

Understanding the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan

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This essay addresses the vexed issue of Guru Arjan's execution in Mughal custody in 1606. In many marked ways it departs from conventional explanations offered in scholarly and quasi-scholarly works. In order to arrive at a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this watershed in Sikh history this essays emphasizes the need to explore more substantial scholarly questions about the period's chronological and spatial patterns in the religious, social, economic, cultural and political aspects of what was happening in Mughal India. In addition it examines the issue of authority and the power dynamics at play in the religious and political institutions of the times. Finally, it addresses the issue of how Guru Arjun's martyrdom became the single most decisive factor for the crystallization of the Sikh Panth.

Like the yearning cry of a rain-bird (*babiha*) he spoke to his disciples that the Guru's teachings should never be forsaken. The blissful state of equanimity (*sahaj samadhi*) can be attained only in the delight of love (*piram rasu*) in the company of the holy through the teachings of the Guru. May I be a sacrifice unto Guru Arjan.¹
 [Bhai Gurdas]

The most controversial issue in Sikh history is related to Guru Arjan's execution in Mughal custody. A number of interpretations of this event have emerged in scholarly and quasi-scholarly writings. Most of the historians of Mughal India look at it simplistically from a political angle. Richard H. Davis, for instance, has recently pointed out that the Sikh Gurus began to play a more active role in north Indian political conflicts because the Sikh community had become a formidable social group. Accordingly, Guru Arjan set himself as the lord of the Sikhs and took sides in Mughal dynastic disputes and hence suffered the consequences of backing the losing side.² Similarly, in the early decades of twentieth century Beni Prasad treated this whole affair as "a single execution due primarily to political reasons."³ He argued that the kind-hearted Guru fell into the mistake of blessing the distressed Prince Khusrau, an opportunity that was seized by the Guru's enemies who made the utmost of it. To Jahangir they represented his 'treason and impiety' with all the color that personal malice and fanatical hatred could impart. The emperor was at first disposed to take a lenient view of this affair, but he fell at last into the snares of Guru Arjan's enemies. The Guru was sentenced to death and his property including his hermitage was confiscated.⁴ In contrast to this viewpoint, however, most of the

Sikh scholars have vehemently presented this event as the first of the long series of religious persecutions that Sikhs suffered at the hands of Mughal authorities.⁵

The principal sources that have been used by scholars to reconstruct Guru Arjan's execution offer divergent views on this issue. The fragmentary traces of these contemporary and near contemporary documents illuminate the processes at work behind this watershed in Sikh history. There is an urgent need to build a careful interpretive framework to offer a coherent and meaningful narrative. We will begin with the examination of the passage in the *Jahangirnama* concerning this event to understand the imperial perspective, and then we will closely look at other available sources. In addition, we will address the following questions: How did the resurgence of Turko-Mongol traditions at the beginning of seventeenth century mark the end of Akbar's liberal policy in Mughal India? What were the competing religious traditions in the Punjab, interacting with each other in the context of religious pluralism of Akbar's rule? Why did the rapid growth of the Sikh Panth during Guru Arjan's period become a matter of concern for the Mughal authorities? What were the cultural patterns of the social constituency of the Sikh Panth from the perspective of social anthropology? How did the issues of authority and power dynamics play in the religious and political institutions of the times?

Jahangir's memoirs in his *Jahangirnama* present an account of important events, particularly of the early years of his reign, and a candid view of his personal life, replete with his vices and virtues. Bonnie Wade, for instance, remarks that from his memoirs we gain a personal sense of Jahangir and his times: "He was a complex character, full of contradictions, a mixture of bad temper and genial temperament, one who had disregard for human misery yet acutely sensitive to art and nature, a lover of sport as well as entertainment. He was callous and cruel, yet garrulous and erudite."⁶ In a particular entry in the *Jahangirnama* related to this study Jahangir explicitly says that he ordered the execution of Guru Arjan since he had blessed his eldest son, the rebel Prince Khusrau. In this context, Wheeler M. Thackston's translation of the original Persian text (folios 27b-28a) reads as follows:

There was a Hindu named Arjan in Gobindwal on the banks of the Beas River. [28a] Pretending to be a spiritual guide, he had won over as devotees many simpleminded Indians and even some ignorant, stupid Muslims by broadcasting his claims to be a saint. They called him guru. Many fools [/dervish-garbed worshippers] from all around had recourse to him and believed in him implicitly. For three or four generations they had been pedaling this same stuff. For a long time I had been thinking that either this false trade should be eliminated or that he should be brought into the embrace of Islam. At length, when Khusraw passed by there, this inconsequential little fellow wished to pay homage to Khusraw. When Khusraw stopped at his residence, [Arjan] came out and had an interview with [Khusraw]. Giving him some elementary spiritual precepts picked up here and there, he made a mark with

saffron on his forehead, which is called *qashqa* in the idiom of the Hindus and which they consider lucky. When this was reported to me, I realized how perfectly false he was and ordered him brought to me. I awarded his houses and dwellings and those of his children to Murtaza Khan, and I ordered his possessions and goods confiscated and him executed [*siyasat o yasa rasanand*].⁷

Evidently, Jahangir claims to have watched the Sikh movement with disapproval for a number of years. He did not like the conversion of “some ignorant, stupid Muslims” to the Sikh faith. He had two solutions in his mind: either to put an end to “this false trade” or to bring him into the “embrace of Islam.” Jahangir perceived Guru Arjan’s blessings to the rebel Prince Khusrau (/Khusraw) as an indication of his involvement with the movement attempting to put the prince on the throne rather than his father. He gave orders to Murtaza Khan, the governor of Lahore, to confiscate Guru Arjan’s “possessions and goods” and to execute him according to *yasa siyasat*. Literally, *yasa* is the Mongol term for ‘law’ and *siyasat* means ‘punishment’, signifying the phrase as ‘punishment under law’. In Mughal times both words were used for capital punishment. Under the *Yasa* of Mongol warlord Genghis Khan (/Chingiz Khan), the blood of princes and honored persons was not spilled. Only those means of killing were employed for them that would prevent this happening.⁸ Thus, the punishment of extreme tortures was inflicted without shedding the blood of Guru Arjan who was a religious leader even in Jahangir’s eyes.

Here, it is extremely critical to understand the background of the *Yasa* of Chingis Khan with respect to its application in the medieval Indian society. It is frequently referred to as *Tora* (/tura) in Mughal chronicles. According to Thackston, the *Tora* is the Genghisid (/Chingisid) code of conduct and Mongol customary law. It was respected in large part by members of the Timurid dynasty, who laid claim to legitimacy through their connections to Genghis Khan and his offspring.⁹ Undoubtedly, the Mughal rulers interpreted it in the light of their own particular situations. The scholars have occasionally expressed the opinion that in its original context the *Yasa* was too cruel a code and that its cruelty surpassed that of other analogous codes.¹⁰ It has not come down to us in its entirety, either in the original or in copy. We know only fragments of it which have been transmitted by ancient Arab, Persian, and Armenian historians - Makrizi, Mirhond (/Mir Khond), Ibn-Batuta, Vartang and Mahakia.¹¹ In this context, Mansura Haider addresses the question whether *Yasa* or *tura* that had played a guiding role in the Mongol polity had still retained some of its traces in the Mughal Empire in India. He argues that the clauses of *tura* were not explicitly described by the Mughal chroniclers. Basically, they refer to *tura* in two senses: first, in the sense of Turko-Mongol customary practices and royal traditions; and second, in the sense of Chingizi *tura* including such matters as hunting, military organization, social norms, moral conduct, religious principles, policy of toleration, attitude towards divines of all religions, the theory of absolute

surrender to sovereign, and so on. The Timurid historians like Babur, Bayzid, Mir Khond and Gulbadan Begam vouchsafe its continuity in Mughal India without giving any further information about it. Interestingly, Abu'l Fazal provides us with no reference to *tura* and its clauses. This may be due to the fact that during Akbar's reign the purely Central Asian traditions became the first casualty in the process of creating a composite culture and a synthetic civilization. Strangely enough, an upsurge of Turko-Mongol traditions, however temporary and purposeful, became noticeable during the first few years of seventeenth century. Not surprisingly, there are several explicit references in Jahangir's memoirs to Chingizi *tura* and Chaghatai traditions. Occasionally, the clauses of Yasa were used politically to defeat the rival claimants. For instance, in the proceedings of the consultative assembly in which Khusrau's candidature was under consideration along with his father, Said Khan Chaghatai who was "a simple-minded Turko-Mongol" and a senior Akbari noble, vehemently raised the question that how could Khusrau supersede his own father, Sultan Salim. Such a practice, he pointed out, was not in conformity with the prevalent traditions and the *tura* of Chaghatai.¹²

In his insightful analysis, Ganda Singh provides us with the background of Khusrau's rebellion. He argues that Jahangir was the frustrated son of a long-lived father who had to wait thirty-eight years before ascending the throne. According to Bonnie Wade, the then Prince Salim (Jahangir) had begun to chafe at his father's longevity, and in July 1600 he attempted unsuccessfully to seize the Agra fort and for nearly two years tried futilely to overthrow his father.¹³ In fact, Salim burst into open rebellion against Emperor Akbar and assumed the royal title in 1601. Then he had Abu'l Fazal, the principal supporter of the emperor's policy of religious pluralism, murdered in August 1602. It took Akbar many years to forgive his involvement in Abu'l Fazal's murder. Due to his paternal affection and failing health, Akbar achieved a kind of reconciliation with his son and publicly designated him as his heir to the throne. However, rumors continued to circulate that Akbar had in fact approved the nomination of his grandson Khusrau as his heir to the throne rather than his rebellious and intemperate son. This set in motion royal intrigues and counter-intrigues with frantic efforts for winning support for the contesting parties – Prince Salim and his son Khusrau. The proposal of the *Khan-i-Azam* Aziz Koka and Raja Man Singh to exclude Prince Salim as unworthy in favor of his son was stoutly opposed by a number of nobles.¹⁴ This afforded a very favorable opportunity to the adherents of Islamic revivalism to exact from Prince Salim as a price for their support to his claims to the imperial throne two solemn oaths: first, binding him to defend the Islamic religion against non-Muslim heathenism, and second, to wreak no vengeance upon those who had at any time in the past espoused the cause of Khusrau. Salim gladly accepted both the conditions and took the required oaths.¹⁵

After the death of Emperor Akbar on October 17, 1605 Prince Salim occupied the throne as the new emperor, Nur-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir ("Light of Mohammad's Faith and the Conqueror of the World"). With a clear stroke of statesmanship, the new emperor effected reconciliation with Raja Man Singh and

dismissed him in all honor to his government in Bengal. Prince Khusrau was also received with warmest affection with a grant of a *lakh* of rupees for the renovation of a mansion allotted to him for residence in the fort of Agra. But the ambitious and impatient spirit of Khusrau felt restless in a sort of semi-confinement in the Agra fort. To try his luck once again, he escaped on April 6, 1606, and hurried towards the Punjab evidently in the hope of gaining supporters in the northwest and leading a successful rebellion against his father. He was closely followed by Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan), who in turn was followed at a short distance by Jahangir himself. Bukhari followed the same route as was followed by Khusrau, crossing the river Beas at Goindwal, and inflicting a crushing defeat on the rebel prince near Bharowal. In his flight towards Kabul, Khusrau was captured on April 27, while trying to cross the river Chenab. He was brought to Lahore, hands bound and chains on his legs in accordance with the custom and code of Genghis Khan in Mirza Kamran's garden, where Emperor Jahangir ordered him into confinement on May 1, 1606 (Muharram 3, 1015 A.H.). For over a week, April 28 to May 7, the emperor stayed on in the garden outside the town of Lahore, waiting for the auspicious hour to enter the fort on Muharram 9 (May 7, 1606).¹⁶

