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Abstract

This article argues for the value of looking past the emperor Aurangzeb, in seeking to understand how he has been portrayed. The eighteenth-century Braj source from Punjab examined here portrays local debates and conflicts at the centre, and the Mughal state at the periphery, of the project of communitarian self- formation. Here, the emperor operates from the outside. Internal communitarian concerns, particularly regarding caste inclusion, dominate, linking the text in question to larger questions around caste and community that emerged in early modern South Asia in a range of contexts.

Aurangzeb/Alamgir figures most prominently in Sikh historiographical sources in association with two events: the arrest and execution of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, and the assault and seizure of the Sikh centre of Anandpur during the tenure of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. The greatest periods of open conflict between Sikhs and the state occurred after the death of Aurangzeb, including a period of widespread revolt under a follower of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur, in the second decade of the eighteenth century and just after the death of the Guru, and two particularly deadly periods of persecution in following decades.[1] Sikh relations with Mughal authority had not however always been so fraught. Under Akbar's long rule, from 1556 to 1605, the Sikh community had flourished under the third, fourth, and fifth Gurus, growing into a sizable and prominent community in Punjab centred from the time of the fourth Guru at Ramdaspur, the modern city of Amritsar. It was with the ascension of the emperor Jahangir to the throne in 1605 (which he occupied until 1627) that Sikh relations with the state took an agonistic turn, culminating in the execution of the fifth Guru.[2] The long reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) corresponds, in Sikh communitarian terms, with the period of Guruship of the four final Gurus: Har Rai (1630-61, Guru 1644–1661); Hari Krishan (1656-64, Guru 1661–1664); Guru Tegh Bahadur: (1621-75, Guru 1664–1675; and Gobind Singh (1666-1708, Guru 1675–1708). It thus had a formative influence on the later development of the tradition under the Gurus, particularly during the period of increased martiality that was inaugurated with the period of the sixth Guru from 1606 to 1644 but which reflected a far broader militarisation of rural society in early modern northern India and also drew on complex antecedents.[3]

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[1] These are popularly known in Sikh circles as the *choṭā ghallūghārā*, or small massacre, when Sikhs were targeted in response to the killing of a Hindu government official by Sikh militia in 1746, and the *vaḍḍā ghallūghārā* or large slaughter of 1762, when Sikhs were killed in large numbers by the forces of Ahmad Shah, founder of the Durrani dynasty.

[2] On the representation of that execution, see Louis E. Fenech, "Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, 1 (2001), pp. 20–31 and Louis Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the "Game of Love"* (New York, 2000).

[3] Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799* (New York, 2011); Hardip Singh Syan, *Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century: Religious Violence in Mughal and Early Modern India* (London, 2013).

It is easy to view the Sikh relationship with the Mughal state in isolation, or as uniquely important in the shaping of the tradition. Given the politics of the present, it is also easy to see religious difference as operating as a central feature of this relationship. As has been pointed out, there is no doubt that the Mughal context — and particularly the reign of Aurangzeb — played a formative role in shaping Sikh tradition during the formative period of the ten Gurus. A broader view, however, helps to make more legible the contours of this relationship, and the larger forces that shaped it. For instance, the execution of the ninth Guru under Aurangzeb, as well that of the earlier execution of the fifth Guru, Arjan at the opening of the reign of the emperor Jahangir, generally follow a Mughal model for "dealing with Shi'i-style messianic and millenarian groups" that Samira Shaikh describes in her contribution to this volume.[4] This is not to justify such actions but to note that they reflected a broader pattern that did not apply only to non-Muslims.[5] Further, one of the causes for Arjan's demise was his support for Jahangir's rival, his own son Khusrau, who rebelled against Jahangir in 1606.[6] Khusrau's pursuit of support by Guru Arjan too was part again of a larger process by which Mughal princes, as Munis Faruqui notes, "approached each and every group, regardless of religion, as potentially useful in their alliance building efforts" as they sought the social and political resources to make a bid for the throne.[7] Faruqui argues that the diverse networks that fought for a given prince were generally not punished for their support of a non-winning side, but we can see from the example of Guru Arjan that this was not always the case.[8] One can surmise that Jahangir's wrath stemmed not only from the Guru's support for his rebellious son Khusrau, but perhaps also from the Guru's prior purportedly strong relationship with the emperor Akbar, with whom the Prince Salim had developed an adversarial relationship, in the final years of Akbar's reign, as the emperor favoured Khusrau over him.[9] It is also in keeping with imperial accounts of Khusrau's rebellion, which laid blame for it on Khusrau's associates, rather than the Prince himself, and the brutality of Jahangir's treatment of Khusrau himself; indeed, Jahangir punished all of Lahore for "complicity" in Khusrau's rebellion.[10] Following this pattern, the seventh Guru, Har Rai, was in communication with Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb's rival for the throne, although he is also represented as distancing himself from him.[11] What all of this tells us is that what might be perceived as a singular enmity based in religious difference often was embedded in complex

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[4] For discussion of the portrayal of Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution in the text by Kuir Singh discussed here, see: Anne Murphy, "The *gurbilās* literature and the idea of 'religion'" in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, (ed.) Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (New York and New Delhi, 2012), pp. 93–115.

[5] For further discussion of the significance of these millenarian parallels, see: Anne Murphy, "A Millennial Sovereignty? Recent Works on Sikh Martial and Political Cultures in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", *History of Religions*, 55, 1 (August 2015), pp. 89–104. The essay addresses the works of Purnima Dhavan, Louis Fenech, Robin Rinehart, and Hardip Singh Syan, which are discussed in abbreviated form here.

[6] The Guru was also criticised for bringing large numbers of Hindus and Muslims into his community; J. S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (eds) *Sikh History from Persian Sources* (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 56–58.

[7] Munis D. Faruqui *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504-1719* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 9.

[8] *Ibid.,* p. 12, 254 ff.

[9] There is a strong tradition of support by Akbar for the Sikh Gurus, but most are unattested in the imperial records. A meeting between Akbar and Guru Arjan is described in the *Akbarnāma* (1598): Grewal and Habib, (eds.) *Sikh History* p. 55. On unattested support, see Anne Murphy *The Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (New York, 2012), p. 162. On the degradation of the relationship between Akbar and Salim, the future Jahangir, see Faruqui *Princes of the Mughal Empire,* pp. 30 ff.

[10] Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire,* pp. 188, 197, on "complicity" and Jahangir's punishment, see p. 204, 226 ff..

[11] Grewal and Habib, (eds.) *Sikh History,* p. 94.

practices of alliance-making and negotiation, specific struggles for power, and broader historical developments that bear significantly upon it. Consideration of this can enhance our understanding of the Mughal state and emperor, as well as the historical development of the Sikh tradition in relation to them.

