

Epic Poetry of Bhai Gurdas as source of History

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Part I

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Bhai Gurdas was scion of the family of Guru Amar Das ji, and contemporary of four Gurus, Guru Amar Das ji, Guru Ram Das Ji, Guru Arjun Devji and Guru Hargobind ji. He was born circa 1555 and died in 1629/1637 in the presence of Guru Hargobindji. He is accepted as a nephew of Guru Amar Das ji, and a maternal uncle of Guru Arjun Devji. Bhai Gurdas must have been hearing anecdotes from the lives of the Gurus and about the situation in Punjab at the advent of Guru Nanak. There was perhaps no written record about the life and times of Guru Nanak, but stories must have been going round by word of mouth.

Poetry starts welling out from the mind at a young age. As soon as poetry started forming in his mind, he commenced writing about the story of the new emerging society whose foundation was laid by Guru Nanak. His sensitive mind quickly concluded that Guru Nanak had in fact organised a new "*Nirmal* (pure) *Panth*". This was an entirely new dispensation differing from all existing religions and sects. He studied the all-important existing religions and their interactions with one another to understand the reasons which lead Guru Nanak to embark upon the creation of a new path or movement. He considered it necessary to describe the practice of religion by the people when Guru Nanak came on the scene.

Historical Events mentioned in the first *Vaar*:

Bhai Gurdas gives us a great insight into Guru Nanak in his first *Vaar*, which happens to be the longest one, with 49 *pauris*. He describes the Creation of the Universe and the beliefs accepted by the ancient Hindu mythology in the first 19 *pauris*. He makes his comments on the Creation of the Universe and the behaviour of humans. The all-pervading *Onkar* revealed Himself by his One Word and created the infinite Cosmos. Gurdas writes that it appears as if in His "One Hair" there are myriads of galaxies. In each world He revealed Himself in uncountable forms. He created the four *Yugas*, or ages, of this world. In the *Satyug*, *Treta* and *Duapur Yug* people lived for long years, but they did not construct palaces or temples. Dwelling briefly on the events of the *Satyug*, *Treta* and *Duapur Yugas*, Bhai Gurdas describes that in the present age of Kaliug the low instincts have come to the forefront. Ego and hate reign supreme. Everyone behaves according to his own whims, and is ever engrossed in his personal welfare. So long the Lord does not appear on the earth the True guru (Satguru), the mystery of the world cannot be understood. Bhai Gurdas does not find any difference between the True Guru and God. Satguru dispels the prevailing darkness. *Kaliyug* is the ocean of ignorance. Some worship stones, others worship graves, and some recite magical formulae and practise spells and charms. Hypocrisy is practiced at large. Different religious practices have cropped up. Some worship the moon, the sun; whilst others worship the earth and the sky. Some propitiate air, water and fire to appease *Yama* the god of Death. Mankind is immersed in delusions. Four *Varnas*, Ten orders of ascetics

and twelve of Yogis have emerged. Naked Jains and other *sadhus* and mendicants have their own way of living. Many varieties of Brahmins commenced giving different expositions of religious philosophy by commenting on the Shastras, the Vedas and the Puranas. Mutual rivalries confused the public. In the twentieth *pauri* Bhai Gurdas describes the prevalent tenets of Islam. After Mohammad Sahib, 72 divisions appeared among Muslims. *Pirs* and *Aulias* propagated the rituals of Ramzan *Rozas*, *Eid* and *Namaz*. Temples were demolished and mosques erected in their place. Non-conformists were declared apostates (*kafirs*) and killed.

Pauri 21.1 *Chari varani chari mazahaban jagi vichi Hindu Musalmaney...*

Pauri 21.3 *Gang Banarasi Hinduan Makka Kabba Musalmaney...*

Pauri 21.5 *Ram Rahim kahaide iku namu dui rah bhulaney*

Pauri 21.7 *Sachu kinare rahi gia khahi maradey bamhani maulaney.*

Like the four main *Varnas* of Hindus, four sects of Muslims became prominent. As opposed to the Hindus making pilgrimages to the Ganga and Banaras, the Muslims considered Kaaba in Mecca their holy shrine. They practiced circumcision and the Hindus used a sandalwood mark on foreheads and wore the sacred thread. The Hindu invoke Ram and the Muslims Rahim - the merciful. Both have forgotten the Truth of Vedas and Muslim holy books and worldly greeds and Mammon have led them astray. Truth deserts both. Maulanas and Brahmin were killing each other.