Beni Prasad has given the chronology of Khusrau's revolt for which he has prepared a date-wise table of his movements as well as Jahangir's movements.¹⁷ On the basis of this chronology, Ganda Singh writes: "On or about 23rd of May, a report was poured into the ears of Emperor Jahangir that during the short halt of Khusrau at Goindwal, on the right bank of river Beas, the Sikh Guru Arjun had gone to see the prince and had conveyed to him some preconceived things and had also blessed him with a saffron mark on the forehead."¹⁸ This was practically a month after the Guru was alleged to have blessed the prince and some twenty-seven days after the emperor himself had crossed the river Beas at that very place. According to Ganda Singh, this makes the whole story a puzzle and throws serious doubt on the genuineness and authenticity of the report: "If the Guru had met and blessed Khusrau at Goindwal, it would certainly have been reported to the emperor on the spot or in its immediate neighbourhood where it could have been verified and authenticated by eye-witnesses and the Guru would have been arrested and carried a prisoner with him to Lahore."¹⁹ Ganda Singh makes two further points in his analysis: first, the Guru was at Taran Taran at that time, not at Goindwal, and second, the mark of saffron by the Guru on the forehead of the Prince was "a pure and simple concoction of some conspirator's fertile imagination to exploit the emperor's emotions against the Guru."²⁰ He concludes his analysis with a firm statement: "The political allegations were only used as a handy pretext and recorded as camouflaging justification for his drastic action against a popular religious leader, either to satisfy his guilty conscience or to throw his future critics off the track of truth."²¹

By contrast, Kapur Singh takes issue with modern Sikh writers, including Ganda Singh, who have endeavored to show that in reality Guru Arjan was in no way involved with the rebellion of Prince Khusrau directly or indirectly. For him, Jahangir's diary was his personal property and was to remain in the imperial library

even after the emperor's death and no question of making its contents public was ever to arise.²² What the emperor wrote in his diary was what he believed to be true. Kapur Singh, however, accepts the possibility that the emperor himself may have been misled regarding the true facts of the case. He then offers a radical thesis that "Prince Khusrau was well aware that Guru Arjan was a fearless and uncompromising opponent of the policy of Jahangir by which the emperor had made the law of *shariat* the foundation of his government and that Guru Arjan was such a towering personality and of such high moral courage that he would not fear or flinch from receiving and offering comfort to the prince who was fleeing before the royal host which was at his very heels."²³ With respect to the story of the saffron mark Kapur Singh observes: "[T]he prince, in accordance with the etiquette required at the Guru's court, made some offering as a mark of respect and love, and the master of ceremonies, the *ardasiya*, put a saffron mark on the prince's forehead as a token of the acceptance of his offering."²⁴ There is no doubt that Jahangir misinterpreted this ritual gesture as a sign of potential revolt.

Kapur Singh concludes that the punishment which Emperor Jahangir ordered to be inflicted on Guru Arjan in accordance with the laws of Yasa was on two grounds: one, that the crimes of Guru Arjan were of such grave and political nature that the Guru's existence was definitely considered a danger to the safety of the Mughal Empire in India, and two, that the spiritual status of Guru Arjan was considered so exalted as to make it necessary for him to be put to death by being boiled alive in water.²⁵ In his interpretation Kapur Singh plays upon the political overtones of the word Yasa and cites two incidents in which Chingiz Khan (/Genghis Khan) and his general Mukhali imposed the punishment on two *bikkis* ("Mongol priests"): one was put to death by being boiled alive and in the other case his hands and feet were tied and then he was thrown into mid-current of a river. The underlying idea was to kill these *bikkis* without shedding their blood so that their ghosts could not return to cause grave injury to the Mongol tribes.²⁶ It is in this context that Kapur Singh describes Guru Arjan's martyrdom by 'shamanistic law'.²⁷

There is a contemporary reference to Guru Arjan's execution in 1606 in the *Maktubat-i Rabbani* of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, leader of the Naqshbandi movement in the Punjab in the early seventeenth century.²⁸ He rejoiced at the news of this execution, providing the hard evidence about the historical situation in which Muslim revivalists celebrated the Guru's death in Mughal custody. In a personal letter to Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan), the most influential Mughal official of Jahangir and the persecutor of Guru Arjan, he wrote:

These days the accursed infidel of Gobindwal was very fortunately killed. It is a cause of great defeat for the reprobate Hindus. With whatever intention and purpose they are killed – the humiliation of infidels is for Muslims life itself.²⁹

In a jubilant tone Sirhindi refers to Guru Arjan as the 'accursed infidel of Gobindwal' (*kafir-i la'in gobind wal*) whose 'execution...very fortunately

happened' (*kushtan ...bisyar khub waqi` shud*). This direct reference has convinced Sikh scholars that Sirhindi's hand was evident in Jahangir's decision to imprison and subsequently execute Guru Arjan. Recently, Louis Fenech has questioned this conclusion on two grounds: first, the Shaikh's infamous letter was not sent to Jahangir himself, but to the Governor of Punjab, Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan); and second, Sirhindi wrote this letter well after the fact. On the basis of these two arguments Fenech concludes that the Shaikh's role in the Guru's execution is conjectural.³⁰ These technical arguments aside, no one can deny Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's intimate relationship with Shaykh Farid Bukhari, the principal actor in Guru Arjan's execution and the main supporter of the Islamic revivalist movement.

Most instructively, there is a crucial entry in the *Jahangirnama* (folio 27b) before the order of Guru Arjan's execution, describing Jahangir's monetary grant to a group of Naqshbandi dervishes: "Since Shaykh Husayn Jami had dreams about me that came true shortly after-ward. I awarded him twenty lacs of dams, which would be thirty-five to forty thousand rupees, for his own expenses and for the khanqah and the dervishes who were with him."³¹ No scholar has thus far tried to unmask the mystery behind the actual context of this entry. Shaykh Husayn Jami, a peerless member of the Naqshbandi order, used to write encouraging letters to the then Prince Salim (Jahangir): "I have seen His Holiness Khawaja Baha'uddin in a dream, and he said, 'Soon Sultan Salim will mount the throne, causing the world to flourish in justice and equity and giving the grief-stricken cause for rejoicing with his generosity and liberality'."³² The original name of Khawaja Baha'uddin was Baha'uddin Naqshband (1317-1389), the eponymous founder of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, which was highly influential in Timurid Iran and Central Asia. The historical significance of this entry will become clear in our examination of the religious dimension of Guru Arjan's execution in the next section. Here, it is crucial to note that Shaykh Husayn Jami was accompanied, according to Jahangir, by a number of "dervishes who were with him" when he was honored by the emperor in Lahore. It is highly likely that Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi was one of them. Most probably, this was the occasion when complaints against Guru Arjan were made to the emperor about his alleged blessings to Prince Khusrau. Otherwise, why would Sirhindi express his jubilation at the Guru's execution later on? He was self-reflexively expressing his elation at the mission accomplished. We will have more on the strategy of using the motif of a dream in the Naqshbandi letters addressed to Mughal authorities, including Emperor Jahangir.

In his major study Yohanan Friedmann has pointed out Jahangir's ambivalent relationship with Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi from the fact that the emperor imprisoned Sirhindi in the fort of Gwalior in 1619 so that his "disturbed disposition and confused mind would calm down a little."³³ This happened only when Sirhindi incurred the displeasure of Jahangir for his unbending opposition to the Shi'a who were powerful at court. Later on Sirhindi was restored to favor before his death in 1624. Friedmann compellingly argues that much of the material surrounding Sirhindi and his popularity exists because of his devout followers, those directly

under his mastership, rather than the Mughal courtiers to whom he occasionally wrote. He further claims that Jahangir's personal religious predilections did not determine his state policies. In any serious analysis, however, one must keep the historical context in mind because human behavior is indeed contextual and contingent. At the beginning of his reign Jahangir's political situation was quite unstable. His own son provided him the greatest challenge. At that time he was bound to listen to radical voices of Muslim revivalists that offered him unflinching support. Once he established himself firmly on the Mughal throne he could be magnanimous even with his opponents and project himself as a liberal emperor like his father. People's attitudes change with the change in historical circumstances. Our main concern here is related to the circumstances that led to Guru Arjan's execution in Mughal custody at Jahangir's orders.

The other contemporary independent account of "the rebellion of the Prince against his father, and the consequences thereof" is a Jesuit document, a letter written in Portuguese from Lahore on 25 September 1606 by Father Jerome Xavier to the Provincial at Goa. Father Fernao Guerriero produced this letter in Part IV of the *Relations*. The relevant portion of this letter reads:

While the Prince was flying from Agra, he passed the spot where there dwelt one whom the Gentiles call Goru [/Guru], a title equivalent to that of Pope amongst the Christians. This person was looked upon as a saint, and was greatly venerated. On account of his reputation for holiness, the Prince went to see him, hoping apparently that this would bring him good fortune. The Goru congratulated him on his new royalty, and placed his tiara on his head. Although the Prince was a Moor, the Goru deemed it lawful to bestow on him this mark of dignity, proper only to a gentile, since he was the son of a Pagan woman; and the Prince accepted it, believing the Goru to be a saint.

When, after his son's capture, the King heard of this circumstance, he ordered the Goru to be apprehended, and for some time kept him a prisoner. However, certain Gentiles interceded on behalf of their holy man, and in the end he was allowed to purchase his freedom for a hundred thousand *crusados*, for which sum a wealthy Gentile became his surety. Now this man thought that either the King would remit the fine or that the Goru would himself provide, or at any rate find some means of raising, the sum required. But in these hopes he was disappointed, and in consequence he proceeded to take from the wretched pontiff all his worldly possessions, including the furniture of his house, and even the clothes of his wife and children; for these gentiles regard neither Pope nor Father where money is concerned. And when this did not suffice to pay the fine, he subjected him to every kind of ill-usage, causing him to be beaten with slippers, and preventing

food from being given to him, in the hope that his victim, to escape from his sufferings, would produce the money which he still believed him to possess. But neither the Guru nor those about him could meet the demands of his tormenter; and at last the poor man died, overcome by the miseries heaped upon him by those who had formerly paid him reverence. The Gentile sought to escape his obligations by flight, but he was taken, and having been deprived of everything that he possessed, was thrown into prison, where he died.³⁴

In order to fully appreciate the significance of this letter we need to know the various usages in the text. The people of Spain and Portugal gave the name *Mouros*, or 'Moors', to Muslims in all parts of the world, the name having come into use when the Muslims of Mauritania overran the Peninsula in the middle ages. To the Portuguese the people of India were either Moors or Gentiles (*Gentios*), the latter term being applied to all Hindus, irrespective of race, caste or creed.³⁵ Similarly, the term "Hindu" was first used by Achaemenid Persians to describe all those people who lived on or beyond the banks of the river Sindhu, or Indus. Thus the term "Hindu" implied an ethno-geographical category. It was only under the Muslim rulers that the term began to acquire a religious connotation.³⁶ As such, it came to be used by the Muslims to refer to the native peoples of India who did not convert to Islam. In Persian writings, therefore, Sikhs were regarded as Hindu in the sense of non-Muslim Indians. Jahangir's description of Guru Arjan as a "Hindu" must be understood in this general context. Upon comparison of Father Xavier's letter with the passage of the *Jahangirnama* certain revealing facts emerge.

