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Contesting Plagiarism and Historiographical Distortions: The Image of *Guru Tegh Bahadur*

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ABSTRACT

In 1975, the tercentenary of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom ignited a significant academic debate and controversy. In 1975 a renowned historian published an article in a respected research journal, depicting the Ninth Guru as a collaborator in acts of plunder and extortion alongside a Muslim Sufi, Hafiz Adam Sarhandi. This portrayal elicited strong objections from Sikh organizations and prompted immediate responses from Sikh scholars in major academic publications. Two decades later, similar objections arose over NCERT textbooks that similarly depicted Guru Tegh Bahadur. Even Audrey Truschke's recent comments on the Ninth Guru as a rebel executed for armed opposition misreads the evidence and perpetuates these distortions.

This study traces the origins of such misrepresentations in key Persian chronicles from the Mughal to the Colonial times by examining the motives and methods of Persian historians writing under the patronage of the Mughals and the British Colonial Government of India. On examining the Persian sources, it has been revealed that the distortion of Guru Tegh Bahadur's mission and martyrdom can be traced back to Persian historians loyal to the Mughal court, plagiarism promoted by the British Colonial administration, and misinterpretation of Persian texts by their English translators/editors. To honor the Guru's 350th martyrdom anniversary scholars must rigorously reexamine Persian chronicles, disentangle interpolations by colonial translators, and contextualize the Mughal-Sikh relations within the politics of Mughal orthodoxy and the legitimate socio-religious concerns and dissent of the Sikh Gurus.

Keywords: Persian Historiography, Plagiarism, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Aurangzeb, Sujan Rai Bhandarii, Yahya Khan, Ghulam Hussain Khan, Raymond, John Briggs, *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin.*

1. INTRODUCTION

It looks legitimate to remind that in 1975, on the Tercentenary of the Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, a research paper became the flashpoint for a fierce scholarly debate across Punjab. A prominent historian published an article accusing the Ninth Guru of colluding with a Muslim Sufi called Hafiz Adam to carry out plunder and rapine (Singh, F. 1974, pp. 79-89). It met with immediate outrage, and leading Sikh scholars mobilized swift rejoinders in peer-reviewed journals (Singh, K. 1975, pp. 153-166). The intensity of this debate revealed how deeply rooted contestations over the Guru's image had become both within and beyond academic circles. Far from being a closed chapter, the controversy exposed the fragile interface between historical interpretation, religious identity, and regional pride. It underscored the urgent need for a methodical reassessment of the sources that shaped such insensitive claims.

Two decades later, a parallel uproar emerged over NCERT's history textbooks, which reiterated discredited portrayals of Guru Tegh Bahadur as a mercenary rebel (Satish, 1982, p. 228). The Sikh community successfully petitioned for the removal of these offensive passages, yet the underlying historiographical problem persisted. The textbooks had drawn on the same Persian and Colonial compilations of dubious provenance that fueled the 1975 controversy. Although the revision eliminated overt insults, it failed to address the deeper issue: the uncritical reuse of narratives that equated voluntary offerings and religious gatherings with militant sedition (Satish, 2007, pp. 346-47). This pattern of repetition demonstrated how entrenched distortions could resurface in new institutional formats, shaping generations of students' perceptions of a genuine martyr in the cause of freedom of conscience, transcending religious boundaries the world over.

More recently, Audrey Truschke has reignited discussion by casting Guru Tegh Bahadur as a political insurgent executed for armed opposition to the Mughal state (Audrey, 2017, p. 47). While her scholarship sometimes brings uncommon insights into Aurangzeb's polity, it inadvertently perpetuates the earlier smears by relying on the same Persian-Mughal chronicles without sufficiently contextualizing their biases. Truschke's monograph situates the Guru's martyrdom squarely within the framework of imperial security, thereby reinforcing the idea that the Guru posed a direct military threat. It reinforces misconceptions that have circulated for centuries and underlines the pressing need for a comprehensive source critique rather than isolated corrections.

The present study undertakes this task by tracing the origin of distortions in three key strata of historical writing. First, it analyzes near-contemporary Persian court chronicles/ texts like *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, *Nuskha-i-Dilkusha*, *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, Farukhsiyar Nama, Muntakhib-ul-Lubab, Ibratnama*, *Mirat-i-Waridat, Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*, etc., that offer terse and often hostile references to the Ninth Guru. Second, it examines the transformation and expansion of these accounts in Colonial compilations such as Ghulam Hussain Khan's *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* and its subsequent English translations by Raymond Hajee Mustafa and Lt. Col. John Briggs. Third, it briefly takes note of modern historiography and textbook narratives that continue to echo outdated tropes. By intertwining philological analysis, manuscript/text collation, and historiographical critique, this study recreates the pathways through which bias was encoded and transmitted.

The structure of the study reflects this tripartite approach. In Part I, the focus falls on the earliest Persian narratives, examining their provenance, courtly context, and narrative strategies of omission and denigration. Part II turns to the colonial era, exposing cases of plagiarism, mistranslation, and editorial intervention that amplified anti-Sikh biases. Part III assesses the survival of these themes in postcolonial academic and educational environments, identifying opportunities for corrective pedagogy. A concluding by illuminating the historical origins and transmission of contentious claims about Guru Tegh Bahadur, this study aims to recover a nuanced portrait of the Ninth Guru's religious and temporal leadership and moral courage. In doing so, it seeks to honour the 350th martyrdom anniversary with scholarly integrity, offering a model of source-centered inquiry that respects both Sikh traditions and the highest standards of historical criticism.

2. METHODOLOGY

Sources and Approach

This section outlines the philological and historiographical methodology applied in analyzing Persian manuscripts, colonial translations, and modern historiography.

The study adopts a philological and historiographical methodology designed to interrogate how the image of Guru Tegh Bahadur has been represented, misrepresented, and transmitted across Persian, colonial, and postcolonial narratives.

First, a **philological approach** is employed to analyze primary Persian manuscripts and chronicles, including *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh, Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, Muntakhib-ul-Lubab, Ibratnama, and Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*. Each text is examined in its original language to identify omissions, interpolations, terminological ambiguities, and rhetorical strategies that shaped the portrayal of the Ninth Guru. By collating variant manuscript readings, this approach helps disentangle authentic records from later accretions and biases.

Second, a **comparative historiographical method** is applied to assess how these Persian narratives were appropriated, plagiarized, and transformed in colonial-era compilations such as Ghulam Hussain Khan's *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* and its English translations by Raymond Hajee Mustafa and John Briggs. The study highlights how selective mistranslations and interpolations introduced or amplified hostile tropes, reframing the Guru as a rebel or freebooter in ways that aligned with colonial administrative agendas.

Third, the analysis extends to **modern and postcolonial historiography**, including NCERT textbooks and works by contemporary historians such as Audrey Truschke. These are critically assessed to show how

colonial distortions continue to resurface in present-day academic and curricular narratives.

Throughout, the methodology emphasizes **triangulation of sources**:

1. Persian chronicles under Mughal patronage,
2. Colonial translations and reinterpretations, and
3. Sikh vernacular sources, sacred writings, and collective memory.

This layered comparative analysis allows the study to map the genealogy of distortion and to recover a historically grounded portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur as a spiritual leader and martyr of conscience, rather than a political insurgent.