It is not surprising, then, that portrayals of the emperor Aurangzeb and the Mughal state more broadly in eighteenth century Sikh sources are complex. This is particularly visible in the Persian *Zafarnāmah,* recently explored in depth in a monograph by Louis Fenech.[12] The *Zafarnāmah* was said to have been written by Guru Gobind Singh to censure the emperor after the betrayal of the Guru at the siege of Anandpur in 1704–5: the Guru and his forces had been guaranteed safe passage from his centre at Anandpur, which had been laid siege by Mughal and *Pahāṛi* (Punjabi hill) forces that in preceding years had engaged in a series of both alliances and conflicts with the Guru. The Guru and his forces were attacked as they left in retreat, and later faced both forces in battle, with devastating consequences. The *Zafarnāmah* was modelled on the *Shāhnāmah*, in what Fenech calls a delicate balance between "emulation" and defiance; it also by title references a fifteenth century biography of Timur by Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī, laying claim through both references to ideals of kingship and sovereignty that the Guru invokes in his censure of the emperor's actions.[13] Fenech sees the *Zafarnāmah* as resisting Mughal sovereignty, "underscoring the equality and the sovereignty of the Guru and his Sikhs both rhetorically and aesthetically, both directly and indirectly",[14] and acting as "the poetic shape of the Tenth Sikh Guru's sovereignty and by extension that of Sikh sovereignty".[15] As I have noted elsewhere, the exact contours of what "sovereignty" might mean in this context require critical examination: is the Guru's sovereignty the same as "Sikh sovereignty?" and what did it mean in political terms, in relation to the Mughal state and local powers?[16] As we learn from Busch's article in this issue, *mansabdārī* was indeed a complex affair, and regional rulers both rejected and accepted its requirements — and its privileges — at different times. It is not clear that *mansabdari* was on offer for the tenth Guru, as Fenech contends and Hardip Singh Syan questions in recent work, and the integration of religious and political discursive registers that is visible in the *Zafarnāmah* is a broader feature of the period, as much present within the Mughal political imagination as it was of Sufi and other religious communities.[17]

Further to the point, texts of the period were not univocal on this theme. The earlier *Bachittar Naṯak*, or 'Wondrous Play', also attributed to Guru Gobind Singh in the late seventeenth

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[12] Louis E. Fenech, *The Sikh Zafar-nāmah of Guru Gobind Singh: A Discursive Blade in the Heart of the Mughal Empire* (New York, 2013).
[13] *Ibid*., p. 8; this biography of Timur is mentioned by Fenech (p. 43) but not explored. Thank you to one anonymous reviewer for emphasising this connection.
[14] For quote, see *Ibid*., *Zafarnamah, 105;* on the broader Islamicate world, see p. 96.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 97.
[16] Murphy, "A Millennial Sovereignty?"
[17] Fenech, *Zafar-nāmah* 83–84; Syan *Sikh Militancy* 217 ff. On the mobilisation of Mughal vocabulatires of power in the Sikh context, see Louis Fenech, *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus: The Court of God in the World of Men* (New Delhi, 2008). On parallel instances of political/religious integration, see Nile Green, *Indian Sufism since the Seventeenth Century: Saints, Books and Empires in the Muslim Deccan* (London, 2006); James Hastings, "Poets, Saints and Warriors: The Dadu Panth, Religious Change, and Identity Formation in Jaipur State circa 1562–1860 ce" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2002); A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam, South Asia Across the Disciplines* (New York, 2012); William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge, 2006).

century, and like the *Zafarnāmah* integrated into the text associated with the tenth Guru, the Dasam Granth, states that *"ba ̄be ke ba ̄bara ke dou ̄/ a ̄pa kare paramesvara sou ̄| d ̄ına sa ̄ha ina ko pahica ̄no / dun ̄ıpati una kau anumano"* || "The successors of Baba [Nanak] and Babur were both created by God; recognise him as the sovereign of religion (*d ̄ına sa ̄ha*) and him as the lord of the earth".[18] Here we see clear recognition of a difference between the two realms of "sovereignty" of "those of the Guru" and the descendants of Babur. Indeed, the *Zafarnāmah* itself expresses complex relationships with Mughal power. Hardip Singh Syan's recent reading of the text highlights its criticism of imperial power alongside a sense of negotiation: "Sikh-Mughal relations were not irreconcilable; there was always the possibility the Khalsa would accept Mughal service or create pragmatic political alliances with other groups", reflecting a complex array of relationships, alliances and conflicts.[19] We thus see diverse accounts of the relationship of Mughal forms of power, and Aurangzeb in particular, with the Sikh community in the eighteenth century, both within texts of the period and in recent scholarly accounts of it.

Much as Rajasthani historical literature has been treated, as Cynthia Talbot points out in her essay, Sikh-oriented[20] Punjabi Braj historiographical works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have overwhelmingly been utilised in the scholarly literature in so far as they adhere to a reading generated by a logic outside of the texts themselves: as corroboration, in partial and isolated terms, of historical events and religious developments.[21] What would happen if we were to read such sources as literary works outside of the quest for corroboration, with a broader view of both the texts themselves and the worlds they reflect?[22] Doing so enables us to see more of the complexity of the historical relationship of the Guru and the Sikh community with the Mughal state, as well as a greater sense of the ideologies and lived realities of the social and religious imaginaries at work in the Punjab in the eighteenth century. Such an approach provides a valuable, if at times indirect, perspective on the Mughal polity and the emperor Aurangzeb in this period. It reveals that local political struggles (both among groups, and within the Sikh community) should not be reduced to a conflict with the Mughal state, and that our understanding of both Aurangzeb and Mughal power might benefit from being viewed through the lens of these more localised sites of struggle, particularly as Mughal administrative and military frameworks began to weaken by the end of the seventeenth century. As will be discussed below, a transformation occurs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that shapes this process: the consolidation of a caste-inflected and simultaneously inclusive and exclusive religious and cultural identity that we might now view as 'Hinduising', or productive of a 'Hindu' identity — inclusive in its attempts to articulate forms of authority that would apply

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[18] Bachittar *Na ̄tak*, Ch. 13, stanza 9. Fenech argues that the text contains "the Guru's recognition by the state" as well as a "recognition of Timurid sovereignty" (Fenech, *Zafarnamah,* p. 100).
[19] Syan, *Sikh Militancy*, p. 250. See also Dhavan, *When Sparrows*.
[20] That is, which define aspects of Sikh communitarian formation and/or the ideas, history and practices of the community.
[21] I too have at times read such texts in such terms; they are of course useful sources in this regard. This essay however attempts to reach beyond this kind of reading. For a comprehensive reading of the text in question here, see the emerging doctoral work of Julie Vig, "Locating *gurbila ̄s* in the world of Braj literature: political, religious and literary encounters in eighteenth and early nineteenth century North India". For Talbot's parallel observations about Rajasthani historical literature, see her article in this special issue.
[22] Julie Vig's forthcoming doctoral work will embrace a broad reading of the text examined here, and others like it, that I cannot accomplish here.

broadly, and exclusive in its imposition of caste and other regulatory devices that would define membership along hierarchical lines — reflecting a competitive environment characterised by the articulation of a range of religious identities in the period, only some of which were integrated into this newly emergent communitarian vision. Here I show some of the resonances of and responses to this broader process in the Punjabi and Sikh context, where caste (and its rejection or acceptance) is represented as a central location for the articulation of political and religious self-formation as Sikh, contextualising the Sikh relationship with Aurangzeb and the Mughal state and rejecting a view of this relationship in isolation. To discern such a vantage requires a relatively broad view of the text in question, to allow it to speak beyond corroboration and the stories that are conventionally sought within it.