In the first place, while the *Jahangirnama* was a confidential document to a certain extent, reflecting the state policy, Xavier's letter was based upon what was popularly known to the people about this event at that time. This, however, does not diminish the importance of this document in any way.³⁷ It was a well-known fact among the residents of Lahore that it was Prince Khusrau who went to see Guru Arjan at his place, "hoping apparently that this would bring him good fortune," not that the Guru went to see him, as wrongly claimed by Jahangir in his memoirs. Again, the imperial account is misleading about the location of Guru Arjan's meeting with Khusrau at Goindval. Sikh tradition is quite explicit that Khusrau went to see the Guru at Taran Taran.³⁸ In this context, Beni Prasad rightly remarks: "At Taran Taran, Khusrau sought and obtained the benediction of the influential Sikh Guru, Arjun, the editor of the Sikh scriptures, whom he had seen during his grandfather's lifetime and to whom he represented himself as a distressed, forlorn individual."³⁹ Anyone who has even cursory knowledge of Sikh traditions can easily understand the situation that as a religious leader Guru Arjan would have treated even the emperor in the same way if he had gone to see him. Sikh hospitality was, and still is, open to everyone.

Secondly, with respect to Guru Arjan's blessings to the prince, the letter states: "The Goru [/Guru] congratulated him [Khusrau] on his new royalty, and placed his tiara on his head." Guerreiro has committed a mistake here in using the word 'tiara' for the *tika* (Persian, *qashqa*), the mark made on the forehead of Hindus as a sign to bring success in some undertaking. This was the word which Xavier himself used in his letter: "*elle lhe deo o parabem do nouo reynado e lhe pos o tiqa na testa.*"⁴⁰ In his annotation C.H. Payne provides an explanation by saying that as Khusrau was the son of a Hindu princess (his mother was the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das of Jaipur), the Guru considered him entitled to this distinction.⁴¹ In the charged atmosphere of rebellion, however, Jahangir misinterpreted Guru Arjan's innocent gesture of 'blessing'. Defending the imperial perspective, Sajida S. Alvi goes to the extent that Jahangir was dealing with someone he believed to be "a rebel who happened to be the leader of the Sikh community."⁴² She even goes a step further than Jahangir himself who did not describe Guru Arjan as a 'rebel'. This kind of interpretation, however, reflects an agenda in scholarship, exaggerating fragmentary traces of documentary evidence in historical analysis.

Finally, Xavier's letter throws an interesting light on the popular tradition in Lahore that in the end Guru Arjan "was allowed to purchase his freedom for a hundred thousand *crusados* [i.e., about two *lakhs* of rupees], for which sum a wealthy Gentile became his surety." This rich Gentile (Hindu) subjected the Guru "to every kind of ill-usage" which brought on his death. Let us examine this issue in the light of *Mahima Prakash Vartak* (1741 CE) that provides the first written account of Guru Arjan's martyrdom based upon collective memory (coming from the close family circles of Bhallas): "Chandu Sah (sub-caste of Khattris) was the enemy of [the] Guru and he was [a] Dewan of the emperor. He complained to the emperor that the Guru helped the rebel prince with money. The emperor said, 'wealth is increasing in the house of Nanak. Our kingdom may get damaged.' The emperor sent a messenger to call Guru Arjan who came to Lahore and stayed in the Pandit's house. The emperor fined the Guru. The fine was paid by Chandu who took possession of the Guru's body."⁴³ This became the meta-narrative in the Sikh sources till the nineteenth century in which Emperor Jahangir was literally absolved of any role in the Guru's death. This narrative played a crucial role in subverting the understanding of the Sikh community concerning the death of Guru Arjan, according to which the actual blame for his execution was placed on the Guru's own alleged enemy, Chandu Shah, rather than on Jahangir and the Mughal officials who were primarily responsible for his death. How did it happen? We will address this question in detail as we proceed in our analysis.

The final independent source about Guru Arjan's execution is the Persian text *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* (1640s). The relevant passage from this work reads:

When after the capture of [Prince] Khusrau, His Majesty king Jannat Makani Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir punished and mulcted *Guru Arjan Mal*, on account of his having prayed for the welfare of Prince Khusrau, the son of His Majesty Jannat Makani,

who had rebelled against his father, and a large amount was demanded from him [Guru Arjan], he found himself powerless to pay it. He was tied up and kept [in the open] in the desert around Lahore. He gave up his life there owing to the strong sun, summer heat and the injuries inflicted by the collectors. This happened in [A.H.] 1015 [A.D. 1606-7]. Similarly, His majesty exiled Shaikh Nizam Thanasari from India for his joining, and uttering a prayer for the welfare of Khusrau.⁴⁴

There are two noteworthy points in this passage. The first relates to the manner in which Guru Arjan “gave up his life there owing to the strong sun, summer heat and the injuries inflicted by the collectors” (*az tabash-i aftar o shaddat-i garma o azar-i muhassala jan dad*). Although this information was provided to the author after almost forty years after the execution took place, it was still alive in the mid-seventeenth century oral tradition. The second point is about Shaikh Nizam Thanasari who was exiled by Jahangir for the crime for “uttering a prayer for the welfare of Khusrau.” In his memoirs, Jahangir himself writes: “Shaykh Nizam Thanasari, one of the imposters of the age, [23a] met Khusraw, encouraged him with good news, and escorted him a while along the way. He came to see me. When I heard the news, I gave him his expenses for the road and ordered him to make a pilgrimage to Mecca.”⁴⁵ This statement exposes the double standards of justice applied by the autocratic ruler for an alleged similar crime. The Sikh Guru was given capital punishment according to the Mongol tribal law (Yasa), while a Muslim Shaikh was exiled and sent to Mecca.

The only Sikh account that offers a contemporary understanding of Guru Arjan’s death is the twenty-third *pauri* (“stanza”) of the twenty-fourth *var* (“ballad”) of Bhai Gurdas.⁴⁶ Our paper began with the last three lines of this stanza. Louis Fenech has provided an adroit analysis of this *pauri* in his “Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources.”⁴⁷ Although his main concern is the evolution of the concept of martyrdom in the Sikh tradition, Fenech maintains that “it is quite certain that the *pauri* does deal with Guru Arjan’s final hours” and that “Bhai Gurdas understood the fifth Master’s death as that of a hero, since the description of Guru Arjan’s life and last moments in this *var* conform to the pattern of the hero’s life and death we noted in the *Adi Granth*.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Fenech points out that early Sikh sources do not tell us much about the manner in which the Guru died and the causes of his death: “In fact, even Sikh tradition is not altogether sure regarding the means of the Guru’s death – whether it occurred by torture, execution, or drowning in the Ravi river.”⁴⁹ The reason for this ‘silence’ will become clear as we examine the religious, economic, social and cultural dimensions, including the issues of power and authority, related to the question of Guru Arjan’s execution in Mughal custody.

In contrast to Bhai Gurdas’s silence, however, a group of Hindalis had apparently become vocal in their pro-establishment stance about Guru Arjan’s

execution. They formed a schismatic group within the Panth which accepted the leadership of a rival claimant, Bidhi Chand, son of Baba Hindal of Jandiala, in opposition to Guru Hargobind. Bidhi Chand had married a Muslim woman and evidently responded to the reproaches of the Sikhs by turning apostate. He aligned himself with the Mughal administrators of Lahore. Here, it is instructive to closely look at the apocryphal texts of the epilogue of the Banno version of the Adi Granth prepared in 1642 CE. The second set of apocryphal shaloks attributed to Guru Nanak is normally entitled *Gost Malar nail hoi* (“Discourse that took place with Malar”). This is the same title as that of *sakhi* 125 of the Bala tradition. There is an actual verbal correspondence between them: the typical expression *vir salamalekh barai khudai sach chau* (“Brother, may peace be with you and may you speak the truth with the blessings of God!”) of the Banno text resembles with the *yar salamalekh bara khudai sach chau* of the Bala *janam-sakhi*.⁵⁰

On the basis of his analysis of verbal and thematic similarities, Sahib Singh skillfully concluded that the responsibility for the composition of the apocryphal texts of the Banno *bir* (“recension”) rests solely on the shoulders of the Hindalis, the authors of the Bala Janam-sakhis.⁵¹ In the context of present discussion, the ninth apocryphal shalok deserves careful attention:

*Bhatti andiri paian mili agani salai//balu ret bhakhaia dichai
agani jalai// andir bhujjai dhan jiu tarapharhe te bilalai//api
bakhache nanaka kis nu kahiai jai// (9)*⁵²

The fire flared up when [the firewood] was put into the big furnace.
The sand was made red hot with the burning fire. When the inside
of the body burns like the firewood the soul cries out in agony and
suffers intense pain. Only God can have mercy on such a one, O
Nanak, where else can one go to narrate one’s ordeal? (9)

Here, we can only speculate on the motives of the author of the apocryphal texts of the Banno version. Why did the author use the imagery of punishment through red-hot pan over a big furnace and burning sand? Was he obliquely and indirectly alluding to what happened to Guru Arjan when he was executed in Lahore in 1606? Was he consciously employing this imagery to raise the question of legitimacy of the spiritual status of the Guru? That is, how could a servant of God have been so treated, and if he had been so treated, could he still be regarded as God’s servant? It is quite possible that in contrast to the ‘silence’ of the mainstream Sikh tradition the Hindalis may have been indirectly trying to justify the Mughal stand on Guru Arjan’s death.

