

Bhai Nand Lal Katha

ایک اونکار سنگور, پرساد

سری وحیگورو جی کی فتنہ

In this katha the greatest Sikh scholar of the 20th century Sant Singh Maskeen provides an outline and historical contextualization of the ghazals of Bhai Nand Lal. As is typical of the deep katha of Maskeen, he draws heavily on historical and philosophical traditions of the time for comparative purposes and to highlight the significance of the poetry.

The katha is divided in two parts: the first outlines the history of religious traditions and philosophy in India leading to the creation of the Sikh path. This is done in order to set the right historical context for the ghazals. The second part is then a discussion on the ghazals and works of Bhai Nand Lal.

This translation is a part of a greater project running in 2012-2014 with the aim of highlighting the role and figure of Bhai Nand Lal in the Sikh tradition. For more on the life and works of Bhai Nand Lal Goya please see our website on www.bhainandlal.com



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Original katha: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyIAqcM3cc8>

This katha was translated by Prabhjot Singh

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ

There are two paths available in the world to walk on - one path is the path of the world, which ends in the physical world itself (lōk), and the other leads to the world beyond (parlōk), that ultimately culminates in merging with the Creator. The pace of people walking on either of these paths vary greatly - some tread briskly, leaving others behind, others loose direction in the midway, or hit roadblocks, and there are yet others that have only just begun walking.

A part of our physical self belongs to this world, while the internal consciousness is the light that belongs to the world beyond. That is to say, we are partly composed of the five elements, and partly with the Eternal Light, the Parāmatmā.

ਖਾਕ ਨੂਰ ਕਰਦੰ ਆਲਮ ਦੁਨੀਆਇ ॥

The Lord infused His Light into the dust, and created the world, the universe.

(Ang 723, Guru Granth Sahib)

It is our responsibility to sustain the physical self, as well as make efforts towards merging with the Absolute. A person who adopts this kind of lifestyle is known as Rāj Yogī.

ਰਾਜ ਮਹਿ ਰਾਜੁ ਜੇਗ ਮਹਿ ਜੇਗੀ ॥ ਤਪ ਮਹਿ ਤਪੀਸਰੁ ਗ੍ਰਿਹਸਤ ਮਹਿ ਭੇਗੀ ॥

Among kings, He is the King; among yogis, He is the Yogi. Among ascetics,

He is the Ascetic; among householders, He is the Enjoyer.

(Ang 284, Guru Granth Sahib)

In ancient times, society was divided into yogis, householders, warriors and ascetics. A Yogi could not even dream of becoming a King, while the instances of a King becoming a Yogi were very rare. Similarly, householders who were engrossed in pleasures of life could not adapt to meditation, while renunciates and ascetics found nothing of interest in such worldly pleasures. That is to say, some walked on the worldly path, and others chose the spiritual path.

In ancient times, it is said, the majority of people in India cared only for the spiritual path, and totally ignored the worldly aspect. Such individuals showed little or no care for worldly comforts, all their efforts were directed towards making sure they touched the zenith of the spiritual path.

A considerable portion of the population in those times made such efforts right from a very early age, and even affluent noblemen were drawn towards them. Great kings like Gautama Buddha, Raja Bharthari, Raja Gopichand, Raja Asoka etc. were full of such burning desire for liberation that they renounced their kingdoms and became ascetics.

The minority of the population that only cared for material things were looked down on. The derogatory term 'Shūdrā' was used to address such people, which at the time, meant nothing more than someone who is lowest of the low, someone who has no care for the world beyond. (Of course, with time, the meaning of the term changed to its present day meaning). Historians and intellectuals have estimated that such people were only 2% of the total population.

Hence, it was naturally inevitable for India to lag behind in economic and monetary areas. On the flip side, however, she has gifted to mankind more spiritual wisdom than any other other country in the world. 4 Vedas, 108 Upanishads, 6 Shaastars, 27 Smritis, 18 Puranas, and thousands of other minor Granths belonging to other spiritual schools, like Jainism, and Buddhism were all born in India. The King, the Guru of all Granths, Dhan Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji Maharaj also took their bodily form in this country.