3. FINDINGS / ANALYSIS

Persian Chronicles under Mughal Patronage:

Early Persian accounts of Guru Tegh Bahadur appeared soon after his martyrdom, influenced by court interests and censorship. Chroniclers in Aurangzeb's service navigated strict regulations that forbade direct criticism of imperial policy or unflattering depictions of the Mughal Emperor (Elliot, Vol. VII, 1969, pp. 182-83). Consequently, references to the Ninth Guru are casual, brief, and often sanitized, emphasizing his tenure of guruship and martyrdom without context. This pattern of reticence reflects a broader reluctance among the Mughal historians to document the incidents of socio-religious dissent in full. By presenting capital punishment to Guru Tegh Bahadur as a routine administrative act, these accounts tacitly endorse the Emperor's harsh treatment of public figures who enjoyed people's trust, in the narratives, setting the stage for centuries of distortion.

Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* (1696) stands as the foundational near-contemporary account. A resident of Batala, Panjab, and a pargana-level court official, Sujan Rai Bhandari records that Guru Tegh Bahadur led the Sikhs for eleven years before being imprisoned in Shahjahanabad and courting martyrdom, by imperial order (Bhandari, 1918, pp. 69-70). Yet he omits any discussion of the motivations behind this drastic penalty, leaving readers without insight into the Guru's principled stand or the Mughal rationale. His minimalistic treatment suggests either fear of reprisal or strict adherence to the Imperial ban on sensitive detail, by confusing the date/year of the Guru's martyrdom (Bhandari, p. 70; Grewal and Irfan, 1999, pp. 90, 94). Sujan Rai Bhandari inadvertently created an information vacuum that later chroniclers would fill unquestioningly or with speculation and bias.

Inayatullah Khan Ismi's *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri* (1701–1707) extends the narrative to encompass the broader context of Aurangzeb's religious policy. Commissioned to compile the Emperor's decrees, Inayatullah reveals the demolition of the Sikh shrine at Buria. He mentions an inquiry ordered by Aurangzeb in response to local unrest, implicitly framing the Sikhs as a source of disorder (Ganda Singh, G. 1949, p. 73). Though his work offers rare factual details, names of officials, and the place of demolition, it also reproduces the language of Islamic orthodoxy that viewed non-Muslim faiths as threats to the Mughal rule. Such accounts fortify the impression that Sikh institutions were looked upon as inherently subversive.

Bhim Sen's *Nuskha-i-Dilkusha* (1709) presents a striking example of Mughal courtly apprehension regarding the Sikh Panth's ascendancy in various parts of the country. Written under the patronage of Rao Dalpat Singh Bundela, Bhim Sen observes that Guru Tegh Bahadur lived in the mountains near Sarhind, amassed substantial offerings, and began styling himself *Patshah*. He notes that the Emperor, alarmed by the Guru's rising prestige and grandeur, summoned him to the Imperial court and awarded him capital punishment (Bhim, MS # 23, folio 169). In Bhim Sen's portrayal, there is no trace of spiritual or doctrinal motive, only a subtext of imperial suspicion that the Ninth Guru's influence among the people equated to sedition. This perspective transforms voluntary donations and growing followership into threats to the Mughal State's sovereignty, illustrating how Mughal chroniclers recast religious devotion as political rebellion.

Muhammad Ahsan Ijad, the author of *Farukhsiyarnama* (1131 Hijri/ 1719AD), while writing on the Sikh uprising under the leadership of Banda Singh, refers to Guru Tegh Bahadur's arrest and martyrdom very briefly. For example, he reveals that "Alamgir had issued the Farman for [Guru] Tegh Bahadur's arrest, but the order was kept secret. He [Guru Tegh Bahadur] was made prisoner by Dilawar Khan, the Faujdar of Sarhind, when encamped near Ropar, intending to proceed to the Ganges to bathe. When brought to the court, he (Guru Tegh Bahadur) refused to embrace Islam and was executed (Irvine, 1922, p. 79). Ijad's remarks are very brief but are crucial regarding the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru. Besides commenting upon Aurangzeb's direct involvement in arresting the Ninth Guru, he is the only historian who reveals that Guru Tegh Bahadur was offered to embrace Islam to save himself from capital punishment. Like a true loyal Mughal court historian, Ijad, neither discloses the reason for the Ninth Guru's arrest nor the date and place of martyrdom, which was the tested approach of Persian historians to omit the incidents that caused aspersions on the fairness of Aurangzeb.

Khafi Khan's *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* (1731) amplifies this hostility, deploying polemical rhetoric to look upon the Sikh religious places of worship with jealousy and

contempt. As a court historian, Khafi Khan portrays the network of Sikh *Dharamsalas* and the Sikh *Masands* (preachers) as a covert political apparatus. He reports imperial edicts ordering the expulsion of Sikh preachers and the razing of their religious meeting places, attributing these measures to the need to curb indulgence in *Kufar* (blasphemy), a shadowy rebellion against the Islamic orthodoxy propagated by the Mughal Emperor. Khafi Khan's narrative employs evocative metaphors, such as "blasphemous practices" spreading through villages to heighten alarm about the growth of the Sikh Panth (Khafi, 1874, p. 651). It reminds us of Emperor Jahangir, who looked upon the fast spread of the Sikh Panth under Guru Arjan with contempt, calling it *Dukan-i-Batil* (Shop of falsehood), deserving immediate closure, subsequently resulting in the martyrdom of the Fifth Guru in June 1606. Similarly, by casting voluntary gatherings and offerings in criminal terms, Khafi Khan cements a template that later writers would adopt uncritically.

Muhammad Qasim Lahori's *Ibratnama* (1723) deepens the politicized framing by commenting upon the imposition of Islamic orthodox practices by Aurangzeb, besides situating Guru Tegh Bahadur among renowned Sufi luminaries summoned for scrutiny at Aurangzeb's court. Lahori recounts how Muslim Sufis such as Shah Daula Gujrati, Shah Sadaruddin Kasuri, and Shah Hasan Dur, who enjoyed considerable influence, were summoned to the Imperial court to assess their loyalty as well as their spiritual legitimacy. He remarks that some of them were successful in receiving royal favor, and others of the ilk of Dervish Sarmad courted martyrdom (Lahori, MS # 1270, folio 15). Into this milieu, he places the Ninth Guru, suggesting that his mass following and temporal charisma were the real cause of Emperor Aurangzeb's wrath (Lahori, folio 15), who desired from him unqualified faithfulness to the Mughal throne besides abjuring temporal concerns. By equating Guru Tegh Bahadur's principled stance with that of dissenting mystics, Lahori indirectly portrays him as a religious contentious figure, subject to the same disciplinary logic that governed Sufis like Sarmad, deemed subversive.

Muhammad Shafi Warid's *Mirat-i-Waridat* (1734) continues the narrative trajectory by remarking on the inexplicable growth of the Sikh Panth under the successive Sikh Gurus. He marvels at the Guru Tegh Bahadur's wealth, grandeur, and honor, but then blames the Ninth Guru for coercing "the local population of nearby towns, often indulging in plunder, which led to his arrest and execution by Imperial authorities after a long search." (Warid, MS# 553, folio 15). Intriguingly, Warid offers no concrete incidents, no dates, no testimonies, yet his brief statement suffices to cast Guru Tegh Bahadur as a figure who exploited his followers, and his growing influence was a threat to the Mughal State. In doing so, Warid retrospectively justifies Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's action, implying that the Ninth Guru's martyrdom was not an act of conscience but a necessary check on the claim of spiritual and temporal leadership in the disguise of religious leadership.

