

The Role of *Shaheedi Pehre* in Sikh Martyrology

By

Gurpartap Singh

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Religion

August 9, 2024

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Dr. Richard McGregor

Dr. Anand Taneja

Copyright © 2024 Gurpartap Singh  
All Rights Reserved

To the *Guru Khalsa Panth*,  
And to the countless *Shaheeds* and their lions, horses, and devotees.

Your own flesh and bones,  
Gurpartap Singh

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 The Current State of Sikh Martyrology</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition by Louis Fenech</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1.3 A Pre-examination of Sources and Authors</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>19<sup>th</sup> Century Literature</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1 <i>Gurpartap Suraj</i> by Santokh Singh</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1.1 The 10<sup>th</sup> Guru is Asked About the Power, Role, and Duties of Shaheeds</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1.2 Daya Singh Converses with a Shaheed</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>2.1.3 Three Prayers Offered to Shaheeds &amp; An Account of Bahadur Shah</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1.4 Summary of Shaheeds within <i>Gurpartap Suraj</i></b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2 <i>Panth Parkash</i> by Rattan Singh Bhangu</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>2.2.1 The Shaheed Child-Princes of the 10th Guru</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>2.2.2 Shaheed Bhai Taru Singh Ji</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>2.2.3 Shaheed Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>2.3 <i>Naveen Panth Prakash</i> by Giani Gian Singh Ji</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>2.3.1 Shaheedi Pehre of Baba Raam Singh Ji Bedi</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>3.1 <i>Do Gursikh Nirmolak Heerey</i> by Giani Kirpal Singh Ji</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>3.1.1 Akaali Baba Mitt Singh Ji</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>3.1.2 Accounts of Shaheeds at Takhat Hazur Sahib</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>3.1.3 Shaheedi Pehra within a Child (Bachitar Singh Ji)</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>47</b>

## Introduction

Within the field of Sikh studies there is a contemporary academic renaissance at play bringing to light many unexplored facets of the Sikh faith, its traditions, and its vast literature. Among the schools of thought and ideologies being studied, there has been mention of Sikh martyrs and their symbolism within the faith, however, the field would benefit now from new explorations of both old and new literature alike. Within this dissertation, we will focus on the phenomenon of *shaheedi pehre* (martyr-invocation) within Sikh martyrology by surveying Sikh historical texts and hagiographies to posit a better understanding of the role this concept holds within the faith.

In this study of *shaheedi pehre* we will also analyze the role of the *shaheed ganj* (“martyr-shrines”) and their ritual worship, along with the lesser examined accounts of the *shaheedi mandal* (“cosmic realm of the Shaheeds”). Looking to two sources adhered to by previous scholars, as well as bringing to light accounts never mentioned in the field, this dissertation will present a historical analysis of Sikh literature and put forth new discussions of Shaheeds within the study of Sikh martyrology.

### 1.1 The Current State of Sikh Martyrology

Although the tradition of martyrdom is held dear within the Sikh faith, as we will come to know, scholarly endeavors on the matter have been minimal. Analyzing Sikh historical texts, great emphasis is given to the concept of martyrdom and its motivational undertaking by prospective Sikhs. There is, however, a lack of academic research done on the specific analysis of Shaheeds and their doings both before and after their deaths. To gain an understanding of this, we will first turn our attention to the *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions* and its entry on “Martyrdom” by Navdeep Mandair (author), from the University of Birmingham, and Arvind-Pal Mandair (editor), a well-known scholar of Sikh studies from the University of Michigan. The definition of martyrdom they define within the Sikh tradition is given as follows:

“Martyrdom, *shahadi*, is a sacrificial death for a socially just cause. It is grounded in the Philosophy of Oneness taught and actualized by the Sikh Gurus and is an outgrowth of the *sant-sipahi* (saint-soldier) ideal as well as the notion of *miri-piri* (the obligation to act politically and justly as an aspect of religious practice)” (Mandair)

After giving this definition, the entry then goes into a lengthy examination of cross references regarding the field of “*Shaheed*” (“giving martyrdom”) and the debates that it has involved.

