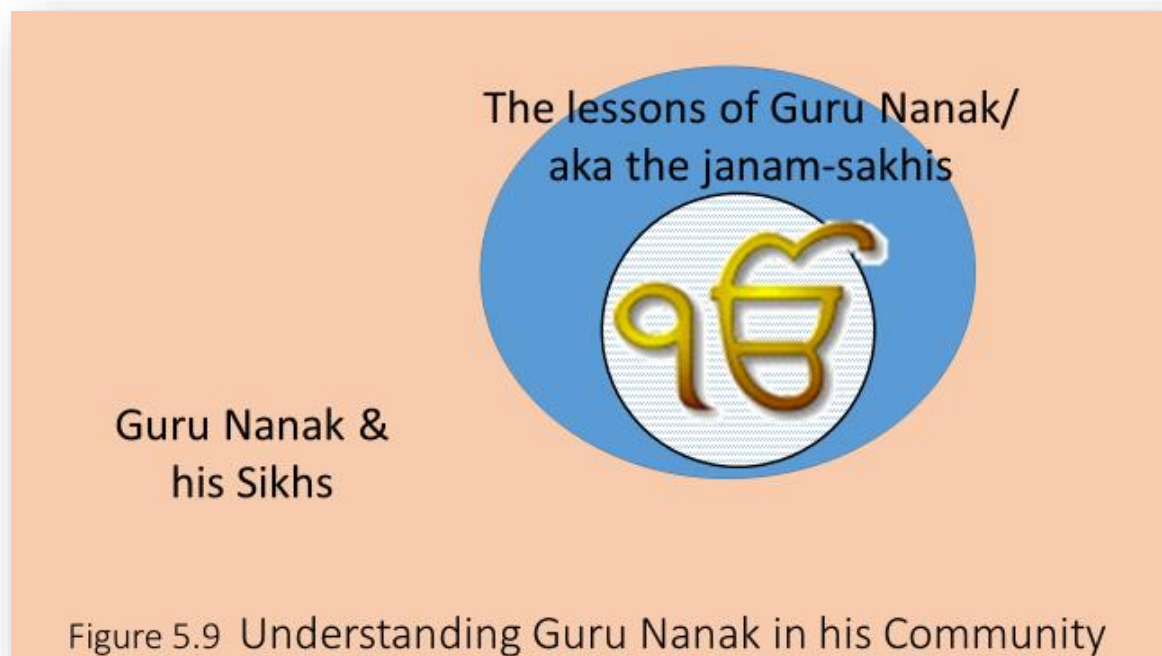
of the Guru's teachings, even though he was a "devotee of Durga,"<sup>569</sup> and, upon his ascension to the guruship, served as the leader of the Sikh community, to which Nanak was now a member, having relinquished his role as Guru to someone worthy of its position as both a spiritual and community leader. The importance of all this rests in depicting Nanak as a member of the community, not just as its spiritual leader. He may be the Guru, but he is part of the community, and as such is a participant in the collaborative effort seeking to realize and enact the spiritual path his teachings laid out.

This is the truly formative element of Sikh identity by way of the *janam-sakhis*; Guru Nanak was as much a Sikh himself as anyone who has devoted themselves to those teachings. You cannot separate the Guru from the community, he is an instrumental part of it. He is not simply the community's founder or teacher, but a member who lives in accordance with the message he conveyed as part of the community, sharing in the experience of the community along the way. (Though for many moments on his journeys, it was a community of two, with others separated by long distances.)

It is possible to illustrate this in a manner similar to the diagrams of the scriptural relationships discussed earlier in this chapter. Figure 5.9 clearly presents this more nuanced discussion of Guru Nanak as part of the community itself. By locating him with the rest of the Sikh community, he is shown to engage the scriptural texts, which embody his lessons. While he had no specific textual reference to consult for his understandings of the revealed notion of *Ik Oankar*, he did compose one that he shared with those who

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<sup>569</sup> Shyam Dua, ed. *The Luminous Life of Guru Nanak Dev*, 78.



accompanied and encountered him along his journeys and while settled at Kartarpur. The janam-sakhis, by representing these moments of composition, reinvigorate the initial lessons through their repetition via these stories. This type of engagement with these lessons and their teacher is made possible by their presentation via narrative. Sikhs who were with the Guru, were given the lessons in their direct form, the hymns recorded in the Adi Granth, while later audiences are given the janam-sakhis that convey the experience of both the Guru and his teachings through the narrative account. In each, Guru Nanak is as much a participant in the narrative, as he is in the actions which strive toward the goals of the lessons he is presenting. He follows the teachings through his teaching of them. Guru Nanak, as presented in the janam-sakhis, is there doing Sikhism, and those who walk with him, whether it was as the events of these stories unfold, or through their identification

as Sikhs in a later time, are working with him as they engage his teachings in their efforts to be Sikh.

### **Maintaining the Relationship**

What remains to be seen in the exploration of Sikhs' relationship to Guru Nanak via the janam-sakhis is how the specifics of that relationship are structured. What is conveyed by these lessons? The final chapter turns to examine the nature and outcome of the pedagogical projects conveyed by the various janam-sakhi iterations, and how this serves to delineate understandings of who is actually participating in this relationship and how they are, and are supposed to, go about doing so.

## 6. The Pedagogical Function of the Janam-sakhis

It is easy to say that Sikhs participate in and with the janam-sakhi stories as a general claim. In fact, much of their personal devotion to Guru Nanak hinges upon a connection made through the sakhis. What remains to be demonstrated is which sakhis continue to foster this relationship, and what is being taught by those anecdotes. The simple act of selection stands out as a key factor in understanding the pedagogical role of the janam-sakhis, as an author, editor, or compiler must first consider which stories to tell before proceeding to tell them. This stage of this study requires attending to the first of these steps, because sakhi selection is the most comprehensive way to show how the narrative will lead and instruct an audience to specific understandings (which are then expressed in the narrative presentation).<sup>570</sup> It is important to focus on the selections made by these modern janam-sakhi presentations in relation to the historical janam-sakhis, as they represent the distillation and continuation of a pedagogical engagement fostering the participation evidenced today. The following discussion demonstrates how the pedagogy in these narratives informs participation with the narratives, supporting the threads of the last two chapters' foci and providing an example of how the collaborative efforts of a community are grounded in the individual apprehension of these lessons.

Attempting these analyses in the Punjab would be almost impossible; the tradition of Guru Nanak is too prevalent. But in materials created for diasporic communities, it is

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<sup>570</sup> Analyzing the specifics of those narratives begins the road down an exhausting comparative study between various iterations of janam-sakhis. That is not in the purview of this study. Rather than discussing each instance of pedagogy, it is possible for us to see trends and tactics across the body of janam-sakhi literature and note that audiences are being both instructed in Sikh tradition and participating in it.

possible to more easily discern the sustained presentation of the janam-sakhis in reaching those Sikhs who are outside the traditional sphere of Sikh influence. Janam-sakhis in English represent the furthest reach of this tradition, as they are about as far from the original manuscript traditions as one can get. Participation in Sikh tradition, and in the message of Guru Nanak as conveyed by the janam-sakhis, is taken for granted in the Punjab. The environment is saturated, if you will, with instructive keys and actions derived from the constant exposure to Sikh history, community practices, and local history that ties back to stories of the Guru. Attempting to gauge or measure the pedagogical value of the janam-sakhis in such an environment would be nigh impossible, as so much else crowds the field of Sikh instruction. But in the diaspora, where there is an acknowledged language gap,<sup>571</sup> these presentations of the janam-sakhis (in English) fill a role that is far more distinct and measureable than the diverse and widely-disseminated janam-sakhi stories do in the Punjab.

The modern janam-sakhi presentations described in Chapter Four represent a distinct mode of engaging Sikh tradition (and the Guru himself). They are quite clear in their intention of spreading the message of Guru Nanak through the story of his life. But these do not all tell the story in the same way; sometimes anecdotes may be missing or emphasized in different ways. These modern sources have selected anecdotes from the pool of Guru Nanak's tradition to make their point about their interpretation of Guru Nanak's life and message for their audiences. The task at hand is to demonstrate how these

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<sup>571</sup> Charles Townsend, "*Gurbani Kirtan* and the Performance of Sikh Identity in California," as noted in Chapter 4.

new janam-sakhis are conveying that message and how the selective presentation of Guru Nanak's tradition (read as "life model" for purposes here) work to foster participation via the pedagogical impetus of these narratives.

### **Selection in Modern Janam-sakhis**

Scholarly attentions have generally focused on the origins and contents of the historical manuscripts. No previous study of the janam-sakhis has looked to identify just which stories are most commonly used. This is a significant oversight. Obviously, the inclusion or exclusion of specific sakhis alters the overall presentation of his life. Saying he did (or did not) do things or go places alters the understanding of his actions and the implementation of his spiritual message. Truncating that presentation to fewer than ten anecdotes, as many new presentations have done, definitely impacts any understandings of the Guru's life and message conveyed by a narrative. Selection limits the ways and means of participation for the audience. This section looks to visualize, through elementary statistical comparisons, the differences in modern janam-sakhi presentations' selection of anecdotes and then to discuss how selection impacts or conditions the pedagogical function of these janam-sakhi presentations.

### A Foundation in McLeod

This dissertation has employed the scheme of sakhi identification and numbering that McLeod laid out in his first work on the janam-sakhis, which provides a baseline for comparison between various janam-sakhi presentations. McLeod identified one hundred



and twenty-four individual sakhis across the historical janam-sakhi traditions. All direct references to individual sakhis in this work have identified the sakhi in accordance with McLeod's numbering scheme, provided in Appendix One.<sup>572</sup> This study's labeling of the sakhis falls in line with McLeod's scheme, making only one slight modification with regard to sakhis 106 "The inhospitable village unmolested" and 107 "The hospitable village dispersed." These two sakhis never appear without the other, in fact the story of each is only sensible when held in comparison with the other.<sup>573</sup> Roopinder Singh provides a brief account of these in *Guru Nanak: His Life & Teachings*:

106. The inhospitable village unmolested

107. The hospitable village dispersed

On their way, near Lahore, they [Guru Nanak and Mardana] came to Kangarpur, where they were not treated well by the villagers. As they were leaving, the janamsakhi tradition tells us, the Guru said: "May you continue to prosper in this very village." Soon thereafter, they went to Manak, where they were welcomed warmly, and spent a night there. As they were leaving, the Guru said: "May this village be deserted."

When Mardana asked him about the seemingly inappropriate responses, the Guru said that negative attitude of the first village should be contained. On the other hand, if the warm and caring people of the second village were to spread out into the world, they would have a positive impact wherever they went and thus goodness would permeate the world through them.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 73-76.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. McLeod noted that they "really constitute a single *sākhī*," but insisted on separate numbering for the two without further explanation.

<sup>574</sup> Roopinder Singh, 34.

It is easy to see how the one sakhi does not make sense without the presence of the other; therefore, for the scheme of comparing sakhis, these two are treated as one in this work, yielding a total pool of one hundred and twenty-three possible sakhis.<sup>575</sup>

The first steps of this study were innocently forecast in McLeod’s *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. While McLeod’s focus was directed elsewhere, his work provides this study its first numbers to compare. He identifies which sakhis were included in the four primary historical janam-sakhi traditions. Table 6.1 shows that none of these early janam-sakhi sources used more than sixty percent of the one hundred and twenty-three possible sakhis. The fact that none of the “original” janam-sakhi manuscripts employed all of the one hundred and twenty-three possible sakhis, indicates the presence of a process of selection utilized at their compilation. Therefore, attention should be given to an examination of how sakhi selection has impacted later presentations of the Guru’s life.

