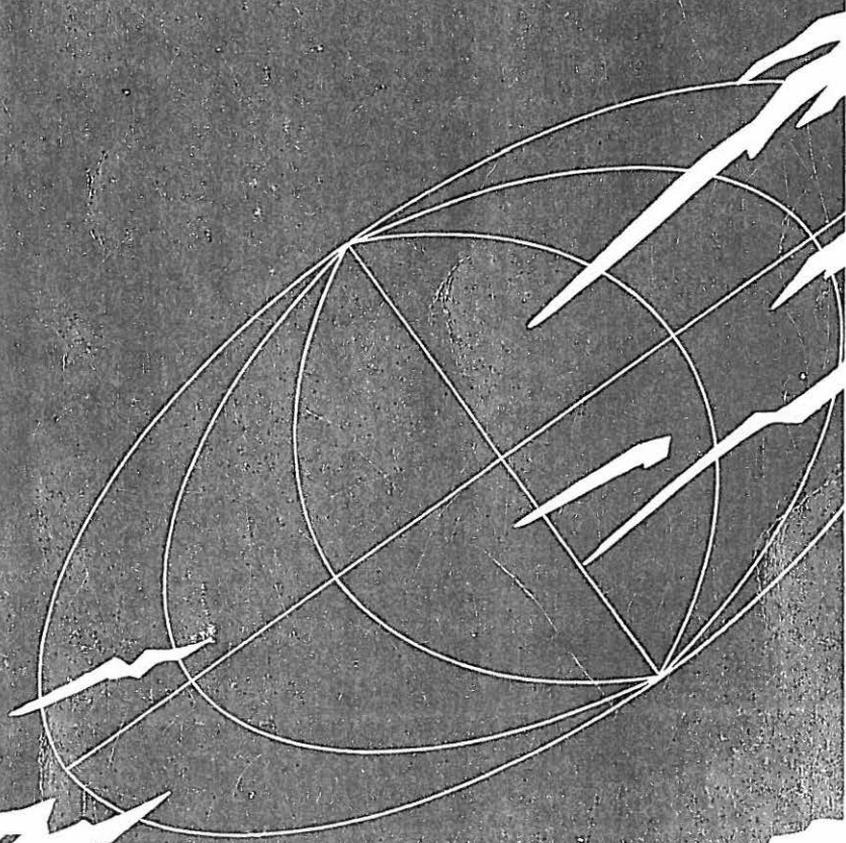


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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF

PUNJAB STUDIES



Vol. 1 No. 1
January-June 1994

Persian Sikh Scripture: The Ghazals of Bhā'ī Nand La'ī Goyā

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This is an essay concerning the virtually unexamined Persian ghazals of the late seventeenth century Sikh poet, Bhā'ī Nand La'ī Goyā. Specifically, I intend to analyse the third ghazal in the poet's *Divān* and compare this with the first ghazal of the *Divān* of Ḥāfeẓ to which Goyā's poem alludes. Such allusion allows Nand La'ī to demonstrate his contention that the Sikh path is the only one along which seekers of the Truth should travel. It is this purpose which informs the entire text. To Goyā, Ṣūfīs are bound to remain strapped to the wheel of existence, forever coming and going.

I

Although part of Sikh canonical literature, *bānī*, the poetry of Nand La'ī Goyā is little known to many of those who today profess an allegiance to the teachings of the 10 Sikh gurūs. Approved for recitation within the gurdwara, these works are seldom if ever recited. Language may be identified as the principal reason for this ignorance. The authentic works of Nand La'ī are all in Persian, a factor which has restricted their circulation to a very small, educated group. There is, moreover, virtually no scholarly literature available on the subject. Of course there are Punjabi translations, but such works suffer from serious flaws.¹ These often read more Sikh understanding into the poetry than the text itself permits, and are altogether ignorant of the rhetorical

International Journal of Punjab Studies, 1, 1 (1994)
Sage Publications New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London.

and prosodical features of the Persian 'ghazal. The taste of the original, a *masala* recipe if you will, with a spicy mixture of ingenious puns, double-entendres, assonance, and fantastic aetiology, is thus lost. This paper, if I may continue the metaphor, will focus mainly on the meat itself, the ideas articulated by the poetry. Like a true Indo-Persian dish, however, the spices are absolutely essential, and will be added wherever necessary.

Specifically, I intend to analyse the third ghazal in the *Divān* of Nand La'1 and compare this with the first ghazal of the *Divān* of Hāfez to which Goyā's poem alludes. In this particular case, such allusion allows Nand La'1 to demonstrate his contention that the Sikh path is the only one along which seekers of the Truth should travel. It is this purpose — to offer Sikhism as an alternative to Islam — which informs the entire text. To him, Sufis are bound to remain strapped to the wheel of existence, forever coming and going. The assumption that Nand Lal's style is an open one with which the followers of many traditions could easily identify is therefore not borne out by a close scrutiny of his Persian ghazals.²

II

In describing the particular way in which a Sikh religious ceremony is conducted, the modern Sikh 'code of conduct', *Sikh Rahit Maryādā*, under the section headed *kīrtan*, the congregational singing of hymns, states:

saṅgat vic kīrtan keval gurbāṇi jāṁ is dī viākhiā-sarūp racnā bhāi

*gurdās jī te bhāi nand lāl jī dī bāṇi dā ho saktā hai.*³

Within the community of believers only the utterances of the Gurūs (as found in the Ādi Granth and in portions of the book of the tenth Gurū, the Dasam Granth,) or the commentaries of Bhāi Gurdās, (the *Vārān Bhāi Gurdās*,) and Bhāi Nand Lāl, (the *Divān-i Goyā*,) may be sung as *kīrtan*.

Here the *Divān* of Nand La'1 Goyā is, in effect, placed on an equal footing with the writings of the Gurūs, giving it canonical status. One should not, however, exaggerate its significance.

The *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* refers to the Nand La'l collection of poems as 'commentaries' (*viākhiā-sarūp*) because, like the ballads of Gurdās Bhallā, they provide no significant additions to Sikh theology. The *Divān* elucidates Sikh theology commensurate with the Ādi Granth, but in a genre and a language that was not traditionally Sikh, but rather typically Sūfī—the Persian mystical ghazal.