Religious Dimension

In his insightful analysis of “Crystallization of Religious Communities in Mughal India” Wilfred Cantwell Smith aptly argues that the Sikh and Islamic processes of

crystallization were parallel movements, which intertwined at certain points decisively.⁵³ One of such conspicuous moments was the execution of Guru Arjan in Lahore in 1606 by Jahangir. Smith argues that this happened shortly after a major step in a Muslim process of consolidation took place, particularly in Shaykh Farid Bukhari's (i.e. Mir Murtaza Khan's) success in diverting and then suppressing Khusrau's bid for a more Akbar-like reign. In his analysis Smith focuses on the role of two protagonists of Naqshbandi Sufi order (from central Asia), Khawajah Baqi Bi-Allah (1563-1603) and his most eminent disciple Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) who played leading role in Islamic religious revival in the Indian subcontinent. In fact, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi became known as *al-Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Thani*, 'the Rejuvenator of Islam at the Beginning of the Second Muslim Millennium'. Not surprisingly, Saiyad Athar Abbas Rizvi remarks that "an overwhelming majority of modern scholars in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent believe that but for the leadership of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, who claimed to be the *mujaddid* of the second millennium, orthodox Sunnism, if not Islam as a whole in India would have been doomed."⁵⁴

Coincidentally, Baqi Bi-Allah was born in Kabul in 1563, the year when Guru Arjan was born in Punjab, while Sirhindi was born in 1564 at Sirhind in Punjab.⁵⁵ Baqi Bi-Allah was educated at the chief cultural centers of Muslim Central Asia, especially Samarqand and Bukhara. After becoming a member of the Naqshbandi order, he was specifically commissioned to come to India in his mid-thirties to promote the order there. Most of the other Sufi orders (Chisti, Suhrawardi and Qadiri) in India had on principle kept clear of affairs of state, feeling that spiritual purity must be kept uncontaminated by worldly snares, especially politics. The Naqshbandis introduced a different view, holding that their version of Islam could be established only by the use of state support. Therefore, Baqi Bi-Allah set himself to collecting and organizing a party of influential Muslim nobles and administrators who could serve to impose a new direction on Mughal policies. Since Akbar had not carried along with him all his Muslim aristocracy in his liberalism, Baqi Bi-Allah set out to draw the dissidents together to create a reactionary bloc. At Lahore he established a close contact with the emperor's father-in-law, the viceroy Qilich Khan, one of the opponents of Akbar's religious policy. He later moved to Delhi where he established an especially close link with another noble Shaykh Farid Bukhari, who took on himself the total financial support of a *khanqah* ("hospice") in Delhi for him. Under the influence of his new master Shaykh Farid Bukhari not only became the chief rival of Abu'l Fazal in ideological matters, but also tried to lead the emperor to follow a completely different path from his religious pluralism.⁵⁶

Baqi Bi-Allah's most striking achievement, however, was his winning over a young and brilliant Punjabi intellectual Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, who was initiated into the order of mystics in 1599. After staying six weeks with his master in the *khanqah* Sirhindi emerged as an apparently transformed character. Although Baqi Bi-Allah died in 1603 in Delhi, the disciple proved even more energetic in his mission than the master. On their role in Islamic religious revival, Smith observes:

To see Baqi Bi-llah and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi at work, then, is to see one particular emergence in Islamic history coming forth, gradually being formulated, championed, fought over, and eventually dominating: ousting rival views and finally persuading not all, but the most effective part, of the community that *this* is what they shall will their religious life to be. One must understand the radical nature of this decision in the life of the community: its profundity; its reverberating consequences, for the people who took it, and for their descendants, and for the Sikhs, and for almost everyone else in India until today. The life of all of us today, mine as well as Indians', is what it is in part because these men acted the way they did, and not otherwise.⁵⁷

Smith maintains that during Akbar's reign India seemed on its way to creating a composite, harmonious, culturally rich society that would have been something quite splendid and also something quite new. However, before this development had time to work it out fully, another phase in Indo-Muslim development was brought into being by the efforts of Muslim revivalists, among whom Baqi Bi-llah and Sirhindi seem to be crucial.⁵⁸ For Sirhindi, the *shari'a* ("Islamic law") was the only true religious way: "Therefore, the Shari'a is a guarantee of all these blessings [of knowledge, action and sincere belief] and there is no purpose in seeking anything beyond the Shari'a. The Way and the Truth, which for the Sufis have become distinct; both are servants of the Shari'a."⁵⁹ His great achievement was paradoxically to win Indian Islam away from Sufi extremism by means of mysticism itself. Notably, on his deathbed in 1624 Sirhindi's last admonition to his followers was "hold *shariat* (...) tight with your teeth."⁶⁰

In any historical analysis, there is an urgent need to investigate the role of different human actors involved in a particular event. There are about five hundred and thirty 'Letters' (*Maktubat*) that Sirhindi wrote to his disciples and Mughal officials. They form a great classic of Indo-Muslim religious literature. Let us examine the following excerpts from the *Maktubat* that illuminate Sirhindi's reaction against what he called "rulers misled by wicked Muslim clerics" (*ulama*), particularly his strong criticism of Emperor Akbar's reign:

Notwithstanding the presence of Islam in a foreign land, the infirmity of the Muslim community in previous generations did not go beyond the point where the Muslims followed their religion and the unbelievers followed theirs...

In the previous generation, in the very sight of men, unbelievers turned to the way of domination, the rites of unbelief prevailed on the abode of Islam, and Muslims were too weak to show forth the mandates of the faith. If they did, they were killed. Crying aloud their troubles to Muhammad, the beloved of God, those who believed in him lived in ignominy and disgrace; those who denied

him enjoyed the prestige and respect due to Muslims, and with their feather brains condoled with Islam. The disobedient and those who denied Muhammad used to rub the salt of derision and scorn into the wounds of the faithful. The sun of guidance was hidden behind the veil of error and the light of truth was shut out and obscured behind the curtain of absurdity.

Today, when the good tidings of the downfall of what was prohibiting Islam [i.e., the death of Akbar] and the accession of the king of Islam [i.e., Jahangir] is reaching every corner, the community of the faithful have made it their duty to be helpers and assistants of the ruler and to take as their guide the spreading of the Holy Law and strengthening of the community. This assistance and support is becoming effective both by word and deed. In the very early days of Islam the most successful pens were those which clarified problems of Holy Law and which propagated theological opinions in accordance with the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the consensus of the community, so that such errors and innovations as did appear did not lead people astray and end in their corruption. This role is peculiar to the orthodox *ulama* ["Muslim clerks"] who should always look to the invisible world.

Worldly *ulama* whose worldly aspirations are their religion – indeed their conversation is a fatal poison and their corruption is contagious...In the generation before this, every calamity which appeared arose from the desires of these people. They misled rulers. The seventy-two sects who went on the road of error were lost because the ruler enforced his errors on others and the majority of the so-called ignorant Sufis of this time upheld the decisions of the wicked *ulama*—their corruption was contagious...It is hoped that in these times, if God wills, the worthy will be honored with royal company.⁶¹

Evidently, Sirhindi was predisposed against the reign of Emperor Akbar in which, according to him, the faithful Muslims had suffered ignominy due to his liberal religious policy. Welcoming the "accession of the king of Islam" he had already started his campaign of influencing Mughal officials to make the "Holy Law" (*shari'a*) as the foundation of Jahangir's reign for the sake of strengthening of the Muslim community in India. Smith has pointed out that the rhetoric and appeal of Sirhindi's letters kindled religious fervor, and resulted in a religious revival that completely altered the history of Indian subcontinent.⁶² In fact, Sirhindi prompted the Naqshbandi Sufi order to pursue exclusivist agenda, providing a theological and ethical direction to transform the "house of unbelievers" (*dar al-harb*) into the "house of submission" (*dar al-islam*) through "religious war" (*jihad*) in Mughal India. His aim was to enlarge the house of Islam with the active support of the state.

Most instructively, a significant number of Sirhindi's letters were addressed to a Mughal grandee, Shaykh Farid Bukhari, who had earlier distinguished himself in warfare against the Afghans in Orissa when he was promoted to the command of 1500 horses during the reign of Emperor Akbar. Akbar had also conferred upon him the grand title of the "master of the pen and the sword" (*sahib-us-saif-w-al-qalm*).⁶³ When Jahangir was ascending to the imperial throne after Akbar's death in 1605, it was Shaykh Farid Bukhari who was responsible for extracting a solemn oath from the new Emperor to defend Islam. In this context, the testimony of Father Pierre Du Jarric in his book *Akbar and the Jesuits* is quite revealing:

Accordingly, the leading noble, Sheikh Farid Bukhari, having been sent by the others as their representative came to the Prince (Salim, entitled Jahangir), and promised in their names to place the Kingdom (of India) in his hands provided that he would swear to defend the law of Mohammad.⁶⁴

In fact, Shaykh Farid Bukhari rendered conspicuous services in the capture and liquidation of Prince Khusrau and thus earned the title of *Murtaza Khan* ("lord agreeable"), eventually increasing his rank to the command of 6,000 horses.⁶⁵ It was this Murtaza Khan to whom Jahangir handed over Guru Arjan to be capitally punished according to Mongol tribal law.

Immediately after Guru Arjan's execution, Sirhindi expressed his exultancy in a letter that he wrote to Shaykh Farid Bukhari for the mission accomplished. The first lines of this letter have already been identified in the previous section. The remaining part reads as follows:

Before this *Kafir* ["infidel"] was killed, I had seen in a dream that the Emperor of the day had destroyed the crown of the head of *Shirk* or infidelity. It is true that this infidel was the chief of the infidels and a leader of the Kafirs...The object of levying *Jeziya* ["capitation tax on non-Muslims"] on them is to humiliate and insult the *Kafirs*, and *jihad* ["religious war"] against them and hostility towards them are the necessities of the Mohammedan faith.⁶⁶

The common motif of a 'dream' in the letters of the two Naqshbandi stalwarts, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shaykh Husayn Jami, is quite striking. This was part of their strategy to convince the Mughal authorities receiving their letters about the urgency of their agenda. Here, Sirhindi made no secret of his hatred against Guru Arjan when he declared him as the 'chief of the people of heinous sin' (*reis-ahl-i-shirk*) and 'an infidel-leader of the people of infidelity' (*kafirs-imam-i-ahl-kufr*). From these intensely spiteful phrases one can easily capture the sense of venom in Sirhindi's raving and ranting. He considered the growing influence of the Guru as the main obstacle in the success of his own revivalist agenda in the Punjab. His strong prejudice against non-Muslim Indians is quite evident from this letter in

which he advocated their ‘humiliation and destruction’ as the ‘necessities of the Mohammedan faith’ (*jehad bil-kuffar wa ghilzat bar ishan az zaruriyat-i-din ast*). In view of this overwhelming evidence no serious scholar can afford to ignore the interaction of parallel religious movements at that particular stage in Indian history.