Table 6.1 McLeod’s Analyses of Historical Janam-sakhi Traditions		
Miharban	65 sakhis	53%
Puratan	65*	53%
<i>Gyan-ratanavali</i>	60	49%
Bala: <i>Hafaz Qutb</i> , 1871 lithograph	48	39%
Bala: <i>Divan Buta</i> , 1871 expanded lithograph	74	60%

<sup>575</sup> The merging of sakhis 106 and 107 into one for this comparative phase results in changes in the sakhi counts listed for some sources. Any source marked with \* in the charts that follow has been adjusted to consider sakhis 106 and 107 as one sakhi, not two separate accounts. The descriptions of these sources offered in previous chapters and the sakhi listings in the Appendix will still note these as distinct sakhis and count them accordingly.

## **Evidence of Selection in Modern Janam-sakhis**

With McLeod's cataloguing system in mind, this author took to reading the sources described in Chapter Four to see which sakhis these presentations included. The tables on the next few pages illustrate the specific counts and percentages of sakhis employed by these sources. The tables are organized in the same manner as the discussion of these sources in Chapter Four. Table 6.2 offers data on academic and popular press editions, while Table 6.3 combines the schoolbooks, children's books, and comic book presentations. Table 6.4 provides the counts and percentages for the new media presentations of the janam-sakhis. The next sections will present and comment on each category of janam-sakhi presentations, while holding off on any comparative analysis until all have been reviewed.

### Academic and Popular Press Editions

These four sources offer the most depth to their presentations of Guru Nanak's life. This makes sense, as they are geared toward most astute adult readers. Individually, they range from 21% to 58% coverage, which puts them in a similar range as the historical janam-sakhis (ranging 39-60%). This comparison is skewed by the highly academic treatments of Harbans Singh and Kirpal Singh, whose works can be seen as both modern presentations of the janam-sakhis as well as academic studies of the historical traditions. Harmand Singh Thind's and Roopinder Singh's works are decidedly geared toward the more "popular" audience, rather than an academically interested one and depict less than a third of the sakhis available to them. It is odd that in a text that aspires to tell the life of

<u>Table 6.2</u> Academic and Popular Press Editions		
Harbans Singh's <i>Guru Nanak and the Origins of the Sikh Faith</i>	70* sakhis	57%
Kirpal Singh's <i>Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study</i>	72*	58%
Harmand Singh Thind's <i>Sakhian from Sikhism</i>	26	21%
Roopinder Singh's <i>Guru Nanak: His Life &amp; Teachings</i>	38*	31%
Vir Singh's <i>Gur Balam Sakhian</i>	36	29%
Puran Singh's <i>Book of the Ten Masters</i>	26*	21%

Guru Nanak, Roopinder Singh left out two-thirds of what is known about that life. But that is truly no different than the shortcomings of all the other presentations to be discussed here. No one narrative has provided a complete picture.

Vir Singh's *Gur Balam Sakhian: Stories of Beloved Guru Nanak* and Puran Singh's *Book of the Ten Masters* have been included here as well (in the grey band at the bottom of the table). While these texts are colonial-era janam-sakhis, they are still available in print, and in English no less. Therefore, for the criteria of this study, they can count as modern works in their new form. Their inclusion here raises the average sakhi count of these editions to forty-five, or to just shy of thirty-seven percent of the possible sakhis.

### Schoolbooks, Children's Books, and Comic Books

These three categories offer the largest sampling of modern janam-sakhis, and are shown below in Table 6.3. It is surprising to note that only one of these, Ajit Singh

Aulakh's *Illustrated Life Stories of Guru Sahibs'*, offers more than a third of the possible sakhis.<sup>576</sup> The five schoolbooks, noted in the top grey bands, offer an average of over

<b>Table 6.3</b>		
<b>Schoolbooks, Children's Books, and Comic Books</b>		
Singh and Dhillon's <i>Guru Nanak Dev</i> (Stories from Sikh History 1)	20 sakhis	16%
Singha and Kaur's <i>Guru Nanak Dev</i> (Sikh Studies 3)	26	21%
Sikh Missionary Society's <i>Guru Nanak (For Children)</i> and <i>The Guru's Way (For Children)</i>	17*	14%
Tejinder Kaur Anand's <i>The Essence of Sikhism 3: The Lives and Teachings of the Sikh Gurus</i>	21	17%
Ajit Singh Aulakh's <i>Illustrated Life Stories of Guru Sahibs'</i>	42*	34%
Irpinder and Gautam Bhatia's <i>The Proud Sikh...</i>	4	3%
Arpana Caur's <i>Nanak: The Guru</i>	23	19%
Anita Ganeri's <i>The Milk and the Jasmine Flower and Other Stories</i>	2	2%
Santokh Singh Jagdev's <i>Bed Time Stories-2: Guru Nanak Dev Ji</i>	25	20%
Gurbakhsh Singh's <i>Sikh Sakhis for the Youth</i>	5	4%
Mala Singh's <i>The Story of Guru Nanak</i>	24	20%
Mridula Oberoi's <i>The Sikh Gurus (Life and Times)</i>	17	14%
<i>Travels of Guru Nanak (Activity Book)</i> , compiled by Baljit Singh, Inderjeet Singh	30*	24%
Vaneeta Vaid's <i>Tell Me About Sikh Gurus</i>	10	8%
Rosetta Williams' <i>Sikh Gurus</i>	15	12%
<i>Luminous Life of Guru Nanak</i> , Shyam Dua editor	30	24%
Amar Chitra Katha: Mansukhanis' <i>Guru Nanak</i>	30	24%
Diamond Comic's <i>Sikh Gurus</i>	19	15%

<sup>576</sup> The sakhi count listed for this text notes only those sakhis in the chapter on Guru Nanak. Four sakhis featuring Guru Nanak (92 -95) included in the chapter on Guru Angad were not considered to be part of the presentation of Guru Nanak's life being made by the text.

twenty-one sakhis, or roughly seventeen percent of possible sakhis. The two comic books, in the lower grey band, average almost twenty-five sakhis in their presentations. The remaining children's books, between the two sets of grey bands, demonstrate the variety of ways authors have sought to present the life of Guru Nanak. Some offer key sample sakhis, while others portray a more elaborate narrative of the Guru's life, and yet only one presents more than a quarter of the sakhis available. Certainly, some leeway must be granted when considering the nature of the audience to whom these are directed—children—but it is a fact that these narratives have chosen to employ, on average, less than seventeen percent of the sakhis available.

### New Media Expressions

The websites noted in Table 6.4 have the potential to convey the largest presentations of Guru Nanak's life, as they are not bound by the limitations of print, marketability, or shelf-space. The internet is not constrained by these in the same way actual books are, because webhosting fees are relatively cheap. However, none of these sites take advantage of these factors to make more complete presentations of the possible sakhis, as none pass the threshold of utilizing one-third of the available sakhis. As a group, these websites offer an average of just under sixteen sakhis, or about 13 percent of those possible.

Table 6.4 New Media Expressions		
www.info-sikh.com	28 sakhis	23%
www.panthic.org	1	>1%
www.realsikhism.com	7	6%
www.sikh-history.com	14	11%
www.sikhiwiki.org	37*	31%
www.sikhlionz.com	10	8%
www.sikhnet.com	15	12%
www.sikhs.org	12	10%
Animated World Faiths, <i>The Life of Guru Nanak</i>	7	6%
BBC Learning Video, “The beginnings of Sikhism”	2	2%
Geethanjali, <i>Guru Nanak Animated Stories</i>	21	17%

### Selection in Modern Janam-sakhis

Of the thirty-five sources examined here the largest pool of sakhis used in one source is the seventy-three found in Kirpal Singh’s *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study*, while the website Panthic.org uses only one fully developed anecdote, 16. “Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqirs,” in its presentation of the Guru’s life. That is quite a disparity. Each author has his or her reasons for presenting Guru Nanak’s life in the way selected. While previous chapters have discussed potential motivations for these choices, it is important to note here the dramatic differences that arise from them. Of the one hundred and twenty-three possible sakhis these authors could have used, they only collectively employed one hundred and one of those. These presentations have left out

twenty-two sakhis entirely (noted in Table 6.5 in the next sub-section). That is roughly eighteen percent of the sakhis about Guru Nanak that are left out. Imagine the impact of leaving out eighteen percent of other historical figures' lives. What would the Gospels or the Hadith look like if they were missing eighteen percent of their content? We know so little about the life of these figures, to leave out such a significant portion is detrimental to understanding the traditions that honor them.

In all, only four sakhis are found in over three-fourths of the modern sources, while eighty-nine were used in less than half of these modern presentations. Forty-six sakhis can be found in less than ten percent of the sources. Those are dismal numbers to consider if one were looking for some semblance of consistency across these modern janam-sakhis. Closer attention needs to be given to those sakhis that were included and those left out. These next sections examine these sakhis and consider the impact of their selection or omission.

### Sakhis not Selected

It is interesting to note that twenty-two sakhis have been left out of these modern janam-sakhi presentations. The majority of these, eighteen of the twenty-two, were sakhis that McLeod said “must be rejected” or which he classified as “improbable.”<sup>577</sup> It is, with an odd note of irony, that we see Sikh authors neglecting so many of the same sakhis that McLeod characterized as lacking “features which suggest a substratum of truth.”<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 77-87.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. One could hope that pointing this out would abate some of the outrage that has been directed at McLeod over the years.



However, it is somewhat understandable as to why these sakhis have been left out. The first four listed in Table 6.5 all describe situations that result in the young Nanak reciting specific hymns. McLeod characterized these as “examples of episodes that evolved as appropriate settings for certain *śabads* or *śloks*.”<sup>579</sup> Possible reasons for their exclusion from the modern janam-sakhis are too numerous to list. That said, if the point of the sakhi is to relay a specific hymn, then these may not have been suitable for presentations that did not go into such theological depths as exegetical story-telling.

Many of these omitted sakhis involve Guru Nanak meeting with historical figures, many of whom died well before the Guru was born in 1469 CE, or those who are not found in any corresponding historical records, as is the case with sakhis 61 and 62, conversations

<b>Table 6.5</b> <b>Sakhis Omitted from Modern Presentations</b>		
<b>2. Recitation of Sapat Ślokī Gītā</b>	<b>55. A girl turned into a boy</b>	<u>102. A watchman receives royal authority</u>
<i>12. The true field</i>	<b>59. A deceitful people turned to righteousness</b>	<b>105. Kīṛ nagar: the city of insects</b>
<i>13. The true merchandise</i>	<i>61. Rājā Mitr Sain</i>	<b>108. The meeting with Sheikh Farīd in Āsā</b>
<i>15. The true harvest</i>	<i>62. Rājā Jagannāth</i>	<b>117. The meeting with Khwājar Khizar</b>
<i>35. Mount Govardhan, Mathurā, and Brindāban</i>	75. The mullah's village	<b>119. The meeting with Makhdūm Bahāuddin</b>
<i>41. Meeting with Kabir</i>	76. Rahīm and Karīm	<i>123. Discourse with Abdul Rahmān</i>
<b>51. The bhagats revealed in the stars</b>	<u>88. Merchant of Dīpālpur</u>	<b>Bold-</b> Rejected Sakhis <i>Italics-</i> Improbable Sakhis <u>Underlined-</u> Possible Sakhis Normal- Probable Sakhis
<b>53. The yogi of Jāpāpatan (Jaffna)</b>	<b>96. Death of Makhdūm Bahāuddin</b>	

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 83.

with two Rajas, while sakhi 41. “Meeting with Kabir” was introduced in the Bala janam-sakhi, as noted in both McLeod’s and Surjit Hans’ studies.<sup>580</sup> The Bala Janam-sakhi’s introduction of Kabir (1398-1448)<sup>581</sup> served to put Guru Nanak in a lineage of Indian holy men which culminates with Baba Hindal. This claim has been excised from later janam-sakhi interpolations and Sikh tradition. Add to that the fact that Kabir died about twenty years prior to Nanak’s birth, and a more historically-aware modern audience would have issue with this sakhi. Similarly, meetings with Sheik Farīd (108) and Makhdūm Bahāuddin (119 & 96) also would imply some creative views on the historical record as Farīd died in 1265 CE and Bahāuddin passed away even earlier, in 1170 CE.<sup>582</sup>

The two sakhis (75 and 76) deemed “possible” by McLeod are part of the arc of Guru Nanak’s travels to Mecca and Medina. These two are less notable sakhis than Guru Nanak’s other conversations with Muslims. The story of the moving mosque (sakhi 79) and Guru Nanak’s refutation of the Muslims’ ban on sacred music (80) are more interesting reads than sakhis 75 and 76, which tell about Guru Nanak deciding to join a mullah on his pilgrimage and a theological debate he got involved with along the way.