Unfortunately, a great deal of legend has attached itself to the figure of Nand La'l, so much so that a true picture of the historical man has become a very difficult thing to reconstruct. This difficulty is compounded by the complete lack of references to Nand La'l outside of traditional Sikh sources. Contemporary Indo-Persian accounts of the Sikhs, *tazkireh* (biographical notes on contemporary poets), court documents, all are silent. Even the prose writings of Goyā himself say very little about his personal life.⁴

According to Sikh tradition, however, Nand La'l was born a Hindu Khatri in 1633 in Ghazna, Afghanistan where he was educated according to the curriculum of the period, a curriculum in which both the Persian and Arabic languages, the Qur'ān, the Hādīth, and works on mysticism such as Hujwirī's *Kashfu'l-mahjūb* and Rumī's *Mathnavī-ye Ma'navī* were stressed. After his father's death in 1652 he left for Multan where he became a court munshī. Here he married a Sikh woman, and took a keen interest in her faith, eventually becoming an adherent. From 1678–79 he was in the employ of the future Mughal emperor Bahādur Shāh, after which he joined the retinue of the tenth Gurū. He left for Multan after the death of Gurū Gobind Singh, and died there in 1712. While with the Gurū, he became the chief poet in the *majlis*, 'an assembly or court', composing ghazals, *rubā'iyāt*, *abyāt*, and all other standard forms of Indo-Persian poetry.⁵

Since the eleventh century with the writing of Hujwirī Dātā Ganjbaksh's handbook on Sūfī mysticism, the *Kashfu'l-mahjūb* in Lahore, India had been home to numerous Sūfī orders. Sūfī modes of thought and worship were so appealing to Hindus that many, either directly or indirectly, were converted to Islam. The majority of Muslims did not understand the theological formulations of Islam. Desiring a more emotional religion they

naturally turned to the Ṣūfis who presented God as *yār*, 'the Friend', and as *ma'shūq*, 'the Beloved', rather than the incomprehensible, abstract entity of the theologians. Although not a direct influence on the thought of Gurū Nānak, Sufism did marginally contribute to the sant tradition of northern India from which the first gurū drew much of his theology.⁶

By the time that Nand La'l's association with the Sikh faith commenced, the Sikh religion had already flourished for approximately 200 years. It seems likely that the interest of a Perso-Arabic-trained munshī like Nand La'l would have been in the textual tradition of the scripture, not in the popular Sikh tradition of urban and rural Punjabis,⁷ for the former presented the undiluted essence of the Sikh faith. Sikh tradition acknowledges this fact, for Nand La'l's name is prefixed with the term *bhāī*, an honorific for those who demonstrated a capacity to interpret the Ādi Granth and communicate the wisdom of the gurūs, and were publicly recognised for their piety.⁸ The interests which dominate Goyā's ghazals, moreover, are very reminiscent of those permeating the sacred Sikh scripture, particularly the repeated emphasis laid upon the infallibility of the remembrance of the Divine Name as the sure means to liberation.

Although the *Dīvān* itself attests to the Sikh tradition to which Goyā subscribed, it does not attest to the socio-political environment in which Goyā wrote. Tradition holds that Nand La'l lived during one of the more prolific periods of Sikh history. Although the faith began peacefully under the direction of Gurū Nānak (b. 1469)— whose teachings in the vernacular appealed to many Punjabis, particularly peasants because of his emphasis upon the dignity of honest labour, equality and internal devotion— by the time of the fifth Sikh Gurū, Arjan, the Panth (literally, 'path') had come under threat — a threat which, according to tradition, became manifest in the death of Arjan while in Mughal custody. Tradition continues that this event was interpreted by Sikhs as a martyrdom and that it led Arjan's son, Hargobind, to initiate the conversion of Gurū Nānak's Panth into a militant community.⁹ It was in Gurū Hargobind's time that Nand La'l was born.

Nand La'l's period witnessed increasing hostility between the Sikhs and Aurangzeb's Mughal government; the execution of

the ninth Sikh Gurū by that government in 1675; the subsequent gurūship of Gurū Gobind Singh; and the establishment of the militant Khālsā brotherhood by the tenth gurū in 1699. Nevertheless, these events do not figure in Goyā's ghazals. When the rare reference to Goyā's context occurs in the *Divān* the main concern is with the present cosmic age, the Kaliyug, the era of ultimate degeneracy in the cosmic cycle, not with the contemporary conditions of late seventeenth century northern India. The message here is religious not political; the issue is to highlight the fate of righteous.¹⁰

It is the ghazals in this *Divān* with which we are concerned.¹¹ In its form, the ghazal is a short poem of a dozen or so *baits* ('couplets'). It maintains a strict formal unity; the metre must be uniform throughout, it must have the same end rhyme (*qāfiyeh*) throughout. The observation of such injunctions is meant not only to demonstrate the poet's skill, but to highlight the musicality of the verse, a significant element when one recalls that ghazals were often recited or sung. The poet's dexterity is also shown in the way he manipulates the time-honoured rhetorical conventions of the ghazal, such as the harmony of images (*tanāsub*); the beautiful attribution of cause (*hosn-i ta'lil*); puns (*tajnīs*), particularly the perfect pun (*tajnīs-i-tāmm*); and amphibology (*ihām*). Often, the last bait includes the *takhalluṣ*, 'the sobriquet of the writer.' In this final bait the author may praise his own poetic skill, express his state of mind, or long for mystical union with God. The genre demands that each bait be a self-contained unit which may be detached and quoted, since it contains the expression of a complete idea. A ghazal is, therefore, primarily a collection of baits, and for this reason the poem cannot, in many cases, be said to possess any thematic unity.¹² Where the first bait may criticise external observances, the next may speak of love, the third may long for wine, and the fourth may lament separation from a beloved object. Since the bait is self-sufficient each word may contain any number of meanings, making it allusive in the extreme, assuming the reader's complete familiarity with any allusions to the Qu'rān, the Ḥadīth, to the poetry of other poets (Persian, Central Asian and Indian) and to Islamic lore.¹³