It is instructive to note that the conversion of Muslims to the Sikh faith was one of the charges laid against Guru Arjan by Emperor Jahangir in his memoirs. No one can deny the truth of this matter. First, the language and style of Guru Arjan’s *Tilang* hymns clearly presuppose Muslim audiences, and it is quite possible that a significant number of Muslims were attracted to the Sikh faith due to its universal appeal.⁶⁷ Second, like Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan frequently employed Persian and Islamic loan-words to reach out to his Muslim audience of the countryside, but the truth which he wished to express was his own.⁶⁸ In this context, Christopher Shackle mentions a class of Muslim poets (*sha’ir*), drawn from Sufi circles, which constituted the elite of the countryside.⁶⁹ It is no wonder that some of those Muslim poets may have felt threatened by Guru Arjan’s growing popularity. Third, Bhai Gurdas specifically identifies the name of a Muslim, Mian Jamal, in the list of close associates (*hazuri sikhs*) of Guru Arjan.⁷⁰ He must have been the leader of a significant segment of Muslim devotees within the large cross-sections of the Sikh Panth.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the process of inviting the Muslims to join the Sikh faith did not begin with Guru Arjan. Rather, Guru Amar Das had already extended a bold invitation to a Shaikh at Goindval to be converted to his dispensation: “O Shaikh! Your mind is wandering on all four sides and blowing all over like whirlwind. Bring your concentration on the single point in the [Guru’s] house. Discard vain rationalizations and recognize the Guru’s Word. Prostrate yourself before the True Guru who is omniscient. Burn away desire and greed, and look upon yourself as a guest in this world. By following consistently the True Guru’s will you will obtain honor at the divine Portal. Says Nanak: Cursed are the clothing and food of such people who do not contemplate the divine Name.”⁷¹ Due to his policy of religious pluralism Akbar did not seem to have taken a serious view of those Muslims who joined the Sikh faith during the period of Guru Arjan. In fact, the Naqshbandi promptings were directed at reversing the liberal process by which the works of two Muslim Sufis, Shaikh Farid (1173-1265) and Bhikhan Shah, became an integral part of the Sikh scripture. It is not quite clear how instrumental Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi may have in Guru Arjan’s execution; but the less one credits him with direct involvement, the more one is left regarding him as formulating theologically the direction in which his society and Mughal officials were moving fast anyway.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors

Shifting the focus away from widely analyzed religious and political dimensions of Guru Arjan’s execution W.H. McLeod cautiously proposed in 1975 that Jahangir

and his subordinates may well have had good reason for their 'fears' about the increasing influence of the Jats within the Sikh Panth.⁷² In his analysis he offered the hypothesis that the founding of the villages of Taran Taran, Sri Hargobindpur and Kartarpur in the rural areas saw large number of converts from local Jat peasantry. He thus proposed a sudden shift in the social constituency of the Panth when rural component came to the fore during the period of Guru Arjan. An examination of the social constituency of the Sikh Panth reveals how the radical egalitarianism of the Gurus' teachings attracted a large number of Jats from the rural areas of the Punjab into the fold of Sikhism. This process had already begun during the period of Guru Nanak at Kartarpur and continued under his successors. In fact, the fifth Guru inherited diverse cross-sections of the Punjabi society when he assumed the office of the Guru. The projects of the excavation of large pools and a large well with six Persian wheels (*chheharta*) in the Majha area during his reign were basically intended for the welfare of the Jats. His philanthropic work during famine was for the amelioration of their poor economic conditions. The Mughal authorities, including Emperor Akbar, were highly impressed by it. At the time of his meeting with Guru Arjan at Goindval on 4 November 1598 Akbar remitted the annual revenue of the peasants of the district, who had been hit by the failure of the monsoon. This was indeed a major relief to the farmers. As a result of these activities Guru Arjan's popularity skyrocketed among the rural peasantry of the Punjab.

In his analysis McLeod has focused on the martial traditions as an integral part of Jat cultural patterns: "With their strong rural base, their martial traditions, their normally impressive physique, and their considerable energy the Jats have for many centuries constituted the elite of the Punjab villages. They are also noted for their straightforward manner, for a tremendous generosity, for an insistence upon the right to take vengeance, and for their sturdy attachment to the land."⁷³ He has stressed the influence of Jat cultural patterns as a definitive factor in understanding the militant developments of the Panth following Guru Arjan's execution in 1606: "The growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems which prompted a militant response."⁷⁴ As we are principally concerned to understand the pre-execution situation, we must avoid the dangers of retrospective interpretation by subscribing to an essentialist approach that might circumscribe the 'character' of a rather large group of diverse people within the Panth. However, when we look at cross-cultural anthropology of peasantry in general in world history, there is considerable merit in McLeod's assertions.

A brief survey of the history of the Punjab from the time of Timur's invasion in the late fourteenth century through to the establishment of Mughal rule in 1526 reads like a textbook example of an environment of brutality, exploitation and disenfranchisement that was responsible for breeding a sharp sense of alienation in the rural population. In particular, the Jat community of the Punjab suffered the brunt of tumultuous historical circumstances. For many reasons, including their

pastoral background and socio-cultural patterns, the Jats were reduced to the bottom of the caste hierarchy.⁷⁵ Therefore, they had no scope of improving their lot in the Hindu tradition. The peasant dream of radical egalitarianism was fulfilled among the Jats when they joined the Sikh movement. Guru Arjan provided them much hope to improve their economic situation. Nevertheless, as a result of the inequitable policies of the Mughal regime, “the conditions of the peasant generally approximated the lowest possible level of subsistence.”⁷⁶ It is no wonder that an average peasant family in the Punjab would make a bare subsistence living from year to year.

In order to understand the economic distress of the Jats of the Punjab, we must look at a cross-cultural model of peasantry in Gerhard Lenski’s work in which he provides the nine classes of social stratification in agrarian societies and locates peasants most clearly in the four lower classes in that hierarchy (i.e., five privileged classes of the ruler, governing class, retainers, merchants and priests; and four unprivileged classes of peasants, artisans, unclean and degraded, and expendables).⁷⁷ He compellingly argues that “the burden of supporting the state and privileged classes fell on the shoulders of the common people, and especially on the peasant farmers who constituted a substantial majority of the population.”⁷⁸ Put bluntly and brutally: “In short, the great majority of the political elite sought to use the energies of the peasantry to the full, while depriving them of all the basic necessities of life.”⁷⁹ In this context, it is equally important to look at the observations of an economic anthropologist, George Dalton, who maintains that “peasants of all times and places are structured inferiors.”⁸⁰ In traditional peasantries, he argues, “their inferiority is structured legally and reinforced via dependent land tenure.”⁸¹ Not surprisingly, in a system of structured inferiority standard accusations are hurled at peasants pejoratively: “that they are untrusting and suspicious, aggressive and competitive, passive, stubborn, and stupid.”⁸²

In the Mughal agrarian system, Irfan Habib argues, “the peasant together with his family, universally appears in our documents as a separate, individual producer, tilling his own fields.”⁸³ The peasants of the Punjab during Mughal rule were not merely tenant farmers with direct obligation to the land owning class, but instead they were independent producers whose sense of entitlement was strictly impugned by intervening authorities. The Jats migrated from other parts as pastoral people and eventually evolved into a land owning agriculturalist class in the Punjab through independent industry. Their spirit of independence was further enhanced by the technology of the Persian-wheel for the purpose of irrigation, an instrumental factor in the development of agriculture in the Punjab during Mughal times. In this context, it will be useful to take into account Chetan Singh’s apt observation that the most efficient utilization of animal power for irrigation was in the form of the Persian-wheel.⁸⁴ He argues that even prior to Babur’s invasion the Jats were quite familiar with this technology. In the *Babur-nama*, for instance, a fascinated Babur describes a Persian-wheel in operation near Bhera: “We saw the wheel with buckets, had

drawn water, and asked particulars about getting it out; indeed we made them draw it again and again.”⁸⁵

In his *Ain-i-Akbari* (II, p. 316) Abu'l Fazal testifies the importance of well-irrigation in Punjab during the reign of Emperor Akbar: “This province is populous, its climate healthy and its agricultural fertility rarely equaled. The irrigation is chiefly from wells.”⁸⁶ In fact, the Persian-wheels were widely used in the regions of Lahore, Dipalpur and Sirhind, because these were the areas with sufficient and easily procurable ground-water supplies. Here, the town of Ramdaspur (Amritsar) was located in the Majha part of the Bari Doab. The familiarity of the Jats with the Persian-wheel was taken for granted in several passages of the *Adi Granth*.⁸⁷ Undoubtedly, the use of the Persian-wheel encouraged the extension and development of cultivation in the central Punjab. However, the self-sufficient class of the peasants was deprived of the fruits of their labor by a self-serving regime that extracted from them a large amount of revenue for providing the technology of the Persian-wheel. Not surprisingly, the Jats were quite resentful towards the inequity of Mughal policy. It is in this context that Guru Arjan's excavation of a well with six Persian-wheels (*chhehartia*) makes sense, providing a much needed relief to the farmers of Majha area who did not have to look towards the Mughal authorities for their irrigation needs. Similarly, the four hundred years old pool at Thatte Khera at Guru Ki Vadali, near Taran Taran, provides us with the hard evidence of how Guru Arjan was deeply concerned with the needs of the rural peasantry.⁸⁸

During the famine conditions of the late 1590s the Jats were further reduced into destitution. In the conditions of economic distress, therefore, the poor Jats turned towards the charismatic message of Guru Arjan who resolved the ‘tensions of meaning’ in their lives. But they were predisposed against the oppressive state structures that took two-thirds of their production in revenues. In this context, James C. Scott has examined the nature of peasant resistance as follows:

Most subordinate classes throughout most of history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized, political activity. Or, better stated, such activity was dangerous, if not suicidal....For all their importance when they do occur, peasant rebellions – let alone revolutions – are few and far between. The vast majority are crushed unceremoniously....For these reasons it seemed to me more important to understand what we might call *everyday* forms of peasant resistance – the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them. Most forms of this struggle stop well short of outright collective defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on....When these stratagems are abandoned in favor of more quixotic action, it is usually a sign of great desperation.⁸⁹

For Scott, peasant resistance is like a giant iceberg. Most of it is covert, hidden below the surface, and not visible at all to the elites against whom it is carefully directed. This kind of resistance normally assumes three forms: first, it is *material*, such as feigned dumbness or deliberate laziness; second, it is *formal*, such as tales of revenge or rituals of aggressions; and third, it is *ideological*, such as millennial religions, myths of heroic banditry, or world-upside-down images. Scot warns in the concluding summary: “The subordinate classes – especially the peasantry are likely to be more radical at the level of ideology than at the level of behavior, where they are more effectively constrained by daily exercise of power.”⁹⁰ To a certain extent these conditions may be applied to the Jats of the Punjab during the period of our study. They were certainly offering covert resistance to Mughal authorities while turning towards Guru Arjan for comfort and solace. They took keen interest in listening to the heroic ballads recited by the bards in the Sikh court, focusing on tales of revenge, myths of heroic banditry and world-upside-down-images in the reestablishment of the golden age of the kingdom of mythological Raja Janak.

In sum, as part of their cultural traditions the Punjabi Jats have always been known for their defiance of authority. The Mughal officials were fully aware of a massive influx of Jats into the Sikh movement. During Akbar’s reign they were successfully dealing with covert Jat resistance by providing revenue free grants to Guru Arjan in the Majha (Ramdaspur and Taran Taran) and Doaba (Kartarpur) areas so that they could indirectly maintain their control over them. They were using Guru Arjan’s philanthropic work of excavation of large pools and wells to their advantage. As a result of Guru Arjan’s alleged blessings to Prince Khusrau, however, the situation of Mughal-Sikh relations changed dramatically. Because of their ‘fears’ about the increasing Jat influence within the Sikh Panth, the Mughal authorities purposefully kept Guru Arjan’s execution a private affair. Even Jahangir had left Lahore after passing the orders of capital punishment. In actual practice it was Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan) who carried out Jahangir’s orders. It should, however, be kept in mind that no one dies a natural death in state custody. The Guru was tortured according to the Mongol law (*yasa siyosat*) while he was in Mughal custody for about a week (May 24-30, 1606).⁹¹ During this period, what happened to the Guru can be reconstructed only by an analysis of the Mongol tribal practices followed by the Mughal authorities.