It is important to keep in mind that the goal of janam-sakhi authors is as much to tell a coherent story as it is, in the case of telling Guru Nanak’s life, to convey important Sikh teachings through that story. These twenty-two sakhis may not have served the

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<sup>580</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 85-6; and Hans, *Reconstruction*, 204-5.

<sup>581</sup> Kabir, *The Bijak of Kabir*, trans. Linda Hess and Shukdeo Singh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>582</sup> McLeod, *GNSR*, 80 and 82.

authors' needs in those regards, but at some point in history these sakhis did serve a need.<sup>583</sup> It is interesting to note this shift and these exclusions, but the specific reasons for them remain with the individual authors. Luckily, those same authors chose to include one hundred and one sakhis in their presentations, and it is far easier to discuss the sakhis that are presented than make conjectures about the ones that were not.

### Sakhis Selected?

The complete listing of included sakhis, ranked by how many sources in which they were presented, is provided in Appendix Three.<sup>584</sup> It is not necessary for this study to discuss every sakhi that was included in these modern presentations. Specific attention will be given to the most prominent sakhis and to a few select others that note key issues with regard to the issues of pedagogy and participation.

It is also interesting to note which type of text presents certain stories. Thirty-two of the forty-six sakhis found in less than ten percent of the sources are found only in the academic and popular press editions. These are listed below in Table 6.6. That means that the most obscure sakhis are found in the works specifically devoted to presenting the most

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<sup>583</sup> This is where/ how selection can be seen to indicate what Ricouer calls the “dialectic of representation.” He contends that representations of history (the janam-sakhi narratives in this case) express “the plurality, the differentiation, and the multiple temporalization of social phenomena” (all of which are demonstrated by the variety of janam-sakhi constructions and the legacy of those narratives as social narratives). This then signifies meaning and ultimately results in the authorial claim that the representation is “the past *in truth*” (this was Guru Nanak’s life). This claim to represent truth, while acknowledging a variety of possible representations (various janam-sakhi narratives), helps clarify how a single iteration presents its own (internalized) hermeneutic scheme through the proposed application of that narrative. Paul Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 227-228.

<sup>584</sup> The listing is divided by quartiles, separating sakhis by their appearance in more than seventy-five percent of the sources examined, or more than half, less than half, and less than a quarter, respectively.

Table 6.6 Sakhis Found Only in Academic and Popular Press Editions		
17. The loṭā and ring presented to a faqīr	44. Ayodhyā: discourse with paṇḍits	69. Kurukshetra: discourse on bathing
18. Bhāgīrath and Mansukh	49. The brick falls from the temple	74. Multān: discourse with a descendant of Pīr Bahāuddīn
19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh	50. The jackal and the food from God's court	78. Mecca: Gurū Nānak's miraculous arrival
24. The mullah seeks to exorcize his evil spirit	52. Rāmeśwaram	82. Hīnglāj
31. Delhi: the real alms	56. The meeting with Kaliyug	85. Bābur attacks Ṭillā Bālgundāī
32. Delhi: the sultan's elephant resurrected	57. The struggle with Kāl	86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with parents
37. Allahābād	63. Ujjain	98. Death of Kālū and Tipārā
38. Banāras: discourse with paṇḍits	65. Narabad River	104. The ṭhags and the funeral pyre
40. Rājā Harināth	66. Bikāner district and city	109. Jhaṇḍā Bāḍhī and the Jugāvalī
42. Hājīpur Paṭṇa	67. The land of Saraṭhi (Saurāshtra)	111. The devotees of Kīrān Paṭhāṇān
43. Ayodhyā: discourse with 'all the bhagats'	68. Mathurā	

complete studies of the Guru's life. They are not quite inconsequential, as no event in the sakhis is, but neither are they earth-shattering revelations. These thirty-two do include significant events in the life of Guru Nanak. Sakhis 86 and 98 stand out as they tell of Nanak's reunion with his parents and their later passing. These are important family moments, not only for the Guru, but for the tradition as a whole. Unlike his ascetic counterparts, Guru Nanak returned to his family after his missionary travels. He established the community at Kartarpur and brought his parents to live there with him. Roopinder Singh's account tells that "Even though he had spent many decades travelling and spreading the word of God, he was with them in the evening of their lives and

performed his duties as a son.”<sup>585</sup> These sakhis convey important social teachings about respect and family duty. That said, it is understandable that including stories about dying parents in children’s books may be considered in poor taste and may not be the best thing to present to young readers.

Most of the other sakhis listed here simply mark points on the map where the Guru is reported to have travelled<sup>586</sup> or note conversations with various religious figures that would further bore young audiences. However, one amazing anecdote is included here despite the fact that it makes for a wondrous tale—sakhi 56 “The meeting with Kaliyug.” In this sakhi, Guru Nanak comes face to face with “the spirit of the last and most evilly affected of the four cosmic ages of Hindu calculation.”<sup>587</sup> Harbans Singh’s account of the Puratan Janam-sakhi version of this story is quite dramatic and pointed.

#### 56. The meeting with Kaliyug

The *Puratan Janamsakhi* here describes the Guru’s encounter with Kaliyug. As the Guru and Mardana were passing through a remote wilderness, Kaliyug stirred up a violent storm. So severe was the tempest that the trees of the jungle began to fly about. Mardana was petrified with fear, and in the words of the *Janamsakhi*, thus spoke to the Guru, “True sovereign, thou hast brought me to my death in this desert. I shall not here get even a shroud or a grave.”

The Guru asked him to remain calm and not feel troubled. Mardana answered, “Up to this day in my life I have not faced a calamity like this. Who knows what is going to befall this frail frame of mine today?” Then fire was demonstrated. Smoke arose in all four corners and all four sides

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<sup>585</sup> Roopinder Singh, 56.

<sup>586</sup> This was a specific concern of Fauja and Kirpal Singh’s *Atlas Travels of Guru Nanak*, first published in 1976. This volume specifically maps Guru Nanak’s travels through the janam-sakhi accounts, and then (interestingly) serves as evidence in Kirpal Singh’s *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study* for the veracity of his travels. No clearer illustration of a janam-sakhi hermeneutic circle is needed. Fauja Singh and Kirpal Singh, *Atlas Travels of Guru Nanak*, Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, 2004.

<sup>587</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSF*, 101.

became ablaze like lightning. Mardana covered up his face and laid himself down on the ground saying, “Who lives now?” Then came water. Thick clouds gathered and the skies descended in torrents. But the rain fell at some distance from the Guru.

“Mardana, raise thy head,” spoke the Guru. “Rise and play thy rebeck.” Mardana rose and tuned the strings, Rag Gauri was made. Guru Nanak recited this *shabad*:

If the fear of God is in the heart,  
    all other fear is dispelled.  
If one remaineth in fear,  
    the heart will be devoid of the fear of God.  
I have no other shelter except Thee, my Lord!  
Whatever happeneth is Thy will!!  
Be affrightened if thou have  
    any fear other than that of God.  
To live in fear is the mind’s disquiet.  
The sould dieth not, nor is it drowned:  
It is redeemed through God’s grace.  
He who created the world ordaineth everything:  
By His order we come and by His order we go.  
His will prevaieth for ever and a day.\*

Then, says the *Janamsakhi*, Kaliyug appeared in the form of a hideous demon with his head touching the heavens. But as he came nearer, he shrank in size. By the time he confronted the Guru, he was reduced to the proportions and form of a human being. Joining his hands he stood before the Guru and said, “Thou art the Creator’s own minister. I salute thee.”\*\* Mardana learned how groundless his fears were and how exaggerated impending troubles looked from a distance.<sup>588</sup>

The lesson elaborated in the last line of this selection is quite clear. It ties nicely into the accompanying hymn and would be a good thing to tell children, as well as adults, to help them through difficult situations. But the fantasy of meeting the demonic form of Kaliyug may be too much for modern audiences to swallow, despite the importance of the lesson this story conveys.

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<sup>588</sup> H. Singh, *GNOSE*, 126-127. Harbans Singh’s footnotes are marked by asterisks in this passage and are provided below.

\*Guru Granth, *Gauri*, p. 151

\*\* *Puratan*, p. 44.

Postulating about or second-guessing the reasons for these omissions from other janam-sakhi iterations is not the most fruitful venture; noting that these interesting and instructionally valuable sakhis were omitted is. At this point, it now becomes appropriate to consider the sakhis that were included in the majority of these modern sources, because they are the ones being put forth to audiences in an attempt to convey the life and message of Guru Nanak. These sakhis are the primary and prominent constituents of the modern life-models of Guru Nanak being presented to audiences and, therefore, serve as the basis of continuing modes of participation for their audiences.

#### The Most Prominent Sakhis

It should be no surprise that the five most popular sakhis have been discussed at length already in this study. Included here in Table 6.7 are the stories of Nanak honoring the honest work of Bhai Lalo, the “Sacha Sauda” story of charity, Guru Nanak at Hardwar pointing out the emptiness of ritual action, Nanak’s commission by God to be his Guru on Earth, and the young Nanak’s rejection of outward religious signs without inner devotion. A total of eight of the top eleven<sup>589</sup> sakhis have been provided in full in earlier chapters (including 6, 60, and 122). Two more of these were mentioned in brief as part of larger discussions in Chapter Three (8 and 79), while only sakhi 21, a surprisingly tranquil account of Guru Nanak’s honest labors in the granary of Daulat Khan, has gone without a focused review up to this point. This sakhi, which tells about the Guru’s good dealings and honest demeanor, reflects a lesson about honest work that is as important to Sikh

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<sup>589</sup> Two sakhis tied for tenth in the ranking of the most prominent sakhis.

<b>Table 6.7</b>		
<b>The Most Prominent Sakhis</b>		
<b>Sakhi</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo	31	89%
16. <i>Kharā saudā</i> : the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs	30	86%
34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields	28	80%
22. Immersion in the river: his call	27	77%
5. Investiture with the sacred thread	23	66%
60. Sajjan the <i>thag</i>	22	63%
79. Mecca: the moving mosque	22	63%
122. <i>Pañjā Sāhib</i> : the rock stopped	22	63%
6. The restored field	21	60%
8. The cobra's shadow	19	54%
21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat	19	54%

traditions as the lessons conveyed by these other sakhis. His work-ethic is later called into question when Nanak is accused of embezzlement (sakhi 23), and after an investigation of his tidy records, the charge is quickly dropped when they find Nanak's management has actually been more frugal and wise than any had expected.<sup>590</sup>

The discussions of these sakhis have shown the variety of ways Sikhs (and scholars) have presented, interpreted, and engaged or participated in the lessons presented via the narratives. Through them, Sikhs come to know who Guru Nanak is and how he acted. Collectively, these sakhis represent a body of shared stories, expressed in a variety of narratives distilled from a common tradition, that seek to promote and continue that very tradition. The promotion of these stories in modern narratives reinforces the community's engagement with the doctrines and themes conveyed by Guru Nanak's actions and lessons,

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<sup>590</sup> This also further differentiates Guru Nanak from ascetic holy men, who refuse to do such labor.



which further affirms Sikhs' relationship with Guru Nanak in his role first as Guru, then as a member of the community who acts in accordance with those very lessons.