Such allusions would have easily been inferred by the late

seventeenth century north Indian audience for which Nand La'1 wrote. The educated in this period, regardless of the particular religion to which they adhered, were reared in Perso-Islamic culture. As the official language of the Mughal court was Persian, it was only natural that those who sought to benefit economically or socially from it would learn the language, as well as the culture for which the language was a vehicle. Though many did indeed imbibe the culture, they did not necessarily follow the faith of their rulers. Many Hindu court scribes, for example, wrote in Persian, yet retained their faith and identity.¹⁴

An examination of the *Dīvān-i Goyā* demonstrates that the same held true for Nand La'1. Although individual ghazals may lead one to believe that Nand La'1 adhered to Ṣūfī ideas and interpretations, the *Dīvān* as a whole clearly demonstrates his Sikh bias. Specific terms that recur throughout the *Dīvān* point to an interpretation which differs from that of the Ṣūfī mystical poets. Thus, while the terminology is generally Ṣūfī, the concepts are undeniably Sikh. Terms such as *sālik* ('traveller' [along the mystical path]), *gharīb* ('stranger'), *rind* ('rogue'), *gadā* ('beggar'), and *mardān-i ḥaqq* ('the men of God') that are used to characterise Muslim Ṣūfīs, for example, are used to characterise those whom Nand La'1 considers Ṣūfī, the *gursikhs*, the Sikhs of the Gurū. At times the concepts behind the terminology are, in fact, Muslim. But when this occurs, the term is turned around, acquiring a derisive meaning from the Sikh point of view. The ghazals, in other words, have a cumulative effect.

Of course, it is only natural to assume that Nand La'1 was strongly allied to the Ṣūfī tradition, since many elements in the thought of the Sikh Gurūs which the poet attempts to emphasise have affinities with Ṣūfī concepts.¹⁵ In their work, an emphasis is found upon remembering and repeating the name of God (*zīkr*), the unity of God (*tauḥīd*), a revelation in creation, the transcendence and immanence of God, expressions of God in terms of light, a human organ which requires purification (*dil*), a doctrine of grace, a stress on the pain involved in separation from the Beloved, an ascent to union through a series of stages (*maqāmat*), a cleansing of self and an ultimate union with the Divine (*fanā*). Ṣūfī symbolism thus easily accommodates Sikh ideas. But when Nand La'1 uses these, it is to the Sikh concept that he alludes.

There is, moreover, the fact that in some fundamental respects Nand La'ī's poetry is in direct conflict with that of the Ṣūfīs. The most obvious example of this is his acceptance of the doctrine of karam (Sanskrit: karma).¹⁶

III

To illustrate the above we will examine the third ghazal in the *Dīvān-i Goyā* which imitates and comments upon the above-mentioned ghazal of Ḥāfeẓ.¹⁷ It should be noted that for Nand La'ī, commentary on Ḥāfeẓ's ghazal is, at the same time, a commentary on ṣūfism since in India the Persian poet was considered a representative of the Ṣūfī path.¹⁸ Nand La'ī here responds to what he considers the pessimistic view of human life expressed by Ḥāfeẓ and offers solutions from the Sikh perspective. Although scholars have stressed the difficulty in interpreting Ḥāfeẓ our concern here is with Nand La'ī's interpretation of his poetry alone.¹⁹

Let us begin with the first bait of their respective ghazals.

Ḥāfeẓ

*alā yā ayyohā al-sāqī ader
ka'san va navel hā//keh 'ashq
āsān namūd avval valī āftād
moshkihā*

O cup-bearer, quickly bring the vessel, fill it and pass it around the ring.// First it appeared that love was easy, but afterwards problems (moshkil) arose. (1:1)

Goyā

*bedeh sāqī marā yak jām-i jān
rangīni-ye delhā//bechashm-i
pāk bīn āsān konam īn jomleh
moshkihā*

Ocup-bearer, give me a goblet of the soul- /life-giving goblet [of wine] (jām-i jān) which gives colour to hearts, //so that with a clear sighted eye I may solve all these problems (moshkil). (3:1)

To listeners with a thorough understanding of the conventions of Persian mystical poetry, Nand La'ī's bait is straightforward and coherent: the difficulties of life can be easily solved with the cup of the wine of divine intoxication. Ṣūfīs could thus easily understand such a couplet. As noted above, however, this bait may be interpreted in ways that would not provide a representative

statement of Nand La'ī's *Divān*. The term *jām-i jān*, for example, which appears in the first *meṣrā'* (hemistich), seems to allude to the common Ṣūfī symbol for enlightenment, the wine in the legendary, all-seeing goblet of Jamshed.²⁰ It is particularly open to misunderstanding.

There are a number of baits in the *Divān* which on the surface allude to the intoxicating Ṣūfī draught, positing wine as the key to true mystical insight.

*sāqiya barkhez o hān por kon āyāgh // tā za nosh-i ū konam
rangīn dimāgh*

O cup-bearer! Come and fill the cup // so that I can redden
my palate with its drink. (47:1)

*beyā āy sāqi-ye rangīn za mai por kon āyāgh injā //
nasheh-'i la'l-i mai gūnat za haqq bakhshad sarāgh injā*
Come here, O rosy cup-bearer, and fill our goblet with wine
// [for] the intoxication of your wine-coloured ruby²¹ lips offers
the cup of Truth here. (4:1)

There are other baits, however, which show that for Nand La'ī the effects of this 'Ṣūfī wine' are certainly not enlightening. The bait which follows the latter couplet cited directly above, for example, highlights the impotence of this wine.

*ānāl-ḥaqq az lab-i maṣṣūr garchūn shisheh qolqol kard //
neh keh ārad tāb īn ṣahbā kojā jān-i dimāgh injā*
[Even] if the 'I am the Truth' gurgles from the lips of Maṣṣūr
[al-Hallāj] like the [wine] bottle, // it is not because this wine
brings *tāb* (burning). What place does the cup of intoxication
have here? (4:2)

The blood coming out of the throat of the famous Ṣūfī martyr, Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, is here likened to the wine bottle.²² In another bait the wine is something to be altogether avoided.