The majority of the writers of these Granths of other faiths were written by Rishis and Munis that led a householder's life. They would spare 10% of the time to earn their sustenance, while rest 90% of their time was wholly devoted towards attainment of spiritual wealth. Such devotion naturally produced immense amounts of spiritual wisdom, which they shared with rest of the world. However, because they did not give much time to worldly affairs, they lagged behind in money matters and remained poor throughout their lives. A majority of the Bhagats in Guru Granth Sahib - Bhagat Ravidas, Kabir Ji, Trilochan Ji, Sain Ji, Sadhna Ji, Bheekhan Ji, Baba Fareed Ji -- are all poor in the worldly sense. Bhagat Ravidas Ji for instance says:

ਦਾਰਿਦੁ ਦੇਖਿ ਸਭ ਕੇ ਹਸੈ ਐਸੀ ਦਸਾ ਹਮਾਰੀ ॥

ਅਸਟ ਦਸਾ ਸਿਧਿ ਕਰ ਤਲੈ ਸਭ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਤੁਮਾਰੀ ॥੧॥

Seeing my poverty, everyone laughed. Such was my condition.

Now, I hold the eighteen miraculous spiritual powers in the palm of my hand;

Everything is by Your Grace. ||1||

(Ang 858, Guru Granth Sahib)

Bhagat Kabir Ji were also extremely poor; his worldly condition is evident in some of his Shabads:

ਮੁਸਿ ਮੁਸਿ ਰੇਵੈ ਕਬੀਰ ਕੀ ਮਾਈ ॥ ਏ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਕੈਸੇ ਜੀਵਹਿ ਰਘੁਰਾਈ ॥੧॥

ਤਨਨਾ ਬੁਨਨਾ ਸਭੁ ਤਜਿਓ ਹੈ ਕਬੀਰ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਲਿਖਿ ਲੀਓ ਸਰੀਰ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Kabeer's mother sobs, cries and bewails - O Lord, how will my grandchildren live? ||1||

Kabeer has given up all his spinning and weaving,
and written the Name of the Lord on his body. ||1||Pause||

(Ang 524, Guru Granth Sahib)

Baba Fareed Ji were in the same condition:

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਰੇਟੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਕਾਠ ਕੀ ਲਾਵਣੁ ਮੇਰੀ ਭੁਖ ॥

ਜਿਨਾ ਖਾਧੀ ਚੇਪੜੀ ਘਣੇ ਸਹਨਿਗੇ ਦੁਖ ॥੨੮॥

Fareed, my bread is made of wood, and hunger is my appetizer.

Those who eat buttered bread will suffer in terrible pain. ||28||

(Ang 1379, Guru Granth Sahib)

It is a human habit that one follows those who are ahead of them in their field. In olden times, these were the great souls that people followed and tried to emulate. They never hesitated before sacrificing worldly pleasures for the sake of spiritual gains. Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj sacrificed twenty Rupees for this cause and explained to his father that he had sacrificed those few rupees on the path to liberation. Such spiritual paths were emulated by majority of the population.

With time however, lifestyles and ideologies changed, and with it changed the role models. People started imitating those who had achieved success in the materialistic world. Earlier, people were judged by the amount of good virtues one possessed. The more patient, calm, wise and intelligent a person was, the higher respect he would get from his peers.

But changing times brought about a turn of tides; the parameters of judgement changed, and so did those who judged. Nowadays, a person is judged by the amount of his wealth and social affluence, and sadly these are the kind of people that are being emulated. But if we use this sort of criteria for measurement, then Kabir Ji, Fareed Ji, Ravidas Ji, Sadhna Ji, and other Bhagats will fail badly, for they have lagged behind in worldly success. However, they have climbed such spiritual heights that they have been able to knock on the Lord's door, and sit on His throne.