For beginners, it is vital to first note that the Sikh tradition gives great importance to the role of martyrdom.

Not only was the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev Ji<sup>1</sup>, seen as the *Shaheeda 'n de Sirtaaj* (“Crown Jewel amongst the Martyrs”), for attaining martyrdom by sitting atop a hot plate and having sand poured on them, but the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, gave his head to save the pandits of Kashmir as well. Finding roots of martyrdom within the Gurus themselves, talk of martyrdom as well as celebrating commemorative anniversaries of Shaheeds is all common practice within the religion. Furthermore, this sentiment is upheld greatly throughout Sikh history and rituals.

Looking back to the encyclopedia entry, it states that early scholars in the field such as William Hewat McLeod created the groundwork for the field, however, this work came with its biases around the representation of the Sikhs. More specifically, his view on the death of the fifth Guru, regarded as the paramount Shaheed within the faith, was reduced to a simple death sentence enacted via judicial ruling instead of a martyrdom (Mandair). Not only did this hurt the sentiment of the Sikhs but it laid the unstable groundwork for Sikh martyrology. Furthermore, Louis Fenech, who we will look to deeper, reproduced McLeod’s assessment and further bolstered the idea of a biased conceptualization of the term “Shaheed” by giving a similar analysis of the ninth Guru. Lastly, the encyclopedia entry then goes on to source Michael Nijhawan’s ethnographic study, *Dhadi Darbar: Religion, Violence, and the Performance of Sikh History*, favoring the same notions as the previous two scholars, by studying the tradition of folk music within the Sikhs and how it glamorized the martyrs and their accounts. To amalgamate the points of this entry, we can simply note that these scholars discredited the term “Shaheed” with Sikh examples because of its various altered meanings and uses throughout history which they thought was being overly fantasized by the Sikhs.

In this entry, however, we can see how both Navdeep Mandair and Arvind-Pal Mandair stand in opposition of these claims. Not only do they find that these scholars gave subpar recognition for the colonial pressures that pushed for the term to uphold a dynamic role but put forth findings that lacked analysis with historical relativism. In other words, it is because the tyrannical reign that Sikhs had to endure through the centuries and the onset of colonial subjugation that made the use of this term hold varying meanings. To support this claim, the entry includes the work of Brian Axel, of Duke University, who proposes to re-examine the concept of martyrdom and its “glamorization” in light of the colonial struggle and impact on the Sikh thought. It is important to note, however, that both sides of the argument entail a certain ambiguity when analyzing the term and its use by the Sikh people over time. Moreover, it is evident that the field has not moved beyond these surveys. The analysis deriving from these cross references and the lack of mention when it comes to major concepts regarding the Shaheeds shows this. For instance, there is no mention of *shaheedi pehre* within the works of these scholars and little mention and analysis of *shaheed ganjs* or the *shaheedi mandal*.

---

<sup>1</sup>Within the Sikh faith and many Indian traditions, it is common practice and norm to add “Ji” to the end of a name to denote respect towards and individual.

In all, the scholarly literature on the study of Sikh martyrdom shows its limits when seen as a whole. Arguments posit claims regarding only terminology and categorizing of whether the term can be applied or not for Sikh martyrs. For example, although looking to the martyrdoms of the fifth and ninth Guru should be analyzed for their symbolism within the Sikh sphere, the conversation should not end there. Although building off an unstable base might not be wise, this dissertation is going beyond terminology – acknowledging Sikh martyrs as Shaheeds – and moving the conversation forward to unexamined depths: finding references to Shaheeds in literature and putting on display their actions post-martyrdom, and their roles within the Sikh faith at large.