*goyā za nageh yār keh makhmūr gasht īm // kī khāhash sharāb
por ashrār mikonīm*

O Goyā! Since we became intoxicated from seeing the
Friend, // how can we desire the sin-inciting wine? (59:5)

To Sikhs there is no doubt that the wine to which Nand La'ī refers in 4:2 and 59:5 above is that of Ṣūfī intoxication. When the reference is, however, a positive one (4:1, for example), the goblet is filled with the Sikh 'wine' which destroys duality. The allusion to Sikh wine is stronger in the following bait.

*mudām bādeh kash o ṣūfī-ye ṣafā mībāsh // tamām-i zuhd
show o rind bīnava mībāsh*

Always drink wine and be a pure Ṣūfī. // Wash asceticism away completely and become a helpless ruffian (*rind*). (40:1)

The wine here is clearly not Ṣūfī since drinking it produces someone who, in fact, transcends the Ṣūfī, a 'pure' Ṣūfī.²³ For Sikhs this is the wine described in the compositions attributed to Mardānā, the Muslim minstrel (*dūm*) who is believed to have accompanied Gurū Nānak on his travels. These compositions use the particular Punjabi process of distilling wine as a metaphor for making divine wine. His third *slok* describes this wine:

*kāmyām lāhaṇi āpu madu amrit tis kī dhār. satsaṅgati siu
melāpu hoi liv kaṭorī amrit bhārī pī pī kaṭahi bikār.²⁴*

Make the body the still and your 'self' the wine whose unbroken stream is the divine nectar. Join with the true *saṅgat* (the company of believers) and drink cupfuls of this wine which will destroy all sins.

Nand La'ī has no need for Ṣūfī wine. For him, as we have seen, it is impotent. Just as worthless for Goyā is the Ṣūfī path to which Ḥāfeẓ alludes. The second *meṣrā'* of Ḥāfeẓ's bait is typically Ṣūfī, emphasising the difficulty and the suffering involved in traversing what Jalāl-ud dīn Rumī calls 'the way filled with blood.'²⁵ On this path the first step was taken on the *rūz-i alast*, the day of the pre-eternal covenant. According to Sura 7:171, when Allāh pulled humanity from the loins of the yet-to-be created Adam and asked them *alastu bi-rabbikum*, 'Am I not your Lord?' they answered *balā shahidnā*, 'Yes! we witness it.' From the time of Sanā'ī (d. 1131) this *balā* (بلى) 'yes' was interpreted as *bala* (بلاء) 'affliction' and thus on the 'day of alast' humanity willingly agreed to tread the path of love filled with sorrow,

grief and affliction, and to bear every calamity that God would bring down on them during their lives to test their love and devotion. Only when the heart was destroyed was one prepared for higher spiritual life.²⁶ As Nand La'1 makes clear in his allusion to Hāfez such difficulties are easily dispelled along the path to which he refers. This is a path altogether different from that of the Ṣūfīs, as the following bait illustrates through *ihām*, ambiguity:

gar za rāh-i shauq sāzī sīneh šāf // zūd binī kheshtanrā bi gazāf

If you cleanse your breast by // from [following the] path of love (*rāh-i shauq*), // you will quickly see yourself without idleness. (48:1)

Both meanings are relevant here. For Goyā the genuine Ṣūfī is one who transcends the *rāh-i shauq* and travels along the true path of love.

It should also be noted, moreover, that just as the true mystical path is not designated by terms commonly associated with the Ṣūfī path so too are those who travel along it not assigned common Ṣūfī epithets. A term for both the Ṣūfī to whom God is near and a stage along the Ṣūfī path is *ḥairān*, 'awe'.²⁷ Within the *Divān*, however, the majority of baits in which this term appears clearly indicate that Nand La'1 has reversed it, making it a derisive one from the Sikh point of view:

jomleh-'i 'alam bī tow ḥairān ast o bas // sīneh as hejr-i tow baryān ast o bas

The entire world is just perplexed (*ḥairān*) without You. // The bosom is just roasted on account of separation from You. (39:1)

khodā bemānad za ḡhairat jadā o man ḥairān // ḥadis-i shauq-i tow as baskeh beshamār āmad

God remains separate [from us] on account of [His divine] jealousy and I [remain] perplexed (*ḥairān*) // The story of Your love is endless. (19:6)

Only when the Sikh is separated from God is he *ḥairān*. The connotations are certainly not pleasant. Nand La'1, however,

does have ghazals in which *hairān* is viewed in a positive light. In such cases, the poet reinterprets this term to correspond to the Sikh state of *vismādu*, 'ecstasy engendered by awe'. In the Ādi Granth such a reinterpretation is clearly recognised when Gurū Nanak's famous discourse with the Ṣūfīs is placed before *Āsā dī V.ār*, 1:7. Although the terminology in the Gurū's discourse is Ṣūfī, the concept is Sikh.

*bhagati teri hairanu dardu gavāvahi*²⁸

I am *hairānu* at your *bhagati* (love, devotion) which dispels the pain of separation (*dardu*).

*vismādu nād vismādu ved vismādu jā vismādu bhed vismādu rūp vismādu raṅg*²⁹

Vismādu are [the varied forms] of speech, *vismādu* is knowledge. *Vismādu* is creation and *vismādu* the distinctions [therein]. *Vismādu* are the forms [of creation] and *vismādu* their varieties.

It is also in this light that the following bait must be read:

har keh gūyad tow cheh bashī o cheh gūyad joz-i tow // gasht hairān hameh 'alam hameh dar 'ain-i jamāl

Everyone says, 'What are You?' and asks, 'What else is there besides You?' // The whole world becomes *hairān*, all in the essence/eye of [Your] beauty. (52 8).