An account of crucial consequences, which has remained unnoticed by modern historians, is found in Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk* (1736-37). In his attempt to trace the background of the Sikh uprising under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadar, Yahya Khan also takes note of Guru Tegh Bahadur with a different kind of renewed vigour and approach. Interestingly, after reflecting on Guru Nanak and his teachings, he discusses Guru Tegh Bahadur, besides describing Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Singh Bahadur's armed conflict with the Mughals. Regarding Guru Tegh Bahadur, he makes startling revelations, which are very crucial for our study because these have been reproduced verbatim by Ghulam Hussain Khan, the author of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. These are as under:

> The eighth successor of (Guru) Nanak, named (Guru) Tegh Bahadur, gathered a large number of his followers and became a man of influence. Several thousand people used to accompany him as he moved from place to place. His contemporary, Hafiz Adam, a Faqir belonging to the group of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi's followers, had also come to have many murids and followers. Both persons (Guru Tegh Bahadur and Hafiz Adam) took to the practice of levying forcible exactions and moved about in the land of the Panjab. (Guru) Tegh Bahadur used to collect money from Hindus, and Hafiz Adam from Muslims. The royal Newswriters wrote to the Emperor Alamgir that two faqirs, one Hindu and the other Muslim, named so and so, had adopted such and such practice; it would not be uncommon that with the increase of their influence, they may go out of control. Having received this news, Alamgir wrote to the Hakim (Governor) of Lahore that both should be arrested. Hafiz Adam should be banished from the imperial territories towards lands inhabited by Afghans beyond Attock and Peshawar and should never be allowed to return. (Guru) Tegh Bahadur should be arrested and kept in confinement. Action was taken in accordance with the order. After some days, another order came regarding (Guru) Tegh Bahadur that he should be put to death and his body cut into pieces be hung on the various points of the city wall. What was ordered happened. However, the followers of [Guru] Tegh Bahadur used to move

about like faqirs, and it was not their habit to wear arms (Yahya, MS # 1287, folios 30-31).

Yahya Khan's above statement is highly fallacious and cannot be brushed aside. For example, instead of Delhi, he has taken the locale of the martyrdom of the Guru to Lahore. Furthermore, he introduced an anachronistic person, Hafiz Adam, whose antecedents and period are questionable (Anand, 1976, pp. 11-12), which does not lend credence to his account. The nexus between Guru Tegh Bahadur and Hafiz Adam looks improbable because the Sufi Silsila to which he belonged was quite antagonistic to the teachings of Sikhism.(Dhillon, 2022, pp. 88-89). The report of the Imperial News-Writers that the Ninth Guru was a potential danger is self-contradictory when Yahya Khan states that the followers of Guru Tegh Bahadur lived like *Fakirs*, and they were not in the habit of wearing arms. Above all, during those days, there is no evidence of armed confrontation between the Ninth Guru and the Mughal authorities. It seems that the obligatory offerings that Guru Tegh Bahadur received in the form of *Daswandh* from his Sikhs have been misconstrued by Yahya Khan as forcible exactions.

What was the motive of Yahya Khan in depicting such an image of the Ninth Guru? Yahya Khan had served as *Mir-Munshi* (Chief-Secretary) to Emperor Farukhsiyar when the Sikh uprising under Banda Singh Bahadar was a major Mughal crisis. Being a loyal Mughal courtier, Yahya Khan was jealous and antagonistic towards the Sikhs for ousting the Mughals from Panjab. Consequently, besides tarnishing the personality of Guru Tegh Bahadur, he went on spreading canards about the last days of Guru Gobind Singh, obviously to discredit the Sikhs and their Gurus. He was in search of an excuse and thus indulged in a concoction to find a post-facto justification for the capital punishment of the Guru by Aurangzeb. Accusing Guru Tegh Bahadar as an unlawful character, coupled with weaving the tale of Hafiz Adam, an unknown and non-existent person, was a strategy to throw future historians off the track, besides depicting that the Mughal Emperor was judicious and impartial in dispensing justice.

Rai Chaturman, in *Chahar Gulshan* (1759–60), surveys Indian history up to the Mughal period. In the section on religious sects, he briefly discusses the Sikh Gurus under "*Nanakpanthis*." After summarizing Guru Nanak's life, he mentions the later Sikh Gurus in passing. Regarding Guru Tegh Bahadur, Rai Chaturman reproduces the information gathered from Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* that the Ninth Guru ascended the seat of Guruship during Aurangzeb's reign for eleven years, courted martyrdom in Shahjahanabad on the Emperor's orders, and that Guru Gobind Singh was his son (Rai, 2011, p. 286). Like Sujan Rai Bhandari, Rai Chaturman divulges no details on the circumstances and cause of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, besides repeating the mistake regarding the exact date and year of the Ninth Guru's martyrdom, obviously avoiding revealing the truth.

Colonial Compilations: Plagiarism and Perpetuation:

Murtaza Hussain Bilgrami, author of *Hadiqat-ul-Aqlim* (1780), written under British patronage, offers a brief and flawed account of the Sikh Gurus. He claims Guru Tegh Bahadur led the Sikhs for eleven years and was awarded capital punishment for causing unrest, omitting any specific date and place (Bilgrami MS# 537, folio 148). Following in the footsteps of his predecessor, namely Sujan Rai Bhandari, Muhammad Shafi Warid, Bilgrami misdates the martyrdom to the 17th year of Aurangzeb (1085 Hijri) instead of the 19th (1086 Hijri), seemingly to deflect blame from the Mughal Emperor and thus depriving future historians of knowing the truth.

Ghulam Hussain Khan's *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, written around 1782 under the auspices of the British Colonial Government of India, represents a watershed in the institutionalization of distortion. Drawing heavily on earlier Persian chronicles, especially Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* and Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk,* Ghulam Hussain Khan incorporates wholesome text verbatim yet attributes it to his scholarship (compare text of Yahya, folios, 30-31; Ghulam, 1897, pp. 401-402, See also Appendix-1). This wholesale theft of history went unnoticed until Major Nassau W. Lees exposed his mass-scale indulgence in plagiarism (Lees, 1868, p. 423). Lees lamented that Khan had "transferred almost the whole of this work verbatim, without ever once mentioning the author's name." Despite Lee's scathing critique, Colonial authorities went on to produce and print an English version of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* as an authoritative source, lending an officially approved treatise on the history of India, including the anti-Sikh biases.

Academia knows well that the British colonial government of India assigned Raymond Hajee Mustafa the job to render the English translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* for the benefit of European Orientalists engaged in studying the history and culture of India. It was completed in 1787 and published in 1789 from Calcutta under the title of *A History of Mahomedan Power in India.* Unfortunately, it further amplified *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*'s distortions by editorial interventions, inserting details that were absent in the original Persian text. Raymond elaborated the narrative of Guru Tegh Bahadur's alleged alliance with anachronistic Hafiz Adam (Anand, 1976, pp. 11-12), dressing the account in lurid language of a freebooter, indulging in plunder, rapine, and labelling him the potential future armed rebel (Raymond, 1789, pp.

90-91). These inventions, such as the Guru's imprisonment at Gwalior and forcible exactions on the people, have no basis in any near-contemporary manuscript or historical account. Nevertheless, Raymond's version laid the foundation for Colonial editors to transform the Mughal hostile propaganda into a universal indictment.

Later, Lt. Col. John Briggs's 1832, London edition of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, which was based on Raymond's version, facilitated the text's reach in British academic circles. Although Briggs refined the English prose and standardized orthography, he made no effort to correct historical inaccuracies or critique Ghulam Hussain Khan's source of information. As a result, fallacious narrative of sedition and rebellion found their way into the British pioneering surveys of the Sikh and Indian history by Eminent historians such as James Mill, and others (Mill, 1858, pp. 302-303; Malcolm, 1812, pp. 28-29; Cunningham, 1849, pp. 57-58; Trump, 1877, p. LXXXVIII), citing Briggs's edition uncritically, replicating its falsehoods in officially approved works. The colonial apparatus thus perpetuated a self-reinforcing cycle, an imperial power sponsoring distorted history to justify itself, and that very history lending credence to further political control.