Story of Guru Nanak as written by Bhai Gurdas in 10 episodes:

Episode I

Advent of Guru Nanak

Pauri 23.1 *Suni pukari datar prabhu Guru Nanak jag mahi pathaia.*

Pauri 23.4 *Chare pair dharam de chari varan iku varana karaia.*

Pauri 23.8 *Kali taran Guru Nanak Aaia.*

The benevolent Lord listened to the woes of humanity and Guru Nanak appeared in this world. Guru Nanak preached about the One Lord of all, rich and poor and converted all into one clan of humanity. Guru Nanak came to redeem the dark age of *Kaliyug*.

Pauri 24.1 *Pahila babey paya bakhshu dari pichho dey phiri ghali kamai...*

Pauri 24.4. *Baba paidha sach khand, nau nidhi naamu garibi pai.*

Pauri 24.5 *Baba dekhai dhian dhari jalati sabhi prithavi disi ai.*

Baba Nanak first obtained grace and then underwent rigorous discipline. He reached the Realm of Truth and received the *Naam* of nine treasures and humility. The Baba contemplated and saw the whole earth burning (with fire of lust and anger).

Episode II

Baba Nanak on his world mission:

Pauri 24.7 *Babey bhekh banaiya udasi ki riti chalat.*

Pauri 24.8 *Charhia sodhani dharati lukai.*

The Baba donned the robes of an Udasi (teaching saint) and commenced his journey to bring humanity to the path of righteousness.

Episode III

Baba at pilgrim centres

Pauri 25.1 *Baba aia ti rathai tirathi purabi sabhe phiri dekhai.*

Pauri 25.3 *Bhau na Brahame likhia charey bed simmriti pari pekhai.*

Pauri 25.5 *Kalijug dhundukar hai bharami bhulai bahu bidhi bhekhai.*

Pauri 25.6 *Bhekhi prabhu na paiai apu gavae rup na rekhai.*

Baba Nanak visited the pilgrim centres and observed the rituals and ceremonies. He read the four Vedas and Simrities and found that Brahma had nowhere written about Love of the Primal Lord. Pitch darkness prevails in *kaliyug* and religion appears in the form of garbs, guises and rituals. The hypocritical ways do not lead us to the Lord. He can be reached by self-effacement and devotion.

Pauri 26.6 *Gurmukh koi na disai dhunde tirathi jatri meley.*

Pauri 26.7 *Dithe Hindu turaki sabhi pir paikambari kaumi katele.*

Pauri 26.8 *Andhi andhe khuhe thele.*

Even after extensive search at the pilgrim centres, Guru Nanak did not find any truth-oriented people. He came across many Hindu, Turks, Pirs and other Muslim religious heads and found that "the blind were leading the blind."

Conclusion of Bhai Gurdas about appearance of Guru Nanak:

Pauri 27.1 *Satguru Nanak pragatia miti dhundhu jagi chananu hoa*

Pauri 27.2 *Jiu kari suraju nikalia tarrey chhapey andheru paloa.*

With the advent of Guru Nanak, the mist disappeared and the world was illumined. It was just like the appearance of the sun when darkness and the stars disappear. Every home thus became a place of religion where singing (*kirtan*) the praises of the Lord commenced.