Just as the Ṣūfī state of *hairān* is often derided from the Sikh perspective, so too is the Ṣūfī concept of annihilation (*fanā*), the merging of the individual self with God. Again, Nand Lal's use of *ihām*, allows for this interpretation in the following bait:

fanā pazīr bovad harcheh hast dar 'alam // neh 'ashiqān keh asrār-i 'ashq āgāh and

In the world everything is transitory/everything is capable of *fanā*, // [except for] lovers ('*ashiqān*) who are aware of the secrets of love. (27:2)

In other words, those whom Nand La'ī considers lovers are not interested in *fanā*. Rather, it is *sahaju*, the condition of ultimate,

inexpressible beatitude, the ultimate state of mystical union with *Akāl Purakh* ('the one beyond time') that they seek.

IV

The next relevant baits in our discussion also allude to both paths, demonstrating the different perspectives on life in the world of the two religions, Sikhism and Islam.

Hāfez

*marā dar manzil-i jānān chēh
aman-i 'aish chūn har dam //
jaras faryād mīdārad keh bar
bandīd maḥmalhā*

In the caravanserai of the Beloved what security of life [is there] for me when every moment // the bell dangling from the camel's neck calls out, 'Bind your pack-saddles [It's time to go].'(1:3)

Goyā

*marā dar manzil-i jānān hameh
'aish o hameh shādī // jaras
bīhūdeh mīnālād ko jā bandīm
maḥmalhā*

In the caravanserai of the Beloved everything is everlasting joy and eternal delight for me. // The bell dangling from the camel's neck laments in vain, 'Where shall we bind the pack-saddles?' (3:2)

Hāfez compares the world with a caravan alighting place. Every moment the bell of a departing camel announces that lodging here is only temporary and that all must soon quit this place. This bait alludes to the insecurity and uncertainty which plague all Ṣūfīs starting out on the path. For Nand La'l the world is a delightful place in which security is eternal. The reason for his exuberance is the belief that *Akāl Purakh* is immanent in creation, particularly within the human heart. Those who thus tread the path to which Nand La'l alludes are certain for they need only to open their eyes to the revelation that lies around and within them. In the *Ādi Granth*, that aspect of *Akāl Purakh* which permeates the world, which He himself allows humanity to perceive is the *nām*, an expression for all that constitutes the nature and being of God.³⁰ A sufficient understanding of this is the means to liberation. And so, for Nand La'l:

*zīkr-i vaṣṣash bar zabān bāshad lazīz // nām-i ū andar jahān
bāshad lazīz*

The recital of His praise becomes sweetness on [my] tongue
// His Name (*nām*) [fills] the world with delight. (34:1)

In fact, so glorious is this world in which dwells the *nām* that paradise pales in comparison.

*har gaz beh sair rauzeh-i rizwān nemīravād // goyā kasī bejānab
kū-ye botān gozasht*

O Goyā. If a person passes by the lane of the beautiful people
(i.e., the world), // [he] will never [want to] stroll the garden
of paradise. (7:5)

In this bait Nand La'ī reverses a Muslim term for paradise, *rauzeh-'i rizwān*, infusing it with negative meaning from the Sikh point of view. In effect, it is a rejection of the typically Islamic view of paradise. The rejection of paradise is also characteristically Ṣūfī,³¹ but the reverence which Nand La'ī accords this world is not. This esteem is typically Sikh.

The next bait in Goyā's third ghazal lays great stress on the belief in the splendour of this world in which Akāl Purakh resides. He again alludes to another bait of Ḥāfeẓ in which the uncertainty and insecurity of the Ṣūfī is laid bare.

For those upon the Sikh path, there is no insecurity and no uncertainty.

Ḥāfeẓ

*shab-i tarīkh o bīm-i mauj o
gerdābī chonīn hāyal // kojā
dānand ḥāl-i mā sabokbārān
sāḥalḥā*

The darkness of night, the fear
of the waves, and such a terrify-
ing whirlpool. // How can
those people who walk on the
shore lightburdened know our
condition? (1:5)

Goyā

*khodāḥāẓar bovaddā'im bebīn
dīdar-i pākashrā // neh gerdābī
darū ḥā'al neh daryā o neh
sāḥalḥā*

God is always present. See His
pure face! // In it there is no
whirlpool which terrifies, no
sea, no shore (3:3)

V

The world as the creation and habitation of Akāl Purakh implies that the true seeker of God need not withdraw from society in order to achieve liberation. This idea that liberation is not found in renunciation is often repeated in the Ādi Granth, and constantly implied in the *Divān-i-Goyā*. Although not a direct allusion to a bait of Ḥāfeẓ, the fourth couplet in Nand Lal's third ghazal makes this implication clear.

cherā bīhūdeh mīgardī beṣahrā o bedast āy dil // chū ān sulṭān-i khūbān kardeh andar dīdeh manzilhā

Come heart, why are you aimlessly walking about in the desert and in the plain // when that Sultan of the beautiful people has [already] built his dwellings in your eyes? (3:4)

Goyā's last bait, however, in terms characteristic of the Ādi Granth — 'wherever you look [God is present]' (*jah jah dekh*)³² — alludes to the final bait of the Ḥāfeẓ poem.

Ḥāfeẓ

Goyā

*ḥozūrī gar hamī khāhī az ū
ghāyab mashow ḥāfeẓ //
matamā talqa man tahva
da'ad-donya va ahmelhā*

O Ḥāfeẓ, if you always desire his presence, do not be absent from him. // When you find the person you love, abandon the world and its cares. (1:7)

*chū ghair az zāt-i pākash nīst
dar har jā keh mībinam // bogū
goyā kojā begozāram in donyā
ahmelhā*³³

Since in every place I look there is nothing but His pure essence, // O Goyā, tell [me] why should I forsake this world and abandon it? (3:5)

For Goyā — and, by implication, the Sikhs — renunciation is rejected. All one need do is look within oneself.