The Text

The type of literature examined here is the *gurbilā̃s:* literally, the 'sport' or 'play' of the Guru, but with strong affinities in this period between the idea of '*tarīkh*' or history and '*bilāsa*' or '*lilā"*. This historiographical form emerged in the late seventeenth century and grew into a substantial genre in the eighteenth century, reflecting the development of a broader historical consciousness within the Sikh community.[23] It is written in Braj in the Gurmukhi script, with limited Punjabi linguistic features, discussion of which I defer for separate exploration.[24] The specific text under examination here is Kuir Singh's *Gurbilās Patshāhi Das*. Its dating is subject to debate. While a date of 1751 is mentioned in the text itself, there are metrical problems with the relevant line that lead to doubts about its authenticity.[25] Surjit Hans argues for a late eighteenth or early nineteenth century date for the text, drawing in part on what he believes is Kuir Singh's awareness of the British presence in the country, while Madanjit Kaur argues convincingly for taking the text as the product of the mid-eighteenth century.[26] We settle here for the estimate of mid to late eighteenth century.[27] The genre begins with writings attributed to the tenth and final living Guru of the normative Sikh tradition, particularly his *Bachittar Nāṭak,* mentioned above, which is a central part of the Dasam Granth, a larger compilation of texts associated with and probably only partially composed by the tenth Guru.[28]

Texts in the genre are strongly intertextually related, frequently referring to each other; for example, Sukha Singh's contemporary text is very similar, reflecting direct borrowing of one

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[23] Murphy, *Materiality of the Past*.

[24] Anne Murphy, "Punjabi in the (late) vernacular millennium", paper delivered at the 12th International Conference on Early Modern Literatures of North India (ICEMLNI) at the Universite´ de Lausanne, Switzerland, 15-19 July 2015. Forthcoming in conference volume.

[25] Kuir Singh, *Gurbilā̃s Patshā̃hi Das*, (ed.) Shamsher Singh Alok, introduction by Fauja Singh (Patiala, Punjab, 1999), p. 277. I rely here on this published version.

[26] Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* (Jalandhar, 1988), pp. 266, 269); see Kuir Singh, p. 259. Madanjit Kaur, "Koer Singh's Gurbilas Patshahi 10: An Eighteenth Century Sikh Literature." <http://sikhinstitute.org/recent_res/ch13.html> Accessed June 13, 2010.

[27] See Dhavan, *When Sparrows* p. 153 Footnote 15, and 5, Footnote 6.

[28] On the genre and the major texts associated with it, see Murphy, *Materiality of the Past,* Chapter 3; Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition,* pp. 123ff; W. H. McLeod, "The Hagiography of the Sikhs", in *According to Tradition: Hagiographical Writing in India*, (eds.) Winand M. Callewaert and Rupert Snell (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 33ff.; *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, (ed.) W. H. McLeod (Chicago, 1984), pp. 11ff., and McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?,* p. 51. For discussion of the term "*bilā̃sa,"* see Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past". For an overview of the Dasam Granth, see Robin Rinehart, *Debating the Dasam Granth* (New York, 2011).

from the other.[29] As I've argued elsewhere, the concern of texts in the *gurbilās* genre, in general, is the discursive formation of the Sikh community in relation to the memory of the Guru; I most fully explored this through an overall account of the structure and narrative emplotment of the work *Gur Sobhā* or "Light of the Guru", written at the end of Guru Gobind Singh's life and completed in approximately 1708.[30] In general, a central concern of all *gurbilās* texts is the narration of the lives of the Gurus and the articulation of connections between the Guru and the members of the evolving *panth*. In this way, the narration of the past of the Guru constitutes the means for the formation of the Sikh community.[31]

The texts in this genre stand at a crossroads of many kinds, reflecting the transition from the period of living Guruship in the beginning of the eighteenth century to the post-living- Guru period, as well as the political instability in Punjab as the political landscape across the subcontinent began to transform. Kuir Singh's *Gurbilās Patshāhi Das* is therefore reflective of these later developments in the eighteenth century, as it portrays earlier events. Such texts were fundamentally shaped by the redefinition of sovereign relations within a late and then effectively post-Mughal Punjab. By the end of the eighteenth century, the political landscape across the subcontinent was transformed into a range of post-Mughal polities (many of which still paid at least nominal allegiance to the Mughal state) and the eventual establishment of a centralised imperial state in Punjab under a Sikh ruler (knitted together out of pre-existing smaller independent chiefly entities), and other smaller principalities. Conflicts in the period reflect the growing stature of Sikh leaders and community formations in an unstable political field. We can thus read such texts in relation to how they express a specifically Sikh historiographical project, with varying valences to this in different texts that themselves are shaped by the dynamic changes that characterised the eighteenth century in the Punjab.[32] As I will argue here, we must also understand how such texts express broader social transformations across a wider region in this period.

Early examples of the genre, such as *Gur Sobhā,* express a sense of sovereignty in the Guru's centre of Anandpur; this is not however made equivalent to the Sikh community as a whole.[33] As Dhavan has noted, Sainiapati's vision is broad, where "the Khalsa's corporate authority represents a hope for a unified *paṅth*".[34] This is not surprising, given that at that point in the early eighteenth century the Sikh community was transitioning from the period of living Guruship to

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[29] See introduction to Kuir Singh, *Gurbilās,* ix and Gurtej Singh, "Cosmpromising the Khalsa Tradition: Koer Singh's *gurbilās"* in *The Khalsa: Sikh and Non-Sikh Perspectives*, (ed.) J. S. Grewal, pp. 47-58 (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 48–49. Quotations from other works are given throughout Kuir Singh's work. On the parallels between Kuir Singh and Sukha Singh, see Dhavan, *When Sparrows* Chapter 7 and Hans *Reconstruction* pp. 250-253.

[30] On the dating of *Gur Sobhā*, see Dhavan *When Sparrows*, p. 182 fn. 5 and 6; G. S. Mann suggests 1701 for the initiation of the text ("Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times," *Journal of Punjab Studies* 15, 1–2 (2008), pp. 229–284; see p. 252). On the text in general, see Hans, *Reconstruction* pp. 245ff. and J. S. Grewal, "Praising the Khalsa: Sainapat's Gursobha", in *The Khalsa: Sikh and non-Sikh Perspectives*, pp. 35–45, (ed.) J. S. Grewal (New Delhi, 2004). For my argument on the text along these lines, see: Anne Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past", *History and Theory.* 46, 2 (October 2007), pp. 345–365. See further discussion of this work below.

[31] Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past" and *Materiality of the Past,* Chapter 3.

[32] See also Purnima Dhavan, "Reading the Texture of History and Memory in Early-Nineteenth-Century Punjab", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 29, 3 (2009), pp. 515–527.

[33] Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past" and *Materiality of the Past,* Chapter 3.

[34] Dhavan, *When Sparrows,* p. 44.

the articulation of ultimate authority within the sacred canon (the Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib) and the community; these represent the paired principles of *graṅth* (text) and *paṅth* (community) articulated by the tenth and final human embodied Guru.[35] Although Anandpur is clearly defined as the seat of the Guru — which Dhavan has noted that Sainapati sees as a "a powerful symbol for a new Khalsa society" over which one can argue that sovereign claims are articulated — it is the sovereignty of the Guru in non- statist and broad terms that is emphasized: the sovereignty of the Guru over the community, with portrayal of some of the contestation that accompanied that definition of community (see further discussion of this point below).[36] This kind of non-statist holistic vision of the community prevails in later texts as well, such as in Kuir Singh's, but is also accompanied by more state-oriented articulations of power: the Guru is explicitly called upon to counter repressive state power, and the Guru is meant to "destroy the Mlechas" or foreigners.[37] A vilification of the foreigners or 'Turks' is however directly related to state power and its 'religious' meanings are ambiguous, as I have argued elsewhere.[38] Such a distinction has been observed in other texts that articulate the distinction between *mleccha* or 'barbarian' and that which is not; in times of greater peace, accommodation and appreciation are expressed, while at other times difference is emphasized.[39] The key issue is one of state power, and the relationship of the Sikhs and the Guru with it.[40] This is where the figure of Aurangzeb emerges, although not in isolation.

