

DID GURU NANAK MEET PIR DASTGIR AND PIR BAHLOL DANA?

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ABSTRACT

Dr Trilochan Singh has reported that “Every day, the Dastgir Pir, and Bahlol Dana, another Sufi saint, sat near the Master, imbibed every word of his wisdom.” But this was challenged by Mr Tanvir Ahmed Qadri that it cannot be possible since Pir Dastgir breathed his last 303 years before the birth of Guru Nanak and Pir Bahlol Dana happened to be about 660 years before the birth of Guru Nank. In this paper we have tried to find out the truth.

INTRODUCTION

Dr Trilochan Singh [3, p 389] is a famous Sikh historian and scholar. He has authored a book, *Guru Nanak: Founder of Sikhism*, about Guru Nanak to commemorate his 500th Birthday (*Parkash Divas*) Anniversary. He reported illuminating discussions with Pir Dastgir and Pir Bahlol Dana at Baghdad as follows:

“There was a stone not far away from the Tigris, on which Guru Nanak sat everyday and delivered his inspiring sermons. Every day, the Dastgir Pir, and Bahlol Dana, another Sufi saint, sat near the Master, imbibed every word of his wisdom. There were illuminating discussions, inspiring songs, and mystic communion between the Master and his admirers. When Guru Nanak came away Pir Bahlol Dana never forgot that the vision and mystic illumination and he sat there in front of the stone with a few personal relics that the Guru had left, for sixty long summers and winters. When he died he asked to be buried near the place sanctified by the holy feet of his Master, Baba Nanak. On the stone his disciples engraved the story. There were two inscriptions one outside the shrine and one on the stone. The one on the stone is still there and the other has faded away or gone with the demolition of the wall.”

I wrote an article, “*How Long was Guru Nanak’s Travel Towards Middle East?*”, I quoted above paragraph of Dr Trilochan Singh to mention that Guru Nanak stayed in Bagdad for a long time [1]. When Mr Tanvir Ahmed Qadri, Real Estate Agent at Mumbai, India read the above article and found a grave mistake in that paragraph of Dr Trilochan Singh, which was quoted in this article.

I am happy that the articles in *UNDERSTANDING SIKHISM : The Research Journal* is read by non-Sikhs

also. I appreciated Mr Tanvir Ahmed Qadri for pointing out the grave mistake as follows:

Grave Mistake

*“I would like to say though your writings with praises to Guru Nanak or Nanak Shah were very Good , but one sided and there were a lot of contradictions with Truth , The Date of Birth & Date of Death of Guru Nanak as mentioned by yourself on the very first line says (Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE) if this is True then the mention that **Bahlol Dana & Dastagir Pir** sat in his company are completely false as these two very distinguished Saints or Auliyas of Allah were born as per facts available in history and through their works and records and through Family Sources the Date of Birth and Date of Last Breath of Shaikh Abdul Qadir Al Geylani (RA). He is lovingly called all over the world as **Piran-i-Pir Dastagir** (RA) (1077 - 1166 CE) so you can see the difference of almost **three hundred & three years** between his death and Nanak's birth , so nobody can claim that Hazrat Piran-i-Pir Dastagir sat with Nanak when he came to Baghdad or even Hazrat Bahlol Dana sat in amazement with Nanak in Baghdad since Bahlol Dana was born hundreds of years before the Birth of Nanak . So to say that Piran-i-Pir Dastagir (RA) or even Bahlol Dana (RA) sat with Nanak in Baghdad is utterly false. Your false claim of superiority is far from Truth and differ from the facts of history. Please reply to this if you have any historical documents to prove.” (RA is Short Term for Rahmatullah-I-Alaih , which means Mercy of Allah be Upon the Saint whose name has been Taken.)*

I did reply immediately and the following discussion is based on further research to find the truth.