*in mata'-i ḥaqq beh pīsh-i ṣāhibān-i dil bovad // chūn beṣahrā
mīravī dar gasheh vīrāneh nīst*

This merchandise of Truth is [right] in front of those who have a heart (*ṣāhibān-i dil*)³⁴ // Why are you wandering about in the desert? In the corners of a ruined place [the treasure] is not found. (10:5)

In Punjabi commentaries on this bait the allusion is lost.³⁵ From their perspective this couplet is simply a reference to Gurū Nānak's emphasis on a disciplined worldliness,³⁶ and the analysis ends there. This bait, however, does much more than heap scorn on those who practice asceticism. In a *ḥadīth qudsī*, 'an extra-Qur'ānic revelation', Allāh said, 'I was a hidden treasure that wished to be found,' and created the world for this purpose.³⁷ It was mentioned above that in Ṣūfī poetry one's self must be destroyed through the pain inflicted by the Beloved, a necessity for eventual union with the Divine. The heart is thus compared to a ruined place, *vīrāneh*. Persian poets constantly played with the image of the treasure found only among ruins, and it is to this idea that Goyā alludes. It is, moreover, this belief that Goyā rejects. It is not the idea that God dwells in the heart which Nand La'ī discards,³⁸ but the notion that one's heart must be destroyed through affliction before finding the hidden treasure. It is again a rejection of the Ṣūfī path.

VI

In an attempt to demonstrate Nand La'ī's intention to differentiate the Sikh path from that of the Ṣūfī, the third ghazal of the *Dīvān* is the best poem with which to begin. Goyā's allusion to Ḥāfeẓ's ghazal certainly demonstrates that for him the paths were different and that the one to which our poet himself referred was, in fact, the only path worthy of travel. As the paths are different so too are those who travel along them. By reinterpreting terms which are used to designate Ṣufīs, Nand La'ī alludes to the person whom he considers the true *qalandar* (wandering Muslim ascetic):

*hazār takht-i marṣṣa' fatādeh dar rāh and // qalandarān-i
tow tāj o nagīn nemīkhāhad*

Thousands of [gold and] jewel encrusted thrones have fallen
by the wayside. // Your *qalandarān* do not want a crown
(*tāj*) or a signet-ring (*nagīn*). (27:1)

On one level the second *meṣrā'* is simply a continuation of the first. On another it is a clear distinction between the Muslim

qalandar and the Sikh. The term *tāj* designates both the crown of temporal authority and the head gear of the qalandar, usually a conical hat.³⁹ With this in mind the difference becomes clear.

In the next bait Nand La'1 alludes to the genuine *gadā* (beggar):

*gadā-ye kū-ye torā mail-i bādashāhī nīst // havā-ye sulṭanat
o shauq-i kajkolāhī nīst*

The beggar (*gadā*) on Your lane does not long for a kingdom.
// He has no desire to be an emperor nor is he enraptured
by the *kajkolāh*. (9:1)

The *kajkolāh*, the young beautiful person with 'his cap awry,' a reference to Ṣūfī ḥadīth in which the Prophet Muhammad saw God as a young man with his cap askew,⁴⁰ became a standard Ṣūfī image of the saucy Beloved (God). Clearly, the *gadā* in Goyā's bait is not Ṣūfī. For this 'beggar' (i.e., Sikh) the *kajkolāh* holds no fascination. Nor does the Sikh pay heed to the common Ṣūfī symbol of the Beloved as cypress tree:

*ghair ān sarv-i ravān har gaz nayāyad dar naẓar // tāqad-
i ra'nā-ye ū dar dīdeh-'ī mā jā gereft*

Never did anyone look at anything but the stately cypress
// until His blossoming figure took root in our eyes. (13:3)

The bait which follows the reference to the *kajkolāh* alludes to the fact that is indeed the Sikh of whom Nand La'1 speaks:

*har ān keh momalkat-i dil gereft sulṭān shod // kasī keh yāfī
torā hamchū ū sipāhī nīst*

All those who capture the kingdom of the heart become kings.
// There is no [greater] warrior (*sipāhī*) than that person who
finds You. (9.2)

The allusion to the Sikh is clear in the use of the term *sipāhī*. In ghazal poetry the term is very rare and never used to describe the religious warrior, only the opposing enemy.⁴¹ In Sikh usage, however, the term is certainly revered. Often coupled with *sant*, the compound term designates the ideal Sikh who combines the piety and spirituality of the true believer with the courage

of the true soldier,⁴² an ideal which was manifested, according to tradition, in the person of the tenth gurū. This reference is certainly intriguing since it may well shed some light on the evolution of Sikh ideas during the period in which Nand La'ī was writing.

Another intriguing reference appears in the final bait of the eleventh ghazal:

*sha'ir-i goyā zindagī-bakhsh ast chūn āb-i heyāt // balkeh
az pākizgī za āb-i baqā khāhad gozasht*

The poetry of Goyā is life-giving like the water of life.
// Even more so, because of its purity it will surpass the
water of *baqā*. (11:6)

Here Goyā's poetry transcends the highest Šūfī state, *baqā*, 'continued existence within the Beloved after annihilation (*fanā*)'.⁴³ Nand La'ī makes clear in this couplet that the Šūfī notion of *baqā* has no place in Sikh teachings. This bait is, of course, very much in line with the common ghazal technique of the poet praising his own work in the final couplet. There is, however, a strong hint to Sikh doctrine, an allusion magnified in the following bait:

*ḥarf sair az ḥaqq nayāyad hīch gāh // bar lab-i goyā keh
ḥaqq bakhshandeh ast*

Except for 'God/Truth (*ḥaqq*)' no other word (*ḥarf*) will ever
come // from the lips of Goyā because he is 'Truth-offering/
God-giving'. (8:5)