The anonymously authored *Haqiqat-i-Bina-wa-Uruz-i-Firka-i-Sikhan* (1783) indicates that, besides disliking the popularity of Sikhism among the people, including the Zimindars of Panjab, Emperor Aurangzeb abhorred the Sikh Gurus taking a keen interest in the secular affairs of the people. He desired Guru Tegh Bahadur to renounce the doctrine and style of *Miri-Piri* and restrict himself purely to passive spiritualism (*Haqiqat*, MS # 1286, folio 4). It clearly reveals the Mughal Emperor's anxiety regarding the growing socio-religious influence of Guru Tegh Bahadur, whose appeal of message resonated among the people across the social spectrum, including Zimindars. The anonymous author of *Haqiqat* subtly exposes Aurangzeb's desire to suppress the popularity of Sikhism by luring Guru Tegh Bahadur to accept the Imperial patronage in the form of a revenue-free land grant to live in a corner without taking interest in secular affairs.

Budh Singh Arora, the author of *Risala Dar Ahwal Nanak Shah Darvesh* (1783), which he wrote on the recommendation of James Brown, a British Resident based in the Mughal-Darbar in Delhi, has also commented upon Guru Tegh Bahadur. As a resident of Punjab, he was supposed to gather accurate information about the Sikhs and their religion. However, on examining the *Risala* of Budh Singh, one feels disappointed that he did not reflect the simplest kind of information about the Sikh Gurus. For example, he states that Guru Tegh Bahadur was the son of Guru Harkishan; Emperor Aurangzeb was in the Deccan, where he summoned the Ninth Guru to appear in the Imperial court, and the Ninth Guru courted martyrdom in the Deccan, where a magnificent Sikh religious shrine has come up (Arora, MS# 433, folios 2-3). We can say that Budh Singh Arora intentionally tried his best to mess up, confuse, and distort the cause and context of the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru under the Colonial design that needs probing.

Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari, the author of *Tarikh-i-Muzaffari* (1800), reflects a complete dependency on Ghulam Hussain Khan's flawed version in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, offering no corrections or critical engagement with earlier mistakes. Most notably, he repeats the entire account of Ghulam Hussain Khan regarding the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (Ansari, MS # 269, folios 86-87), which had become a defining moment in the collective Sikh memory by this time. Ansari's silence not only reflects a broader historiographical trend of indulgence in plagiarism, besides downplays the Mughal culpability in religious persecution and discrimination against the non-Muslims.

Ahmad Behbahani, the author of *Mir'at-ul-Ahwal-e-Jahannuma* (1810), represents the final phase of Persian historiography on Guru Tegh Bahadur in the pre-modern era. His narrative, however, is steeped in historical errors. He repeats Budh Singh Arora's mistakes by claiming that Guru Tegh Bahadur was the son of Guru Har Krishan. Furthermore, he asserts that Guru Tegh Bahadur was murdered by a Hindu rather than courting martyrdom under imperial orders (Ahmed, 1992, p. 281). This revisionist framing deliberately shifts responsibility away from Aurangzeb, sanitizing the Mughal Emperor's involvement in what Sikh sources uniformly consider a legitimate martyrdom for freedom of conscience.

The foregoing discussion confirms that the Persian historiography of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the late seventeenth century to the colonial period depicts a consistent attempt to prove that the Ninth Guru's socio-religious mission was a political rebellion. These accounts were motivated by the authors' sympathetic attitude towards their co-religionist Mughal Emperor, coupled with the intent to legitimize the atrocious treatment as a judicious and legitimate one, deserving of a rebel. The enduring legacy of these Colonial compilations can be seen in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century history books, gazetteers, and travelogues that continue to echo *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*'s pejorative portrayal of the Sikhs, besides the persona of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. By cloaking a Colonial agenda in the guise of scholarly history, Ghulam Hussain Khan, Raymond, and Briggs entrenched an anti-Sikh narrative at the heart of Anglophone historiography. Resultantly,

as mentioned earlier the writings of modern historians, including European scholars (Malcolm, 1812, pp. 28-29; Cunningham, 1849, pp. 57-58; Mill, 1858, pp. 302-303; Trump, 1877, p. LXXXVIII), are full of misconceptions about Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Sikh religion. The colonial embrace of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* marginalized the contemporary Sikh perspectives (*Bachittar*, 2000, Chap. 5.13-16; Sainapati, 1980, pp. 65, 68; Bhangu, 2004, pp. 24-28, 419). It suppressed the alternative narrative that was rooted in the sacred writings and *Hukamnamas* of the Ninth Guru, besides the collective Sikh memory enshrined in the Sikh sources.

Postcolonial Texts and Curriculum:

Though William Irvine had expressed his reservations on the credibility of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* (Irvine, 1922, p. 79), however, modern India's leading historians, especially J. N. Sarkar, took no initiative to correct the unwarranted observations (Sarkar, 1928, pp. 312-13). The amazing fact is that no British Colonial historian and modern indigenous historian took pains to verify the sources of Ghulam Hussain Khan from which he had acquired information but went on to accept the narrative presented by him as the proverbial truth (Faruki, 1972, pp. 253-554; Satish, 2007, pp. 346-47, Muzaffar, 1986, p. 327). Though in the case of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Prof. Ganda Singh and Teja Singh did their best to remove the mist of a fallacious account of Ghulam Hussain Khan (Ganda Singh, 1950, p. 56; 1976, pp 191-267), however, the gullible modern historians do not take cognizance of it. We can state that the root cause of it is the *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* and its English translation, on which our modern-day historians still rely for writing the history of India.

There is no denying the fact that Persian historiographical works display commitment and faithfulness to the Mughals, besides harboring communal bias against the non-Muslim subjects. Secondly, though Persian sources are indispensable for doing the history of India, at the same time, regional/vernacular sources are equally crucial while exploring the history of the Sikh Gurus. Another critical factor that has been ignored or has gone unnoticed so far is the indulgence in rampant plagiarism, distortions, repetitions, omissions, ignoring evidence detrimental to the persona of the Emperor, and communal prejudice by the Persian historians. Only by unraveling these layers of misinterpretations/ misconceptions, the present-day scholars disentangle fact from fiction and restore the Ninth Guru's true legacy.

Despite clear reservations by William Irvine regarding the credibility of the sources information of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, besides the absence of a near-contemporary perspective on Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom, twentieth-century textbooks and popular histories continued to perpetuate the Colonial distortions. Prestigious Indian educational bodies such as NCERT and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) incorporated uncritical summaries of *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* into their curricula. Textbooks routinely presented the Ninth Guru as a militant rebel "levying contributions" and "forcible exactions," echoing Raymond and Briggs' erroneous translation. This version suppressed the authentic Sikh perspective, shaping the perception of future generations of students and researchers. The persistence of these stereotype narratives underscores not only editorial negligence but also institutional reluctance to revisit entrenched narratives once they gain official sanction. It is a pity that even the prominent historians (Grewal and Irfan, 1999), who did well to produce an admirable tome, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, were found shy to discuss plagiarism and distortions by Ghulam Hussain Khan, thus missed the opportunity to resolve the issue once far all.