Kuir Singh's *Gurbilās Patshāhi Das* is broadly similar in organisation to *Gur Sobhā* but features a more complex literary sensibility and language, Vaishnava and more general mythological references, and a clearer political ethos appropriate to its later time of composition, as political sovereignty in relation to the Mughal state and other smaller Hindu kings from the Punjab Hills was being won with greater and greater confidence and stability among Sikh chiefs and other

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[35] For discussion of the authority invested in *granth* and *panth*, see Harjot Oberoi, "From Punjab to 'Khalistan': Territoriality and Metacommentary," *Pacific Affairs* 60:1 (1987), pp. 26–41, 33ff.

[36] For Dhavan quote, see *When Sparrows* 44. For discussion of Anandpur and the non-statist sovereignty of the Guru, see Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past" and *The Materiality of the Past*, Chapter 3.

[37] See Kuir Singh, *Gurbilās Patsha ̄hi Das*, pp. 12 and 50, and elsewhere.

[38] Murphy, "*Gurbilās* literature".

[39] See, for instance, Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37:4 (1995), pp. 692–722. Indeed, distinctions between Muslim and non-Muslim shift in the text overall (Murphy "*Gurbilās* literature"). Surjit Hans — who provides an account that has provided the premier scholarly reference on the *gurbilās* literature for some time — positions the Kuir Singh text as relatively late, as has been noted, and one reason for this is the "conciliatory tone" of the author towards Muslims. For Hans, this likely reveals "a strong imprint of Sikh rule under Ranjit Singh for whom it was absolutely necessary to hold the three communities in some kind of balance" (Hans, *Reconstruction*, p. 269). Gurtej Singh describes this text as exhibiting "a deep hatred of Muslims" (Gurtej Singh, "Compromising the Khalsa Traditon", p. 49) but Hans senses a conciliatory approach because "an impression is given that the term covered the tyrannical rulers only" (Hans, *Reconstruction,* p. 269). In stark contrast, Gurtej Singh notes that "the key to the author's character, and consequently to that of his work, lies in his intense hatred of Muslims. Hopes of prayers for their ruination are the most numerous to come across", although, as he also avers, this is certainly directly related to political domination by Muslims (Gurtej Singh, "Compromising", p. 52). Louis Fenech concurs, reading Kuir Singh's text as "perhaps the most vitriolic early nineteenth century text in regard to Muslims" (*Zafar-na ̄mah,* p. 107).

[40] In previous work, I highlighted how state power is differentiated from Islam in this text, and how a sense of both identity and difference is found within the articulation of the spiritual/mystical aspect of the Sikh *pan ̈th* in relation to that of Islam, through a comparison of practices, determination of difference, and a resolution through equivalency (Murphy, "*Gurbilās* literature").

successor forces, culminating in the establishment of the kingdom of Lahore under Maharaja Ranjit Singh at the close of the eighteenth century.[41] This development reflects the ascendancy of successors to Mughal authority, including Sikh chiefs, within a complex and changing political field (and this is an important point to which we will return) as the eighteenth century progressed. Kuir Singh's text, overall, glorifies the activities of the tenth Guru (even when tragedy is portrayed), with a focus on conflicts with neighbouring polities and the Mughal state; in this way it bears strong similarities with the accounts that Allison Busch describes in her paper in this issue, where regional leaders are emphasized and as in the example Cynthia Talbot's essay highlights, its concerns are mostly with glorifying the protagonists. Power struggles between kings and the Guru, and with Mughal forces, are a central concern — though not an exclusive one — and are often framed as secondary to concerns that are more local and immediate.

The place of state power

What then does Kuir Singh's text tell us about the imagination of the Sikhs in relation to state power and the figure of the emperor? As has been noted, contestation with state powers is a key theme, through portrayal of clashes that occurred between Sikh forces and local regional powers (primarily, the *rājā*s of the Punjab hills). Yet, it would be a mistake to see this as the sole issue addressed within the text, or to read such conflicts *only* in relation to state formation. As I've suggested, part of the reason that the text has been read in this way results from "corroboration effect" — the ways in which Kuir Singh's text has been read to address historical concerns and corroborate events that come to the fore in later Sikh historiography. General understanding of the content of Kuir Singh's text has thus been profoundly shaped by interest in the articulation of Sikh political power in the eighteenth century.[42] There are other possible readings, however, that reflect the interests of the text more broadly.

Consider, for instance, the chapter names designated by the editor of the published version upon which this article is based, Shamsher Singh "Ashok".[43] These are not chapter names as given within the text itself (which is why they are more clearly in Punjabi, not in the Braj that characterises the text itself):

(1) *Muḍḍhlī Kathā* (page 1 in the published edition)

[41] On Vaishnava elements, see Julie Vig "The Use of Brajbhasha and Vaishnava Vignettes in Kuir Singh's Gurbilās: Power and Authority" currently unpublished paper presented at the 45th Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, 2016.

[42] There is a large literature on the ways in which recent Sikh political discourse has been framed in relation to representations of the past, see Murphy, "History in the Sikh Past" for references.

[43] Ashok was an important figure within the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee or SGPC, the managing body for Gurdwaras in Punjab since 1925 and then later both Punjab and Haryana after 1966, until the recent formation of the Haryana Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Ashok was responsible for the production of a remarkable range of textual work on core Sikh texts; many of the manuscripts with which he did some of his most important work were lost during the 1984 Indian army attack upon the Darbar Sahib/Golden Temple and the destruction of the Sikh Reference Library there.

(2) *Rājā Mān Siṅgh te Auraṅgzeb* (10)
(3) *Kāshī toṅ Ajuddhiā* (22)
(4) *Vidiā Prāptī ate Kashmīrī Paṇḍit* (31)
(5) *Rāj Sāj* (48)
(6) *Bhaṅgāṇī dā Yuddh* (63)
(7) *Ānaṅdpur dī Ābādī: Rājā Bhīm Chaṅd dī Khimā-Prārthanā* (81)
(8) *Devī dā Pragaṭ Hoṇā* (91)
(9) *Khālsā Paṅth dī Racnā* (108)
(10) *Siṅgh Saṅgatāṅ nūṅ Saddā ate Pahāṛī Rājiāṅ dī Bemukhtā* (121)
(11) *Pahāṛiāṅ dā Mast Hāthī ute Lohgaṛh dā Jaṅg* (141)
(12) *Husainī Badh* (151)
(13) *Shāhzādā Muajjam dī Āmad* (155)
(14) *Shāhī Faujāṅ dī Chaṛhāı te Jaṅg* (159)
(15) *Paṅdarhvāṅ Adhiaī* (166)
(16) *Zafarnāme dā Prasaṅg* (173)
(17) *Bhāī Dayā Siṅgh jī Auraṅgzeb Pās Zafarnāmā lai ke gae* (202)
(18) *Talwaṅdī Sābo, Damdamā Sāhib* (210)
(19) *Shāhzādā Tārā Āazam Māriā* (226)
(20) *Dill īon ˙Abcal Nagar, Naṅdeṛ* (233)
(21) *Aṅtim Samācār* (256)

Whereas some chapter headings listed are simple and explanatory, such as the first chapter with the "main or primary story" and the fifteenth chapter, entitled just that, most provide topics for the chapters. Conflict with the state and local forces and political matters are prominent in the list, from the early sections where the ninth Guru's tenure is discussed and his death at Mughal hands is described (Chapter 4), to later descriptions of the political conflicts of the Guru with surrounding Paha ̄r. ̄ı chiefs (e.g. Chapter 6), and to the sending of the *Zafarna ̄mah* after the loss of Anandpur (Chapter 16); also central are aspects of Sikh community formation such as the formation of the Khalsa in (Chapter 9) and a controversial accompaniment to that creation, the worship of the goddess (Chapter 8).