DISCUSSION

A critical examination indicated that Dr Trilochan Singh’s statement, “*Every day, the Dastgir Pir, and Bahlol Dana,*

another Sufi saint, sat near the Master, imbibed every word of his wisdom.” was based on reference # 33 and 34, which is *Pauri* #36 of *Vaar* 1 of Bhai Gurdas as follows [4]:

ਪੁਛੇ ਪੀਰ ਤਕਰਾਰ ਕਰ ਏਹ ਫਕੀਰ ਵਡਾ ਆਤਾਈ॥
 ਏਥੇ ਵਿਚ ਬਗਦਾਦ ਦੇ ਵਡੀ ਕਰਮਾਤ ਦਿਖਲਾਈ॥
 ਪਾਤਾਲਾਂ ਆਕਾਸ਼ ਲਖ ਓੜਕ ਭਾਲੀ ਖਬਰ ਸੁ ਸਾਈ॥
 ਫੇਰ ਦੁਰਾਇਣ ਦਸਤਗੀਰ ਅਸੀ ਭਿ ਵੇਖਾਂ ਜੇ ਤੁਹਿ ਪਾਈ॥
 ਨਾਲ ਲੀਤਾ ਬੋਟਾ ਪੀਰ ਦਾ ਅਖੀਂ ਮੀਟ ਗਿਆ ਹਵਾਈ॥
 ਲਖ ਅਕਾਸ਼ ਪਤਾਲ ਲਖ ਅਖ ਫੁਰਕ ਵਿਚ ਸਭ ਦਿਖਲਾਈ॥
 ਭਰ ਕਚਕੋਲ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦ ਦਾ ਧੁਰੋਂ ਪਤਾਲੋਂ ਲਈ ਕੜਾਈ॥
 ਜ਼ਾਹਰ ਕਲਾ ਨ ਛਪੈ ਛਪਾਈ ॥36॥

English translation by Dr Jodh Singh, Punjabi University [http://www.searchgurbani.com/main.php?book=bhai_gurdas_vaaran&action=pauripage&vaar=1&pauri=36&submit=]

The Pir debated and came to know that this Faqir is much more powerful.

Here in Baghdad he has shown a great miracle. Meanwhile he (Baba Nanak) talked about myriads of netherworlds and skies.

Pir Dastagir asked (the Baba) to show him whatever he had seen.

Guru Nanak Dev taking along with him the son of the Pir, melted into thin air.

And in a wink of eye visualized him the upper and lower worlds.

From the nether world he brought a bowl full of sacred food and handed it over to Pir.

This manifest power (of the Guru) cannot be made to hide.(36)

In this *Pauri* only one name, Pir Dastgir, is found but there is no mention of Pir Bahlol Dana. However, I checked other *Pauris* connected with Guru Nanak's travel to Mecca and Baghdad only Pir Dastgir has been mentioned in another *Pauri* # 35 of *Vaar* 1 here again the name of Bahlol Dana is missing:

ਬਾਬਾ ਗਿਆ ਬਗਦਾਦ ਨੂੰ ਬਾਹਰ ਜਾਇ ਕੀਆ ਅਸਥਾਨਾ॥
 ਇਕ ਬਾਬਾ ਅਕਾਲ ਰੂਪ ਦੂਜਾ ਰਬਾਬੀ ਮਰਦਾਨਾ॥
 ਦਿਤੀ ਬਾਂਗ ਨਿਮਾਜ਼ ਕਰ ਸੁੰਨ ਸਮਾਨ ਰੋਯਾ ਜਹਾਨਾ॥
 ਸੁੰਨ ਸੁੰਨ ਨਗਰੀ ਭਈ ਦੇਖ ਪੀਰ ਭਇਆ ਹੈਰਾਨਾ॥
 ਵੇਖੇ ਧਿਆਨ ਲਗਾਇ ਕਰ ਇਕ ਫਕੀਰ ਵਡਾ ਮਸਤਾਨਾ॥
 ਪੁਛਿਆ ਫਿਰਕੇ ਦਸਤਗੀਰ ਕੈਨ ਫਕੀਰ ਕਿਸ ਕਾ ਘਰਾਨਾ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਕਲਿ ਵਿਚ ਆਇਆ ਰਬ ਫਕੀਰ ਇਕ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਾ॥

ਧਰਤ ਅਕਾਸ਼ ਚੜ੍ਹੇ ਦਿਸ ਜਾਨਾ ॥35॥

Translation By Dr Jodh Singh, Punjabi University [[http://www.searchgurbani.com/main.php?book=bhai_gurdas_vaaran&action=pauripage&vaar=1&pauri=35]:

From Mecca Baba went to Baghdad and stayed outside the city.