### **Participating in the Pedagogical Project of the Janam-sakhis**

The goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the pedagogical projects of the janam-sakhis informs Sikhs' participation in their relationships with Guru Nanak and with the Sikh Panth. It has been helpful to refer to the janam-sakhis throughout this study as social narratives because of the ways that they facilitate Sikhs' connections to Guru Nanak and form the basis of a communally-held public memory of Guru Nanak and a community history centered upon the Guru. This is not to say that the janam-sakhis act as a singular social narrative or public memory in a necessarily coherent or unilateral manner. It is not as if the whole community comes together to create the specifics of the social narrative or foster a memory; it is a far more nebulous creative act, spread across a variety of expressions and interpretations that comprise the vibrant narrative that is essentially a negotiation of community identity.

This creative impulse informing the janam-sakhis' role in these ways is intended to influence and condition audiences' understandings of and responses to Guru Nanak and his message. Chapters Two and Four, along with the first sections of this chapter, demonstrate the variety of ways that numerous authors have sought to represent Guru Nanak in very specific ways and have communicated their conceptions to the community in the form of the janam-sakhis they created. Each iteration has made an attempt to present or confirm an understanding of the Sikh mission as grounded in Guru Nanak's life and teachings.

Even the scholarly analyses discussed in Chapter Three promote specific readings and interpretations of the janam-sakhis. All of these authors and scholars have employed various narrative techniques, discursive modes, selection, omission, and a variety of media modes to make their distinct presentation of Guru Nanak's message.

Each presentation or discussion of the janam-sakhis contributes to the larger discourse that is the negotiated social narrative to which the community relates. This is clear evidence of the need to examine the janam-sakhis in ways that take more than the historical context of a few manuscripts into account and consider as many of the disparate and continuing interpretations of Guru Nanak offered in modern janam-sakhis as possible. Both Wendy Doniger and Dan Sperber have advanced arguments for taking variant tellings of a story into account in order to better understand how that story is discussed and understood by a community.<sup>591</sup> The next logical step of such an analysis would consider the discourses about those stories, both the re-presentations and the interpretations of the stories, as valuable contributions to that conversation.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four laid out a (historical) model of the janam-sakhis' spread and discussed the many various ways people have understood, interpreted, and re-presented these stories in new ways to promote and sustain their presence.<sup>592</sup> These chapters demonstrated how each new presentation serves to reinvigorate or engage the projects set forth in the earliest tellings, thus renewing the message of Guru Nanak for a

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<sup>591</sup> Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, and Sperber, *Explaining Culture*.

<sup>592</sup> Sperber refers to such a model as an epidemiological model, tracing the spread of representations through a population and over time, as a community and its textual representations continue to transmit, interpret, and sustain the stories that are important to them.

new audience. While it is not the duty of this study to map the entire process of transmission, the two ends of this path are clearly noted through discussion of the earliest janam-sakhi sources in relation to the modern and widely-distributed iterations made in English for audiences in the diaspora. What happened between those two points can be summed up by the communication of these narratives and their subsequent interpretation giving rise to new ways to understand and engage the teachings of Guru Nanak.

The reforms of the Singh Sabha, excising the fantastic elements of the Bala janam-sakhis and promoting the simple presentation of the Puratan manuscripts, are one clear point of reorientation of janam-sakhi narratives. The fact that there were a variety of manuscript traditions for the Singh Sabha to critique is evidence of the vibrant discussion of Guru Nanak's life during the times in which these lineages were first recorded—the sectarian interests of the Bala and Miharban janam-sakhis offered specific critiques of issues and practices that Sikhs contemporary to these recordings had to contend with. Modern janam-sakhis contend with issues that face Sikhs today. Consider the *Panthic Weekly* article's interpretation of the Sacha Sauda story, insisting that Guru Nanak fed those who were destitute and hungry, not a bunch of ascetic sadhus or faqirs.<sup>593</sup> This clearly prescribes to whom charity should be offered and proscribes its offering to others. The rejection of the ascetic life could then be extended in practice to offer a critique, based in Guru Nanak's actions and teachings, of modern ascetic practices or as a litmus test to determine which charitable cases are worthy.

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<sup>593</sup> This article was discussed in Chapter Five under the “A Participatory Example: Identifying as Sikh through the Janam-sakhis” section.

While it may be tempting to inquire as to why other presentations were made in the ways that they were, those are questions reserved for interviews with the authors. It is far more helpful and indicative of the scale of the pedagogical project of the janam-sakhis to embrace the fact that a multitude of representations have caught hold in the population at various times and then spread throughout the community to garner the influence necessary for their elevation from a story that is known and read, to something so special that it both orients the life of the individual and extends to the collective community as a social narrative that fosters the grand tradition that is Sikhism. Individual presentations of the sakhis mark specific attempts to condition, reify, or alter the course of the tradition. The variety of janam-sakhis narratives can be likened to a conversation of Sikhs in the community working out the details of their understanding of Guru Nanak. Some views are agreeable to all, while others are granted conditional or partial acceptance. To those viewing such a conversation from afar, it appears much like a negotiation of how the community will regard and commemorate Guru Nanak. Obviously, there will not be total coherence or a homogenous view presented, as people have to work it out for themselves, but there is a core sentiment, expressed as the connection to Guru Nanak, which holds the disparate voices together and sustains the community.

Given that this core relationship best demonstrates the personal connection to Guru Nanak expressed by the janam-sakhi narratives, one could consider each narrative expression a relationship in itself, or at least fostering or conditioning an aspect of that relationship. Each reader or audience structures their engagement in accordance with or as a reaction to the narrative's presentation. There is a simple explanation for this: when

encountering new ideas, our mental processes can engage the new ideas in one of three ways: acceptance, rejection, or modification. Reading a “new” janam-sakhi will stir readers to have to make a choice about how they choose to react to it. They can buy into the presentation wholeheartedly or reject it outright. Many, though, will accommodate parts of the presentation in ways that may flesh out points with which they were not as familiar, or they will reconsider a commonly held notion about their own religious lives (such as considering Guru Nanak’s regard for the idea of karma). Gurinder Singh Mann’s claims about Puratan janam-sakhi manuscripts that redefine the extent of Guru Nanak’s travels are certainly grounds for future modification of many Sikhs’ beliefs about their Guru’s life.<sup>594</sup> Each Sikh structures their relationship to Guru Nanak through his or her own understandings of who he was, how he acted, and what he taught. The various janam-sakhi presentations offer interpretations to help readers understand those points and explain their relevance to the readers’ situations as best as they can. Each offers a vision of faith to which the Sikhs are, or at least can be, devoted.

Collectively, these are what McLeod refers to as the “myth of Nanak”—the variety of personal engagements with Guru Nanak that “is expressed in anecdote, in discourse, and in an occasional declaration of faith.”<sup>595</sup> All janam-sakhis inform this myth. In terms of this study, this “myth” has been demonstrated to be an important contributing factor in establishing a relationship with the Guru, for the successful transmission and elaboration of Guru Nanak’s teachings, and as an introduction to the shared history of the Sikh Panth.

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<sup>594</sup> Gurinder Singh Mann, “Stories of the Founder.”

<sup>595</sup> McLeod, *EST*, 243.

Had McLeod operated in the same terminology, he would have affirmed the myth's role as a social narrative presenting a vibrant picture of the continued conversation about Guru Nanak through the janam-sakhi narratives that enlivens Sikh identity and community today.

All communities require stories like these from which their members learn the essential lessons about who they are, where they come from, where they are going, and how to get there. It should be no surprise at this point that this litany of lessons echoes the structure of David Carr's "prospective-retrospective principle" of narrative organization. In this case, the janam-sakhis instill specific lessons that serve the individual Sikh's needs, drawing her or him into relationships with both Guru Nanak and the larger Sikh community and serving the community's needs to affirm those relationships as essential constituents of their collective identity and collaborative efforts. These relationships are further affirmed through the constant repetition of the stories, no matter how varied the narratives, and references to the Guru that inform the community's actions in accordance with the teachings of the tradition. What McLeod called the "myth" is better addressed as the pedagogical project, and it has to be viewed as encompassing the variety of ways authors have sought to present it. The vibrant history of the janam-sakhis and their continued presence and influence show that this myth extends far beyond its historical roots into a variety of new expressions that foster the tradition's development and growth, and I suspect it will continue to do for many years to come as new janam-sakhi narratives are written to address new concerns and new contexts for new audiences.

## 7. Next Steps and Implications for Fields of Study

### **Regarding Janam-sakhi Scholarship**

This study has shed light on emerging lines of discussion about the janam-sakhis that are too easily overlooked. The first and most prominent fact is that the janam-sakhis are still around as a vibrant corpus of literature that is being read, created, and presented for new audiences and in new ways. The second fact addresses a necessary shift in understanding how new media forms of the janam-sakhis interact with audiences in ways quite different from textual engagements.

The examinations of modern janam-sakhis offered in this dissertation are the first of their kind. All previous studies have limited conversations about the janam-sakhis to their historical manuscripts and the contexts in which those developed, as there can be no successive, let alone successful, study of how these narratives engaged their original contemporary audiences. Save for the Bala janam-sakhi, all other manuscripts were “discovered” in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Until new evidence comes to light about where these manuscripts were in the years between their authoring and their “discovery,” scholars have no basis to make any assertions about what these narratives did for, to, or with the community. Luckily, that is not the case with modern janam-sakhis and their audiences. Well-developed surveys inquiring about early exposure to the janam-sakhis, reading habits, book collections, and even understandings or interpretations of the sakhis would reveal a great deal of information about how Sikhs are currently engaging these materials. Given sufficient research support, this is the inevitable next step for this

study, shifting from a focus on the narrative presentation itself to that narrative's reception and use in the Panth.

The second new line of discussion addresses the use of new media forms to present Guru Nanak's life. Discussions about how Sikhs engage these various media forms as part of their religious lives are still new to the field. Doris Jakobsh's work on the presentation of Sikh identity on-line is groundbreaking, but it does not stress the relationship to Guru Nanak as evidenced through *janam-sakhi* narratives.<sup>596</sup> There is a lot to be learned through the application of methods emerging in the field of media and culture studies about how audiences engage with and relate to these new media forms and how such media is produced and distributed as a commercial product for those audiences.

### **Regarding Sikh Studies**

Materials examined in this study affirm the "transnational" character of the contemporary Sikh tradition. The separation between Sikhs living in the Punjab and those in the diaspora is only distant with regard to travel arrangements. It is now possible to be in near constant contact with family and friends in India and across the globe via phone calls, email, and social media websites and apps. While Sikhs in the diaspora may be at the front lines of confronting communities that are ignorant and possibly even afraid of who Sikhs are, Sikhs in India are themselves being confronted by new cultural paradigms

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<sup>596</sup> Much of Doris Jakobsh's work focuses on issues of identity and diaspora life, seeking to understand the promotion of Khalsa expressions over non-Khalsa Sikhism, especially in the post-1984 setting, as well as considering the place and role of women in the Panth. See Doris Jakobsh, *Sikhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 2011), and "Sikhizing the Sikhs: The Role of 'New Media' in Historical and Contemporary Identity Construction" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, November 2007).



that have become part of the global Indian community. Sikhs are not simply having to differentiate themselves from Hindus but are also having to assert their own independent identity in new ways. The crux of these assertions lies in the foundation provided by Guru Nanak. Sikhs constantly refer to the lessons of Guru Nanak and his successors in describing their faith. Therefore, a new line of engagement emerges for the janam-sakhis to address—education beyond the Sikh Panth. Some of the works discussed in this study have addressed their narratives to non-Sikhs as well, but a thorough examination of this aspect of the janam-sakhis' role needs investigation. This study has only scratched the surface of this new conversation.

It would be interesting to examine how presentations of the janam-sakhis work with/ on new audiences outside of the Panth. In their earliest days, the janam-sakhis were thought to be missionizing texts, helping to spread Guru Nanak's message to new areas. One has to wonder if modern janam-sakhis can work in the same way. A possible point of investigation here would be the 3HO community, which draws in a large number of non-Punjabis to their conception of Sikhism. Certainly they employ janam-sakhis as part of their lessons about Guru Nanak. It would be interesting to see how new converts react to those presentations and what they draw from them.

