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**"Exploring the Divine Harmony: Adi Granth, Bhagat Bani, and the Spiritual Legacy of Hazrat Baba Farid "**

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**Abstract**

*Exploring the Divine Harmony: Adi Granth, Bhagat Bani, and the Spiritual Legacy of Farid" delves into the rich tapestry of Sikh scripture, highlighting the profound connections between the Adi Granth, Bhagat Bani, and the spiritual legacy of Farid. The article embarks on a journey to uncover the essence of divine harmony encapsulated within Sikhism's sacred texts, emphasizing the inclusive and pluralistic nature of Sikh spirituality. Through a comprehensive examination of the Adi Granth as the central scripture of Sikhism, revered as the eternal Guru, and the Bhagat Bani, which comprises hymns by various Bhagats including Farid, the article illuminates the universal truths and spiritual unity*

*embedded within Sikh scripture. Farid's spiritual legacy emerges as a testament to the timeless wisdom and universal appeal of Sikhism, transcending religious boundaries and fostering a deeper understanding of the divine. Through a blend of historical context, literary analysis, and spiritual insight, "Exploring the Divine Harmony" invites readers on a transformative journey of discovery, celebrating the profound insights and spiritual legacy of Farid within the rich tapestry of Sikh scripture.*

**Key words:** Adi Granth, Bhagat Bani, Hymns, Saints, Devotees

**Adi Granth:** The Adi Granth, also known as the Guru Granth Sahib, is the central religious scripture of Sikhism. It was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Sikh Guru, in 1604. The Adi Granth contains the writings and hymns of Sikh Gurus, starting from Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, up to Guru Arjan Dev Ji himself. Additionally, it includes contributions from other saints and poets, both Hindu and Muslim, whose writings were deemed compatible with Sikh philosophy and teachings. The Adi Granth is considered the eternal Guru by Sikhs and is revered as the living embodiment of spiritual guidance and wisdom.

**Bhagat Bani:** The term "Bhagat Bani" refers to the hymns or compositions of various Bhagats, meaning "saints" or "devotees," whose writings are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. These Bhagats hailed from diverse religious backgrounds, including Hinduism, Islam, and other traditions, and lived across different time periods in South Asia. Their hymns, which are incorporated into the Guru Granth Sahib, reflect their devotion to the divine and their spiritual insights. The inclusion of Bhagat Bani in the Guru Granth Sahib underscores the Sikh belief in the universality of divine truth and the recognition of spiritual wisdom beyond sectarian boundaries.

Adi Granth contains the Bhagat Bani. Bhagat Bani is the 'utterances' of fifteen medieval Indian poets of Sant, Sufi and Bhakti origin. Poets of these poems are generally referred to as Sants but two of them (Bhikhan and Shaikh Farid) were avowedly Sufis. In the Sikh tradition, the term Bhagat has two meanings, one in the general sense of 'devotee' or 'worshipper' who practices bhakti, and the other specifically referring to historical figures such as Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Jaidev and so on. As such, the title Bhagat Bani is used in the Sikh scripture to describe the compositions of the fifteen poet-saints as a whole.

The presence of the hymns written by the non-Sikh saints in the holy text of the Sikhs is a unique thing. Wilfred Cantwell Smith researched how one religious movement unequivocally

incorporates the scriptural writings of other religious movements<sup>1</sup>. Smith argues that the Adi Granth includes largely the hymns and sayings of the Sikh Gurus, but also a moderately small percentage of passages by others such as the Bhagats ('Devotees') of a slightly earlier time or of those who were not officially members of what has subsequently band together into the Sikh community<sup>2</sup>. Karine Schomer maintains that some selections of Kabir's sayings have been made by the compilers of the Adi Granth on the assumption that they are in conformity to the 'moods and motivations' of the Sikhs. In a similar vein, W.H. McLeod writes about the Bhagat Bani which comprises the works of various religious poets (notably Kabir, Namdev, and Ravidas) which were plainly included in the Adi Granth because the beliefs which they express correspond to those of the Nanak<sup>3</sup>. Nir bhai Singh gives three main arguments to explain the inclusion of the Bhagat Bani in the Adi Granth. First, the hymns of the Bhagats bear testimony to their highly critical attitude towards Brahminical rituals. Since Sikh doctrine also stood against much of Brahminism of the day, it was natural for the compiler to incorporate in the scripture some representative works of the Bhagats of the time.

Second, since different groups used the Bhagat Bani for their sectarian ends, it was edited and included in the scripture to preserve it in its original form. Third, the Sikh scripture includes the compositions of those Bhagats who evolved their philosophy of spiritual development on the basis of their personal mystic experience<sup>4</sup>. Kasai ('butcher'), Dhanna the Jat ('peasant'), and Ravidas the Chamar ('cobbler').