Firstly, Baba himself was in the form of Timeless and secondly, he had his companion Mardana, the rebeck player.

For namaz (in his own style), Baba gave call, listening to which the whole world went into absolute silence.

The whole city became quiet and lo! to behold it, the pir (of the town) also got wonderstruck.

Observing minutely he found (in the form of Baba Nanak) an exhilarated faqir.

Pir Dastagir asked him, which category of faqir you belong to and what is your parentage.

(Mardana told) He is Nanak, who has come into kaliyug, and, he recognises God and His faquirs as one.

Let us look into the translation of line #6 by Dr Jodh Singh:

“Pir Dastagir asked him, which category of faqir you belong to and what is your parentage.”

The word, “ਫਿਰਕੇ” in line # 6 has been interpreted as ‘category of faqir’ by Dr Jodh Singh. If it is so then Dr Jodh Singh's interpretation means that it is a question by Dastgir to Guru Nanak that to which category of Faqir he belongs to. But “ਫਿਰਕੇ” in line # 6 has been translated as “again” by Giani Hazara Singh and Bhai Sahib Vir Singh [4]. Then line # 6 can be interpreted that Pir Dastgir questions again to Guru Nanak that to which place you belong to.

Whatsoever it may be it is apparent that Bhai Gurdas is mentioning about Pir Dastgir here in this *Pauri* # 35 also.

Besides, the name of Pir Bahlol Dana appearing in the paragraph of Dr Trilochan Singh has also not been mentioned in any of the *Pauris* # 32, 33, and 34 in *Vaar* 1 of Bhai Gurdas, which are connected with visit of Guru Nanak to Mecca and Baghdad.

I also consulted Prof Henry Francis B Espiritu, Department of Social Sciences (with specialization in Asian Naqshbandi Sufism), University of the Philippines, Cebu City, Philippines. He reported as follows (*Personal Communication*):

“Based on my readings on the stories of the lives of awliyaulah (saints of Allah) as they are called by the

Sufis; there are actually three (3) saints by the name of Bahlol:

1. The first saint named Bahlol is Hazrat Bahlol Sayf ul Alawi. He was a contemporary of Hazrat Ali (Reign of his Caliphate is from 656--661 CE) who fought for the right of Hazrat Ali to be the fourth Khalifa when it was challenged by Amir Muawiyya. This Bahlol Sayf ul Alawi died fighting for Hazrat Ali against the Ummayyads. Some historical books, however, said that he died after spending his old age in the Ummayyad prison house in Damascus.
2. The second Bahlol is Hazrat Bahlol al Hanafi who flourished during the time of Hazrat Imam Abu Hanifa who was the great jurisprudent of Islam and founder of the greatest school of fiqh in Islam. Bahlol al Hanafi was influential in Abu Hanifa's recognizing Sufism as compatible with Sunni Islam. Bahlol al Hanafi emphasized to Hazrat Imam Abu Hanifa that the inner reality (haqiqat) of all Islamic rituals and Shariah is ikhlas (sincerity). Sufism is concerned with sincerity while Shariah is concerned with societal discipline. Hazrat Imam Abu Hanifa flourished in around 700--770 CE. Hazrat Bahlol Hanafi flourished also at this time.
3. The third Bahlol is **Hazrat Bahlol al Danaai al Mazhub al Majnooni**. He was a great saint who often criticized and gave spiritual advice to **Khalifa Haruon al Rashid al Abbasi**. He was called **Danaai** because he came from **Danaa** village in Baghdad Sharif. He was called **mazhub** because he acted like mad because he was always in the huzoor-i-ilahi (divine presence); he was called **majnooni** because he was so in love with Allah (La ilah). His ways of teaching the Khalifa Haruon was reminiscent to the style of Nasruddin Mullah. He showed the Khalifa the folly of materialism and the need to do justice and mercy to humanity. The reign of the **Khilafah of Haruon al Rashid is 786--809 CE**.