Even within this table of contents we see that political articulation is only *one* aspect of the description of the community around the Guru. Overall however the chapter titles constitute just the kind of selective reading of the text that has constituted the norm to date: to corroborate events driven by an external narrative. There is much more to be found. I'll give one example: in Chapter 16, the focus according to the editor is on the context or perhaps just the "story" of the *Zafarna ̄mah*, its *prasan ̇g*. The content of the *Zafarna ̄mah* is indeed briefly described on p. 199, where Aurangzeb's treachery is described; this betrayal is also discussed earlier: "*ya ̄praka ̄r gura so chal k ̄ına ̄*" "In this way [he] tricked the Guru".[44] Yet, it is a relatively minor event in the chapter, and is accompanied by other recurrent themes that demand our attention. For instance, in this chapter we find an extensive description of the battle of Chamkaur, the battle with Mughal forces that took place after the Guru and his forces abandoned Anandpur. This is relevant to the *Zafarna ̄mah* of course, as it is described within it, but it is treated on its own terms. In addition, we see interactions between the Guru and disciples, reflecting a major

[44] Kuir, Singh *Gurbilās* p. 177.

preoccupation of texts of the period: the definition of the shape of the community around the Guru. Thus we see description of Bhai Pheru and the founding of a *langar* or community kitchen through him (framed in relation to the spread of the Guru's influence in the area).[45] Interestingly, we also see several interactions between the Guru and the Guru's Singhs with women (who are not portrayed as part of their group). We also see in this chapter a theme that I will argue *is* a major recurrent theme of the text throughout: the social composition of the Guru's community. Thus the caste composition of the group of Singhs at Chamkaur is described in detail, mirroring a major concern of the text throughout: the internal construction of the Guru's community out of a range of caste communities.[46] We will return to this important point below.

When we see the political in Kuir Singh's text, we see the portrayal of multi-valent political and religious relationships with those outside the community, complicating a simple sense of opposition between the Gurus and Sikhs with Mughal state power. If we couple this characterisation with the shared moral universe that is established between the Mughal state (and Aurangzeb) and the Sikhs through the *Zafarnāmah* and other texts of the period, complexity is heightened. Fenech notes, for instance, that a commonality is found between the *Zafarnāmah* and the *Akāl Ustati,* in both texts' depiction of "the one god of the Muslims as also the god of Hindus and Sikhs and so on, thus striking an inclusive and pluralistic tone".[47] This aligns with findings within Kuir Singh, that a religious equivalence is established between the Sikh path and that of Islam, even when conflict is portrayed between state power and the Sikhs, such as was manifest in the execution of the Ninth Guru.[48] It is difficult to avoid viewing the Sikh position as articulated in the *Zafarnāmah* — and its mirroring in Kuir Singh's text — as an argument for commonality and accommodation.[49] Such space for negotiation was one that Munis Faruqui has noted was lacking in other locations, where "cultural and racial prejudices significantly impeded a rapprochement with individuals who were never fully assimilated to Indo-Persian culture".[50]The adoption of Indo-Persianate cultural vocabularies of power, and the entreaty for justice within an idiom that was fundamentally meant to speak to an Indo-Persianate world, is difficult to see in another way.[51] The *Zafarnāmah* thus articulates a complex set of relationships among the Guru and the Sikhs, the Mughals and *Pahāṛī* Rajas.[52] This is where its relationship with Kuir Singh's text becomes clearer, where we see the Sikhs articulating a set of political and social claims within a complex larger field. Thus I would agree with Syan's assessment that "Guru Gobind Singh's frustration with Aurangzeb should not be seen in a narrow communal sense, but rather as a more endemic problem of communication and imperial assimilation in Aurangzeb's reign".[53]

The complexity and local nature of the political field is most visible in the positioning of the *Pahāṛī* Rajas in relation to Aurangzeb. Fenech has argued that the *Bacchitar Nāṭak* and other

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[45] *Ibid*., p. 175.
[46] *Ibid.,* p. 177.
[47] Fenech, *Zafar-nāmah*, p. 21.
[48] Murphy, "*Gurbilās* literature".
[49] Kuir Singh, *Gurbilās*, pp. 199-201.
[50] Munis Faruqui, "Awrangzīb" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp. 64-76, see p. 66; see Kuir Singh *Gurbilās*, pp. 199-201.
[51] cf. Fenech, *Zafar-nāmah*, pp. 94-95.
[52] *Ibid.,* pp. 40-41; Rinehart *Debating*.
[53] Syan, *Sikh Militancy* p. 229.

texts of the late seventeenth century establish a relationship between the Guru and these polities through the utilisation of puranic imagery and the narration of a shared lineage, "part of a cultural program to at least partially connect the *darbār* at Anandpur to the Mughal- Rajput courtly elite circles in its vicinity, thus marking the transregional, cosmopolitan, and even classical nature of the Guru's court".[54] This is indicative of the broader assertion by Purnima Dhavan that all Punjabis, regardless of religious background, shared origin stories, and mimics the utilisation of Indo-Persianate representations of power that infused Sikh cultural production in the period: both represent the formation of common representations and discursive forms.[55] Yet, while commonalities with the hill states were thus established in the cultural production of the period, through shared genealogies and mythological topoi, the kings of the hill states are portrayed very much as political 'others' in Kuir Singh's text, and the treachery of the Rajas is emphasized overall, over that of Aurangzeb. Thus in this same chapter of Kuir Singh, the intervention of Mughal forces in the siege of Anandpur is blamed on the defiance of the Hill Rajas, and the machinations of the Rajas is given far greater description in this section.[56] This is historically attested to in other documents of the period. Battles are the focus, indeed, of the *Bachittar Nāṭak* account, which describes the complex local alliances and betrayals that animated conflicts early in the Guru's career (particularly in Chapter 9, for example, which describes the battle of Nadaun). This follows a description of the profound glory of God (described as *kal*) who encompasses all creation and precedes it, a genealogy of the Sodhis and Bedis, and a description of mythic battles.[57] Sainapati's description is parallel, and encompasses the later period addressed by Kuir Singh (which the *Bachittar Nāṭak* does not); it too emphasizes a complex array of alliances and the role of the Rajas as both allies and enemies. The complex political field at work was thus fully present in general terms within Sikh representations of the late eighteenth century, demonstrating awareness of the very *local* nature of the conflict and the multiple players on the political horizon, without a one-dimensional demonisation of Mughal power. In short, as Dhavan notes, "the narrow conceptualization of a binary Sikh-Mughal political rivalry or religious war that has dominated the historical analysis of this period overlooks the complex ways in which Khalsa Sikhs interacted with the changing Mughal and Afghan administrators in Panjab".[58] "This period", she argues, was instead "marked by a complex web of alliances between various regional powers as each group attempted to buttress its own position".[59]