Just like with worldly success, one has to endure extreme hardships on the path to the Creator, such is the law of Nature. And while it is possible one can become rich quickly or inherit ancestral property, the spiritual wealth will be earned only by one's own strenuous efforts. Perhaps this, along with the lack of proper role-models, is the reason behind current spiritual decline, which has reached such low levels that it is possible that the words of spiritual wisdom may not reach their ears anymore.

It is precisely because of the decline in spiritual leadership that our Guru Sahibs have connected us with Sri Shabad Guru, for it is the root that connects us to our Anāhad Nād.

ਤਿਹੁ ਲੋਕਾ ਮਹਿ ਸਬਦੁ ਰਵਿਆ ਹੈ ਆਪੁ ਗਇਆ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨਿਆ ॥੨॥

The Word of His Shabad is pervading the three worlds;

when my ego was quieted, my mind became happy. ||2||

(Ang 351, Guru Granth Sahib)

Spoken words remain in ether; it does not get destroyed. The power of the spoken word cannot be underestimated. A single word can cleanse all the sins of a person. Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj demonstrated this during his fortnightly stay at Baba Farid Ji's place at Pak Pattan. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji says:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਬਚਨ ਬਚਨ ਹੈ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪਾਧਰੁ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਜਨਾਵੈਗੇ ॥੫॥

The True Guru is the Teachings, and the Teachings is the True Guru

who teaches the Path of Liberation. ||5||

(Ang 1309, Guru Granth Sahib)

There was a time when people gladly sacrificed money for the sake of spirituality. But in present times, people are seen sacrificing faith for money. That is why we have industrialists like Birlas and Tatas in abundance, while saints like Sri Namdev Ji and Kabir Ji are nowhere to be seen. In ancient times, even the greatest of kings had utmost respect for saints and religious people. For instance, Sri Ram had utmost respect for Sri Vishishit; whenever he came to meet him, he would step down from his throne and make him sit on it instead. Same sort of respect was showered by King Janak on saint Ashtavakar. Faith would sit on throne, and politics on its feet. But this trend has reversed in present times. People now put faith beneath their feet, while money and other worldly objects are given utmost importance.

Bhai Nand Lal Goya

The spiritual path is full of hardships and obstacles. Some of these difficulties, and their solutions, form the topic of our discussion below. The inspiration of this talk came (to Maskeen Ji) after reading a book titled “Kulliyāt-e Bhai Nand Lal” (لال نند بهای کلیات) which was published by Singhs of Iranian Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Tehran.

The book contains verses of great Sufi saints like Shaikh Sādi, Mawlāna Rumi, Shamz Tabrizi, Ferdowsi and Attar on one side while Bhai Nand Lal Ji's verses are printed on facing pages. Throughout the book, Bhai Nand Lal keep reminding the earlier Sufi poets that, had they met a Murshid like Guru Gobind Singh ji they wouldn't have faced the spiritual difficulties they talk about in their verses. Baba Farid Ji have also mentioned a few of these obstacles in a few places:

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਦਰ ਦਰਵੇਸੀ ਗਾਖੜੀ ਚਲਾਂ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਭਤਿ ॥

ਬੰਨ੍ਹਿ ਉਠਾਈ ਪੇਟਲੀ ਕਿਥੈ ਵੰਢਾ ਘਤਿ ॥੨॥

Fareed, it is so difficult to become a humble Saint at the Lord's Door.

I am so accustomed to walking in the ways of the world.

I have tied and picked up the bundle; where can I go to throw it away? ||2||

(Ang 1377-1378, Guru Granth Sahib)

Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj also expresses a similar sweet lament in the following verse:

ਸੁਣਿ ਨਾਹ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਇਕ ਬੇਨੰਤੀ ਮੇਰੀ ॥

ਤੂੰ ਨਿਜ ਘਰਿ ਵਸਿਅੜਾ ਹਉ ਰੁਲਿ ਭਸਮੈ ਢੇਰੀ ॥

Please listen, O my Beloved Husband Lord, to my one prayer.

You dwell in the home of the self deep within, while I roll around like a dust-ball.