All of them refuted the claims of Brahminical orthodoxy. That is why they were usually scorned by the learned and twice-born and their compositions were generally ignored as being of no significance. In this context, it will be useful to look at the attitude of the celebrated poet Tulsidas-a Brahmin (b. 1543) and a contemporary of the Sikh Gurus-toward the low-caste poet- saints. Tulsidas was a vehement defender of the Smarta tradition, that is, the social and religious order taught in the Dharm shastras and the Puranas and based on the Vedas. It is no wonder that he frequently describes the horrors of Kaliyuga ('Dark Age') depicted by the Bhagats and their compositions in the following

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'What Is Scripture ? : A Comparative Approach . (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) ,pp. 54-5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 270, n. 33.

<sup>3</sup> W.H. McLeod, trans. and ed., Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Nirbhai Singh, Bhagata Namadeva in the Guru Grantha (Patiala: Puryabi University, 1981, pp. 128-90.

manner:

'In this Kaliyuga the 'devotees' describe bhakti by reciting verses (Sakhis), songs (Shabads), couplets (Dohas), stories, and anecdotes while they scorn the Veda and Puranas. (Dohavali, 554) The Shudras dispute with Brahmins. They cast angry looks and scold: 'Are we something less than you? Whoever knows Brahman becomes a noble Brahmin.' Ramacharitamanas) Without any knowledge of Brahman, women and men speak about nothing else. They are so controlled by greed that for a mere trifle they physically attack Brahmins and gurus<sup>5</sup>. (Ramacharitamanas). It is highly likely that here Tulsidas is alluding directly to Kabir and other poet-saints who had attacked Brahminical pretensions in their compositions. Besides these poet-saints, he must have intended to include Guru Nanak and his successors as well because they also composed the three an interesting thing to note is that at least six poet-saints of the Adi Granth belonged to the Shudra caste. Besides the julaha ('weaver') Kabir, there was Namdev the Chimba ('cotton printer'), Sain the Nai ('barber'), Sadhana the types of verses to which he referred. Tulsidas considered all of them a serious threat to conservative Hindu tradition and blamed them in this way: 'They abundant the path of devotion to Hari and dreamed up many new paths<sup>6</sup>.' In the wake of such criticism, it is quite possible that the learned class of that age did not recognize the Bhagat Bani and that it was consequently often presented in inflated and divergent versions. This may have helped to prompt the urge to canonize the Bhagat Bani. However, it should be emphasized that there are also four Brahmin saints-Jaidev from Bengal, the celebrated Ramanand, Parmanand and Surdas-whose verses are incorporated in the Adi Granth. Although a token representation is given to them, it is sufficient to justify the Sikh disputation that the choice of the Bhagat Bani was not made on the source of any caste contemplation. In Sikhism, the caste system is categorically condemned as an agent of institutionalized discrimination. Guru Nanak, for instance, proclaims: 'Recognize the divine light within all and do not inquire into one 's caste as there is no caste in the next world<sup>7</sup>. 12 TheGuru clearly implies here that it is the divine light (jot) symbolizing spiritual enlightenment, and not the caste (Jati), which gives human beings their worth. Moreover, the works by two Sufi mystics, Shaikh Farid and Bhikhan, are also included in the Adi Granth. Thus, the criterion for the

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in David N. Lorenzen, Introduction: The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion, in David N. Lorenzen, ed., *Bhakti Religion in North India* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> W. Owen Cole, *Sikhism and Its Indian Context 1469-1708* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd: 1984), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> M1, Asa 3, AG, p. 349.