We have observed that the English translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* by Raymond, and later by Briggs, played a crucial role in depicting Guru Tegh Bahadur as an extortionist, freebooter, and a rebellious militant. It not only misrepresents the Guru's martyrdom but also reflects broader Colonial motives to suppress the moral and spiritual authority of the Sikh tradition. The Persian historiography of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, notably when mediated through Colonial translators, repeatedly framed the Ninth Guru's temporal and religious concerns as seditious. This narrative strategy sought to legitimize his capital punishment by portraying him not as a martyr of conscience but as a political insurgent. Modern scholarship must now critically reassess these inherited accounts. Only through rigorous source analysis and contextual re-evaluation can the historical integrity of Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and legacy be reclaimed from centuries of ideological distortion.

Evidently, the origin of the distorted image of Guru Tegh Bahadur is rooted in Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*, from which Ghulam Hussain Khan has copied without any impunity. Although the *Tazkira* survives only in a couple of manuscripts, its defamatory portrayal of the Sikh Gurus found wider publicity/acceptance through Ghulam Hussain Khan's work. The endorsement and translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* by the British Colonial Government of India, like Raymond and Briggs, ensured the mass circulation of these distortions/fabrications. We have noted with concern that while Persian chroniclers belonging to the Mughal Imperial court and their later derivatives are marred by plagiarism, repetitions,

omissions, distortions, and communal prejudice, they still sometimes unwittingly certify the persona of Guru Tegh Bahadur's influence and the challenge he posed to the Mughal despotism and hegemony.

It is noteworthy that despite strenuous attempts by the Persian historians to erase or diminish the cause and legitimacy of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Sikh tradition preserved the truth. It transformed it into a central pillar of the collective memory of the Panth. It holds that the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb himself was responsible for the injustice done to Guru Tegh Bahadur, a fact which was deeply etched on the hearts of the ordinary Sikhs. There was a deep anger in their hearts. It come into the open as reported by the court historian Saqi Mustaid Khan in his *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* (1710), that when "On Friday, October 27, 1676 /29th Ramzan, while the Emperor was returning from the Jam'a Masjid, had alighted from the boat in order to mount the moveable chair, (*Takhat-i-Rawan*), an ill-fated disciple of Guru Tegh Singh threw two bricks, one of which reached the chair" (Saqi, 1947, p. 94). Surely, it was an expression of public anger and the failure of imperial propaganda to erase the martyrdom from the canvas of history. However, Tegh Bahadur's legacy transcended the Mughal courtly narratives to inspire the Sikh Panth to stand up in the cause of justice and righteousness without any fear. It reflects how Guru Tegh Bahadur's legacy of moral courage of fear not, frighten not, and resistance to suppress the freedom of conscience, came out into the open amid historiographical silence on the part of Persian chroniclers. His martyrdom was not merely a religious event; it was a defining moment of legitimate dissent/ resistance and moral-spiritual courage, whose impact reverberated well beyond his time.

No doubt, reclaiming the authentic account of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur is a challenging task; however, with proper methodology, it is still achievable in the present times. To address centuries of layered distortions, a rigorous philological methodology must be established. First, researchers should compile a master catalog of all extant Persian, Punjabi, and English texts, including the manuscripts that reference Guru Tegh Bahadur, ranging from *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* to colonial translations of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. Each item must be identified by its various manuscript sigla, provenance, and dates of composition. Researchers then collate variant readings, noting omissions, interpolations, plagiarism, and marginal glosses that suggest editorial intervention. This process will illuminate how narrative threads, such as the alleged alliance with Hafiz Adam or claims of forcible exactions, were introduced, modified, or excised over time. By mapping the textual genealogy of each distortion, scholars can restore the original contours of the Ninth Guru's image as it emerged in the contemporary Sikh sources, rather than later colonial retellings. Contemporary scholarship must recognize these challenges and biases to present a more balanced and historically grounded portrayal of Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and martyrdom.

4. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the broader implications of historiographical distortions and the need for critical re-examination of Persian and colonial sources.

The findings of this study underscore the broader implications of historiographical distortions in shaping collective memory, identity, and interfaith understanding. The persistence of misrepresentations across Persian, colonial, and postcolonial sources reveals not only the biases of their authors but also the long-lasting institutional mechanisms—imperial patronage, colonial translation projects, and modern educational curricula—that allowed such distortions to become entrenched. These narratives, once canonized, influenced generations of students, scholars, and policymakers, thereby shaping the public image of Guru Tegh Bahadur far beyond his historical context.

A critical re-examination of Persian chronicles and their colonial appropriations is therefore essential. By exposing plagiarism, mistranslations, and rhetorical strategies of vilification, scholars can dismantle the inherited prejudices that continue to permeate modern historiography. More importantly, this discussion points toward the responsibility of contemporary scholarship to not only critique past distortions but also to reintegrate neglected Sikh sources, including *Hukamnamas*, vernacular chronicles, and oral traditions, into mainstream academic discourse. In doing so, historiography can move closer to reflecting a balanced account that honors the integrity of Sikh tradition while adhering to rigorous historical methods.

5. CONCLUSION

The study reaffirms that the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur was not an act of sedition or political insurgency, but rather a profound testimony of moral courage and freedom of conscience. Centuries of distortion—rooted in Mughal court narratives, reinforced by colonial plagiarism, and perpetuated in modern academic and curricular texts—have obscured this reality. By systematically tracing the genealogy of these misrepresentations, the paper demonstrates how historical narratives can be shaped and reshaped by power, ideology, and institutional agendas.

The conclusion calls for sustained source-critical scholarship that is attentive to philology, context, and cross-comparison. Only through such rigorous

engagement can the historical truth be disentangled from centuries of fabrication. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for scholars and educators to integrate Sikh perspectives alongside Persian and colonial accounts, thereby creating a more inclusive and accurate historiography. In doing so, the legacy of Guru Tegh Bahadur—as a spiritual leader, martyr, and defender of religious freedom—can be reclaimed and reaffirmed with scholarly integrity.

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Appendix

In order to trace the trail of plagiarism, distortion, omission of crucial evidence, and fabrication of narratives to legitimize the suppression of dissent against the Mughal state's policies, it is essential to examine the works of five key Persian chroniclers. These chroniclers played a pivotal role in shaping the official discourse, often aligning their accounts with the ideological and political interests of the Mughal Imperial court. Furthermore, this study also sheds light on how British colonial translators and editors, during the 18th and 19th centuries, not only misinterpreted these Persian texts but also selectively promoted and disseminated these skewed interpretations on a broader scale, thereby reinforcing colonial narratives that served their own administrative and ideological agendas.

Firstly, we take up the Persian text of *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* by Sujan Rai Bhandari. While listing the names and tenures of the successive Sikh Gurus, he misleads readers by erroneously dating the Ninth Guru's martyrdom to 1081 Hijri, corresponding to the 17th regnal year of Aurangzeb Alamgir, instead of the 19th regnal year, which accords with 11 November 1675 and is well attested in Sikh tradition. We notice that several later Persian historians repeated Bhandari's error. For readers' convenience, we provide images (No. 1 and No.2) of from *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* (1696) and *Siyar-ul Mutakherin* (1783), respectively establishing the source of Ghulam Hussain Khan:

Secondly, many historians are unaware that Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk* contains a reference to Guru Tegh Bahadur and his alleged collaborator, Hafiz Adam Sarhindi, a passage that Ghulam Husain Khan reproduced verbatim in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. Our Punjabi rendering and critical appraisal of it appear in *Sikh Itihas di Farsi Itihaskari* (Dhillon, 2022, p. 273). Yahya Khan's account is markedly polemical as it diminishes Guru Nanak's spiritual authority and the originality of his sacred compositions, treating them as if they were merely a Punjabi version of Sufi poetry; it also portrays the Sikh gathering around Guru Tegh Bahadur in a way that makes accusations of extortion seem plausible, even associating the Guru to a contemporary Sufi as though both together extracted money from the public. His vocabulary is frequently ambiguous, adding to the confusion. Because this testimony is crucial to demonstrating Ghulam Husain Khan's plagiarism, we have already provided its English rendering in this study along with a critique of its evidentiary value. To drive home our argument, we are appending here an image (No. 3) of *Tazkirat-ul Muluk.*