### **Regarding Religious Studies**

This study has diligently avoided vague language about religious agency and claims about super-or supra-natural interactions, all while keeping with a phenomenological approach. The phenomena in this case have been the production and interpretation of

janam-sakhi narratives. This analysis is rooted in the processes of reading and expression, community collaboration and historical understanding. In no place has an appeal been made to a “collective effervescence” that motivates the community, or a hierophany that directly conveys the spiritual insights of Guru Nanak through the magic of the janam-sakhi narratives. Theologians may make those claims elsewhere, but for the purpose of this study it was important to keep issues of participation rooted in an individual’s agency and expressions of that agency. That is why David Carr’s theory of social narratives has been put forward with such zeal. There is no missing link in this theoretical construct that necessitates a leap of faith to understand how a community acts. It is a simple presentation that refutes the idea of a community having agency by its own accord and relegates it to cooperative understanding and action by individuals who have chosen to work together as part of the community that strives for the goals that are shared through these narratives.

The theoretical framework laid out in this study can account for a full spectrum of responses, from large-scale community relationships down to individual actions based on the narratives being read. There is still a step missing, however, and that is the direct examination of how the content of the janam-sakhis is received by the reader and to account for how that instills doctrines, spurs actions, and builds community bonds. These avenues of investigation are opened with assistance from the field of the cognitive science of religion, which focuses on how human mental capacities and processing reacts to and produces religious expressions.

Harvey Whitehouse’s work in *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* is especially illuminating here as it describes the transmission of

religious doctrines throughout a community via the use of ritual.<sup>597</sup> It is the contention of this study, that the act of reading narratives (or having them read to you) like the janam-sakhis parallels the ritual behavior Whitehouse describes and allows the fruitful use of this model in the examination of the doctrinal content of the janam-sakhi texts. Both of these positions focus on pedagogical exercises; ritual is focused on one arena of participation, while reading these texts strives towards a social participation through the principles conveyed. Whitehouse claims that the “doctrinal mode” is most effective when “dialogical relationship [is established with] complex religious teachings.”<sup>598</sup> The janam-sakhi narratives, as well as their performance—the reading of them—create an instructive dialogue between the text and the reader or audience. Additionally, the janam-sakhis foster a direct dialogue with Guru Nanak, the primary teacher of doctrines, thus creating a continuing interactive dialogue. Whitehouse explains the cognitive processes that account for how reading a text and engaging in a dialogue with it lead to the installation of these teachings in not only long-term semantic memory, but into the scheme of implicit knowledge that conditions conscious actions. The doctrines are communicated via frequent repetition (saturation of a social narrative) that arouses the audience (the affective and social connections manifested), making it memorable on both implicit and semantic memory levels and thus successfully conveying the doctrines.<sup>599</sup> One could venture to say

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<sup>597</sup> Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004).

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>599</sup> Whitehouse elaborates the Doctrinal Mode by outlining eight points that describe how both semantic-memory (the general knowledge of the world that we can consciously recall) and implicit memory

that, if such lessons were instilled through the janam-sakhi stories, one would operate as a Sikh. All of this, taken together, provides a cognitively-informed basis for a Sikh's participation in the social narratives that are the janam-sakhis. An investigation into this would examine the doctrinal content of janam-sakhi narratives and would look to develop quantifiable means of comparison of the understandings of Guru Nanak's message, and thus their potential impact on audiences, as presented through the janam-sakhis. Such a study would provide the capstone to an examination of the janam-sakhis' role and impact, illustrating how the social bonds and relationships fostered through the narratives are rooted in an individual's own mental processes. Sikhs think about Guru Nanak and remember that his stories matter to them before they engage in the collaborative social actions that are the religious tradition we know as Sikhism.

### **A Final Thought**

Sikhs cannot separate their tradition or themselves from Guru Nanak. They are his learners, and he is their Guru. The janam-sakhis are the premiere source for information about who Guru Nanak was and what he did to establish the tradition that Sikhs hold dear. This study has illustrated the ways that the lessons of the janam-sakhis have engaged audiences by way of doctrinal instruction, thereby establishing a community tradition and a personal affective connection to the Guru himself. The continuation of the Sikh tradition is dependent upon these factors and, by extension, the narratives that facilitate them. Every day this conversation expands, as new voices, presentations, interpretations, and media are

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(unconscious memory) are activated and social bonds created through shared recall and actions. *Ibid.*, 66-70.

brought forth to convey the life model of Guru Nanak and to help people learn what it means to be, and even how to be, a Sikh.

## Appendix 1

### W.H. McLeod: A Historian's Approach to the Janam-sakhis

Complete Listing of Sakhis, GNSR, 73-76.

1. The birth of Gurū Nānak
2. Recitation of Sapat Ślokī Gītā
3. Instruction by the paṇḍit
4. Instruction by the mullah
5. Investiture with the sacred thread
6. The restored field
7. The tree's stationary shadow
8. The cobra's shadow
9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī
10. Betrothal and marriage
11. The physician convinced
12. The true field
13. The true merchandise
14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand
15. The true harvest
16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
17. The loṭā and ring presented to a faqīr
18. Bhāgīrath and Mansukh
19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh
20. To Sultānpur
21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat
22. Immersion in the river: his call
23. Nānak accused of embezzlement
24. The mullah seeks to exorcize his evil spirit
25. Discourse with the qāzī
26. Departure from Sultānpur
27. Mardānā commanded to throw offerings away
28. Mardānā eats the forbidden fruit
29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra
30. Discourse with Sheikh Sharaf of Pāṇīpat
31. Delhi: the real alms
32. Delhi: the sultan's elephant resurrected
33. Sheikh Bajīd
34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
35. Mount Govardhan, Mathurā, and Brindāban
36. Nānakmatā
37. Allahābād
38. Banāras: discourse with paṇḍits
39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās
40. Rājā Harināth
41. Meeting with Kabir
42. Hājīpur Paṭṭa
43. Ayodhyā: discourse with 'all the bhagats'
44. Ayodhyā: discourse with paṇḍits
45. Gayā
46. The country ruled by women
47. Dacca
48. Jagannāth Purī
49. The brick falls from the temple
50. The jackal and the food from God's court
51. The bhagats revealed in the stars
52. Rāmeśwaram
53. The yogi of Jāpāpatan (Jaffna)
54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prān Saṅgali
55. A girl turned into a boy
56. The meeting with Kaliyug
57. The struggle with Kāl
58. The cannibal's cauldron
59. A deceitful people turned to righteousness
60. Sajjan the ṭhag

61. Rājā Mitr Sain
62. Rājā Jagannāth
63. Ujjain
64. Vindhyā Mountains
65. Narabad River
66. Bikāner district and city
67. The land of Saraṭhi (Saurāshtra)
68. Mathurā
69. Kurukshetra: discourse on bathing
70. Return to Sultānpur
71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit
72. Mount Sumeru
73. Gorakh-haṭaṛī
74. Multān: discourse with a descendant of Pīr Bahāuddīn
75. The mullah's village
76. Rahīm and Karīm
77. The Mecca pilgrim and the following cloud
78. Mecca: Gurū Nānak's miraculous arrival
79. Mecca: the moving mosque
80. Medina
81. Baghdad
82. Hīnglāj
83. The sack of Saidpur
84. Discourse with Bābur
85. Bābur attacks Ṭillā Bālgundāi
86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with parents
87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh Ibrāhīm
88. Merchant of Dīpālpur
89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur
90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the Siddhs
91. Multān: the jasmine petal
92. First meeting with Lahiṇā
93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined
94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse
95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad
96. Death of Makhdūm Bahāuddin
97. Death of Mardānā
98. Death of Kālū and Tipārā
99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad
100. The death of Gurū Nānak
101. The death of the trader's infant son
102. A watchman receives royal authority
103. The coal and the thorn
104. The ṭhags and the funeral pyre
105. Kīṛ nagar: the city of insects
106. The inhospitable village unmolested
107. The hospitable village dispersed
108. The meeting with Sheikh Farīd in Āsā
109. Jhaṇḍā Bāḍhī and the Jugāvalī
110. The leprous faqīr
111. The devotees of Kīṛān Paṭhānān
112. Discourse with Miā Miṭhā
113. Dunī Chand and the wolf
114. Dunī Chand's flags
115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square
116. A pious boy
117. The meeting with Khwājar Khizar
118. Anabhī the Jain
119. The meeting with Makhdūm Bahāuddin
120. The destruction of the hospitable carpenter's hut
121. Sālas Rāi
122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
123. Discourse with Abdul Rahmān
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Rejected sakhis (39), GNSR, 77-83

2. Recitation of Sapat Ślokī Gītā
3. Instruction by the paṇḍit.
4. Instruction by the mullah.
5. Investiture with the sacred thread.
6. The restored field
7. The tree's stationary shadow
8. The cobra's shadow
23. Nanak accused of embezzlement
28. Mardana eats the forbidden fruit
30. Discourse with Sheikh Sharaf of Pāṇīpat
31. Delhi: the real alms
32. Delhi: the sultan's elephant resurrected
43. Ayodhyā: discourse with 'all the bhagats'
49. The brick falls from the temple
50. The jackal and the food from God's court
51. The bhagats revealed in the stars
53. The yogi of Jāpāpatan (Jaffna)
55. A girl turned into a boy.
56. The meeting with Kaliyug
57. The struggle with Kāl
58. The cannibal's cauldron
59. A deceitful people turned to righteousness
70. Return to Sultānpur
77. The Mecca pilgrim and the following cloud
78. Mecca: Gurū Nānak's miraculous arrival
94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse
96. Death of Makhdūm Bahāuddin
101. The death of the trader's infant son
103. The coal and the thorn
104. The ṭhags and the funeral pyre
105. Kīṛ nagar: the city of insects
108. The meeting with Sheikh Farīd in Āsā
110. The leprous faqīr
113. Dunī Chand and the wolf.
115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square
117. The meeting with Khwājar Khizar
119. The meeting with Makhdūm Bahāuddin
120. The destruction of the hospitable carpenter's hut
122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped

Improbable sakhis (18), GNSR, 83-87

11. The physician convinced
12. The true field
13. The true merchandise
15. The true harvest
16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
17. The loṭā and ring presented to a faqīr
29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra
35. Mount Govardhan, Mathurā, and Brindāban
36. Nānakmatā
40. Rājā Harināth
41. Meeting with Kabir
44. Ayodhyā: discourse with paṇḍits
45. Gayā
61. Rājā Mitr Sain
62. Rājā Jagannāth
121. Sālas Rāi
123. Discourse with Abdul Rahmān
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo



Possible sakhis (30), GNSR, 87-92

27. Mardānā commanded to throw offerings away
33. Sheikh Bajīd
34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
37. Allahābād
38. Banāras: discourse with paṇḍits
39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās
42. Hājīpur Paṭṇa
48. Jagannāth Purī
52. Rāmeswaram
63. Ujjain
64. Vindhyā Mountains
65. Narabad River
66. Bikāner district and city
67. The land of Saraṭhi (Saurāshtra)
68. Mathurā
69. Kurukshetra: discourse on bathing
71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit
82. Hīnglāj
88. Merchant of Dīpālpur
97. Death of Mardānā
98. Death of Kālū and Tipārā
102. A watchman receives royal authority
106. The inhospitable village unmolested
107. The hospitable village dispersed
109. Jhaṇḍā Bādhī and the Jugāvalī
111. The devotees of Kīrīān Paṭhānān
112. Discourse with Miā Miṭhā
114. Dunī Chand's flags
116. A pious boy
118. Anabhī the Jain

Probable sakhis (37), GNSR, 92-145

1. The birth of Gurū Nānak
9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī
10. Betrothal and marriage
14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand
18. Bhāgīrath and Mansukh
19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh
20. To Sultānpur
21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat
22. Immersion in the river: his call
24. The mullah seeks to exorcize his evil spirit
25. Discourse with the qāzī
26. Departure from Sultānpur
46. The country ruled by women
47. Dacca
54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ Saṅgali
60. Sajjan the ṭhag
72. Mount Sumeru
73. Gorakh-haṭaṭī
74. Multān: discourse with a descendant of Pīr Bahāuddīn
75. The mullah's village
76. Rahīm and Karīm
79. Mecca: the moving mosque
80. Medina
81. Baghdad
83. The sack of Saidpur
84. Discourse with Bābur
85. Bābur attacks Ṭillā Bālgundāī
86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with parents
87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh Ibrāhīm
89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur
90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the Siddhs
91. Multān: the jasmine petal
92. First meeting with Lahiṇā
93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined
95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad
97. Death of Mardānā
100. The death of Gurū Nānak

## Appendix 2: Sakhi Listings

Texts are presented here in the same order in which they appear in the main chapters of this work, and are separated by the section in which they are discussed. The number of sakhis contained in each of these presentations is listed in boldface type below the author and title. These counts are the work of this author, following the scheme identified by W. H. McLeod in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*.