## **1.2 Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition by Louis Fenech**

Perhaps the only comprehensive study on Sikh Shaheeds, Louis Fenech's book, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'* goes into great length covering the origins of Sikh martyrdom and how the concept of Shaheedi was used to bolster the promotion of sacrifice in times of struggle. Beginning by looking at references to the term "Shaheed" in early historical sources (outside of Sikhism as well) and its root etymology, Fenech creates a timeline for historical events associated with the metaphor of Shaheedi and how it relates to specific time periods of Sikh history. Terming the phrase "rhetoric of martyrdom," Fenech finds that Sikhs used this scheme to formulate and recognize how the role of a Shaheed would bolster betterment for the community and faith at large (Fenech 16).

Beginning with early accounts of martyrdom within *Gurpartap Suraj* and *Panth Prakash* – two texts we will also re-examine in this research – Fenech posits that early Sikh narratives of the term held a sense of enchantment of Shaheeds that saw them as "supernatural entities" (Fenech 14) that was lost in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Considering colonialism, Fenech shows that the underlining ideologies behind the term were purposely shifted by Sikh scholars as a means of reform during the Singh Sabha movement and beyond to make this role of martyr simply one who bears witness to the truth. More specifically and detrimental to the faith, this reform worked to disassociate with concepts resembling that of Hinduism, the mystic realms, powers and positions held by Shaheeds, and commemorative rituals upheld at shrines.

Furthermore, the term that was once dynamic and inclusive of ideologies shared in the mystic Hindu, Sufi and Indian folk traditions was now reduced to a term which strictly upheld death for the new and reformed Sikh identity (that Fenech goes into great lengths to put forward). Looking to the Singh Sabha movement as his main point of emphasis, it is evident that the concept of Shaheedi now held undertones of creating distinction between Sikhs and other religions. Relating this to non-Sikh scholars beyond this point like McLeod and Nijhawan, we can denote how the field of Sikh martyrology followed Singh Sabhian scholars of only discussing that which has been disenchanting. It is important to note here as well, that because the

field of studying Sikh martyrdom has become disenchanted, so too does Fenech work within its parameters.

Although this dissertation will neither overthrow nor confirm these claims, there is mention of points of interests within Fenech's work. In particular, when looking to chapter five titled "The Shahid's Role in a Mystical Universe", we find Fenech analyzing lesser-known concepts relating to Shaheeds such as *Shahid-Prasati* (martyrolatry) that were present within the faith and talked about normally, pre-Singh Sabha Movement (Fenech 145). Furthermore, mentioning the martyries (martyr-shrines) within Sikh literature (Fenech 150) and the cosmic realm in which the Shaheeds are believed to be residing in (Fenech 155), Fenech undertakes a concise analysis of these concepts in light of other Muslim and Hindu shrines for saints.

Looking to examples such as Sakhi Sarwar, Sheikh Farid Shakarganj, and Gugga Pir (Fenech 156), Fenech denotes how early views on the Shaheeds held the same mystic enchantment as other religious figures of the times. Although we will not get into the specific frameworks in which these comparisons can be made, it is important to note that these mystical identities and ideologies are not new to the subcontinent. Lastly, although Fenech mentions how previous Sikh scholars such as Kahn Singh Nabha have only alluded to the purpose of Sikh shrines, he does not go into detail about the lived practices and rituals that they adhere. Regardless, however, Fenech too only briefly unveils these concepts of Sikh martyrology, but his notes are worthy enough of bolstering future research on the matter.

In all, although Fenech mentions the metaphysical aspects of Sikh martyrology, such as *Bhai*<sup>2</sup> Taru Singh and *Baba*<sup>3</sup> Gurbaksh Singh's martyrdom, he overlooks the concept of the *shaheedi mandal* that the author goes to great lengths to explain in the case of both martyrs. As so, these accounts will be put forth more intimately within this research. Furthermore, Fenech shares a short passage of a section of *Sau Saakhi* that refers to statements on Shaheeds made by the 10th Guru (Fenech 168)—which are also included in *Gurpartap Suraj*—where Sikhs are taught the vital importance of Shaheeds. We will reiterate this section from a more meticulous lens and pose other mentions of Shaheeds within the literature that have not yet been examined within the study. All things considered, although Fenech has mentioned these points, we will look to dissect these concepts and accounts by establishing a more holistic foundation of the referenced Sikh literature by undertaking a more careful historical analysis of these texts. To begin, we will now have a preliminary engagement with the texts that will be referenced in this research to help build a framework of what to expect.