Perhaps more importantly, as has been mentioned already, Kuir Singh's text is shaped in relation to an *internal* project: the shaping of an inclusive *Sikh* community. Indeed, this concern seems to outweigh external political interests (and note that it, too, is a form of the political). The conflict

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[54] Fenech, *Zafar-nāmah,* p. 5.
[55] Dhavan, *When Sparrows,* p. 134; Fenech *Darbar of the Sikh Gurus.* It is striking, however, that in his later work Fenech sees the shared vocabulary between the *Pahāṛī* royal cultures and the Sikh darbār as articulating sameness, but argues that distance and rejection characterises a parallel mimicry of the Persianate cultural model. This distinction invites further consideration.
[56] Kuir Singh, *Gurbilās*, pp. 123 ff, Syan notes that ultimate responsibility is seen to rest with Aurangzeb (*Sikh Militancy,* pp. 218-219) but while that is the case, the text gives far greater attention to the portrayal of the Rajas' treachery.
[57] Chapter 5 of the *Bachittar Nāṭak* opens with a description of chaos as the mixing of castes and their duties (verse 2).
[58] Dhavan, *When Sparrows* pp. 76-77.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

with the kings of the *Pahāṛī* region is in fact primarily portrayed in connection with their refusal to undertake Khalsa initiation, not as an issue of political sovereignty or control.[60] The two are intertwined, but so too are other concerns. We see that the kings do not want to accept initiation into the Khalsa because of caste concerns, as is clear in this long exchange between the Guru and the Rajput princes:

taba sabha ko iha bhāṅti ucāro | "tuma khālasa kī rahata sudhāro

Then [the Guru] spoke thus to all [the Rajas]: "Come and adopt the Rahit [behavioural injunctions/code] of the Khalsa"

....

Khaṅḍe jī kī sarnī āvo | yamanī sabhā su māra gavāvo

Come and take refuge in the sword [that is, take initiation of the sword]; We will completely destroy the society of the Yavanas

mai tuma ko ika thāna vicārā | mati tuma deo ulhāmā bhārā

I think of you as one, give me your thoughts, full of complaint.

tā kārana mai tujhai alāiā | tujha ko khālasa carnī lāia¯"[61]
For this reason, I say to you, you should adopt the Khalsa".

ihu suna kai rajpūtana jānī | "hama pāhula kī sūkha na sānī[62]
Hearing this the Rajputs thought: "We will not find happiness in the Pahul [initiation]"

giri raje hama ati abhimānī | kulā karama kima tajai jahānī

As the kings of the mountains, we are respected. How can we abandon our lineages and our karma?"

cār barana tuma ik jā kīne | aṁmrita nija upadesa su dīne[63]
[They answered,] "You have made the four Varnas into one, you give your teaching with the Amrit [to be consumed].

hamarī jāti adhik jaga māhī | kima hama cāra barana saṅg khāhī?

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[60] Gurtej Singh, "Compromising", p. 51.
[61] There are slight variances in spelling in Khalsa College Mss. 605, as compared with the published version referred to here. Differences with semantic impact are given here; in this line, the manuscript features *ca ī̄a ¯*instead of *la ī̄a ¯* (Khalsa College Mss. 605). Thank you to Julie Vig for sharing her analysis of the Khalsa College manuscript with me.
[62] *sūdha* instead of *sūkha,* Khalsa College Mss. 605
[63] *cīne* instead of *dīne,* Khalsa College Mss. 605.

Our Jati is great in the world, how can we eat with the four Varnas?

tumare jīvata paṅtha su jano | nāhata ciṛīana bāja pramāno

We know your living panth, but prove that the sparrows are hawks.

tumare paṅtha rāja kima dai hain ॑| ajāganaṅko māra so lai hain ॑

How will your panth rule? Only today you have killed the goats [at the ceremony to found the Khalsa].

....

nīc jāta kahi nīhala vāsī | hamaro rāja khoha jaga hāsī

With lower castes and the dwellers on the plains/lowlands, our rule will be destroyed and the world will laugh.

iha to bad̤a ascaraja bhī bātā | dua ॒dasa jāta sanāta kā nātā

This is a shocking matter, [such] alliances with the twelve castes".[64]

The relationship between the two parties worsens; it is *then*, within a few pages, that we see an appeal made by the kings to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to intervene.[65] In their argument for this intervention, the Rajas emphasize the power of the Guru at his centre in Anandpur, and the spread of his teachings. Importantly, they also stress the caste implications of his teachings: "*cāra barana ika barana prakārā | nāma khālsā paṅtha sudhāra* ". He has established the name of the Khalsa panth in order to make the four Varnas into one"![66] He is therefore, they assure the emperor, a real and imminent threat to social order, a threat that relates fundamentally to caste.[67] This is a recurrent theme: shortly earlier the caste dimensions of the *pan ̇th* are sketched out;[68] this is further described in the intervening pages, where the landscape of the community is sketched out in geographical terms.[69]

Sikh Communitarian articulation in a broader field

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[64] Kuir Singh, *Gurbila ॒s,* pp. 117-118.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 124.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 124, verse 34.
[67] *Ibid*., p. 124, verses 35-36.
[68] *Ibid.,* p. 115.
[69] *Ibid*., pp. 121 -124. Kuir Singh's description of the formation of the Khalsa describes the acceptance of the Khalsa by Brahmins, Khatris, Aroras, Labanas; the *saṅgat* comes from *caudisā* or the four directions (*Ibid*., pp. 155*;* 122, verse 13.). The Panj Piare at the founding of the Khalsa are described in Kuir Singh's text in a way that emphasizes their different caste backgrounds, as well as the broad range of their geographical origins from the four directions and the centre (which is, of course, the Punjab). G. S. Mann noted the caste representative nature of later representations of the Panch Piare at a conference at Coventry University in 1999; I am not aware of this argument in writing. See *Ibid*., p. 110.

We can see in a text like Kuir Singh's an important emergent definition of the Sikh community vis-a-vis equally emergent 'Hinduizing' forces at this time, when devotional communities were being redrawn around caste hierarchies in what Sumit Guha has described as, drawing on Susan Bayly's work and expanding it, a period of change in caste formulations and forms of power in the eighteenth century, when "corporate groups of heterogeneous origins were hammered into socio-political formations by the ferocious struggles of the age".[70] This makes good sense here, when we place Kuir Singh's text in conversation with other texts of the eighteenth century Punjabi Sikh context, which articulate diverse and sometimes conflicting caste visions. We thus do not see the same discussion of caste concerns at the centre of the Rajas' appeal for Mughal support in the build-up to the siege of Anandpur in the early eighteenth century account by Sainapati, *Gur Sobhā;* there, the threat is conceived in territorial terms.[71] At the same time, there are parallels, such as discussion of internal conflicts within the community of followers of the Gurus that hinge on acceptance of the practices associated with the Khalsa around the rejection of traditional caste-based practices. It is thus noted in Chapter 5 of Sainapati's text that "the Guru founded the Khalsa and let loose all prior entanglements *kīyo pragaṯa taba khālsā, cūkyo saraba jaṅjāla*".[72] Conflicts emerge as a result and are described in Chapter 6, where Khatris and Brahmins are identified as unwilling to abandon old practices.[73] In Chapter 7 of *Gur Sobhā* those who seek to maintain such caste and lineage practices appeal to the state for support against those who seek to dismantle them with the complaint that: "*inho rāha ika nāı calāī* They have begun a new road". The state intervenes on behalf of the Singhs at first and then against them, egged on by upper caste opponents of the new dispensation, such that "On one side the Khalsa, on the other side the world *eka ora bhayo khālsā, eka ora saṅsār*", (with the ruler being tricked by the other members of the community, against the Khalsa, reminiscent of the alliances that turn to conflicts with the *Pahāṛī* Rajas).[74] As Dhavan notes, "it is in Sainapati's *Gursobha* that the radical agenda of the early Khalsa is first articulated";[75] that agenda is most destabilising as it is articulated in relation to caste.