Thirdly, we draw attention to the Persian text of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. Before discussing Guru Tegh Bahadur, Ghulam Husain Khan lists the successive Sikh Gurus and states that Guru Tegh Bahadur succeeded Guru Harkrishan and held the Guruship for eleven years. He further claims that, in the 17th year of Aurangzeb's reign, the Guru was imprisoned and executed by imperial order. Evidently, it is borrowed from Sujan Rai Bhandari and repeats his error of dating the martyrdom to the 17th regnal year of Alamgir. It constitutes a clear instance of plagiarism that went largely unnoticed or was ignored by British colonial historians. Notably, Raymond and Briggs omit this passage from their translations. For reference, we reproduce an image (N. 5) of the relevant Persian passage of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*.

Both translators omit the crucial reference (Raymond, 1789, pp. 89-90; Briggs, 1832, pp. 110-112) to the year of the Guru's martyrdom as recorded in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, thereby concealing the error and deflecting attention from Ghulam Husain Khan's failure to identify the correct year. Additionally, their versions introduce distortions and fabrications absent from the original Persian text. We reproduce Raymond's passage with original spellings, marking questionable contents in italics:

> Nanec-Shah had not for his immediate successor, either the one or the other of his children, but only a servant of his, called Angad, who sat on

the patriarch's carpet with full authority. The ninth in succession from this Angad was one Tygh-bahadyr, who was of such an extraordinary character as drew multitudes after him, ***all of which as well as their leader, went always armed***. This man finding himself at the head of so many thousands of people, ***became aspiring***; ***and he united his concerns with one Hafyz-aadem***, a Mussulman Fakir, and one of those that styled themselves of Shekh-ahmed-serhindi's fraternity. ***These two men no sooner saw themselves followed by multitudes, implicitly addicted to their chief's will, than forsaking every honest calling, they fell a subsisting by plunder and rapine, laying waste the whole province of Pendjab;*** for whilst Tygh-bahadyr was levying contributions upon the Hindoos, Hafyz-aadem was doing the same upon the Mussulmen. Such excesses having soon ***attracted the notice of the crown-officers***, gazetteers, and intelligencers, they wrote to the emperor Aorengzib, ***that these two men made it a practice to live by plunder and sack.*** In answer to such an advice, the emperor commanded the Viceroy of Pendjab, residing at Lahor***,*** to seize these two miscreants, and to send the Mussulman to the country of Afghans, quite up to the last limits of Hindostan, beyond the Atec, with defense to him to cross it again under pain of death. ***Tygh-Bahadur, the other freebooter, he was to send a prisoner to the castle of Gwaliar***. The Governor executed his orders punctually. Some days after there came an order to the Governor of Gwaliar, to put Tygh-bahadur to death, to cut his body into four quarters***, and to hang them at the four gates of the fortress***, a sentence which was literally executed. But this execution was followed by mournful consequences (Raymond, Calcutta, 1789, pp. 90-91).

According to the above, after his arrest, the Ninth Guru was confined in the fort of Gwalior; his martyrdom is likewise said to have occurred there, a claim that directly contradicts Sikh tradition. Nothing in the original text justifies the assertions that Guru Tegh Bahadur "united his concerns with one Hafiz Adam," "subsisted himself and his disciples by plunder," "laid waste the whole province of Punjab," or that he was "a freebooter," apart from the underlying historical errors. Ironically, Briggs did not correct Raymond in the revised 1832 edition. In retrospect, Raymond and Briggs' depiction of Guru Tegh Bahadur as an extortionist and potential rebel not only misrepresents the Guru's life and martyrdom but also reflects the broader colonial design to undermine the moral and spiritual authority of the Sikh tradition. It looks legitimate to remind that contemporary French orientalist, namely A.L.H. Polier, who was a contemporary of Ghulam Hussain Khan and affiliated with the British colonial authorities, was in the forefront to denigrate the Sikhs who were on the threshold of establishing sovereign Sikh rule in Punjab. For example, he says that the Sikhs, "are the terror and plague of this part of India, a nation and power well calculated for doing mischief and encouraging rebellion in the zemindars or cultivators." He went on to denigrate the Sikh Commonwealth of Sikh Misals that it is a "many-headed snake" (Singh, G. 1962, pp. 64-65). This hostility illuminates the British Colonial Government of India's assessment of the Sikh tradition and its deep design in promoting *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*.

Lastly, we would like to draw attention to an extract of *Farukhsiyar Nama* (1717) by Muhammad Ahsan Ijad, who was a near-contemporary Mughal courtier. We have accessed and examined it very recently. Besides confirming William Irvin's observations, our reading provides a few more details about it. While explaining the origin of the Sikh uprising under Banda Singh Bahadur,

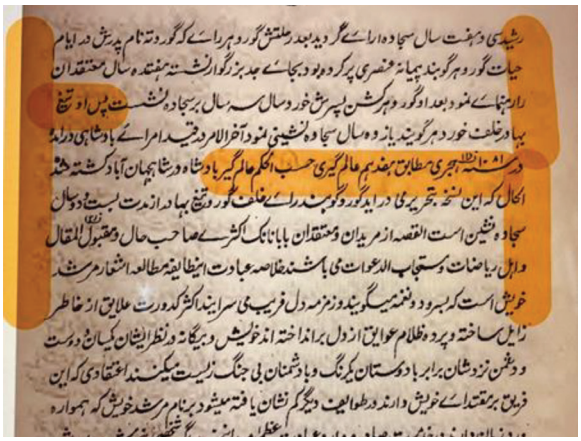

Image 1. Sujan Rai Bhandari, p.70, wherein he records the date of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom wrongly taking place in 17th year of Alamgiri.

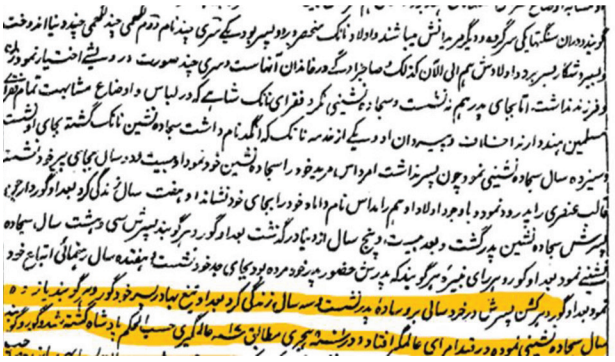

Image 2. Ghulam Hussain Khan's account of Guru Tegh Bahadur in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* wherein he reproduces Sujan Rai Bhandari's error in dating the Martyrdom.

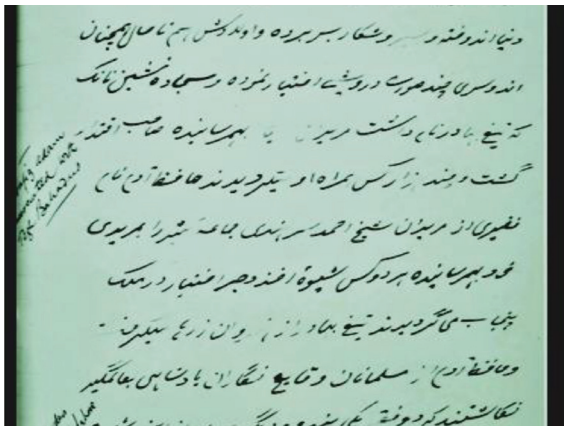

Image 3. Folio 30 of *Tazkirat ul Muluk* by Yahya khan wherein he introduces the tale of Hafiz Adam Khan an alleged collaborator of the Ninth Guru.

