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Guru Nanak: Babur Bani and its historical authenticity and relevance: A review

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Abstract

The article examines Guru Nanak's hymns about Babur's invasion of India in SGGS2 popularly known as Babur Bani or Vani. The article is likely to discuss Guru Nanak's Poetical hymns within its broader historical context it also asserts that the political environment in India at the time of Babur's invasion was influenced by political and social chaos and Guru Nanak as the first witness analyses political and social milieu of the turbulent times through his Poetry. The paper also discusses the authenticity of a historical event, the meeting between Guru Nanak and Babur, whether the event was deliberately glorified by Sikh traditions or did it had any historical significance related to it.

Keywords: Babur, Guru Nanak, eminabad, saidpur, Pakistan, SGGS, Janam Sakhi

Introduction

In this article, I foreground the historical relevance of Guru Nanak's *Babur Bani*. its description has been analyzed by different interpretations, sources, folklores, and biographies. *Babur Bani* is a significant part of the historical narrative of Medieval history, these hymns confirm that Guru Nanak was an extraordinary preacher unlike other contemporary Bhakti Saints, Guru Nanak indulged in descriptions of great length on the political condition of India, and his views on Babur's invasion were unique in the fact, that he fearlessly and courageously represents the pre-Mughal political scenario he highlights, selfishness, disunity, dishonesty of the rulers and ruled whether Hindus or Muslims. It confirms that when Babur came to India, he found little response from local rulers in a lack of resistance he easily captures power and founded the Mughal dynasty.

Sikh traditions based on *Janam Sakhi* painted a variety of folklores and fables regarding the event that during Guru Nanak's third missionary journey (*udasis*) between 1518-21, assisted by his companion Bhai Mardana came to Eminabad(Saidpur, Modern Pakistan) immediately after Babur invaded India. Guru Nanak made a pathetic poem about the sufferings of people, description of death and destruction caused by the Mughal army, women of Hindus and Muslims alike suffered physical intimidation by them, he compared invasion to a sinful marriage procession which brought misery and death to Indians (actually total numbers of hymns associated with *Babur Bani* are 4 in numbers quoted in SGGS, three of these hymns are in *Asa* measure at pages 360 and 417-18 of the standard recension of and the fourth is in *Tilang* measure on pages 722-723.) Finally, Guru Nanak and his companion Mardana were imprisoned by Babur's army then the story goes about Guru Nanak's miracle in prison and his meeting with Babur who asked for his advice. Guru Nanak's advice was to rule the people with justice and mercy and this in fact during his short reign he did^[3].

The historical veracity of the Babur Bani

The portrayal of Guru Nanak and Babur meeting raises the question, of whether their description of "*Babur Bani*" fit into the category of historiography or if it would be better qualified as hagiography whether it was an authentic historical event, there are diverse opinions, we must, however, proceed, beyond the generic interpretations, was in, a fact rarely subjects to scrutiny.

Janam Sakhi the stories related to the life of Guru Nanak or popular biographies discuss many events based on memory, but the distinction between memory and history is even very clear the *Janam Sakhi* arguments and their description of Guru Nanak can best be classified as hagiography or in other terms as memory, so it's very difficult to classify hagiography from historiography so, it seems that *Janma Sakhis*, describe "*Babur Bani*" event in purely

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in a religious term where Guru Nanak's spiritual message is highlighted in reformist tone, it seems *janmsakhis*, treat the event as symbolic and personify Guru Nanak, that, by his advice, Babur the invader who through his dreadful acts infuse darkness in lives of people of Punjab and "Guru Nanak who usually refereed as one who has come to vanquish darkness" succeeded in the mission of peace and piety^[4].

Janamsakhis the stories related to the life of Guru Nanak, discuss many events, basically based on memory, but the distinction between memory and history is never very clear the *Janam Sakhi* accept Guru Nanak was an enlightened one who by his courage and conviction, convinced the Babur of his futile wars, in the moral and spiritual domain it was more by hagiography rather than history. So, given in moralistic nature of Gurumukhi sources about Guru Nanak this begs the question and inquiry of event lead to another trail, that, and whether other contemporary sources describe the event in so detailed way, as, *Janamsakhis*, as of their hagiographical nature couldn't be supposed to be accurate one as a historical account, so attention automatically been turned to, *Babur Nama* or autobiography of Babur which describe the detailed account of his incursion into India.