This is a theme that reverberates through the sources of this period. It must be noted that such a concern is not new in Sikh sources; caste awareness was a feature of Sikh discourse persistently, from the writings of the Gurus themselves to those of Bhai Gurdas and beyond.[76] It is its centrality and multi-vocality in the texts of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that is striking. It is visible in the *Bachittar Nāṭak,* attributed to the tenth Guru, where we see description of the merits of the rejection of adherence to caste.[77]

But the vision of that text, too, is complex, and as Dhavan notes its "narrative framework wavers between a rejection of older Brahmanical ideas of caste and divinity and portraying the Guru as

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[70] Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present* (Leiden, 2013), p. 17; see also p. 38.
[71] See Sainapati, *Srī Sobhā,* (ed.) Ganda Singh. (Patiala, 1988 [1967]), p. 109, (Ch. 9 stanza 10). and Kulwant Singh, trans., *Sri Gur Sobha, Sainapati.* (Chandigarh, 2014), pp. 148–151 (for Punjabi text and English translation of this stanza).
[72] Sainapati *Gur Sobhā,* Ch. 5 stanza 4, p. 78*;* Kulwant Singh *Gur Sobha,* pp. 58-59.
[73] Sainapati *Gur Sobhā,* Ch. 6, stanza 5-6, p. 88; Kulwant Singh *Gur Sobha,* pp. 92-93.
[74] Sainapati, *Gur Sobhā,* Ch. 7 stanza 30, p. 100; Kulwant Singh *Gur Sobha,* pp. 118-119.
[75] Dhavan, *When Sparrows,* p.42.
[76] Syan, *Sikh Militancy,* pp. 36-37.
[77] For example, see Bachittar *Nāṭak*, Ch 6, lines 20-21.

the epitome of a Kshatriya king in ways strikingly similar to Sanskrit texts".[78] As Hardip Syan argues in an important forthcoming essay, debates about Kshatriyahood in this context mirror those across India in this period, such as among the Marathas, and that they were a part of a deeper dialogue about the origins and development of the Khatri and Saraswat Brahmin castes in the Punjab country.[79] What we can see overall in texts of this period, therefore, is not a single stance, but instead a singular locus of *debate*, about caste. Texts of the period therefore can be distinguished in particular for their *differing* views of the roles of Brahmins, with some, such as those writing from within the Chibber Brahmin lineage, arguing for a privileged place for Brahmins within a Sikh *imaginaire* within (for example) the Rahit, or behavioural code associated with the formation of the Khalsa, which emerged in the eighteenth century.[80] As Dhavan shows, what distinguishes Kuir Singh's portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh's invocation of the Devi at a critical time — which is controversial today, because the invocation of the goddess is deemed to be non-Sikh — from Sukha Singh's roughly contemporary *gurbilās* portrayal of the same is Kuir Singh's ultimate rejection of the primacy of Brahminical authority. Brahmin power is only efficacious with the intervention of the Guru. Kuir Singh thus utilises the story of the worship of the Devi not as a way to argue for Brahmin power, but to *critique* it.[81] This critique is positioned alongside his capacious inclusion of all castes within the order of the Khalsa.

Such a concern for caste is visible elsewhere in this period: it is a vivid feature of Wāris Shāh's *Hīr*, a classic Punjabi text attributed to the middle of the eighteenth century — and thus roughly contemporary to Kuir Singh's text.[82] Farina Mir has noted this as a recurrent feature of colonial-era narrations of the romance of Hīr-Rāṅhā (Punjab's Romeo and Juliet), where "*zāt* (caste or kinship group)... figures in these texts as the most salient category of social organization".[83] This was a feature of Wāris Shāh's earlier version as well. Ishwar Gaur sees this concern in Wāris Shāh's text as a way of articulating a sense of local rootedness, but it also provides a striking parallel to the concerns expressed in Kuir Singh's contemporary text.[84] For example, *Jaṭ*s are singled out as a group consistently: when Ranjha loses Hir in marriage to a higher positioned *Jaṭ* family, his curse is directed at all *Jaṭ*s.[85] At times, such declarations are mocking and mirthful, as in the assertion by Ranjha to his would-be Guru, when he begs to be allowed to become a *Jogī,* that while he is ready for all the rigours of ascetic practice: "*Asīṅ Jaṭ hāṅ* – We are Jats!" (and therefore not ready to give up women).[86] Three verses later, it is declared that "Ranjha the *Jaṭ* has become a Fakir", but not until after Waris Shah has declared that "one cannot make a Jat into

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[78] Dhavan, *When Sparrows* p. 38.
[79] Hardip Singh Syan "The Sodhi Kings in the Kaliyuga: The Genealogy of the Sikh Gurus in the Bachitar Natak" (Forthcoming).
[80] Murphy, *Materiality of the Past,* p. 100. See also W. H. McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama* (Dunedin, New Zealand, 1987*),* pp. 16–17.
[81] Dhavan, *When Sparrows*, p. 162.
[82] On dating and for a general overview, see Jeevan Deol "Sex, Social Critique, and the Female Figure in Premodern Punjabi Poetry: Vāris Shāh's 'Hīr,'" *Modern Asian Studies* 36, 1 (2002), pp. 141–171; see particularly his overview of manuscripts, pp. 151 ff.
[83] Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial India* (Berkeley, 2010), p. 123.
[84] Ishwar Gaur, *Society, Religion and Patriarchy: Exploring Medieval Punjab through* Hir Waris (New Delhi, 2009), p. 20. See also Mir, *Social Space of Language,* pp. 127-128. This theme of asking about Ranjha's caste is continued by Hir's father (*Hīr Vāriś Śāh*, ed. Śarīf Ṣābir (Lāhaur, 1986), verses 74-76**,** pp. 37-39). I rely here on this printed edition in the Perso-Arabic script (known in Punjabi as Shahmukhi).
[85] *Hīr Vāriś Śāh,* verses 224-228, pp. 126-129.
[86] *Ibid.,* p. 162.

a Fakir**,** or a donkey into a Pir".[87] Such category errors with reference to caste repeat, throughout the text.[88] Mir argues that the prevalence of this theme in colonial era texts indicates "a contemporary anxiety about social classifications and, more importantly, to their malleability" that reflects the complex history of caste under British rule.[89] This was, however, just as true of the eighteenth century, undergirded by social transformations distinctive to that period.[90]

Bayly describes a two-stage process underway in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries across the subcontinent that defined the new operation of caste in this period. Firstly, "both kings and the priests and ascetics with whom men of power were able to associate their rule became a growing focus for the affirmation of a martial and regal form of caste ideal"; this was characterised by the diffusion of such values into the "upper non-elite 'peasantry'" and the continuing importance of martial 'predators'.[91] Secondly, the period saw "the reshaping of many apparently casteless forms of devotional faith (*bhakti*) in a direction which further affirmed these differentiations of rank and 'community'".[92] A wealth of recent research confirms this latter phenomenon.[93] Monika Horstmann in particular has contributed much to our understanding of such forces in this period in what is now Rajasthan, whereby "all *Vaiṣṇava* orders of an orthodox bent, or with strong orthodox factions within them, struggled in some way or other internally to hold at bay religious counter-currents which threatened to undermine the validity of *varṇāśrama* norms".[94]