“Baba Hazrat Guru Nanak flourished in 1469--1539 CE. These three Hazrat Bahlols flourished earlier and could not have met Baba Nanak. So, I can assure you that it was not Hazrat Bahlol Danaai Mazhub whom Guru Nanak met.

As for Piran Pir Hazrat Dastgir Abdul Qadir Jilani, the crown of all awliyaullah, he flourished at around 1075--1167 CE. It is impossible that Guru Nanak met him also. If the janamsakhis were right in its narratives, it must be a different Bahlol that Guru Nanak met at Baghdad Sharif. If the janam sakhis were true, it must have been a different Piran Pir Hazrat Dastagir that Hazrat Guru Nanak met. But then again, there is only **one Bahlol Danaai** and only **one Hazrat Dastagir** in Sufi sacred history. The janaam sakhis narrated that Guru Nanak met Hazrat Dastagir and Bahlol Danaa; it is not possible--as per my opinion. There

are very grave anachronisms here judging from the very big gap in the dates of these saints' flourishing--they could not have met each other factually. This is just my opinion, Dr. Devinder Sahib. It is up to you to judge for yourself.”

Therefore, according Prof Espiritu it could not be possible that Guru Nanak has met Piran Pir Hazrat Dastgir Abdul Qadir Jilani, who flourished at around 1075--1167 (1166) CE and Hazrat Bahlol al Danaai al Mazhub al Majnooni, who flourished during the reign of the Khilafah of Haruon al Rashid in 786--809 CE.

Besides, Prof Espiritu has also provided some more information about the use of word “Dastgir” as follows: “Just 3 days ago, I was informed by a pious Naqshbandi Muslim who is living in Van, Eastern Turkey, by the name of **Nevzat Varlik Vanli** (via email) that the custodians (khidmatgar) of Qadri Sufi dargahs among Kurdish speaking areas in Van, Turkey are collectively called “Dastagir”. In short, Dastagir also can mean Hazrat Abdul Qadir Jilani Shaykh Dastagir Piran Pir or the mutawwali (attendant) or khidmatgar (religious custodians) of any Qadri Sufi Dargahs (dargahs associated with Hazrat Jilani) in Kurdish areas around Southern Turkey (Anatolia) and in Kurdish areas in Iraq. So I feel from this input of Nevzat Varlik Vanli Hazretleri that Dastagir can mean also custodian of a shrine; that Guru Nanak Padshah **MAY** had been to Baghdad Sharif and had a conversation to a dastagir (custodian) of a Qadri dargah. There is one famous dargah of Baghdad Sharif--and that is the blessed tomb of Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani Dastagir Pir. So, I feel that there **may be a possibility** that Guru Nanak Padshah went to Baghdad Sharif; but he talked to the Dastagir custodian and not to Hazrat Dastagir Jilani himself (as this case will be an anachronism). But then again his having been to Baghdad can be a possibility--but he talked to a Dastagir shrine custodian and not to Hazrat Dastagir Jilani himself. Dastagir can also mean the direct kith and kin of Hazrat Jilani who oftentimes are the custodians of the grave of Piran Pir in Baghdad Sharif.”

According to Bhai Kahn Singh [2] Pir Dastgir Abdul Qadir of Jilan City has breathed his last on February 22, 1166 CE. He also explains that ‘Dastgir’ means the one who holds the hands of others, helpful and supporter. Bhai Kahn Singh [2, p- 831] also mentioned that in Bagdad the followers (ਜਾਨਸਾਖੀ) of Pir Dastgir and that of Pir Bahlol became devotees of Guru Nanak.