From a Sikh perspective, Goyā's self-praise is neither empty nor vain. It is an allusion to the Sikh belief in the Gurū Granth, the mystical, indwelling presence of the eternal Gurū within the hymns of the Ādi Granth. The terms *ḥaqq* and *ḥarf*, 'truth' and 'word' respectively, used in the same bait seem to point in this direction since both *sachu* (Truth) and *sabadu* (Word) are two of the terms which are used by Gurū Nānak to characterise the divine self-expression.⁴⁴ The poetry of Goyā is Truth offering because it provides insight into the teachings found in the Ādi Granth in which the eternal gurū resides. This may therefore

be one of the first allusions to the formal doctrine of Gurū Granth subsequently enunciated, according to tradition, just before the tenth Gurū's death in 1708,⁴⁵ shifting weight onto the claim that while the gurūs were alive the Adi Granth symbolised their personal presence for those *saṅgats* who lived too far from the human Gurū.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis dealt, in part, with some of the intriguing elements which may be found in the *Divān-i Goyā*. There are, of course, many other such features which require analysis. Tradition assumes, for example, that the audience for whom Nand La'1 wrote was the classically educated majlis surrounding the court of Gurū Gobind Singh. In reality, however, the audience Goyā had in mind is unknown. That it was not for the common Sikh is obvious. Had these been his readers he would have written in the vernacular. The purpose which informs the text is to offer Sikhism as an alternative to Islam. This makes it seem doubtful that it was for educated Sikhs that Nand La'1 was writing. It is quite certain that he was addressing his poetry to Ṣūfīs. The question of proselytisation thus arises, as does the question of Nand La'1's relation with ṣūfism. Although tradition maintains Nand La'1 converted many Muslims to the Sikh faith,⁴⁷ the standard interpretation of his *Divān* states that his style was 'generously open, one with which the followers of many different traditions could easily identify.'⁴⁸ On the surface this is, of course, true. Presenting the Sikh path as one to which Ṣūfīs, on first contact, could relate would demand no less. As I have attempted to demonstrate, however, a close examination of his ghazals indicates a desire to convert, a desire well in keeping with the spirit of the Ādi Granth.⁴⁹ And thus, the importance of this analysis.

Also, despite Nand La'1's close association with Gurū Gobind Singh his *Divān* lacks the militant spirit so characteristic of late seventeenth century Sikhism. This may, of course, have contributed to its limited circulation and to the fact that Goyā's work was not included in the Dasam Granth. The conspicuous absence of the name 'Singh' clearly demonstrates that Goyā did not join the Khalsa. Such a stand by this famous disciple

of the tenth Gurū may tell us something regarding the relation of the Khalsa brotherhood to the larger Sikh Panth, a question which has plagued Sikhs for the last century.⁵⁰ In order to determine this, Goyā's relationship with the Khalsa needs to be explored. For this one will need to examine more than just Nand La'l's *Dīvān*. There are hints to the militant Khalsa discipline within his ghazals (the bait in which the sipāhī figures, for example), but these are both few and vague. A partial answer may come from an examination of particular metaphors or similes in which militancy is implied.⁵¹

The examination of the third ghazal has demonstrated that the chief goal of the *Dīvān-i Goyā* is to aid in apprehending the divine reality. In doing this, Nand La'l uses mystical Ṣūfī poetry as a vehicle but distinguishes the ideas found in traditional Ṣūfī poetry from those of the Sikh gurūs. Standard Ṣūfī terms are reinterpreted to designate Nand La'l's Sikhs. The many similarities which exist between the ideas of Goyā and those of the Ṣūfīs stem from affinities which exist between *gurmāt* and the mystical path of Islam. But that is where the similarity ends.

Acknowledgements: An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the University of Toronto Centre for South Asian Studies' Graduate Students' Union Seminar on 20 November 1992. The author would like to thank all those who participated in the discussion which followed. He would also like to thank Professors M.E. Subtelny and W.H. McLeod for reading earlier drafts of the paper, and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute whose sustained financial support from July 1990-March 1991 made this paper possible.

Notes

1. The following provide the Persian in Gurmukhī script accompanied by Punjabi translations: Gaṇḍā Singh (ed.), *Bhāī Nand Lāl Granthāvalī* (Patiala, 1989); and Haribhajan Singh (ed.), *Sāchī Prīti: Ghazālān Bhāī Nand Lāl Jī Sīk* (Amritsar, 1967); the ghazals in the original Perso-Arabic script are presented in Mahān Singh Giānī (ed.), *Taṣnīfāt-i Goyā* (Amritsar, 1963); and Gaṇḍā Singh (ed.), *Kulliyāt-i Bhāī Nand La'l Goyā* (Malaysia, 1963). The *Dīvān* in Gaṇḍā Singh's edition is partially based on the undated, incomplete manuscript found at Khalsa College in Amritsar (ref. no. SHR2311, fols. 103-112). Note also two Urdū translations: Bābā Brij Ballabh Singh Bedī's *Prem Pitāri: Ghazliyat-i Farsi Bhā'ī Nand La'l Ṣāhib Takhalluṣ*

- Goyā* (Lahore, 1912); and Sayya 'Abad Hussain, *Ghazli'yāt-i Bhā'ī Nand La'l Goyā* (Patiala, 1973).
2. Put forward in W.H. McLeod, *The Sikhs: History, Religion, and Society* (New York, 1989), p. 95.
 3. *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* (16th edn., Amritsar, 1983).
 4. The *Dastūr ul-Insha*, for example, is a collection of letters which Nand La'l composed while working in Multan. This collection simply refers to court cases, deaths, burials and other incidents which would have come to the attention of a court scribe (*munshī*), the post that Nand La'l occupied.
 5. This brief, traditional biography is taken from Gaṇḍā Singh, *Bhā'ī Nand La'l Granthāvalī*, 9–13; Annemarie Schimmel's article 'Persian Poetry in the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent, in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Persian Literature* (New York, 1988), 405–21 mentions the various texts with which students in India from the thirteenth century onwards had to be familiar.
 6. For a background on Ṣūfism in India see Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Leiden, 1980); the Ṣūfī contribution to the Sant tradition may be found in W.H. McLeod, *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. (Oxford, 1968), 158–63.
 7. For examples of popular Sikh tradition see W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition* (Oxford, 1980).
 8. Hari Ram Gupta, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I (2nd. rev. edn., New Delhi, 1984), 379–86.
 9. For a background consult M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurūs, Sacred Writings, and Authors* (Oxford, 1909), 6 Vols.
 10. The following two baits may be taken as an example:

az gozashtan hā cheh mīporsī darīn dahr-i kharāb // bādshāh khāhad gozasht to ham gadā khāhad gozasht

What can you ask for the sake of passing in this ruined time? // The king will expire and the beggar will also expire. (11:5)

kīst emrūz keh sowdān-ī nagārī dārad // bādshāh hast darīn dahr keh yārī dārad

Who is it who today possesses passion for the Beloved? In this era he is a king who has a Friend. (29:1)