---

<sup>2</sup> A prefix used in front of the names of Sikh males to denote respect, the term "Bhai" can be literally translated to "brother."

<sup>3</sup> A prefix holding dynamic definitions, "Baba" usually refers to an individual who holds wisdom equivalent to that of an elder or holy priest, regardless of age, as we will come to see later. Within the Sikh tradition, this term may also denote that an individual is a direct descendent of one of the 10 Gurus (E.g. Baba Raam Singh Ji Bedi is seen as a descendent of Guru Nanak Dev Ji).



### 1.3 A Pre-examination of Sources and Authors

Keeping our research goal in mind, the primary aim of this dissertation will be to unveil the overlooked notions of *shaheedi pehre*, the prominent role of the *shaheed ganjs* within Sikh communities, and the neglected accounts mentioning the *shaheedi mandal*. Bearing these three categories in mind, we will venture into key texts regarding Sikh history from 17th - 20th century.

First and foremost, we will begin with the *Gurpartap Suraj* to gain a basic understanding of the stories and references to Shaheeds having occurred during the Guru-period within the late 17th and early 18th centuries. After presenting this account of the role of martyrs within the Sikh tradition and a glimpse of the positionality the Guru has blessed them with, we will then turn our attention to *Panth Prakash*.

Here, we will see how notions found in the *Gurpartap Suraj*, come to play with examples of martyrdoms that span the 18th century. More importantly, we will read in depth accounts of *shaheedi pehre*, construction of *shaheed ganjs*, and the *shaheedi mandal*. Going into these underappreciated accounts, we will come to recognize the details that would have been common knowledge for Sikhs at the time of writing.

We will then examine the *Shri Guru Panth Prakash* – a text published in the late 19th century – that is seen as a reiteration of the previous *Panth Prakash* with updated poetry and elaborated history. Here, we will look to two specific occurrences of *shaheedi pehre* that have not yet been mentioned within the academic realm of Sikh martyrology. More specifically, we will look to the phenomenon of Shaheeds showing themselves and guiding the living for the community's betterment.

Finally, we will turn our attention to the last source of this project, *Do Gursikh Nirmolak Heerey*, a hagiography of two saints of the last century. Only recently made available due to its rarity, this compilation not only holds upwards of 20 references to Shaheeds, but numerous eye-witness testimonies that span the 20th century, the last being of a child possessed by *shaheedi pehre* in 1982 who instructs of the strict rules and regulations that should be followed at each Gurdwara Sahib.

It should be pointed out, although the British and other foreigners had already entered the Punjab by the writing of all this literature, the process of disenchantment that Fenech refers to has not yet occurred amongst these scholars. Even with our most recent source, the author of *Do Gursikh Nirmolak Heerey* repeatedly mentions within footnotes of how the topic and belief of Shaheeds has become taboo with the onset of the Singh Sabha movement, but the reader should hold faith within these eyewitness testimonies. Put differently, disenchantment does not relate directly to colonial entrance, but the forced removal of their subjugation and hindering of Sikh thought by Sikh scholars.

Furthermore, it is important to note here that although mentions of Shaheeds, their mystical powers, and commemorative shrines play a big role within South Asian traditions, this historical analysis will focus only on Sikh literature to help bolster the field of Sikh martyrology. Although comparative frameworks within religious studies is key, it is pertinent to first understand the base literature before juxtaposing it with other traditions and studies. As so, this academic undertaking will create a means for future research on the matter.

In all, with the exploration of the texts both mentioned within the academic study of Sikh martyrology thus far, and those now being addressed through this dissertation, we will end this study by coming to conclusions on how this historical analysis will push the field forward and open avenues for further thinking and research. With all this being said, we will now begin our exploration of both the overlooked and uncharted territories of Sikh martyrology.