Historical Analysis

The narration of the event, the meeting between Guru Nanak and Babur in Sikh traditions looms largely as a folklore account as Gurbani having the religious nature, we have to carefully examine, this event is described as eye witness account by Guru Nanak addressing his close friend Bhai Lalo, in one of the hymns of "*Babur Bani*" the date usually ascribed either been 1519 or 1520, when Babur reach Saidpur or modern Eminabad but, strangely, *Babar Nama* did not have any reference point or description of the event, particularly on any meeting between Guru Nanak and Babur the *Babur Nama* is silent.

Let it not be supposed, however, that concept vision from the source of *Babur Nama* in which the event has not been mentioned does not mean the event, which is a significant part of Sikh traditions and SGGS, neither to be dismissed as wholly insignificant.

This leads us to pose two specific questions relating to "*Babur Bani*". First from what source the description emerges second did Guru Nanak's third missionary journey (UDASIS) represent an eye-witness account of Babur's invasion of India or it may be an addendum later interpolation in SGGS?

Let us enquire first we can see historical references in verses of "*Babur Bani*" the understanding of Guru Nanak's work indicates that his poetry contains political overtones of the contemporary period, and the political situation was fluid. The words like *Khurasan* and *Hindustan* are historical, the first referring to Afghanistan and later to India. Babur himself stated that, after becoming ruler of Kabul, he launched raids in Punjab. The places mentioned in "*Babur Bani*" are still in existence in modern Pakistan, commemorative Gurudwara (*Chakki Sahib*) still is there in Eminabad it is venerated by Sikhs all over the world. The place is historically verified, Saidpur or Eminabad in medieval times was a thriving trading city en route to Kabul- Lahore Highway, so it seems after the destruction of the city in that attack possibly communities shifted to the nearby big city, Gujranwala, for better prospects, as

nowadays Eminabad is small sub town compared to a big city like Gujranwala^[6].

Other Sources

Finally, one might be tempted to think that although no other contemporary source discussed the event so vividly like *Janam Sakhi*, so what other sources contemplates it as we did not have any idea about other sources of period so how could we analyses the historical authenticity of the "*Babur Bani*", the Persian sources of mid-eighteenth century like some independent Persian works refers to the work of Guru Nanak however, again, these works are based on life and teachings of Guru Nanak and description of other Sikh Gurus be portrayed in all fullness because he was admired by writers as multifaceted individual in all of these Persian Manuscripts written during Ranjit Singh's, period so possibility maybe there that these works, if not of Court Chronicles, in nature might be influenced by certain biases of period but however these sources prelude sketchy evidence of events describe in *Babur Bani*: e.g. *IMMAUD – SAADAT-1808 of Sayyid Ghulam Ali Khan*,⁷ it describes about Khalsa Panth and stated that Guru Nanak was contemporary to Mughal Emperor Babur, but it lacks any information about meeting between them.

Another manuscript, "*Tawarikh-i-Sikhan*"^[8] by Khushwant Rai of 1811, which is a biography of Sikh rulers, describes the meeting of Babur and Guru Nanak and the compilation of *Bani* by Guru Nanak, interestingly documents prescribed that Babur was impressed by the personality of Guru Nanak, it presented biographical account of Guru Nanak, it discussed Babur Badshah met Baba Nanak and requested for his blessings' Guru Nanak blessed him accordingly to suggest Babur to rule justly.

Conclusion

Babur Bani is a descriptive account of the chaotic political condition of medieval times in India. its historical relevance lies in the fact, that it preludes a general understanding of medieval India and the convenience of the bhakti movement it brings new hope to the distressed, so Guru Nanak in Punjab was the bridge the catalyst who provides succor vitality, self-confidence to the deprived masses through his message of peace, unity, brotherhood, compassion, and love for the one God.

The historical events related to the Babur invasion of Punjab from 1518 to 1520 mark the beginning of another power struggle between two rival camps of Islamic invaders, the Afghans ruling house at Delhi and the newly emerging power of Mughals under desperado Babur, who was thrown out from his ancestor's home by Uzbeks. His successful incursions in Punjab pave the way for the establishment of the powerful Mughal dynasty in 1526, it changed the political fortunes of many local rulers and Guru Nanak was the only Bhakti Saint a sole witness of the depredations, who seems to be more concerned with the implications of a change in the new regime and redress the grievances of the people affected by the political upheavals of the time, his bold details and composition of the hymns of *Babur Bani* was one the significant evidence of the history of that period. The relevance of '*Babur Bani*' of Guru Nanak lies in the fact that it is still one of the best-documented evidence of the political conditions of India during the pre-Mughal era in Medieval history of India.

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