inclusion of the Bhagat Bani was not based upon the caste or religion of the poet-saints. W. Owen Cole argued that the features common to all of them are their belief in the one God who is ultimately beyond physical form and sectarian garb, their emphasis upon the inwardness of true religiosity and their importance in the history of North Indian piety. All the main bhagats are represented. The most obvious reason for their inclusion is a wish to commend the Sikh Panth as widely as possible by demonstrating its catholicity<sup>8</sup>. Here Cole appears to be claiming that it was the intention of the Gurus to commend the Sikh Panth ('community') as widely as possible by including the Bhagats in the Adi Granth, and elsewhere he explicitly states that the Gurus had wished to bring together into the fold of Sikhism the disparate followers of the poet-saints<sup>9</sup>. Nirmal Dass maintained that Arjun placed preachings of the faith within a religious context by opposing the saints with the songs of the Gurus that expanded back to the twelfth century. Dass makes three points. First, the inclusion of the compositions of the poet-saints in the Adi Granth provides the historical context and prehistory. Second, the poet saints are not merely 'adjunct' or 'marginal' to the preachings of the Gurus, but they are the 'inter-textual ground' for the development the early Sikh tradition. Finally, they provide 'continuity' to radical inner religiosity of North India<sup>10</sup>. To sum up these arguments, it may be stated that it is moderately true that Bhagat hymns are included in the Adi Granth because they endorse the beliefs of the Gurus. It is also true that Guru Arjan abridged the Bhagat matter before addin it into the Holy Scripture and selected only those aspects of the Bhagat Bani that were in vital conformity with the Sikh teachings. But these claims may not explain the entire story. They tend to accentuate the traditional inspection of absolute identity between the teachings of the Bhagats and the Sikh Gurus. This is too simplistic analysis of what may have been an intricate phenomenon. There are, for instance, some verses of the Bhagats that are juxtaposed with comments made on them by the Gurus. Mostly, the verses of Kabir, Surdas, Shaikh Farid, and Dhanna have received straight comments from the Gurus. These comments are not made on the fact that Gurus and the Bhagats are in conformity, but these comments are made to register clear disagreements sometimes with the sayings of the Bhagats. In both cases of agreement and disagreement, the comments of the Gurus serve to delineate their own understanding of the developing Sikh community at the time of their Guruship. In the following passages we will

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<sup>8</sup> W. Owen Cole, *Sikhism and Its Indian Context 1469-1708* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), P, 157

<sup>9</sup> Nirbhai Singh, *Bhagata Namadeva in the Guru Grantha* (Patiala: Puryabi University, 1981), pp. 128-90.

<sup>10</sup> W. Owen Cole, *The Guru in Sikhism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982) P, 21.

examine the concerns of the Gurus on the verses of the poet-saints. These comments will serve three purposes. First, they underline the Gurus' self-understanding of certain themes contained in the verses of the Bhagats and in so doing uphold a process of self-definition for the Sikh community. For example, the Gurus recommend the ideals of fair living and disciplined worldliness for the Sikh community in their comments on the verses of Shaikh Farid that accentuate the ideals of self-torture<sup>11</sup>.

Second, the Gurus' comments offer more clarity and understanding to the incomprehensible texts of the Bhagats so that they turn out to be comprehensible. The aim here is to make the whole of the Bhagat Bani consistent and its message evocative to the Gurus' contemporary audience.

Third, these comments voice ardently the Gurus' differences from the Bhagats on certain vital issues. For example, the Gurus disagree from both Kabir and Shaikh Farid on the issue of the predominance of divine grace over individual effort in spiritual progress. The Sikh vision of divine grace asserts that personal effort alone cannot ensure spiritual progress until divine grace is not there. Therefore, in their comments about poet-saints, the Gurus accentuate that God's gifts are not eventually reliant upon the merit of an individual. Divine grace is finally fundamental but is an anonymous mystery.

In this context it may be stated that Bhagat Bani selection was not made entirely on the basis of the conformity with the teachings of the Gurus. There is difference as well as conformity. It is important to note that the Gurus were deeply concerned about taming a particular Sikh view of true teaching.

The image of Shaikh Farid that emerges in the Farid-bani is that of an ardent follower of orthodox Islam. He prescribes the duty to observe the ritual prayer five times a day, to perform ablutions (wazu, uju in the original text) before prayer and to go to the mosque (masit) regularly. He places much emphasis on 'prostration before God' during the ritual prayer which reminds one of the Qur'anic verses: 'Prostrate and draw near' (Sura 96:19). Like a stern Sufi Master, he even specifies the penalty for the offenders by saying that the head (sir) that does not prostrate before the Lord should be cut off and used as firewood under the cooking pot<sup>89</sup>. The theme is developed in

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<sup>11</sup> Nirmal Dass, *Songs of the Saints from the Adi Granth: Translation and Introduction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 1.

the following three couplets:

“O prayerless cur, Farid, this is not good for  
you! You have not gone to the mosque at the  
five times of prayer.

Wake up, Farid, perform your  
ablutions and say your morning  
prayer. Cut off the head which does  
not bow before the Lord.

What is to be done to the head which does not bow  
before the Lord? It should be burnt under the  
cooking-pot in place of the firewood.”<sup>12</sup>

Here Shaikh Farid clearly stresses the strict adherence to the shar'iat, the legal prescriptions of Islam'i. Indeed, this was in line with the development in the Sufi tradition after Al-Ghazali who made Sufism acceptable to the orthodox circles which were formerly unfriendly to mysticism in Islam<sup>13</sup>. In this context, Schimmel contends that the early Sufis observed the Muslim law faithfully because it was 'the soil out of which their piety grew'<sup>14</sup>.