Sikh texts of this period reveal these two competing forces: Firstly the appropriation of martial and regal caste ideals by Sikhs, as detailed by Dhavan, and which shaped cultural production in Sikh contexts, as described in recent work by Louis Fenech and Robin Rinehart;[95] and secondly, but in a revealing contrast to the processes Bayly highlights, a simultaneous *rejection*, at times, of caste-promoting practices and ideologies that in broader terms accompanied such ideals, reflecting in texts like Kuir Singh's perhaps the interests of sections of society from more martial

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[87] *Ibid*., verse 283 p. 163; verse 285, p. 164.
[88] *Ibid*., verse 478, p. 305, where it is mocked that a Jat might become a ruler. This is fully realised in the poet's description of his period, verse 626, p. 409, where the Jats are described as Sardar and Sarkar, alongside other forms of social role transformation.
[89] Mir, *Social Space of Language*, p. 125.
[90] It is unusual in Punjab Studies to examine Sikh sources alongside those from outside the tradition; reading Wa ̄ris Sha ̃h's *H ̄ir* in light of findings from the *gurbila ̄s* to understand the period more broadly suggests the utility of such a juxtaposition.
[91] Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 26–27, 26 for quote.
[92] *Ibid*., pp. 26-27.
[93] Patton Burchett, "*Bhakti* Religion and Tantric Magic in Mughal India: Kacchva ̃ha ̄s, Ra ̄ma ̄nand ̄is, and Na ̃ths, circa 1500-1750" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2012); James Hare, 'Contested Communities and the Re-imagination of Na ̃bha ̄da ̄s' *Bhaktamā ̃l' in Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia*, (ed.) Anne Murphy, pp. 150–166 (London, 2011); J. S. Hawley, "The four sampradays: Ordering the Religious Past in Mughal North India", *South Asian History and Culture* 2, 2 (2011): pp. 160–183; Monika Horstmann, *Der Zusammenhalt der Welt: Religio ̈se Herrschaftslegitimation und Religionspolitik Maha ̄ra ̄ja ̄ Sava ̄ ̄i Jaisinghs (1700-1743)* (Wiesbaden, 2009); Pinch *Warrior Ascetics;* William R. Pinch, "History, Devotion and the Search for Nabhadas of Galta", in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, (ed.) Daud Ali, (Delhi 1999), pp. 367–399.
[94] Monika Horstmann, "Theology and Statecraft," *South Asian History and Culture* 2, 2 (2011), pp. 184–204; p. 185.
[95] See Dhavan, *When Sparrows,* Fenech, *Zafar-na ̄mah* and Rinehart, Dasam Granth. This was typical of the period, Susan Bayly argues, when caste-based regal ideologies and practices "spread far beyond the royal domains of Rajasthan, particularly across the Gangetic plain and deep into central India. . . . in part through the continuing out-migration of arms-bearing lineages who called themselves Rajput", such as was the case with many peasant lineages in Punjab (Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics,* p. 35).

and peripheral positions less willing to be integrated into a hierarchical caste order,[96] as well as broader challenges to caste in devotional contexts (many of which were themselves challenged by the caste-normalising practices referenced above). As has been noted, this is far from universal, and there are texts associated with the Sikh dispensation that assert caste privilege. I've argued elsewhere for the need to re-locate Sikh interests in this period in relation to other martial groups and millenarian imaginaries; Bayly calls this "the age of the eighteenth-century warrior-dynasts" where "monkhood, soldiering, and finance actually merged and intertwined" (and one must add to this, of course, devotion).[97] Sikh engagements with the martial and the political were not unique or necessarily statist in their trajectory. As shown here, Kuir Singh's and other Sikh texts of the period reflect a Punjabi localised manifestation of broader tensions and transformations, with the Sikh Guru articulating a position of power in relation to other competing social, political and religious forces of the period, many of which were local in their configuration. As Bayly notes, the descendants of recently sedentarised 'peasant' and pastoralist arms-bearing groups did become significantly more cohesive over time, without necessarily embracing the same forms of *jātī* and *varṇā* as other so-called caste Hindus."[98] We can see Kuir Singh as articulating exactly such a position.

As caste-based systems proliferated across north India in this period, engendering tensions and concerns clearly visible in Punjab in broad terms, as we see in Wa ̄ris Sha ̄h's text too, the caste debate was also central to Sikh articulation. Caste-based visions of social organisation were promoted in some quarters but not always accepted; the Sikh case demonstrates a relatively weak appropriation of such caste-based systems, when they were accepted, and at other times their clear rejection. It is not surprising therefore that while Ranjit Singh's kingdom (founded at the very end of the eighteenth century) did feature Brahmins in administration and in sites of privilege — as is visible in the *dharmarth* grants associated with the kingdom — this was certainly not done at the level that Bayly argues was typical of Hinduising polities and social formations of the period.[99] It is in fact the dynamism and diversity of articulations on caste in Sikh-oriented texts, rather than a monolithic position on caste, that demonstrates the vibrancy of this issue within the articulation of a Sikh way of being in the world.

Concluding Remarks

Kuir Singh's text is centrally about the configuration of community, particularly around caste, and his is a cosmopolitan vision. What is important in Kuir Singh is not the sovereignty of the Guru per se — which is assumed in the case of the Guru's centre at Anandpur — but the complex political field that the Guru was located within and, perhaps even more so, the complexity of the politics within the Guru's community itself. Aurangzeb and the Mughal state acted as a kind of persistent presence — brought in at times, peripheral at others — but overall secondary to the local political considerations that had more immediate impact on the Guru's community. It was a shared tension over the place of caste that ultimately is cited by Kuir Singh

[96] *Ibid*., on the Chibber clan. Bayly *Caste, Society and Politics* pp. 39 ff. See Ch 2 on the synthesis of martial and brahmanical interests; the Sikh example seems to reflect this process, at times by replicating it and at times by countering it.
[97] *Ibid*., p. 74; Murphy, "A Millennial Sovereignty?"
[98] Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics,* p. 61.
[99] *Ibid*., Ch. 2. On Brahmins among others in the imaginary of the Dharmarth grants of Ranjit Singh, Murphy *Materiality of the Past,* pp. 167-168.

as the source of the conflict, inciting the intrusion of Mughal state power into what was a regional power struggle.

What drew the "affective community" (to use Purnima Dhavan's term) to the Guru, these devotees of diverse backgrounds who found a place in relation to the Guru at the centre?[100] In Kuir Singh, it was the broad contours of the community in inclusive terms that he most strenuously argues for. Only a broader reading of the text, and its context, reveals this, and its relationship to broader forces. To construe the Sikh community as limited to territory — as important as the Guru's centre at Anandpur was — and with a singular and simplistic sense of enmity to the figure of Aurangzeb and Mughal power as singularly "other", in short, seems to be something that at least this author of eighteenth-century Punjab did not wish to do. Instead, for Kuir Singh, the configuration of the community in terms that exceed the limitations of caste is what mattered. To understand such a configuration of the community, and the framing of the Mughal state and its controversial leader Aurangzeb in relation to it, we may need to look beyond them. anne.murphy@ubc.ca

[100] Dhavan, *When Sparrows*, Chapter 7.