### From Chapter 2

Vir Singh's *Gur Balam Sakhian*  
36 sakhis

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak                              | 26. Departure from Sultānpur                  |
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                            | 27. Mardānā commanded to throw offerings away |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                            | 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra           |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                   | 30. Discourse with Sheikh Sharaf of Pānīpat   |
| 6. The restored field                                   | 32. Delhi: the sultan's elephant resurrected  |
| 7. The tree's stationary shadow                         | 33. Sheikh Bajīd                              |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                   | 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields       |
| 9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī                       | 36. Nānakmatā                                 |
| 11. The physician convinced                             | 39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās        |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs | 45. Gayā                                      |
| 17. The loṭā and ring presented to a faqīr              | 60. Sajjan the ṭhag                           |
| 18. Bhāgīrath and Mansukh                               | 101. The death of the trader's infant son     |
| 19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh                           | 103. The coal and the thorn                   |
| 20. To Sultānpur  | 104. The ṭhags and the funeral pyre           |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                  | 115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square             |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                    | 116. A pious boy                              |
| 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement                       | 121. Sālas Rāi                                |
| 24. The mullah seeks to exorcize his evil spirit        | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                  |
| 25. Discourse with the qāzī                             |   |

Puran Singh's *Book of the Ten Masters*  
27 sakhis

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 83. The sack of Saidpur                                   |
| 6. The restored field                                      | 84. Discourse with Bābur                                  |
| 11. The physician convinced                                | 91. Multān: the jasmine petal                             |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined                               |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     | 106. The inhospitable village<br>unmolested               |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                       | 107. The hospitable village dispersed                     |
| 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields                    | 110. The leprous faqīr                                    |
| 46. The country ruled by women                             | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                                   |
| 48. Jagannāth Purī   | 115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square                         |
| 54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ<br>Saṅgali          | 120. The destruction of the hospitable<br>carpenter's hut |
| 58. The cannibal's cauldron                                | 121. Sālas Rāi  |
| 60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag  | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped                        |
| 71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit                                    | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                              |
| 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                               |   |

**From Chapter 3**

Kirpal Singh's *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study*  
73 sakhis

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| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields           |
| 6. The restored field                                      | 36. Nānakmatā                                     |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                                 | 37. Allahābād                                     |
| 11. The physician convinced                                | 39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās            |
| 14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand                     | 40. Rājā Harināth                                 |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 42. Hājīpur Paṭṇa                                 |
| 18. Bhāgīrath and Mansukh                                  | 44. Ayodhyā: discourse with paṇḍits               |
| 19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh                              | 45. Gayā  |
| 20. To Sultānpur   | 46. The country ruled by women                    |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     | 47. Dacca   |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                       | 48. Jagannāth Purī                                |
| 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement                          | 49. The brick falls from the temple               |
| 25. Discourse with the qāzī                                | 50. The jackal and the food from God's<br>court   |
| 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra                        | 52. Rāmeśwaram                                    |
| 30. Discourse with Sheikh Sharaf of<br>Pāñīpat             | 54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ<br>Saṅgali |
| 31. Delhi: the real alms                                   | 57. The struggle with Kāl                         |

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| 58. The cannibal's cauldron                              | 89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur |
| 60. Sajjan the thag                                      | 90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the Siddhs               |
| 63. Ujjain   | 91. Multān: the jasmine petal                             |
| 65. Narabad River  | 92. First meeting with Lahiṇā                             |
| 66. Bikāner district and city                            | 93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined                               |
| 67. The land of Saraṭhi (Saurāshtra)                     | 94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse                    |
| 68. Mathurā  | 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad                                  |
| 70. Return to Sultānpur                                  | 99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad                        |
| 71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit                                  | 100. The death of Gurū Nānak                              |
| 72. Mount Sumeru   | 101. The death of the trader's infant son                 |
| 73. Gorakh-haṭaṭī  | 106. The inhospitable village unmolested                  |
| 74. Multān: discourse with a descendant of Pīr Bahāuddīn | 107. The hospitable village dispersed                     |
| 78. Mecca: Gurū Nānak's miraculous arrival               | 112. Discourse with Miā Miṭhā                             |
| 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                             | 113. Dunī Chand and the wolf                              |
| 80. Medina   | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                                   |
| 81. Baghdad  | 116. A pious boy  |
| 82. Hīnglāj  | 118. Anabhī the Jain                                      |
| 83. The sack of Saidpur                                  | 121. Sālas Rāi  |
| 85. Bābur attacks Ṭillā Bālgundāi                        | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped                        |
| 86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with parents          | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                              |
| 87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh Ibrāhīm            |   |

Harbans Singh's *Guru Nanak and Origins of Sikh Faith*  
71 sakhis

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|---|---|
| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak                              | 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat        |
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                            | 22. Immersion in the river: his call          |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                            | 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement             |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                   | 25. Discourse with the qāzī                   |
| 6. The restored field                                   | 27. Mardānā commanded to throw offerings away |
| 7. The tree's stationary shadow                         | 28. Mardānā eats the forbidden fruit          |
| 9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī                       | 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra           |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                              | 30. Discourse with Sheikh Sharaf of Pānīpat   |
| 11. The physician convinced                             | 32. Delhi: the sultan's elephant resurrected  |
| 14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand                  | 33. Sheikh Bajīd                              |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs | 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields       |
| 18. Bhāgīrath and Mansukh                               |   |
| 20. To Sultānpur  |   |

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| 36. Nānakmatā   | 87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh<br>Ibrāhīm             |
| 37. Allahābād   | 89. The proud official humbled: the<br>founding of Kartārpur |
| 38. Banāras: discourse with paṇḍits                         | 90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the<br>Siddhs               |
| 39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās                      | 92. First meeting with Lahiṇā                                |
| 44. Ayodhyā: discourse with paṇḍits                         | 93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined                                  |
| 45. Gayā  | 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad                                     |
| 46. The country ruled by women                              | 97. Death of Mardānā   |
| 48. Jagannāth Purī  | 98. Death of Kālū and Tipārā                                 |
| 54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ<br>Saṅgali           | 99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad                           |
| 56. The meeting with Kaliyug                                | 100. The death of Gurū Nānak                                 |
| 58. The cannibal's cauldron                                 | 103. The coal and the thorn                                  |
| 60. Sajjan the ṭhag   | 104. The ṭhags and the funeral pyre                          |
| 66. Bikāner district and city                               | 106. The inhospitable village<br>unmolested                  |
| 70. Return to Sultānpur                                     | 107. The hospitable village dispersed                        |
| 71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit                                     | 109. Jhaṇḍā Bādhī and the Jugāvalī                           |
| 72. Mount Sumeru  | 110. The leprous faqīr                                       |
| 74. Multān: discourse with a descendant<br>of Pīr Bahāuddīn | 111. The devotees of Kīrīān Paṭhānān                         |
| 77. The Mecca pilgrim and the<br>following cloud            | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                                      |
| 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                                | 115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square                            |
| 81. Baghdad   | 116. A pious boy   |
| 82. Hīnglāj   | 121. Sālas Rāi   |
| 83. The sack of Saidpur                                     | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped                           |
| 84. Discourse with Bābur                                    | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                                 |
| 86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with<br>parents          |  |

#### From Chapter 4: Academic and Popular Press Editions

Roopinder Singh's *Guru Nanak: His Life & Teachings*  
39 sakhis

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| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak                                 | 22. Immersion in the river: his call             |
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                               | 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra              |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields          |
| 9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī                          | 36. Nānakmatā                                    |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                                 | 43. Ayodhyā: discourse with 'all the<br>bhagats' |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 46. The country ruled by women                   |
| 19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh                              | 48. Jagannāth Purī                               |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     |  |

54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prān Saṅgali  
 60. Sajjan the ṭhag  
 69. Kurukshetra: discourse on bathing  
 71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit  
 72. Mount Sumeru  
 79. Mecca: the moving mosque  
 81. Baghdad  
 82. Hīṅglāj  
 83. The sack of Saidpur  
 87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh Ibrāhīm  
 91. Multān: the jasmine petal  
 93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined

95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad  
 97. Death of Mardānā  
 98. Death of Kālū and Tipārā  
 99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad  
 106. The inhospitable village unmolested  
 107. The hospitable village dispersed  
 114. Dunī Chand's flags  
 115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square  
 116. A pious boy  
 121. Sālas Rāi  
 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped  
 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Harmandar Singh Thind's *Sakhian from Sikhism*  
 26 sakhis

6. The restored field  
 8. The cobra's shadow  
 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs  
 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat  
 22. Immersion in the river: his call  
 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement  
 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra  
 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields  
 48. Jagannāth Purī  
 58. The cannibal's cauldron  
 72. Mount Sumeru  
 79. Mecca: the moving mosque  
 81. Baghdad

83. The sack of Saidpur  
 84. Discourse with Bābur  
 90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the Siddhs  
 91. Multān: the jasmine petal  
 92. First meeting with Lahiṇā  
 93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined  
 100. The death of Gurū Nānak  
 101. The death of the trader's infant son  
 113. Dunī Chand and the wolf  
 116. A pious boy  
 121. Sālas Rāi  
 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped  
 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

#### **From Chapter 4: Schoolbooks**

Kartar Singh and Gurdial Singh Dhillon's *Stories from Sikh History I: Guru Nanak Dev*  
 20 sakhis

3. Instruction by the paṇḍit  
 4. Instruction by the mullah  
 5. Investiture with the sacred thread  
 6. The restored field

8. The cobra's shadow  
 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs  
 20. To Sultānpur

- 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat
- 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement
- 25. Discourse with the qāzī
- 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
- 58. The cannibal's cauldron
- 60. Sajjaṅ the ṭhag
- 79. Mecca: the moving mosque

- 83. The sack of Saidpur
- 84. Discourse with Bābur
- 89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur
- 114. Dunī Chand's flags
- 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

H. S. Singha's *Sikh Studies 3: Guru Nanak Dev*  
26 sakhis

- 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit
- 4. Instruction by the mullah
- 5. Investiture with the sacred thread
- 6. The restored field
- 8. The cobra's shadow
- 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
- 20. To Sultānpur
- 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat
- 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement
- 25. Discourse with the qāzī

- 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
- 58. The cannibal's cauldron
- 60. Sajjaṅ the ṭhag
- 79. Mecca: the moving mosque
- 83. The sack of Saidpur
- 84. Discourse with Bābur
- 89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur
- 114. Dunī Chand's flags
- 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Sikh Missionary Society Publications

- No. 2- *Guru Nanak (For Children)* by G. S. Sidhu, G. S. Sivia, and Kirpal Singh Rai  
No. 3- *The Guru's Way (For Children)* by G. S. Sidhu, G. S. Sivia, and Kirpal Singh  
18 sakhis total

- 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak
- 5. Investiture with the sacred thread
- 6. The restored field
- 8. The cobra's shadow
- 10. Betrothal and marriage
- 14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand
- 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
- 22. Immersion in the river: his call
- 25. Discourse with the qāzī