Episode IV

Baba meets the Siddhas at Sumer Parbat Pauris 28-31 (significant lines)

Pauri 28.1 *Babe dithi pirathami navai khandi jithe taki ahi.*

Pauri 28.2 *Phir jai charhia sumer par siddha mandali drisati ayee.*

Pauri 29.6 *Siddha Chhapi baithe parbati kaun jagat kau paar utara.*

Pauri 29.7 *Jogi gian vihunia nis dini angi lagaye chhara.*

Pauri 29.8 *Baajh Guru dubba jagu sara.*

Pauri 30.1 *Kali ayee kuta muhi khaju hoia murdar gusayee.*

Pauri 30.2 *Rejey paapu kamavande ulati varh khet kau khai.*

Pauri 30.6 *Qazi hoe rishvati vadhi lai ke haqu gavai.*

Pauri 30.7 *Isatri purakhai daam hity bhavai ai kithaun jai.*

Pauri 30.8 *Varatia pap sabhas jug mahi.*

Pauri 31.7 *Sabadi jiti sidhi mangali kitosu apana Panthu nirala.*

Baba Nanak toured the nine divisions of this earth and then went up the Sumer Mountain (Mountain Kailash) and reached a party of Siddhas and asked them as to why they were hiding away from the public and the world. In their absence from the society, who would teach the public the path of truth? *Jogis* are without knowledge, and only apply ashes to their bodies. Without a Guru (teacher) the whole world is drowning in ignorance. In *Kaliyug* the mentality of the people has become like that of a dog who is always seeking carrion to eat. Even the kings are corrupt as if the fence were destroying the crop-field itself. The *Kazis* whose duty is to dispense justice are taking bribes and giving false judgments. There is sin everywhere. Through dialogue, Baba won over the *Siddhas* and proclaimed his unique *True Panth*.

Episode V

Baba at Mecca Puaris: 32-34

Pauri 32.1 *Baba phiri makkey gia neel basatr dharey banwari.*

Pauri 32.2 *Aasa hathh kitab kachh kuja bang mussala dhari.*

Pauri 32.4 *Ja baba suta rat nounn vali maharabey paiye pasari.*

Pauri 32.5 *Jivan maari lat di kehara suta kuffar kuffari.*

Pauri 32.7 *Tangon pakkaur ghasitia phiria makka kalla dikhari.*

Pauri 32.8 *Hoey hairan kareni juhari.*

Pauri 33.3 *Puchhan phol kitab noun Hindu vada ke Musalmanoi.*

Pauri 33.4 *Baba aakhey hajian shubh amlan bajhau dono roi.*

Pauri 33.5 *Hindu Musalmaan dui dargah andari lahni na dhoi.*

Pauri 33.7 *Karani bakhili aapi vichi Ram Rahim Kuthai Khaloi.*

Pauri 33.8 *Rhey Saitani dunia goi.*

Pauri 34.2 *Jithai jai jagat vichi babe bajho na khali jai.*

Pauri 34.3 *Ghari ghari baba pujiai Hindu Musalman guai.*

Pauri 34.7 *Ugavanahu te athavano naukhand prithami sabh jhukai.*

In these *pauris* Bhai Gurdas describes the visit of Baba Nanak to Mecca. He goes on first to describe the Baba's appearance with a stick in one hand, a book under the armpit along with prayer mat and a *lota* (jug), and then follows the familiar story of how he amazes the Mullahs. When they pulled his legs to find Mecca revolving in the same direction. They asked Baba Nanak to read his book and tell them as to who was better, Hindu or Muslim. The Baba told the Haj pilgrims that without good deeds both would come to grief. Both Hindus and Muslims would not be accepted in the court of the Lord. In their verbal duels they denounce Raam and Rahim. The world is following the ways of the Satan. The Baba won over everyone. Wherever you go in the world you would not find a place where the Baba was not known. From East to West, all nine divisions of the earth bowed to him (Nanak).

Episode VI

Baba at Bagdad: 35-37

Pauri 35.1 *Phiri baba gaia Bagdad noun bahari jai kia asthana.*

Pauri 35.2 *Ik baba Akal roop dooja rababi Mardana.*

Pauri 35.3 *Diti bang nivaji kari sunni samani hoa jahana.*

Pauri 35.4 *Sunn munni nagari bhai dekhi pir bhaia hairana.*

Pauri 36.2 *Ethe vichi Bagdad de vadi karamati dikhlai.*

Pauri 36.3 *Paatala aakas lakhi orhaki bhali khabaru sunai.*

Pauri 36.5 *Naal leeta beta pir da akhi meet gaia havai.*

Pauri 36.6 *Lakh akas patal lakh, akhi phurak vichi sabhi dikhalai.*

Pauri 37.1 *Garh Bagdad navaikai Makka Madina sabhe nivaia.*

Pauri 37.7 Bhaia anand jagatu vichi kakali taran Guru Nanak aia.