Issues of Power and Authority

In her analysis, Bonnie Wade has remarked that the Mughal Empire emerged in the Indian subcontinent as one of the most remarkable and dazzling of imperial entities. At the pinnacle of the empire sat a single individual vested with the power and authority to manage what has been described “as a patrimonial-bureaucratic imperial state.”⁹² For Stephan Blake, the controlling metaphor in the patrimonial state is the patriarchal family and the central element is the imperial household.⁹³ The Mughal

family had its Mongol and Timurid ancestors, whose history was commissioned by Akbar in two manuscripts, the *Timur Nama* (*Tarikh-i Timuriya*, “The History of the House of Timur,” ca. 1584), a major document about the paternal side of the Mughal family; and the *Jami al-Tavarikh* and specifically the portion of it called the *Chingis Nama* (ca. 1596), chronicles the Mongol lineage of his mother’s family. As the Mughal history goes, the Mongol hordes found their unity and leader in the great Temujin, confirmed as Chingis (Genghis) Khan at a convening of the Mongol tribes on the banks of Kerulen River in 1206. Chingis Khan was a great organizer who based his political structure on the principle of family: families form clans, clans form tribes, and so forth. To this he secured sacred and secular sanction of his role: he asserted that Eternal Heaven had delegated to him a divine mission (designated him the only legitimate ruler of the world and transmitting that sovereignty to his descendants) and he drew up an imperial code of laws, or Great Yasa, superior to the Khan himself. It is from the word “Mongol” that we have the form “Mughal,” the term by which the later Indian dynasty came to be known.⁹⁴

Most instructively, Akbar’s vizier or informal secretary, Abul-Fazal ‘Allami (d. 1602), author of celebrated *Akbarnama* and its *Ain-i Akbari*, based on Timurid/Chingisid precedent, developed a fabulous Qur’anic mythology for his most beloved emperor, tracing the divine light which penetrated the legendary Mongol queen Alankuva and which sustains the universe through the emperor’s bloodline to finally become manifest in him.⁹⁵ This was intended to establish the divine right of the Mughal king. In a sense, as Michael Foucault argues, the king could always know everything because he was the one who determined (as God’s representative on earth) the truth.⁹⁶ Notwithstanding this claim to the divine right of the king, Akbar tried to create an atmosphere of trust and cooperation among different communities through his liberal religious policy. By defying his family’s custom and Islamic law he married the daughters of Indian Rajput leaders with whom he needed political/military alliance. His first wife was the eldest daughter of Raja Bihari Mal of Amber, whom he married in 1562 and who was the mother of Prince Salim, Akbar’s successor - Jahangir. Regardless of its political motivation, this marriage was happy and established the persistent importance of the Kachwaha Rajputs in the Empire. It also led to further marital alliances between Akbar and women from other distinguished and powerful Rajput clans.⁹⁷ Unlike his Indo-Muslim predecessors who made Indian women of Hindu faith in their households convert to Islam, Akbar permitted all his wives to maintain their own cultures and religion.⁹⁸

Like absolute monarchs of his times, Akbar may have been able to exercise power because it belonged to him as he had received the ‘gift’ of power from God. In actual practice, however, he knew very well that he needed strategic alliances to rule over more than 80 percent of non-Muslim population in India. For this purpose he adopted a policy of religious pluralism and encouraged the unification of Hindu and Muslim thought. In other words, Akbar’s religious pluralism was part of the larger process of state formation in Mughal India. His decisions depended upon

negotiations and alliances between influential groups within his inner circle of aristocracy, different sections of Muslim community such as Sunnis, Shia's and Sufis, and other non-Muslim representative groups of Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs. What characterized these relations of power was that they were not set in stone. Power could flow very quickly from one point or area to another depending on changing alliances and circumstances.⁹⁹ The most serious weakness of the Timurid system was that able, ambitious, and mature princes were a continuing threat to the emperor and a focal point for discontented factions.¹⁰⁰ This is what became evident after Akbar's death and the accession of his son, Jahangir, to the Mughal throne. Prince Khusrau's rebellion further exposed the great divide between liberal forces and the reactionary block of Muslim revivalists. In order to understand the situation of this power struggle, we need to address the following questions: Why did Prince Khusrau go to Guru Arjan in the first place? Was the Guru actually involved in the rebellion in any way?

It is highly likely that both Prince Khusrau and his father (Jahangir) were with Emperor Akbar when he visited Goindval on 4 November 1598 to meet with Guru Arjan. The Prince knew how his grandfather held the Guru in high esteem. There was an entry in the Kartarpur *bir* (1604) as follows: "In 1598 Emperor Jahangir gave to Guru Arjan a parcel of land, consisting of 8964 *ghuman*, 7 *kanal* and 15 *marle*, for the hospice at Kartarpur" (*sambat 1655 jahangir patishah ne guru arjan ji nu raqba kartarpur dita dharamsal nu 8964 ghuman kanal 7 marle 15*).¹⁰¹ The information in this entry is highly significant from two angles: first, the year 1598 is correct when Akbar actually gave this revenue free grant to Guru Arjan; and second, he might have asked Prince Salim (Jahangir) to offer this grant to the Guru on his behalf. The entry was most probably written later on when Jahangir had actually become the emperor. That is why his name was recorded in the entry as 'Jahangir Patishah'. Being on the main highway the Dharamsala ("hospice") at Kartarpur was actually providing food and lodging to the Muslim pilgrims.¹⁰² It was for this purpose that Emperor Akbar gave this grant to the Guru. Prince Khusrau went to Guru Arjan for his blessings because he knew that the Guru enjoyed a high spiritual reputation among the Sufis and Muslim dervishes who supported his liberal ideas. There is, however, no hard evidence about Guru Arjan's direct involvement in the power struggle between Emperor Jahangir and his son. In that case, we need to find out the reasons for the Guru's execution.

In the first place, Jahangir's memoirs explicitly note that the emperor had a major concern about the growing popularity of the Sikh movement. He had for long chosen to act against this "shop of falsehood" (*dukan-i-batil*) which "they [the Sikh Gurus] had kept warm for three to four generations" (*seh chahar pasht...garam midashtand*). Undoubtedly, Jahangir had first-hand knowledge about the Sikh movement and this fact played a major role in his final decision, as he was generally hostile toward popularly venerated religious figures.¹⁰³ Secondly, the most troublesome issue for Jahangir was the conversion of "some ignorant, stupid Muslims" to Sikh fold. This was the trend that Naqshbandi revivalists and Islamic

clerics may have attributed to Emperor's Akbar's heterodoxy and demanded from the new emperor a stop it in lieu of their pledge of support to him at the time of his accession to the Mughal throne. Jahangir's intentions were quite explicit when he wrote that the alternative for death penalty was to bring him [Guru Arjan] "into the embrace of Islam." This statement itself signaled a change in the religious policy of Jahangir who presented himself as the 'defender of Islam'. Therefore, the religious dimension cannot be overlooked completely in any serious analysis since it plays a crucial role in power relationships. Even a cursory understanding of current affairs can reveal how the variable of 'religion' functions in contemporary 'politics' in various countries throughout the world.

Thirdly, the Mughal authorities had been keeping watch over Sikh affairs for a number of years. They were fully aware of the way the Sikhs venerated the Guru in a most dignified way, a way marked by the symbols of royalty such as the use of a canopy, a throne and the waving of a whisk over his head. The Guru was looked upon as a 'true king' (*sacha patishah*) in contrast with false earthly kings. In fact, the city of Ramdasapur emerged as a new 'power center' in its own right. Here, Guru Arjan had established the divine rule of justice and humility (*halemi raj*) where people enjoyed comfortable living, fired with the spirit of fearlessness, dignity and self-respect. The contemporary Sikh bards sang eulogistic songs of the majesty of the Sikh court in regal metaphors. In their eyes Guru Arjan had reestablished the rule of mythological King Janak on earth. Looking at these developments within the Sikh Panth the Mughal authorities suspiciously took Guru Arjan's work as radically subversive, socially revolutionary and politically dangerous for the Mughal state. One of them, Sulhi Khan, had even made an abortive attempt to attack the Guru's establishment at Ramdasapur but he himself got killed on the way when his horse bolted and fell into the brick kiln. We have already examined the references in Guru Arjan's compositions about a series of complaints that were made to the Mughal authorities by the detractors of the Guru. The Lahore administrators were looking for some pretext to contain the power and authority of the Guru. Khusrau's rebellion provided them with the perfect opportunity to act against him. It is no wonder that Jahangir moved swiftly to eliminate Guru Arjan and cripple the rapidly-growing Sikh movement.

Fourthly, in his influential work, *Discipline and Punish*, Michael Foucault provides us with a model of punishment as public-ritual in seventeenth-century France, explaining the dynamics of power in pre-modern societies. The punishment had its logic or rationale. Power belonged to the king, and when one of the king's subjects acted against him, the infamy of his crime had to be 'written', so to speak, on his body through torture. Punishment, in this way, was a way of signaling to - or, actually, performing for - the people both the nature of power of the king and the consequences of opposing it.¹⁰⁴ However, Foucault's model of punishment has already come under criticism from J.R. Knott who maintains that it "does not address the kind of *agon* [struggle; contest] one finds in the accounts of religious suffering."¹⁰⁵ In the case of Guru Arjan's tortures, Foucault's model cannot be

applied completely because his execution was not a public spectacle. In fact, the Mughal authorities themselves felt ‘powerless’ in ‘fearing’ public backlash because of his high spiritual reputation. Bhai Gurdas was the only person who was allowed to see the Guru before his death. He was devastated when he saw the Guru who had spent the previous night in extreme pain due to his blistered body. His ‘silence’ to reveal the details of vicious tortures may have been prompted by the following considerations: first, he may have been warned by the Mughal administrators for grave consequences if he did so; second, he was overwhelmed by the Guru’s steadfast response in reciting hymns when he was subjected to horrific tortures that he described it in poetic metaphors in his *var* to bring the community out of its traumatic state; and finally, Bhai Gurdas was fully cognizant of Mughal machinations and chose to say little against them in order to ensure that the Sikh Panth would continue to thrive in the light of this most horrific execution.¹⁰⁶ In fact, historians have now acknowledged that “forgetting” is not simply a process of disappearance, but that it is enhanced and nuanced by new conditions that have the power to harm, even kill.¹⁰⁷