- 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
- 79. Mecca: the moving mosque
- 81. Baghdad
- 93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined
- 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad
- 106. The inhospitable village unmolested
- 107. The hospitable village dispersed [114. Dunī Chand's flags] in No. 3
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Tejinder Kaur Anand's *The Essence of Sikhism 3: The Lives and Teachings of the Sikh Gurus*

21 sakhis

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak                              | 39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās         |
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                            | 48. Jagannāth Purī                             |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                            | 54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ Saṅgali |
| 6. The restored field                                   | 58. The cannibal's cauldron                    |
| 7. The tree's stationary shadow                         | 72. Mount Sumeru                               |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                   | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                   |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs | 110. The leprous faqīr                         |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                  | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                        |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                    | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped             |
| 25. Discourse with the qāzī                             | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                   |
| 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields                 |  |

#### From Chapter 4: Children's Books

Ajit Singh Aulakh's *Illustrated Life Stories of Guru Sahibs'*

43 sakhis

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|---|---|
| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak                              | Saṅgali                                       |
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                            | 58. The cannibal's cauldron                   |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                            | 60. Sajjan the ṭhag                           |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                   | 72. Mount Sumeru                              |
| 6. The restored field                                   | 77. The Mecca pilgrim and the following cloud |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                   | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                  |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                              | 81. Baghdad                                   |
| 11. The physician convinced                             | 83. The sack of Saidpur                       |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs | 84. Discourse with Bābur                      |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                  | 90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the Siddhs   |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                    | 91. Multān: the jasmine petal                 |
| 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement                       | 97. Death of Mardānā                          |
| 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra                     | 99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad            |
| 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields                 | 106. The inhospitable village unmolested      |
| 36. Nānakmatā   | 107. The hospitable village dispersed         |
| 39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās                  | 110. The leprous faqīr                        |
| 45. Gayā  | 112. Discourse with Miā Miṭhā                 |
| 46. The country ruled by women                          | 113. Dunī Chand and the wolf                  |
| 48. Jagannāth Purī                                      |   |
| 54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ                  |   |



- 114. Dunī Chand's flags
- 115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square
- 120. The destruction of the hospitable  
carpenter's hut

- 121. Sālas Rāi
- 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Irpinder and Gautam Bhatia's *The Proud Sikh Fun & Learning Pack Fun Magazine*  
4 sakhis

- 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit
- 5. Investiture with the sacred thread
- 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
- 22. Immersion in the river: his call

Arpana Caur's *Nanak: The Guru*  
23 sakhis

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The birth of Gurū Nānak</li> <li>4. Instruction by the mullah</li> <li>5. Investiture with the sacred thread</li> <li>6. The restored field</li> <li>7. The tree's stationary shadow</li> <li>8. The cobra's shadow</li> <li>10. Betrothal and marriage</li> <li>14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand</li> <li>16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br/>and the faqīrs</li> <li>20. To Sultānpur</li> <li>21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat</li> <li>22. Immersion in the river: his call</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields</li> <li>60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag</li> <li>79. Mecca: the moving mosque</li> <li>83. The sack of Saidpur</li> <li>84. Discourse with Bābur</li> <li>89. The proud official humbled: the<br/>founding of Kartārpur</li> <li>99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad</li> <li>100. The death of Gurū Nānak</li> <li>114. Dunī Chand's flags</li> <li>122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped</li> <li>124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo</li> </ul> |
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Anita Ganeri's *The Milk and the Jasmine Flower and Other Stories*  
2 sakhis

- 91. Multān: the jasmine petal
- 114. Dunī Chand's flags

Anita Ganeri's *Traditional Religious Tales: Sikh Stories*

3 sakhis

- 91. Multān: the jasmine petal
- 114. Dunī Chand's flags
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Santokh Singh Jagdev's *Bed Time Stories-2: Guru Nanak Dev Ji*

25 sakhis

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| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                               | 58. The cannibal's cauldron        |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                               | 60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag                |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 72. Mount Sumeru                   |
| 11. The physician convinced                                | 73. Gorakh-haṭarī                  |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque       |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     | 81. Baghdad                        |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                       | 83. The sack of Saidpur            |
| 25. Discourse with the qāzī                                | 84. Discourse with Bābur           |
| 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra                        | 100. The death of Gurū Nānak       |
| 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields                    | 110. The leprous faqīr             |
| 47. Dacca  | 114. Dunī Chand's flags            |
| 48. Jagannāth Purī   | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped |
|  | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo       |

Inni Kaur's *Journey with the Gurus, Volume 1*

15 sakhis

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak            | 14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand |
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit          | 20. To Sultānpur                       |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah          | 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread | 22. Immersion in the river: his call   |
| 6. The restored field                 | 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement      |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                 | 25. Discourse with the qāzī            |
| 9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī     | 26. Departure from Sultānpur           |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage            |  |

Volume 2

3 sakhis

- 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
- 60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Volume 3

10 sakhis

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh                      | 106. The inhospitable village<br>unmolested |
| 48. Jagannāth Purī                                 | 107. The hospitable village dispersed       |
| 54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ<br>Saṅgali  | 110. The leprous faqīr                      |
| 86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with<br>parents | 112. Discourse with Miā Miṭhā               |
| 91. Multān: the jasmine petal                      | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                     |

Gurbakhsh Singh's *Sikh Stories for the Youth*

5 sakhis

16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs  
22. Immersion in the river: his call  
23. Nānak accused of embezzlement  
60. Sajjaṅ the ṭhag  
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Mala Singh's *The Story of Guru Nanak*

24 sakhis

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| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields                      |
| 6. The restored field                                      | 60. Sajjaṅ the ṭhag  |
| 7. The tree's stationary shadow                            | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                                 |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                      | 83. The sack of Saidpur                                      |
| 9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī                          | 84. Discourse with Bābur                                     |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                                 | 89. The proud official humbled: the<br>founding of Kartārpur |
| 14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand                     | 91. Multān: the jasmine petal                                |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 92. First meeting with Lahiṇā                                |
| 20. To Sultānpur   | 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad                                     |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     | 100. The death of Gurū Nānak                                 |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                       | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                                      |
| 26. Departure from Sultānpur                               | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                                 |

Mridula Oberoi's *The Sikh Gurus (Life and Times)*

17 sakhis

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|--|---|
| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak                                 | 22. Immersion in the river: his call    |
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                               | 25. Discourse with the qāzī             |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                               | 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields |
| 6. The restored field                                      | 58. The cannibal's cauldron             |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                      | 60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag                     |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                                 | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque            |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 83. The sack of Saidpur                 |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     | 84. Discourse with Bābur                |
|  | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo            |

Baljit and Inderjit Singh's *Travels of Guru Nanak (Activity Book)*

31 Sakhis

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| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                               | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                   |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                               | 81. Baghdad                                    |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 83. The sack of Saidpur                        |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                      | 84. Discourse with Bābur                       |
| 11. The physician convinced                                | 90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the<br>Siddhs |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 91. Multān: the jasmine petal                  |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     | 93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined                    |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                       | 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad                       |
| 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement                          | 99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad             |
| 25. Discourse with the qāzī                                | 106. The inhospitable village<br>unmolested    |
| 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra                        | 107. The hospitable village dispersed          |
| 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields                    | 115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square              |
| 48. Jagannāth Purī   | 116. A pious boy                               |
| 58. The cannibal's cauldron                                | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped             |
| 60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag  | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                   |
| 72. Mount Sumeru   |  |

Vaneeta Vaid's *Tell Me About Sikh Gurus*

10 sakhis

1. The birth of Gurū Nānak
8. The cobra's shadow
16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag
79. Mecca: the moving mosque

- 94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse
- 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad
- 100. The death of Gurū Nānak
- 114. Dunī Chand's flags
- 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped

Rosetta William's *Sikh Gurus*

15 sakhis\*\*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The birth of Gurū Nānak</li> <li>3. Instruction by the paṇḍit</li> <li>4. Instruction by the mullah</li> <li>5. Investiture with the sacred thread</li> <li>22. Immersion in the river: his call</li> <li>34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields</li> <li>69. Kurukshetra: discourse on bathing</li> <li>79. Mecca: the moving mosque</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>81. Baghdad</li> <li>84. Discourse with Bābur</li> <li>91. Multān: the jasmine petal</li> <li>100. The death of Gurū Nānak</li> <li>113. Dunī Chand and the wolf</li> <li>114. Dunī Chand's flags</li> <li>124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

Shyam Dua ed., *The Luminous Life of Guru Nanak*

30 sakhis

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The birth of Gurū Nānak</li> <li>3. Instruction by the paṇḍit</li> <li>4. Instruction by the mullah</li> <li>5. Investiture with the sacred thread</li> <li>6. The restored field</li> <li>8. The cobra's shadow</li> <li>10. Betrothal and marriage</li> <li>11. The physician convinced</li> <li>16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs</li> <li>22. Immersion in the river: his call</li> <li>25. Discourse with the qāzī</li> <li>34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields</li> <li>39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās</li> <li>45. Gayā</li> <li>48. Jagannāth Purī</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prān Saṅgali</li> <li>70. Return to Sultānpur</li> <li>72. Mount Sumeru</li> <li>79. Mecca: the moving mosque</li> <li>81. Baghdad</li> <li>83. The sack of Saidpur</li> <li>84. Discourse with Bābur</li> <li>87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh Ibrāhīm</li> <li>92. First meeting with Lahiṇā</li> <li>93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined</li> <li>94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse</li> <li>95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad</li> <li>100. The death of Gurū Nānak</li> <li>122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped</li> <li>124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## From Chapter 4: Comic Books

Amar Chitra Katha's *Guru Nanak*  
30 sakhis

1. The birth of Gurū Nānak
3. Instruction by the paṇḍit
4. Instruction by the mullah
5. Investiture with the sacred thread
6. The restored field
8. The cobra's shadow
10. Betrothal and marriage
11. The physician convinced
14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand
16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
20. To Sultānpur
21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat
22. Immersion in the river: his call
23. Nānak accused of embezzlement
25. Discourse with the qāzī
26. Departure from Sultānpur
34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
46. The country ruled by women
58. The cannibal's cauldron
60. Sajjaṅ the ṭhag
79. Mecca: the moving mosque
81. Baghdad
83. The sack of Saidpur
84. Discourse with Bābur
89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur
93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined
95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad
99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad
100. The death of Gurū Nānak
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Diamond Comic's *Sikh Gurus*  
19 sakhis

1. The birth of Gurū Nānak
3. Instruction by the paṇḍit
4. Instruction by the mullah
5. Investiture with the sacred thread
6. The restored field
8. The cobra's shadow
11. The physician convinced
16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
20. To Sultānpur
21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat
22. Immersion in the river: his call
23. Nānak accused of embezzlement
25. Discourse with the qāzī
34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields
48. Jagannāth Purī
58. The cannibal's cauldron
79. Mecca: the moving mosque
122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

## From Chapter 4: New Media Expressions- Websites

*“Siri Guru Nanak Dev Ji”*

<http://www.info-sikh.com/PageNan1.html>

28 sakhis

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit                               | 48. Jagannāth Purī                                |
| 4. Instruction by the mullah                               | 54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ<br>Saṅgali |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag                               |
| 6. The restored field                                      | 71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit                           |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                      | 72. Mount Sumeru                                  |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                                 | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque                      |
| 11. The physician convinced                                | 83. The sack of Saidpur                           |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 84. Discourse with Bābur                          |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                       | 91. Multān: the jasmine petal                     |
| 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement                          | 103. The coal and the thorn                       |
| 25. Discourse with the qāzī                                | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                           |
| 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields                    | 118. Anabhī the Jain                              |
| 36. Nānakmatā  | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped                |
| 46. The country ruled by women                             | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo                      |