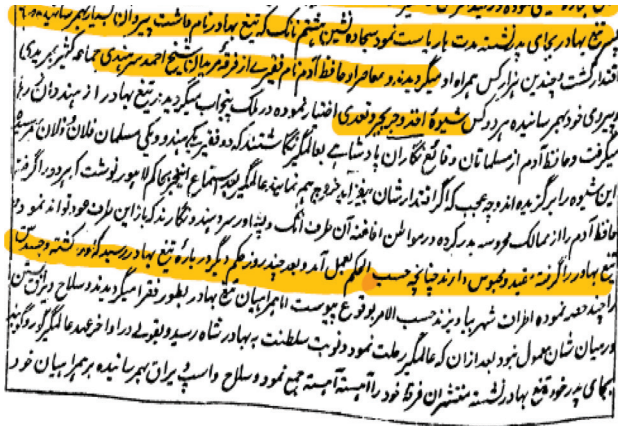

Image 4. *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* p. 401, wherein Yahiya Khan's above episode of Hafiz Adam appears in the same words.

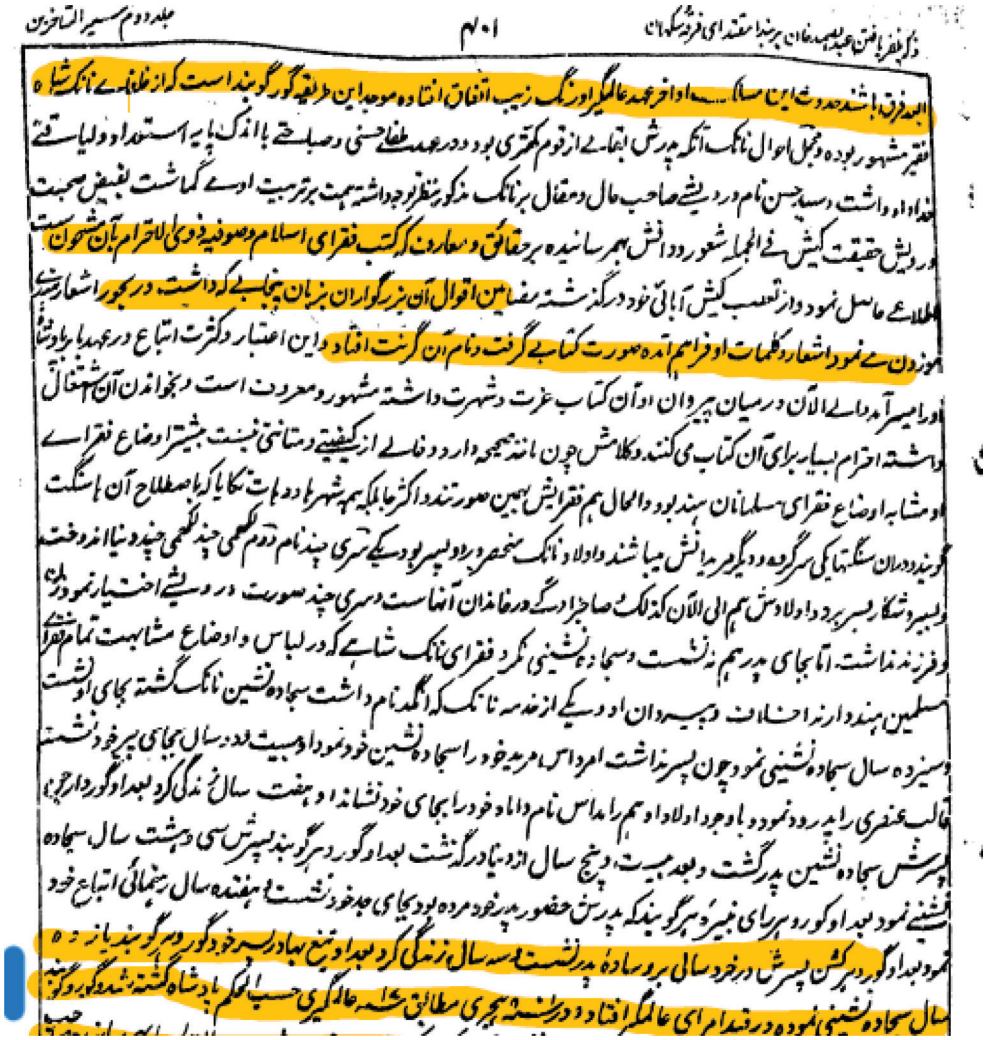

Image 5. Para of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* on p. 401, which has been omitted by Raymond and Briggs in their translations.

Muhammad Ahsan Ijad tries to locate the Sikh dissent and discusses its origin. While commenting upon the Sikh Gurus, he discusses Guru Nanak, Guru Arjun, and Guru Hargobind, and then moves on to Guru Tegh Bahadur:

In the early years of *Hazrat Khulad-i-Makan* [Emperor Aurangzeb], a person named [Guru] Tegh Bahadur resumed the work of [Gurushiip]. He was [rugged] and rigid because the religious behaviour

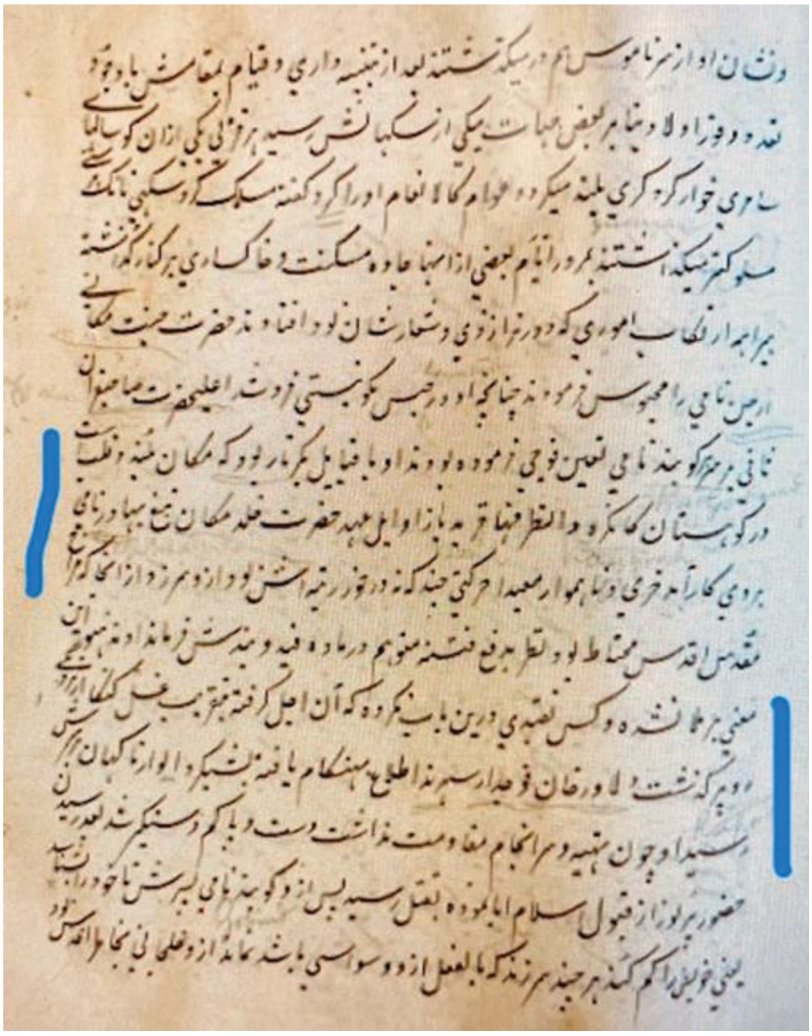

Image 6. Folio 13a of *Farukhsiyarnmama-Fragment* which bears testimony to Aurangzeb's order that was kept secret to arrest Guru Tegh Bahadur, and his denial to embrace Islam