Finally, Louis Fenech has aptly remarked that Jahangir’s role in Guru Arjan’s execution was pivotal and the evidence for this is beyond reproach.¹⁰⁸ However, with their machinations the Mughal administrators successfully subverted the public perception of this event. They had the prior knowledge of Guru Arjan’s enemies, including the traditional Chandu Shah, a Hindu official in Mughal administration, whose daughter was rejected by the Guru as an appropriate spouse for his only son, Hargobind, because Chandu had made some derogatory remarks against the status of the Guru. They spread the rumor that Chandu had purchased the Guru’s freedom by becoming his surety for the fine of two hundred thousand rupees imposed by the emperor. When the Guru’s followers failed to pay the fine, it was Chandu who tortured the Guru to death. This is what Father Jerome Xavier heard in Lahore when he wrote his letter about four months after Guru Arjan’s death. The principal aim behind this whole story was to shift the blame for the Guru’s execution from Emperor Jahangir and Mughal administrators to the Guru’s own enemy, Chandu Shah.¹⁰⁹ The seductive power of this narrative was so great that it became popular in all Sikh sources of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One is startled to find the positive image of Jahangir in these chronicles.¹¹⁰ The shift in Sikh scholarly works came only when they became aware of the actual contents of Jahangir’s memoirs in the early decades of twentieth century.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have mainly focused on the contemporary and near contemporary sources about Guru Arjan’s execution. The comprehensive examination of these sources clearly indicates that Guru Arjan was put to death with tortures according to the Mongol tribal law of Yasa by the orders of Emperor Jahangir. Although the principal cause of capital punishment has been presented as Guru Arjan’s alleged

blessings to the rebel Prince Khusrau, there were other urgent religious, socio-cultural, and economic factors that contributed in the final judgment of the absolute monarch. These major factors were as follows: Naqshbandi reaction against Akbar's policy of religious pluralism and formulating new theological direction for the new emperor and the Mughal officials, the conversion of Muslims to Sikh faith, an extensive Jat allegiance to the Panth, the growing strength of the Sikh movement, and the emergence of Ramdaspur as an autonomous 'power center'. Guru Arjan enjoyed high spiritual reputation among the Sufis and Muslim dervishes, a reputation that encouraged Prince Khusrau to seek his blessings. He had also visited Shaikh Nizam Thaneasri for blessings before he came to Guru Arjan. Why did the emperor not give him capital punishment? Surely, there were other pressing concerns than the simple act of 'blessing' that has been blown out of proportion by the scholars. The Mughal administrators of Lahore who had been carefully monitoring the Sikh movement for a number of years found their opportunity to finally act against the Guru. They moved swiftly to eliminate Guru Arjan and cripple the rapidly growing Sikh movement. Through their machinations they purposefully kept the Guru's execution from public view in an attempt to absolve the state by subverting the understanding of the Sikh community.

The contemporary Sikh account of Bhai Gurdas was principally focused on the last will of the Guru, rather than on the circumstances that were responsible for his arrest by the Mughal authorities. The memory of what Bhai Gurdas actually witnessed was too painful for him to describe in words. Presumably, he was in a state of mental shock due to the sudden turn of events. His stony silence about the main causes of Guru Arjan's death was not due to the loss of memory but a conscious attempt to bring the Panth out of its traumatic state with the help of the Guru's final spirited message. He was fully cognizant of Mughal machinations and chose to say little against them in order to ensure that the Sikh Panth would continue to thrive in the light of this most horrific execution. In this context, one may recall the Gospel of Matthew in which Matthew blames the Jews for the execution of Jesus rather than the Romans who actually did it. Why the Sikh or Christian community continues to suffer is perhaps a point which concerned both Bhai Gurdas and Mathew. The reconstruction of Guru Arjan's tortures may be possible only by an examination of Mongol tribal cultural practices followed by the Mughal authorities. The Mongols followed 'shamanistic law' to punish exalted persons and spiritual leaders. In the two instances cited by Kapur Singh, one was put to death by being boiled alive and the other was thrown into mid-current of a river after tying of his hands and feet. They were killed without shedding their blood so that their ghosts could not return to cause grave injury to the Mongol tribes. In this context, Kesar Singh Chhibar's narrative that after pouring burning sand on Guru Arjan's body he was subsequently bound and thrown into the fast-flowing current of Ravi River may not be off the mark.¹¹¹ Also, the apocryphal text of the Banno recension may be obliquely and indirectly alluding to this shocking eventuality.

In sum, it was Bhai Gurdas who placed a reconstruction on the death of Guru Arjan in the ideal of martyrdom.¹¹² By doing so he presented his life and death as that of a 'hero' that changed the subsequent history of the Sikh Panth. In Smith's view, Guru Arjan's martyrdom is of crucial significance in Sikh history, contributing very basically to the growth of Sikh community self-consciousness, separatism and militancy.¹¹³ The most important consequence of this watershed was the conflict with Mughal authorities that became a permanent feature in the historical developments within the Panth for the next two centuries. Its impact could be seen even in the Sikh scribal tradition that moved away from the more usual Islamicate blue and gold geometric patterns of illumination of the Adi Granth manuscripts in favor of Kashmiri style of floral decoration in yellow, gold, and blue.¹¹⁴ Similarly, the use of Braj language for literary expression, along with the various Indic motifs, came to the fore in the Sikh tradition. On the whole, Guru Arjan's martyrdom became the single most decisive factor for the crystallization of the Sikh Panth. It became an integral part of collective Sikh memory, finding its expression in Sikh art, liturgy and martyrdom tradition.

Notes

¹ *Varan Bhai Gurdas* 24:23.

² Richard S. Davis, "Introduction: A Brief History of Religions in India," in Donald S. Lopez, ed., *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 44.

³ Beni Prasad, *Studies in History: History of Jahangir*, Vol. I (London, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 150.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.

⁵ For instance, see Bhai Vir Singh's detailed footnote in *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, Vol. 7 (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1963), pp. 2377-84. Also see Ganda Singh, *Guru Arjan's Martyrdom: Re-interpreted* (Patiala: Guru Nanak Mission, 1969).

⁶ Bonnie C. Wade, *Imaging Sound: An Ethnomusicological Study of Music, Art, and Culture in Mughal India* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 162.

⁷ Wheeler M. Thackston, trans. and ed., *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 in association with the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), p. 59. Thackston has translated the Persian phrase *gaul-parastan* as 'fools' whereas Shireen Moosvi translates it as 'dervish-garbed worshippers', referring to Sufis in general. This meaning has significant implications in the present context of Guru Arjan's reputation among the Sufis. See

Moosvi's translation of the original Persian text in J.S. Grewal & Irfan Habib, eds., *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), p. 57.

⁸ See Moosvi, *ibid.*, p. 57, n. 4.

⁹ Thackston, trans. and ed., *The Jahangirnama*, p. 14, n. 43.

¹⁰ Valentin A. Riasanovsky, *Fundamental Principles of Mongol Law*, Uralic and Altaic Series, Vol. 43 (Bloomington: Indiana University and The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1965; originally published in 1937), p. 40. Also see chapter 2 of this study for the list of offences to be considered for capital punishment.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹² Mansura Haider, "The Yasai Chingizi (*Tura*) in the Medieval Indian Sources," in R.C. Sharma et al., eds., *Mongolia: Culture, Economy and Politics* (New Delhi: Khama Publishers, 1992), pp. 53-62.

¹³ Wade, *Imaging Sound*, p. 162.

¹⁴ Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1975), p. 439. Rizvi cites Professor Qureshi as follows: "When Akbar died in 1605, the orthodox elements in the court were strong enough to foil the Rajput scheme of putting Khusraw on the throne and to secure a promise from Jahangir that he would restore the institutions of Islam which had fallen into abeyance under Akbar."

¹⁵ Ganda Singh, *Guru Arjan's Martyrdom*, pp. 16-7. Also see, Vincent Arthur Smith, *Akbar, the Greta Mogul [1542-1605]* (Delhi: S. Chand, reprint 1958; London: Oxford University Press, 2nd rev. ed., 1919), pp. 301-03, 311, 316, and 321-23 and Prasad, *History of Jahangir*, pp. 51, 61-2. Father Fernao Guerreiro's account based on Father Xavier's letter dated 25th September, 1606 states: "...he had sworn an oath to the Moors to uphold the law of Mafamede [Muhammad], and being anxious at the commencement of his reign to secure their goodwill, he gave orders for the cleansing of the mosques, restored the fasts [*rameses*] and prayers of the Moors, and took the name Nurdin mohamad Ihanuir, which signifies, 'The Splendour of the Law of Mafamede, Conqueror of the World'." See C.H. Payne, trans., *Jahangir and the Jesuits* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1930), p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁷ Prasad, *History of Jahangir*, pp. 153-55.

¹⁸ Ganda Singh, *Guru Arjan's Martyrdom*, p. 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²² Kapur Singh's assumption here cannot be accepted completely. Why did Jahangir write his memoirs if he did not want to show them to anybody? He was very fond of reading both Yazdi's *Zafarnama* (1403 CE which details the exploits and day-to-day life of Amir Timur) and the *Baburnama*. In fact, there were many copies of both available in Jahangir's library, all of which bear his seal (there are beautiful

reproductions of these seals on the manuscript copy of the *Zafarnama* held in the Baltimore library which has this specific copy of the *Zafarnama*). It is without doubt that Jahangir wrote his own memoirs with these in mind, following in the footsteps of his ancestors. In other words, the *Jahangirnama* was not intended to be a private document but rather a text which would ultimately be made available to all sorts of Mughal gentlemen and princes (particularly sons of the royal line) as a record of his achievements and ideas and perhaps as a guide to living the life of an emperor. This text would be copied and sent out to other Mughal princes throughout the Islamicate in the same way as the *Zafarnama* of both Yazdi and Shamas. Kapur Singh is, however, right in the sense that the text would not be available to common people. In particular, the Sikhs did not know the contents of *Jahangirnama* for at least three hundred years. Only in the beginning of twentieth century they knew who was responsible for Guru Arjan's martyrdom.

²³ Madanjit Kaur & Piar Singh, eds., *Selected Works of Sirdar Kapur Singh: Guru Arjan and His Sukhmani* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1992), p. 35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁷ Kapur Singh cites the Arabic historian Makrizi who says, "When the Mongol accepted Islam, they changed the *sharia* in accordance with their tribal customs. In purely religious matters they consult the chief *qadi* but for domestic matters concerning their individual rights or tribal welfare they accept only the *yasa* of Chinghiz Khan and for this purpose they appoint a separate officer." See *ibid.*, p. 37. Before accepting Islam the Mongols were followers of *shaman* religion, the animistic belief still prevalent in some parts of Siberia. The *shaman* religion includes the worship of ghosts, trees and the sky. Its priests are called *bikkis*. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

²⁸ Ahmad Sirhindi, *Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani* (Lucknow, 1889), letter 193.

²⁹ Friedman Yohanan, *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi: An Outline of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1966), p. 111.

³⁰ Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 200), p. 119.

³¹ Thackston, trans., *The Jahangirnama*, p. 59.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 15. This is mentioned in the preface to *Jahangirnama* by Muhammad-Hadi.

³³ Yohanan, *Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi*, pp. 83-5. For Jahangir's description of "The Charlatan Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi" see *The Jahangirnama*, p. 304. Also see, p. 341: "On this date I summoned to my presence Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, who had spent a while in prison on account of his pretentiousness and presumptuousness, and set him free. I also awarded him a robe of honor and a thousand rupees and gave him the choice of whether to leave or stay. "This chastisement has been a sufficient retribution for my soul," he replied. "I will remain in your retinue."

³⁴ Payne, *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, pp. 11-12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88, n. 4.

³⁶ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 16.

³⁷ For instance, Louis Fenech claims that this letter “provides an account presented through secondary informants.” See his *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, p. 137, n. 11.

³⁸ See chapter 3 on this episode in *Mahima Prakash*.

³⁹ Prasad, *History of Jahangir*, p. 140. Also see note 4.