Pauri 37.8 *Hindu musulman nivaia.*

The Baba reached Baghdad and stayed outside the city. Here, the *Akal Roop* (like the Lord Himself), Baba was accompanied by the *Rababi* (rebec-playing) Mardana. Bhai Gurdas does not mention as to why the Muslims made an exception and allowed a non-Muslim to visit Mecca when non-Muslims were strictly forbidden to visit the place. We can justifiably conclude from his writing about the *Akal Roop* Baba Nanak here, that the Light of the Lord Himself shining on Nanak's face attracted everyone towards him. The Baba gave a loud call of *Namaz* and the world was stunned into silence. The city became quiet and the *Pir* was wonderstruck. Here, in Baghdad, the Baba showed a great miracle. He announced the existence of lakhs of skies and netherworlds. Taking along *Pir Dastgir's* son (asking him to close his eyes) showed him, in a wink, myriad of galaxies. The Baba made Baghdad, Mecca and Madina *pirs* bow to him. The world was delighted that Guru Nanak had come to redeem it from ignorance. He made Hindus and Muslims accept him as God's voice on earth.

Episode VIII

Baba at Kartarpur: 38

Pauri 38.1 *Phiri baba aia Kartarpuri bhekh udadi sagal utara.*

Pauri 38.3 *Ulati Gang vahaioni Gur Angadu siri upari dhara.*

Pauri 38.4 *Putari kaulu na palia mani khote aki nasiara.*

Pauri 38.7 *Sodar Aarti gaviai amrit veley japu uchara.*

In the 28th *Pauri* Bhai Gurdas writes that on returning to Kartarpur, the Baba removed his *Udasi* garments (robes of a traveller) and put on the ordinary householder's clothes and sat on a cot to preach. Soon he reversed the Ganga when he made Angad the Guru and bowed to him. This he

did because his sons did not accept his instructions and had run away from him. Here Guru Nanak sang ‘*Sodar*’ and ‘*Aarti*’ in the evening and recited the ‘*Japji*’ in the morning.

Episode VIII

Baba at Achal Vatala Discussions with Siddhas: 39-44

Pauri 39.1 *Mela suni shivarati da baba Achal Vatale aiye.*

Pauri 39.2 *Darasanu vekhani karane sagali ulati pai lokai.*

Pauri 40.4 *Bhekhu utari udasi da vati kiu sansari reet chalai.*

Pauri 40.7 *Hoey atitu grihasati taji phiri unahu ke ghari mangani jai.*

Pauri 41.4. *Roop vatae jogia singh baghi bahu chaliti dikhai.*

Pauri 42.4 *Guru sangati bani bina dooji oat nahi hai rai.*

Pauri 43.2 *Bajho sache naam de horu karamati asan te nahi.*

Pauri 43.8 *Satinaam binu badari chhai.*

Pauri 44.1 *Babe kiti siddhi gosati sabadi santi sidhan wich ai.*

Pauri 44.3 *Siddhi bolani subh bachani dhanu Nanak teri vadi kamai.*

Pauri 44.4 *Vada purakh pargatia kalijugi andari joti jagai.*

Hearing about the *Shivaratri* fair, Baba Nanak arrived at Achal Vatala. A large number of people gathered at the site of the fair to have a look at him. The siddhas performed many tricks and asked the Baba as to why he had changed back to the householder’s garb. It is very likely that these were the same group of *siddhas* whom Baba Nanak had confronted at Mount *Sumer*, several years earlier. The Baba in turn asked them as to why they went begging to the doors of the householders. The *Yogis* performed many miracles and asked Baba Nanak to show his miraculous powers. The Baba replied, "Or respected Naths, I have no such thing to show. I rely on the strength of the Guru (Lord), His holy congregation (*Sangat*) and the *Bani* (word). Except the True Name of the Lord, I have no miracle to show. Besides His True Name, all else is momentary like the shadow of the clouds." As a result of the discussion between Baba and Siddhas, the later achieved mental tranquility. The *Siddhas* announced, "O Nanak, you have achieved greatness, you have emerged as a great personality and have illumined the *Kaliyug*."