*“The Story of the Real True Bargain- Sacha Sauda”*

<http://www.panthic.org/articles/3309>

1 sakhi

16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs

*“Sikh Stories”*

<http://www.realsikhism.com/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1192337336&ucat=9>

7 sakhis

6. The restored field  
8. The cobra's shadow  
34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields  
58. The cannibal's cauldron  
60. Sajjaṇ the ṭhag  
122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped  
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

“*Guru Nanak Dev ji (1469-1539)*”

<http://www.sikh-history.com/sikhhist/gurus/nanak1.html>

3 sakhis

16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs

34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields

124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

“*Sakhian*”

<http://www.sikh-history.com/sikhhist/gurus/sakhi>

11 sakhis

5. Investiture with the sacred thread

16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren  
and the faqīrs

29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra

34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields

48. Jagannāth Purī

58. The cannibal's cauldron

60. Sajjaṅ the ṭhag

72. Mount Sumeru

73. Gorakh-haṭaṭī

114. Dunī Chand's flags

124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

“*Sakhis of Guru Nanak*”

[http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sakhis\\_of\\_Guru\\_Nanak](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Sakhis_of_Guru_Nanak)

38 sakhis

3. Instruction by the paṇḍit

5. Investiture with the sacred thread

6. The restored field

8. The cobra's shadow

11. The physician convinced

16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren  
and the faqīrs

22. Immersion in the river: his call

25. Discourse with the qāzī

27. Mardānā commanded to throw  
offerings away

29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra

33. Sheikh Bajīd

34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields

36. Nānakmatā

39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās

45. Gayā

46. The country ruled by women

48. Jagannāth Purī

54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ  
Saṅgali

58. The cannibal's cauldron

60. Sajjaṅ the ṭhag

64. Vindhyā Mountains

71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit

73. Gorakh-haṭaṭī

79. Mecca: the moving mosque

81. Baghdad

83. The sack of Saidpur

87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh  
Ibrāhīm

89. The proud official humbled: the  
founding of Kartārpur

90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the  
Siddhs

103. The coal and the thorn

106. The inhospitable village  
unmolested



- 107. The hospitable village dispersed
- 113. Dunī Chand and the wolf
- 114. Dunī Chand's flags
- 116. A pious boy

- 121. Sālas Rāi
- 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

“*Sikh Stories*”

<http://sikhlionz.com/sikh-stories.htm>  
10 sakhis

- 46. The country ruled by women
- 48. Jagannāth Purī
- 60. Sajjan the thag
- 89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur
- 103. The coal and the thorn
- 110. The leprous faqīr
- 114. Dunī Chand's flags
- 115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square
- 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

“*Sikh Stories for Children*”

<https://www.sikhnet.com/stories>  
15/5 sakhis

- 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit
- 5. Investiture with the sacred thread
- 6. The restored field
- 8. The cobra's shadow
- 11. *The physician convinced*
- 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs
- 22. Immersion in the river: his call
- 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement
- 25. Discourse with the qāzī
- 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields

- 46. The country ruled by women
- 48. *Jagannāth Purī*
- 54. *Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the Prāṇ Saṅgali*
- 58. The cannibal's cauldron
- 72. Mount Sumeru
- 73. Gorakh-haṭaṭī
- 94. *Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse*
- 103. *The coal and the thorn*
- 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

“*The First Master Guru Nanak (1469-1539)*”

<http://www.sikhs.org/guru1.htm>

12 sakhis

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread   | 84. Discourse with Bābur               |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call    | 94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse |
| 29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra     | 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad               |
| 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields | 100. The death of Gurū Nānak           |
| 36. Nānakmatā                           | 103. The coal and the thorn            |
| 83. The sack of Saidpur                 | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo           |

### **From Chapter 4: New Media Expressions- Video**

Animated World Faiths’ *The Life of Guru Nanak*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JavKCE2FAf0>

Screenplay by Sally Humble-Jackson

Directed by Zenni Yukishige

A Studio Jiřího Trnky Production for S4C and Channel 4, 1997

DVD: Woodland Hills, CA: Entertainment Programs, 2002

7 sakhis

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| 3. Instruction by the paṇḍit           | 84. Discourse with Bābur     |
| 6. The restored field                  | 100. The death of Gurū Nānak |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call   |                              |

BBC Learning Video’s “The beginnings of Sikhism”

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/the-beginnings-of-sikhism/4822.html>

3 sakhis

- 7. The tree's stationary shadow
- 22. Immersion in the river: his call
- 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo

Geethanjali's *Guru Nanak Animated Stories*

Screenplay by Neraimathi D.

Directed by A. A. Pillai

A Geethanjali Production, 2008

DVD: Chennai: Super Audio (Madras) Pvt, Ltd., 2008

21 sakhis

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. The birth of Gurū Nānak                                 | 23. Nānak accused of embezzlement       |
| 5. Investiture with the sacred thread                      | 25. Discourse with the qāzī             |
| 6. The restored field                                      | 34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields |
| 8. The cobra's shadow                                      | 58. The cannibal's cauldron             |
| 10. Betrothal and marriage                                 | 79. Mecca: the moving mosque            |
| 11. The physician convinced                                | 94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse  |
| 14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand                     | 95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad                |
| 16. Kharā saudā: the feeding of Sant Ren<br>and the faqīrs | 100. The death of Gurū Nānak            |
| 21. Work in Daulat Khān's commissariat                     | 114. Dunī Chand's flags                 |
| 22. Immersion in the river: his call                       | 122. Pañjā Sāhib: the rock stopped      |
|  | 124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo            |

### Appendix 3: Statistical Analyses of Modern Janam-sakhis

The following presents the quartile analysis of the thirty-five modern janam-sakhi sources discussed at length in chapters four and six. These tables indicate how many sources in which each sakhi is to be found (Count). The count is then expressed as a percentage to note the relative use of the sakhi across the sample (Percent). Finally, the individual sakhis are ranked in popularity across the sample (Rank).

#### Sakhis in More Than 75% of Sources

Sakhi	Count	Percent	Rank
124. Saidpur: Lālo and Bhāgo	30	86%	1
16. <i>Kharā saudā</i> : the feeding of Sant Ren and the faqīrs	30	86%	1
34. Hardwār: the watering of his fields	28	80%	3
22. Immersion in the river: his call	27	77%	4
5. Investiture with the sacred thread	23	66%	5
60. Sajjan the <i>thag</i>	22	63%	6
79. Mecca: the moving mosque	22	63%	6
122. <i>Pañjā Sāhib</i> : the rock stopped	22	63%	6
6. The restored field	21	60%	9
8. The cobra's shadow	19	54%	10
21. Work in Daulat <i>Khān</i> 's commissariat	19	54%	10
3. Instruction by the paṇḍit	18	51%	12
25. Discourse with the qāzī	17	49%	13
58. The cannibal's cauldron	17	49%	13
83. The sack of Saidpur	17	49%	13
114. Dunī Chand's flags	17	49%	13
48. Jagannāth Purī	16	46%	17
84. Discourse with Bābur	15	43%	18
23. Nānak accused of embezzlement	14	40%	19
1. The birth of Gurū Nānak	13	37%	20
4. Instruction by the mullah	13	37%	20
10. Betrothal and marriage	13	37%	20
11. The physician convinced	13	37%	20
72. Mount Sumeru	13	37%	20

### Sakhis in 50-75% of Sources

<b>Sakhi</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Rank</b>
29. Nānak cooks meat at Kurukshetra	12	34%	25
95. Lahiṇā becomes Aṅgad	12	34%	25
100. The death of Gurū Nānak	12	34%	25
81. Baghdad	11	31%	28
46. The country ruled by women	10	29%	29
93. Lahiṇā's clothes ruined	10	29%	29
20. To Sultānpur	9	26%	31
54. Ceylon: Rājā Śivanābh and the <i>Prāṇ Saṅgali</i>	9	26%	31
89. The proud official humbled: the founding of Kartārpur	9	26%	31
106. The inhospitable village unmolested 107. The hospitable village dispersed	9	26%	31
121. Sālas Rāi	9	26%	31
14. Birth of Lakhmī Dās and Sirī Chand	8	23%	36
36. Nānakmatā	8	23%	36
91. Multān: the jasmine petal	8	23%	36
99. The installation of Gurū Aṅgad	8	23%	36
39. Banāras: discourse with Chatur Dās	7	20%	40
103. The coal and the thorn	7	20%	40
115. The brāhmaṇ's cooking-square	7	20%	40
7. The tree's stationary shadow	6	17%	43
45. Gayā	6	17%	43
71. The Kashmīrī paṇḍit	6	17%	43
90. Achal Baṭālā: discourse with the Siddhs	6	17%	43
110. The leprous faqīr	6	17%	43
116. A pious boy	6	17%	43

### Sakhis in 25-50% of Sources

<b>Sakhi</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Rank</b>
73. Gorakh-haṭarī	5	14%	49
87. Pāk Paṭṭan: discourse with Sheikh Ibrāhīm	5	14%	49
92. First meeting with Lahiṇā	5	14%	49
94. Lahiṇā commanded to eat the corpse	5	14%	49
9. Marriage of Jai Rām and Nānakī	4	11%	53
26. Departure from Sultānpur	4	11%	53
113. Dunī Chand and the wolf	4	11%	53
18. Bhāgīrath and Mansukh	3	9%	56
19. Mansukh and Rājā Śivanābh	3	9%	56
27. Mardānā commanded to throw offerings away	3	9%	56
30. Discourse with Sheikh Sharaf of Pāṇīpat	3	9%	56
33. Sheikh Bajīd	3	9%	56

47. Dacca	3	9%	56
70. Return to Sultānpur	3	9%	56
82. Hinglāj	3	9%	56
97. Death of Mardānā	3	9%	56
101. The death of the trader's infant son	3	9%	56

### Sakhis in less than 25% of Sources

<b>Sakhi</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Rank</b>
28. Mardānā eats the forbidden fruit	2	6%	2
32. Delhi: the sultan's elephant resurrected	2	6%	2
37. Allahābād	2	6%	2
44. Ayodhyā: discourse with paṇḍits	2	6%	2
66. Bikāner district and city	2	6%	2
74. Multān: discourse with a descendant of Pīr Bahāuddīn	2	6%	2
77. The Mecca pilgrim and the following cloud	2	6%	2
80. Medina	2	6%	2
86. Return to Talvaṇḍī and reunion with parents	2	6%	2
98. Death of Kālū and Tipārā	2	6%	2
104. The <i>ṭhags</i> and the funeral pyre	2	6%	2
112. Discourse with Miā Miṭhā	2	6%	2
118. Anabhī the Jain	2	6%	2
120. The destruction of the hospitable carpenter's hut	2	6%	2
17. The <i>loṭā</i> and ring presented to a faqīr	1	3%	1
24. The mullah seeks to exorcize his evil spirit	1	3%	1
31. Delhi: the real alms	1	3%	1
38. Banāras: discourse with paṇḍits	1	3%	1
40. Rājā Harināth	1	3%	1
42. Hājīpur Paṭṇa	1	3%	1
43. Ayodhyā: discourse with 'all the <i>bhagats</i> '	1	3%	1
49. The brick falls from the temple	1	3%	1
50. The jackal and the food from God's court	1	3%	1
52. Rāmeśwaram	1	3%	1
56. The meeting with Kaliyug	1	3%	1
57. The struggle with <i>Kāl</i>	1	3%	1
63. Ujjain	1	3%	1
64. Vindhya Mountains	1	3%	1
65. Narabad River	1	3%	1
67. The land of Saraṭhi (Saurāshtra)	1	3%	1
68. Mathurā	1	3%	1
69. Kurukshetra: discourse on bathing	1	3%	1
85. Bābur attacks Ṭillā Bālgundāi	1	3%	1
109. Jhaṇḍā Bādhī and the <i>Jugāvalī</i>	1	3%	1
111. The devotees of Kiṛṭān Paṭhāṇān	1	3%	1

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