> and practices adopted by him were illegitimate because of his status. Aurangzeb was strict about this type of crime, and therefore, he issued a *Farman* for [Guru] Tegh Bahadur's arrest to punish him for his conduct. However, no one, including any Hindus, knew about this order. When the time of death arrived, the Guru was proceeding to the Ganges, intending to take a bath, and had just passed Ropar. This news reached Dilawar Khan, the Faujdar of Sarhind, who immediately arrived there; [Guru] Tegh Bahadur was neither prepared nor inclined to fight. He was taken into custody, handcuffed, fettered, and put into prison. Later, when he was presented in the court, he refused to accept Islam and was executed. (Ijad, MS # 3958, folio 13a).

Although this account does not reveal the location of Guru Tegh Bahadur's confinement, nor the exact date and place of his execution, it remains a crucial piece of historical evidence. It discloses that Aurangzeb's order to arrest the Guru was not known to anyone but was kept a close secret. It also identifies Dilawar Khan, the Faujdar of Sarhind, as the official responsible for the Guru's arrest, and locates the event near Ropar. Kesar Singh Chhibber corroborates this in his *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* (1769), that Mughal soldiers from the Ropar police post apprehended the Guru near a village and later handed him over to the Faujdar of Sarhind (Padam, 1997, p. 116). Ijad indicates that Aurangzeb exerted pressure on the Ninth Guru to renounce the Sikh doctrine of *Miri-Piri,* which, in the eyes of the emperor, was illegitimate and politically subversive. Ijad also inadvertently reveals Aurangzeb's intention to convert the Guru to Islam forcibly. Significantly, the Sikh tradition is very consistent in its claim that Guru Tegh Bahadur was physically tortured, compelling him to embrace Islam, but he remained firm on his Dharma. It testifies that Guru Tegh Bahadur was asked to embrace Islam, and on denying it, he was put to the sword. Interestingly, Ijad's statement syncs well with the Sikh tradition. Ironically, the later Persian chroniclers, in order to exonerate the Mughal Emperor, continued to paint the Guru in the image of

an armed insurgent, conveniently ignoring the fact of religious persecution responsible for the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru. Though William Irvin has referred to it in a footnote, we feel pleasure in sharing the image (No. 6) of Muhammad Ahsan Ijad's testimony for wider appreciation at the hands of scholars.

Before concluding this write-up, it is important to reflect on the biases and limitations of the Persian chroniclers, whose fortunes were closely tied to the safety and stability of the Mughal Empire. As a result, their narratives must be interpreted with great caution and a critical eye, reading between the lines to uncover deeper historical truths.

A survey of Persian chroniclers reveals that these writings, originating between the late 17th and late 18th centuries, have commented on the life and martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur casually. These historians came from diverse socio-religious and geographical backgrounds. A few of them served as *munshis* or accountants in the Mughal administration. We find that Inayatullah Khan Ismi, Saqi Mustaid Khan, Muhammad Ahsan Ijad, Yahya Khan, Khafi Khan, and Muhammad Qasim Lahori belonged to the administrative-historiographical class attached to the Mughal court. However, being away from Punjab, most relied on reports from *Waqia-Nigars* and News-Writers, often leading to inaccuracies in their accounts of Sikh history and doctrine.

The motives of Persian historians were closely tied to their socio-political positioning. Many sought Imperial patronage, using their literary skills to gain favor at the Mughal court. Historians like Inayatullah Khan, Saqi Mustaid Khan, and Khafi Khan aligned their narratives with the Mughal State's orthodox Islamic ideology, legitimising tyranny and glorifying rulers like Aurangzeb. For Munshi-turned historians, instead of historical integrity and objectivity, writing was often a strategic path to professional and social advancement. As Mughal rule declined, several Persianate historians, such as Ghulam Hussain Khan, Syed Ghulam Ali Khan, Murtaza Hussain Bilgrami, and Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari, turned to the British East India Company for patronage. Their works, shaped by service to the British colonial administrators, influenced early British understandings of the Sikh tradition.

Evidence at hand suggests that, though some Mughal historians had access to official reports from *Waqia-Nigars* and News-Writers, and consulted texts like *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, none appeared to use the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, despite its relatively balanced treatment of Sikh beliefs. Most Persian chroniclers, because of their loyalty to the Mughal crown, reinforced Mughal legitimacy, rarely questioning policies of religious intolerance and persecution, acknowledging the suffering of non-Muslims. Dissent was routinely portrayed as heretical or anti-Islamic, while Mughal violence was minimized or justified. Vilification of gathering of people around religious persons like Guru Tegh Bahadur by the Imperial News-writers in terms of perceived threats to Imperial authority was a common element.

Mention of Sikh Gurus by the Mughal Persian chroniclers was not a theological exploration but was framed within the context of Mughal Imperial concerns, particularly the Sikh doctrine of Miri-Piri, that social concerns are an inseparable part of Sikh spirituality, but it was understood as subversive, a challenge to Mughal sovereignty. This limited engagement led to mistrust, subsequently putting Guru Tegh Bahadur in confinement, preventing him from preaching his mission freely. While Guru Nanak's spiritual appeal was acknowledged, Persian historians, constrained by Islamic doctrine, especially the belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the seal of Prophethood, portrayed the Guru as a Sufistic figure like a Murshid, Pir, or Shah to fit within Islamic categories.

Imperial figures like Jahangir and Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi viewed the spread of Sikhism as a religious and political threat to both Islam and Mughal rule in India. Their calls for its suppression influenced subsequent Persian historians, who either ignored or rationalized the persecution of Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh's sons. These narratives, couched in religious orthodoxy, mobilized Muslim sentiment against the Sikhs.

In sum, Persian historiography on Sikh history was shaped by proximity to Mughal despotism, theological limitations, and political motives. While informative as historical documents, these accounts must be critically examined for communal prejudice, plagiarism, omissions, and misrepresentations.

Biographical Statement of Author(s)

Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon (b. 5 February 1950) is a distinguished scholar of Sikh history, religion, and devotional literature. He served as the Founder Director (2011–2015) of the Centre for Studies on Sri Guru Granth Sahib at Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU), Amritsar, and previously as Professor and Head (2003–2005) of the Department of Guru Nanak Studies. He was also Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Religious Studies (2009–2010) and a member of both the Senate and Syndicate of GNDU, Amritsar.

Dr. Dhillon obtained his Master's degree in History from the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur (1974), and an M.A. (M.Lit.) in Religious Studies from Punjabi University, Patiala (1976). He earned his Ph.D. in Sikh History from Guru Nanak Dev University in 1985 for his dissertation titled "The Sikh Gurus and the Mughal State."

A dedicated academic and researcher since 1979, Dr. Dhillon has contributed extensively to the study and teaching of Sikh religion, history, and scripture, with a particular focus on the historical interface between Sikh Gurus and Mughal authority. His work continues to influence contemporary scholarship on Sikhism and interfaith historiography.

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