Episode IX

Baba visits Multan: 44

Pauri 44.5 *Melio baba uthia Multane di jarati jai.*

Pauri 44.6 *Agon pir Multan de dudhi katora bhari lai ai.*

Pauri 44.7 *Babe kadhi kari bagal te chambeli dudhi vichi milai.*

Pauri 44.8 *Jiu vichi Gang samai.*

Leaving the fair at Achal Vatala the Baba went on a ‘pilgrimage’ to Multan. At Multan the Pirs came forward holding a bowl of milk full to the brim. Baba took out a jasmine flower from his bag and put it on the surface of the milk, indicating that he would spread fragrance. Bhai Gurdas likened it to the river Ganga merging into the ocean.

Episode X

Baba back to Kartarpur and giving charge to Guru Angad: 45

Pauri 45.1 *Jiarati kari Multan di phiri Kartarpure no aia.*

Pauri 45.4 *Maria sika jagati vichi Nanak nirmal panth chalaia.*

Pauri 45.5 *Thapia Lahina jivade guriai siri chhatr phiria.*

Pauri 45.6 *Joti joti milaikai satigur Nanak rup vataia.*

Pauri 45.7 *Lakhi na koi sakai acharaje acharai dikhaia.*

Pauri 45.8 *Kai palati sarup banaia.*

Returning from Multan, Baba reached Kartarpur. Just like minting a new coin in the world, Nanak commenced a pure *Panth* (religion). While still alive, he appointed Lehna and spread the Canopy of Guruship over his head. Merging his own light with him, the True Guru Nanak just changed his body. No one could understand this strange happening. Nanak converted his "body" into a new form.

When did Bhai Gurdas write his Vaars:

Bhai Gurdas does not mention the fact himself. All of us have accepted the fact that Bhai Gurdas was the scribe of the *Pothi Sahib* or the first recension of Guru Granth Sahib, which was installed in the sanctum sanctorum of the newly constructed Darbar Sahib at Amritsar in 1604. It appears strange and not logical to state that Bhai Gurdas wrote his *Vaars* during the years 1610-1628 as stated by Dr. Sukhdial Singh. (*Punjab da Itihas*, Vol. 5 *Guru Kaal* 1469-1708, Punjabi University 2000 p. 40) This means that Bhai Gurdas became a poet in the last years of his life! There are three good reasons which point out that Bhai Gurdas wrote major portions of his famous poetry (*Vaars*) much before he was chosen to be the scribe of *Pothi Sahib* by Guru Arjun Dev Ji.

1. Poetry is a born gift and it starts forming in the mind of the poets at a very young age, usually in the teens.

2. Bhai Gurdas must have established himself as a known writer and poet *before* Guru Arjun Dev ji selected him for being the scribe of the holy *Pothi Sahib*.

3. Bhai Gurdas was born about 20 years after Guru Nanak Dev ji had left this world. Bhai Gurdas selected only 10 important episodes from Guru's life, which have a bearing on Sikh thought. He left out so many other prevalent anecdotes, which he considered unimportant. It is quite likely that some of them may have been uncovered much later. The story of *Panja Sahib* at Hasan Abdal is one such story. There is doubt that while returning from Baghdad Guru Nanak passed through this place and had met 'Wali Kandhari', a respected pir or "wali" of the place and the imprint of the hand on the stone is indeed that of Guru Nanak. The story of the "wali" throwing a big rock on the Guru Sahib from the hillstop is incredible. Guru Nanak may have met the "wali" by the side of the natural spring. "Wali" may have requested Guru Nanak to let his right palm imprint be sculptured on a rock to commemorate his visit and meeting him. It is most unlikely that the "wali" would hurl a rock on a "Haji" and 'Akal Roop' Baba Nanak. Even if Bhai Gurdas knew this episode as described above, his must have ignored it as of little importance.

End of Part I

(To be concluded)