The most forceful utterances of Shaikh Farid are the ones in which human beings are urged to get right with God almighty before death conquers them and it is too late. This theme of urgency in the face of death and the fear of judgement come from his deep Islamic background. Shaikh Farid frequently mentions the angel of death (Izra'il or Malik) and takes death as a visible presence not to be ignored in the course of one's daily involvement in worldly pursuits<sup>15</sup>. He asserts that the day of death is pre-determined and cannot be altered. In the very first salok, with powerful symbolism, he describes how the angel of death as the bridegroom comes to carry away his bride (soul), cracking the bones of the body, and how the soul has to cross over the eternal fire of hell on the bridge (pulsirat, pursilat in the original text) which is finer than hair and sharper than the edge of a sword for that young girl's marriage, the day was fixed in advance. Now her spouse, the Angel of Death, she

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<sup>12</sup> Shaikh Farid, Saloks 70-2, AG, p.1 381

<sup>13</sup> S. Alam Khundmiri, 'Some Distinctive Features of Indian Sufism,' in Perspectives, pp. 1 81-9, see note 10.

<sup>14</sup> Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Shaikh Farid, Saloks 1, 48 and 68, AG, pp. 1 377, 1 380-1

has heard about has come, open-faced! Twisting and cracking the frame, he forces the frail life out. Explain this to your life-"This pre-destined day cannot be put off. The soul is the bride, Death is the bridegroom: he will marry her and take her away. With your own hands you gave away your soul: to whom, then will you run for an embrace? Finer than a hair is that Bridge of Hell (Silat): did not you hear of it before? Farid, its hellish cries you can already hear: Hasten, lest you be robbed of your soul, unawares.<sup>16</sup>

The bridge of hell (Pul Sirat) is an important element of belief in Islamic eschatology: 'The Bridge is a reality (one of the final testings of mankind before entering paradise). It is placed directly over hell, and people pass upon it. Paradise is beyond it. We ask safety of God (from the perils of crossing the Bridg)<sup>17</sup>.

It signifies the shocking experience which the wicked and the unbelievers undergo while crossing the bridge. Shaikh Farid mentions the deafening shrieks of those who are condemned in the flaming hell and intends to use this as a deterrent to those who have gone astray from the path of God<sup>18</sup>.

Shaikh Farid provides us with a passing glimpse of the souls (ruhan) waiting for ages between the time of death and the day of resurrection, then they will be sent to paradise or hell according to their just desserts<sup>19</sup>. Arberry mentions a practice among the Sufis to perform 'grave exercise' as a part of their meditative life<sup>20</sup>. During the process, a Sufi would imagine that he is dead, that he has been washed, 'wrapped in his garment and laid in his tomb, and that all the mourners have departed, leaving him alone to face the judgement'. The whole idea behind the practice is to turn the mind from worldly pursuits towards devotion to God. It seems that Shaikh Farid also attempts to awaken the minds of thoughtless people by bringing home to them the thought of the 'grave', "Farid, attach not your heart on mansions and wealth. Keep in your mind mighty death: Contemplate that place where you must go."<sup>21</sup> Shaikh Farid's emphasis on the death-theme is designed to make his

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<sup>16</sup> Translation is Charlotte Vaudville, *A Weaver Named Kabir* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) , p. 316., Shaikh Farid, Salok 1, AG, p. 1 377

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Cragg and Marston Speight, *Islam from Within* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Co, 1980) , p. 122a

<sup>18</sup> Shaikh Farid, Salok 98, AG, p. 1383.

<sup>19</sup> Shaikh Farid, Salok 97, AG, 1 382-3.

<sup>20</sup> AJ. Arberry, *Sufism* (London: Allen and Unwin Publishers, 1979), p. 131

<sup>21</sup> Shaikh Farid, Salok 58, AG, p.1 381



audience realize the transitory character of human life, the fragile nature of worldly pomp and show and the brittle lure of carnal beauty. He repeatedly proclaims that human life along with nature is an evanescent phenomenon<sup>22</sup>. He further asserts that the objects of the senses are really poisonous even though coated with sugar. Thus, he tries to create in us, his hearers' readers, the sense of detachment from the things of the world and objects of the senses. However, Shaikh Farid is aware that those who have been misguided by Satan (shaytan) will never rise above their carnal-self: Despite the loudest warning against evil and constant exhortations to good, O Farid! How can they, who have been led astray by Satan, turn their mind towards God?<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Shaikh Farid, Saloks 84, 86, 102, AG, pp. 1 382-83. Also see his Asa 2 hymn, AG, p. 488.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

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