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century Literature

### 2.1 *Gurpartap Suraj* by Santokh Singh

Arguably the most well-known and important piece of literature within the Sikh sphere since its publishing in 1848 is the *Gurpartap Suraj* (literally translated to “The Guru’s Radiant Sun”), better known as the *Suraj Prakash Granth* (SPG), written by *Kavi* (poet) Santokh Singh Ji. This magnum opus retells the stories of the Sikh Gurus along with the brief span of events that followed the passing of the 10th Guru in 1708. The 14-volume book is made up of hagiographies of each Guru and a plethora of Sikhs, regarding their day-to-day lives, struggles, and spiritual guidance and journeys. It is important to note that although this isn’t the earliest text that mentions Shaheeds, this work was made by referencing source literature at the time, cross-referencing the information by conducting fieldwork, and further gathering accounts of the history being studied.

Spanning over 1600 pages, this work is mostly compiled in the language of Braj and penned in the Gurmukhi script. The most notable aspect of SPG’s structure is its division into sections. Although you can find chapters in each section, the sections themselves are categorized in relation to the sun, hence the title. First, you have the 12 *raas*’ (months), then 6 *rut* (seasons) and lastly 2 *ayans* (solstices). For my research, however, only the *ruts and ayans* (spanning the lifetime of the 10th Guru) will be of importance. For understanding the citations of this chapter, it will be denoted to “volume name – chapter number – stanza.” For example, *Ruth 3*, chapter 41, stanza 6 – 8, will be cited as “(3:41:6-8)”. Moreover, this text can now be found in either a 14-volume set edited by Bhai Vir Singh Ji, or the 12-volume Punjabi translation by Dr. Ajit Singh Ji Aulakh – whose work will be referenced to for the purpose of my look into Shaheeds.

For the bolstering of this research, however, we will only look to less than a handful of chapters that mention the role of Shaheeds. Two chapters that are of utmost importance come up within *Rut 3* - chapter 41, and *Rut 6* - chapter 55; both of these events fall under the timeline of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and these texts give a basic understanding of the role of Shaheeds within the Sikh tradition and world at large. The first chapter, entitled “Shaheed” in both Dr. Vir Singh’s and Dr. Ajit Aulakh’s commentary, is a key reference point when discussing martyrs within the Sikh tradition. Not only does this passage give information about the power and position held by such spirits, but it also references a plethora of concepts and ideas spanning different traditions.

### 2.1.1 The 10<sup>th</sup> Guru is Asked About the Power, Role, and Duties of Shaheeds

The chapter begins with Guru Gobind Singh Ji seated on their throne while three of the five *pyaare*<sup>4</sup> are in their company. Bhai Mohkam Singh Ji, Bhai Daya Singh Ji, and Bhai Himmat Singh Ji begin to converse with the Guru, and the question is raised, “Who are those that are called "Shaheeds"? What are their duties? What are their characteristics and features? What powers do they hold? Where do they reside and what position are they seated at?” Hearing this, the Guru laughs and exclaims that they have asked of things that were meant to be kept *gupt* or “subtly hidden” (3:41:5).

Describing the illusion-filled play of the world, the Guru explains how the life of a Sikh will become increasingly hard in the future and their faith and mind’s endurance will be tested often through predicaments and dilemmas. Through everything, the Guru will keep his gaze upon the Sikh even if the Sikh fails 10,000 lifetimes. There are 560,000,000 Sikhs that God has given to the Guru to liberate, and *Akaal Purakh*’s (another name for God: “the Eternal Caretaker”) command is to make each a *maalak* (3:41:7-10) – someone who “owns” their own destiny by winning over their mind’s vices and attaining liberation.