⁴⁰ Payne, *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, p. 93, n. 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Sajida S. Alvi, “Religion and State during the Reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1605-27): Nonjuristical Perspectives,” in *Studia Islamica* (1987), p. 113.

⁴³ Cited in Kirpal Singh, *Perspectives on Sikh Gurus* (New Delhi: National Book Shop, 2000), p. 126.

⁴⁴ Irfan Habib, trans., “Sikhism and the Sikhs, 1645-46: From ‘Mobad’, *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, in J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, eds., *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), p. 67.

⁴⁵ Thackston, trans., *The Jahangirnama*, p. 53.

⁴⁶ For a complete analysis of this *pauri* see chapter 3 of my forthcoming book on *Life and Work of Guru Arjun*, (OUP, forthcoming).

⁴⁷ Louis E. Fenech, “Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 121, No. 1 (January-March 2001): 20-31.

⁴⁸ Fenech, “Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources,” p. 24.

⁴⁹ Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, p. 118.

⁵⁰ See my *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 214-15.

⁵¹ Sahib Singh, *Adi Bir Bare* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 4th edn., 1987; originally published in 1970), pp. 176-83.

⁵² Gurdita Sekhon Manuscript (1653), Tikana Bhai Ramkishan, Patiala, folio 757b.

⁵³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague, Paris and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981), pp. 177-96.

⁵⁴ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History*, p. 438.

⁵⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith in fact began his lecture in 1963 in India as follows: “Exactly four centuries ago, in the year 1563, two men were born of considerable historical significance for India. Both are primarily religious figures. Yet the ramifications of their work also in the political, economic, and sociological realms are major, until today. One is Muslim, one a Sikh: Khawajah Baqi Bi-Allah, born that year in Kabul, died in Delhi 1603; and Arjun, a Panjabi, put to death in Lahore in 1606. Closely associated with the former was another Muslim, one year his junior,

Shaykh Ahmad, also a Panjabi, born in 1564 at Sirhind and died in 1624. These men are recognized as playing a leading role in the development of their own religious community..." See *On Understanding Islam*, p. 177. The late Professor Smith told me in Toronto at a conference in 1989 that no Sikh scholar had responded to his article. I replied to him at that time: "I will do so in my work."

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 185-7.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 183-84.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

⁵⁹ From Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi's *Maktubat*, cited in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 444.

⁶⁰ Cited in Madanjit Kaur and Piar Singh, eds., *Sikhism for Modern Man by Sirdar Kapur Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1992), p. 45.

⁶¹ Cited in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 447-8.

⁶² Smith, *On Understanding Islam*, p. 188.

⁶³ Kaur and Singh, *Sikhism for Modern Man*, p. 45. Jahangir reconfirmed Shaykh Farid Bukhari's title when he presented to him a jewel-studded sword and a jewel-studded ink pot and said: "We consider you the lord of the sword and the pen." See *The Jahangirnama*, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Father Pierre Du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits* (trans. by C. H. Payne), p. 204. Cited in *ibid.*, 45.

⁶⁵ Thackston, trans., *The Jahangirnama*, p. 144.

⁶⁶ Sirhindi, *Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani*, I-iii, letter No. 193, pp. 95-6. Ganda Singh has produced the original and its translation in *Guru Arjun's Martyrdom*, pp. 36-7.

⁶⁷ For details, see my *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, paperback 2003; originally published 2000), pp. 106-111.

⁶⁸ For instance, see M5, *Maru Solihe* 12, AG, pp. 1083-84.

⁶⁹ Christopher Shackle, "Early Muslim Vernacular Poetry in the Indus Valley: Its Contexts and Character," in Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Ave Lallemand, eds., *Islam and Indian Regions* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), pp. 276-7.

⁷⁰ For further discussion see chapter 3 of my *Life and Work of Guru Arjun*, (OUP, forthcoming)..

⁷¹ M3, *Var Sorathi*, 1 (11), AG, p. 646. Also see *Var Bihagara*, 1 (9), AG, p. 551.

⁷² W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 12.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12-3.

⁷⁵ Nonica Datta, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 23.

⁷⁶ Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd revised edition, 1999; originally published, 1963), p. 230.

⁷⁷ Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 284.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁸⁰ George Dalton, "Peasantries in Anthropology and History," *Cultural Anthropology*, 13 (1972): 406.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper San Francisco, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), p. 126.

⁸³ Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 135.

⁸⁴ Chetan Singh, *Region and Empire: Panjab in the Seventeenth Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 95. Chetan Singh cites Irfan Habib in endnote 53 (p. 122) about the introduction of the Persian-wheel in India during the Turkish conquest. However, the spread of the Persian-wheel to large parts of Punjab was a slow process.

⁸⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 122, n. 54.

⁸⁶ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 123, n. 57.

⁸⁷ For instance, see M 1, *Basant Hindol 1*, AG, p. 1171: "Make (service with) the hands your wheel, and focused attention the chain and the buckets, and yoke the mind like the bullock, to work the well. Irrigate your body with the divine nectar, and this way the Gardener, your God, will own you." Also see *ibid.*, p. 123, n. 59.

⁸⁸ The photographs of the original structure of the pool at Thatte Khera may be seen in Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh, "Brick by Sacred Brick: Architectural Projects of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind," in Kavita Singh, ed., *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2003): 36-7.

⁸⁹ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. xv-xvi.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 331. Also see pp. 304-350.

⁹¹ Ganda Singh, *Guru Arjan's Martyrdom*, p. 27.

⁹² Wade, *Imaging Sound*, p. 4.

⁹³ Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), p. xiii. Also see, *ibid.*, p. 216, n. 5. The category "patrimonial-bureaucratic empire" originated with Max Weber, although Weber designated the great Mughal cities as merely princely camps. Blake's analysis of Asian sovereign cities suggests that the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire was the type of state which characterized other Asian empires from about 1400 to 1750 as well.

⁹⁴ Wade, *Imaging Sound*, 36-8.

⁹⁵ Henry Beveridge, trans., *The Akbar Nama of Abu-l-Fazal I, II* (New Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1998), pp. 50-68. Scholars have made the suggestion that Abul-Fazal's situation was markedly different from that of other poets who praised their patrons because he was a member of the *Din-i-illahi* or Akbar's so-called "Divine Religion". For background, see Peter Hardy, "Abul Fazal's Portrait of the Perfect Padshah: A Political Philosophy for Mughal India - or a Personal Puff for a Pal?" in Christian Troll, ed., *Islam in India, Studies and Commentaries* - vol. 2, *Religion and Religious Education* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985), pp. 114-37. I am grateful to Professor Louis Fenech for this reference.

⁹⁶ Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, eds., *Understanding Foucault* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 8.

⁹⁷ Wade, *Imaging Sound*, p. 19.

⁹⁸ Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of the Muslims in Akbar's Reign*, p. 179.

⁹⁹ *Understanding Foucault*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁰ Wade, *Imaging Sound*, p. 162.

¹⁰¹ See Bhai Jodh Singh, *Sri Kartarpuri Bir de Darshan* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968), p. (b). Kahn Singh Nabha's letter refers to this entry which is no longer there.

¹⁰² For details see the Persian document about this land grant in chapter 4 of my *Life and Work of Guru Arjun*, (OUP, forthcoming).

¹⁰³ Jahangir's predisposition against popularly venerated religious figures has been noted by J.F. Richards in his *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), p. 97. Also see the following entry in *The Jahangirnama*, p. 61: "I received the news that an Afghan named Shaykh Ibrahim had started peddling his wares as a spiritual guide in a pargana in the vicinity of Lahore. As is the custom of hoi polloi and the vile, a multitude of Afghans and others had gathered around him. I ordered him summoned and entrusted to Parvez to be held in the Chunar fortress until the affair died down." For Jahangir's hostility towards the Jains, see Ellison B. Findly, "Jahangir's Vow of Non-Violence," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 117 (1987): 245-56.

¹⁰⁴ *Understanding Foucault*, pp. 68-9.

¹⁰⁵ J.R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ For details see chapter 3 of my *Life and Work of Guru Arjun*, (OUP, forthcoming).

¹⁰⁷ David William Cohen, *The Combining of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. xxiv.

¹⁰⁸ Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁹ During my research visit to Pakistan in 1999, I was amazed at the painting of the scene of Guru Arjan's execution in the central Divan Hall of Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Lahore, in which Chandu Shah figures prominently as the principal persecutor. I have the photograph of this painting with me.

¹¹⁰ This observation is directly opposite to Louis Fenech's statement: "The son of Akbar, it seems, has been much vilified in Sikh hagiography, for contemporary Persian accounts note (with some exaggeration perhaps) that Jahangir was an emperor known particularly for his just dealings with all members of his vast empire." See his *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, p. 120. Fenech seems to have missed the point of Jahangir's image in early Sikh sources, particularly the *Mahima Prakash*.

¹¹¹ R.S. Jaggi, ed., *Kesar Singh Chhibbar da Bansavli-nama Dasan Patishahian Ka*, published in *Parakh: Research Bulletin of Panjabi Language and Literature* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1972), p. 55. The appropriate verses are in 5: 139, 141: "Finally [Guru Arjan] was tied and then put down upon the bank of the [Ravi] river...[in this] tied up manner he was thrown into the river." Also see Fenech, "Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources," p. 26, n. 46.

¹¹² For the evolution of the concept of martyrdom in Sikhism in response to changing historical circumstances during the last three centuries, see Fenech's major work *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*. Fenech plays upon the nuances of the words *shahid* and *shahadat* which, according to him, came to be understood as a "heroic Sikh killed in battle or executed while upholding the claims of righteousness" in the nineteenth century. See his "Martyrdom and the Sikh Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vo. 117, No. 4 (1997): 641. This assumption is, however, questionable. The word *shahid* was already used in the sense of martyrdom in the late seventeenth-century Sikh literature. Note, for instance, its usage in *Pakhiyan Charitar* in the Dasam Granth, *charitar* 102 and verse 30: "The war erupted with great intensity in which many hefty brave men resolved to die fighting. They were attacking the enemy with great anger and contempt from all the four directions. During the battle many fell as 'pure martyrs' in the field (*hue pak shahid jangah mayane*). God alone knows how many brave men died fighting." Moreover, the question of martyrdom is always context-related. From the Sikh perspective, Guru Arjan made the 'supreme sacrifice' (*kurbani*) in defense of Sikh faith while the Mughal state regarded him as a supporter of rebel Prince Khusrau. In the early Sikh tradition the phrase *sis laggana* or *sis dena* ("offering of a head") was used for martyrdom. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was thus described in the Dasam Granth. In the narrative of Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bansavali-nama* (1769) Guru Arjan is said to have explicitly stated in the verse (V: 131): "Our head will be given in sacrifice, and this moment has come as certainty" (*asada laggega sisu ihu nischa hai aia*). The same phrase *sis dena* for martyrdom was adopted in the standard Sikh Prayer (*Ardas*): "Think of the sacrifices of those Singhs and Singhanis who gave their heads for righteousness..." (*jinhan singhan singhanian ne dharam het sis ditte...*).

¹¹³ Smith, *On Understanding Islam*, p. 191.

¹¹⁴ For further discussion on this see chapter 5 of my *Life and Work of Guru Arjun*, (OUP, forthcoming)..