11. The *Divān* also contains nineteen *rubā'īyāt* (quatrains) and four *abyāt* (couplets).
12. This is, of course, open to some debate: See, for example, M. Hillman, *Unity in the Ghazals of Ḥāfeẓ* (Minneapolis, 1976).
13. See Finn Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody* (Weisbaden, 1982).
14. Incidentally, many Hindus wrote elegies on the martyrdom of Ḥusain. See Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford, 1964), 105–107.
15. W.H. McLeod, 'The Influence of Islam upon the thought of Gurū Nanak', in *History of Religions*, VII:iv (Chicago, 1968).
16. The following bait demonstrates this :

ṣad kār kardeh'ī keh nayāyad bekār tow // goyā bekon keh bāz beyāyad
bekār 'umar

You have done hundreds of things that were not fitting for you. O
Goyā, do [things] in such a way that life may come back to you.
(47:5).

17. Imitating past masters of the genre was not considered plagiarism. By adhering to the metre, rhyme and subject matter of the original, the new poem attempted to 'improve' or even surpass it by giving it a slightly different interpretation: See M.E. Subtelny, 'A Taste for the Intricate: The Persian Poetry of the Late Timurid Period,' in *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 136, 1 (Stuttgart, 1986), 70-71.
18. Annemarie Schimmel often states that the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfez was considered by many Indian ṣūfis as next in importance to the Qur'ān and Rumi's *Mathnavī*: See *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, 171.
19. J.C. Burgel, 'Ambiguity: A Study in the Use of Religious Terminology in the Poetry of Ḥāfez', in *Intoxication, Earthly and Heavenly: Seven Studies on the Poet Hafiz of Shiraz* (Geneva, 1991), 7-39; the full text of the ghazal appears in A.J. Arberry (ed.), *Fifty Poems of Hafiz* (Cambridge, 1962), 37. The baits in this paper are numbered as found in Arberry's book.
20. See Arberry, *Fifty Poems*, 150.
21. The term *la'l* (here, 'ruby') may be a play on Goyā's name.
22. See Louis Massignon, *La passion d'al-Ḥosayn ibn Mansour Al-Ḥallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922*, (Paris, 1922), 2 Vols.
23. A similar technique permeates the compositions of the Gurūs. The 'true Muslim' or 'pure Muslim', and the 'true Hindu', are, in fact, those who have transcended both Hinduism and Islam: See McLeod, *Gurū Nānak*, 161.
24. *Sloku Mardānā*, 3, Ādi Granth, 533.
25. Rumi, *Mathnavī-ye Ma'navī*, Vol. I.R.A. Nicholson (ed. and trans.), (London, 1925). This phrase (*rāh-i por khūn*) is part of the introduction.
26. Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, 1982), 107-108.
27. J.S. Trimmingham, *The Ṣūfī Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), 152-53.
28. *Āsā Rāgu*, Ādi Granth, 422.
29. *Āsā dī Vār*, 1:7, Ādi Granth, pp. 463-64.
30. McLeod, *Gurū Nānak*, 195-99.
31. Ṣūfis love the Beloved for the sake of the Beloved alone, not for the hope of paradise: See the prayer of the famous female mystic, Rabe'a al-Adawiya in A.J. Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya'* (London, 1990), 51.
32. See Gurū Nānak's *Sirī Rāgu* 31, Ādi Granth 25.
33. This word appears as *ahlalhā* in every copy of the *Dīvān* I have seen. The Punjabi and Urdū commentators invariably translate the word as 'peoples', *ahlhā*. However, this word does not fit the metre nor the understanding of the ghazal. It thus seems to be a misspelling of the Arabic *ahmelhā*, 'abandon it'.

34. That is, those who are aware that God dwells within the human heart.
 35. Haribhajan Singh, *Sāchi Prīti*, 86.
 36. See, for example, Gurū Nanak's *Sūhi*, 8, Ādi Granth, 730:

añjan māhi nīrānjan rahīai jōg jugati pāīai

The path of true Yoga is found by dwelling in God while yet living
 in the midst of the world's temptations.

37. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (North Carolina, 1975), 139.
 38. Note, for example, the rhetorical question posed in ghazal 9, bait 4:

*kudām dīdeh keh dar way sawād-i nūr-i tow nīst // kūdam sīneh keh
 ū makhzan-i ahla nīst*

Where is the eye in which the blackness of your light does not reside?
 Where is the heart which is not a divine treasury?

39. Trimingham, *Sufi Orders in Islam*, 268.
 40. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 290.
 41. Terms used to describe Muslim warriors were *mujāhid* and *ghāzī*.
 42. W.H. McLeod, *The Sikhs*, 55.
 43. For a description of *baqā'* and *fanā'* see F. Rahman 'Baḳā' wa-Fanā' in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), I:2, 951.
 44. McLeod, *Gurū Nānak*, 191-94, 203-204.
 45. For a description of the traditional doctrine of Gurū Granth see W. Owen Cole, *The Guru in Sikhism* (London, 1982), 55-64.
 46. Harbans Singh, *Heritage of the Sikhs*, (Delhi, 1983), 43-44.
 47. Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, 379-86.
 48. The quote is from McLeod, *The Sikhs*, 95. However, this sentiment is shared in Gaṇḍā Singh (ed.), *Bhāi Nand Lāl Granthāvalī*, 14.
 49. For this element in the Ādi Granth see Pashaura Singh, 'The Text and Meaning of the Ādi Granth', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1991.
 50. This question is dealt with, in part, in W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity* (Oxford, 1989).
 51. Note the following bait:

*mā nemīyārīm tāb-i ghamzeh-i mazhgān-i ū // yak nagāh-'i jānfizāyish
 bas bovad dar kār-i mā*

We are unable to bear the impact of his flirting eyelash. One soul-
 refreshing glance is sufficient for our affair. (2:2)

The eyelash is often compared to either a set of spears or to a company of soldiers. In the latter, when the two eyelashes meet together in a wink it is often likened to platoons engaged in battle.