(Ang 1111, Guru Granth Sahib Ji)

On the spiritual path, one has to pass through a stage of dispassion (Vairāg). This pain can be

illustrated by the pain a mother goes through when giving birth to a baby. It is not possible to avoid physical pain of labor in the process of childbirth. Similarly, one cannot expect the birth of a new, spiritual life without undergoing through the pain of separation and Vairāg.

ਰੇਵਹਿ ਸੇਖ ਮਸਾਇਕ ਪੀਰ ॥

ਅੰਤਿ ਕਾਲਿ ਮਤੁ ਲਾਗੈ ਭੀੜ ॥

The Shaykhs, Pirs and spiritual teachers weep;
at the very last instant, they suffer in agony.
(Ang 954, Guru Granth Sahib Ji)

Baba Farid Ji go so far as to say:

ਤਨੁ ਤਪੈ ਤਨੁਰ ਜਿਉ ਬਾਲਣੁ ਹਡ ਬਲੰਨਿ ॥

ਪੈਰੀ ਥਕਾਂ ਸਿਰਿ ਜੁਲਾਂ ਜੇ ਮੂੰਪਿਰੀ ਮਿਲੰਨਿ ॥੧੧੯॥

My body is cooking like an oven; my bones are burning like firewood.
If my feet become tired, I will walk on my head, if I can meet my Beloved. ||119||
(Ang 1384, Guru Granth Sahib)

A similar lament and spiritual pain is mentioned in the verses of the greatest of Sufi poet's what world has ever produced in the book "Kulliyāt-e Bhai Nand Lal", - remedies to which are provided by Bhai Nand Lal Ji's verses on the facing pages. Two Iranian Muslims had started coming to Sri Gurdwara Sahib after reading the book. One of them was a young Engineer who exclaimed Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji are the true Lord of the world. He even went to Sri Nankana Sahib and Sri Harmandir Sahib to pay his obeisance to Guru Sahib.

Sheikh Saʿdī is revered all over the world as a prominent Sufi poet. His two major works are Bustān (بوستان), and Golestān (گلستان). (He says in one of his verses:

دیدار می‌نمایی و پرہیز می‌کنی

بازار خویش و آتش ما تیز می‌کنی

dīdār me-nomayī o parhez mīkonī

bāzār ʔʔʔesh o ātish mā tez mīkonī

He says, O Khodā, you exhibit yourself in front of me for a few moments, but then hide behind the veil again. In your doing that, both your value and the fire of longing in my heart increases manifold.

To this, Bhai Nand Lal Ji replies thus:

جمال او همه جا بی حجاب جلوہگر است

تو در حجابِ خودی یارِ مه لقا چه کند

jamāl ū hame jā be-hijāb jalwa-gar ast

tū dar hijāb-e khudī yār ma laqā che kunad

(Verse No. 2, Ghazal 20 - Divān-e Goyā)

Bhai Nand Lal Ji says that the Lord's splendor is omnipresent everywhere without any veil. But what can His moon-like face do when you yourself are covered in the veil of ego? Where is the omnipresent going to hide? He's in waves of oceans, in fragrance of flowers, in the thundering clouds; in short, He's everywhere.

ਕਿ ਜਾਹਿਰ ਜਜ਼ੂਰ ਹੈਂ ॥ ਕਿ ਹਾਜ਼ਿਰ ਹਜ਼ੂਰ ਹੈਂ ॥

You are the visible illumination. You are All-Prevading.

(Sri Jaap Sahib, Sri Dasam Granth Sahib Ji)

[At this point in the katha Maskeen Ji were about to quote Hafiz and Bhai Nand Lal Ji's reply to him, but it seems like he gets diverted and then starts discussing Alankārs in Guru Granth Sahib Ji instead. He says in the last few minutes that he will return to talk more about Bhai Nand Lal Ji in a later smagam.]

If you wish to continue with this topic and read a side-by-side comparison and a deeper analysis of a ghazal of the esteemed Persian poet Hafiz and a ghazal of our revered Bhai Nand Lal, download the document "Persian Sikh Scripture" by Louis Fenech from our website.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa Waheguru ji ki Fateh

www.bhainandlal.com