If the information given above by Mr Tanvir Ahmed Qadri and Prof Henry Francis B Espiritu is correct then:

1. How could Bhai Gurdas and Dr Trilochan Singh make such a grave mistake about the dialogue between Guru Nanak and Pir Dastagir (1077-1166 CE), who had breathed his last about 303 years (1469 minus 1166) before the birth of Guru Nanak?
2. Where from did Dr Trilochan Singh took the information that Guru Nanak had a dialogue with another Pir Behlol Dana, who happened to be living during the reign of the Khilafah of Haruon al Rashid is 786-809 CE, about 660 years (1439 minus 809) before the birth of Guru Nanak?
3. How it could be possible that Pir Bahlol Dana, could sit in front of the stone, with a few personal relics that Guru left, for sixty summers and winters and asked to be buried near to the place sanctified by the holy feet of his Master, Baba Nanak?
4. How could Dr Trilochan Singh use such inauthentic information from Bhai Gurdas' *Vaaran* while writing about Guru Nanak?
5. How could Dr Trilochan Singh ignore the information by Kahn Singh [2] that Pir Dastgir Abdul Qadir of Jilan City has breathed his last on February 22, 1166 CE.

If the word, “ਫਿਰਕੇ” (*Firkai*) is interpreted as “*firqah*” in Arabic; which means religious party or a particular religious community; “sect/tribe or custodian of shrine(s) of Piran Pir Hazrat Dastgir Abdul Qadir Jilani then it makes a lot of sense that Guru Nanak did meet or had dialogues with the custodian of shrine(s) of Piran Pir Hazrat Dastgir Abdul Qadir Jilani. Bhai Kahn Singh also interpreted ‘*Firkai*’ as the one who succeeds to the seat of Pir Dastgir is also called Dastgir). But having dialogue with the Piran Pir Hazrat Dastgir Abdul Qadir Jilani and Hazrat Bahlol al Danaai is not possible at all.

It appeared from the PREFACE of his book that Dr Trilochan Singh depended too heavily on the information from *Janam Sakhis*. Contrarily he criticized those scholars and researchers who doubted the authenticity of some incidences recorded in *Janam Sakhi*.

Vaaran of Bhai Gurdas are accepted as the KEY to understand Gurbani by the majority of the Sikh theologians, scholars and researchers. The Dharam Parchar Committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee (SGPC) has recommended preaching from *Vaaran* of Bhai Gurdas in the Gurdwaras [*Rahit Maryada*]. Many Sikh scholars think that no article/paper on Sikhi (Sikhism) is considered complete unless some *Pauris* are not quoted from *Vaaran* of Bhai Gurdas.

Now let us discuss the veracity in the *Pauri* 36 of *Vaar* 1 of Bhai Gurdas. The *Pauri* # 36 as quoted above is all wrong if examined scientifically and logically since it

indicates that Sikhism has already been established on other worlds before establishing it on our Earth. Although it is true that life could also be on many planets in the Universe and Guru Nanak has also mentioned this in his Bani, JAP, but it is impossible to go there in a moment and to bring something (*parsad*) as a proof except by imagination. This *Pauri* also confirms the performance of miracle by Guru Nanak, in whose philosophy nobody has any power to perform such miracles.

CONCLUSIONS

- It could be safely concluded from the above study that Guru Nanak did not hold any dialogue with Pir Dastagir or Pir Bahlo Danaai as reported by Dr Trilochan Singh in his book which he based on *Pauri* 36 of *Vaar* I of Bhai Gurdas and the *Janam Sakhis*.
- However, there is every possibility that Guru Nanak had dialogue with the custodian of the shrine of Dastgir in Baghdad.
- It could also be concluded that one should refer to *Vaaran* of Bhai Gurdas and the *Janam Sakhis* very carefully since some information given there contradict the Bani of Guru Nanak.
- It is evident that there is great need of lot of research to find out the real biography of Guru Nanak.

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I am very thankful to Mr Tanvir Ahmed Qadri of Mumbai, India for pointing out some mistakes in the paragraph of Dr Trilochan Singh, I used in my article. I am also very grateful to Prof Henry Francis B Espiritu, Department of Social Sciences (with specialization in Central Asian Naqshbandi Sufism), University of the Philippines, Cebu City, Philippines for providing necessary information about Pir Dastgir and Pir Bahlol Dana. With the help of Mr Qadri and Prof Espiritu I have been able to set the record straight in Sikh history.

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