To interject, this number is intriguing as it’s rarely discussed in the Sikh sphere/academia. A more well-known number, however, is “96 *crore*” (960,000,000): the number of spirits destined to be martyred and joining the Guru’s eternal army. Reference to this prophesized number can be seen in historical and current literature alike, as well as gurdwaras such as that of Maltekri Sahib<sup>5</sup> in Nanded, Maharashtra.

Moving forward, the Guru then explains how Shaheeds – those who have passed the ultimate test – not only become *maalaks* but gain full access from the realm in which we see this earth, all the way up to the realm of Kubera (the god of wealth). With all and any power, they are able to move freely amongst every realm, and their command is held above all beings:

Animals, birds, mountains, snakes, humans, *jach* (yetis), *gandharvas* (divine celestial musicians), *rakshasas* (demons), *apsaras* (celestial dancers), and anyone else who possesses power/energy, will all be under the command of Shaheeds - *yamadutas* (the messengers of death) included! (3:41:13)

With such power and freedom, the Guru explains, all entities will roam in fear of the Shaheeds. Although the people of the world will see them as *baitaal* (ghosts), those who study the shastras will see Shaheeds as "*vidhiyadhar-devte*"- celestial gods with all knowledge - who live in the skies (3:41:14). Furthermore, they are classified into the three personalities of *rajo*, *sato*, and *tamo*. Those who adhere to the worship of such

---

<sup>4</sup> The *panj pyaare* (“Five Beloveds”) were the first out of a crowd of thousands to finally offer their head to the 10th Guru at what is now known to be the first *Khalsa* (Sikh warrior) baptism ceremony in 1699.

<sup>5</sup> It is said that an unseen treasure is currently buried here and will be revealed when 96 *crore* Shaheeds have come together. The Khalsa will then use this treasure for its benefit.

shaheeds, in return, receive the fulfillment of their mind's desires (3:41:15).

It is important to note here that these three-character types hold vital importance when it comes to understanding the qualities of all things – martyrs included. Within Indian religious understanding and philosophy, it is seen that all things within the creation of God fall under these three categories: “*rajo*” relating to ambition and activeness, “*tamo*” relating to darkness and ignorance, and “*sato*” is seen as a state of peace and creativity. Although all three states permeate all of creation and have their key qualities, beings may shift or be in multiple states at once at any given time. To give a very concise and rudimentary example: a king can be seen as the embodiment of the state of *rajo*, a priest/saint as one who adheres to *sato*, and a warrior who thrives in *tamo*. Here, Santokh Singh writes how all Shaheeds fall under these same three categories as well and uphold their own characteristics. More on this will be discussed later, however.

Looking back to the chapter, along with holding all power, it is stated that Shaheeds administer both pain and pleasure to all living beings as well. Even the deities who were once in control of *Bharat Khand* (the Indian Subcontinent) have now left this position to allow the heavens to be free of tension, while the Shaheeds now uphold their duties - so much so that whatever is ritually offered to the deity is now in the hands of the Shaheed (3:41:16-17). Although we will not get into it within this research, it is important to note how in the span of a few stanzas the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru is not only creating a paradigm shift in giving the role of deities to Shaheeds, but also making way for a new player within the arena of the Indian religious cosmos. This subtle shift within this framework is a topic that has not yet been studied within Sikh martyrology.

Describing some of their powers, Guru Gobind Singh then explains that there isn't just one type of Shaheed. Although they are categorized as standing between the states of *rajo*, *sato*, and *tamo*, there is also a hierarchy within the realm of Shaheeds with some having a greater set of responsibilities and position than others. Even so, however, each Shaheed receives their own respective offering and may don many types of delicate clothing of any color. Lastly, they have many different modes of transportation and are free to travel to any island or continent with ease as well as cross any ocean or river - no matter how much traveling they do, they never forget their whereabouts or locations (3:41:18-19). Although specific examples of these powers aren't given directly within this chapter, we will look to several of them within other source material later.

Furthermore, when no command or direct order is given to the Shaheeds by the Guru, they roam freely and watch the "play" of the world unfold. One major distinction between Shaheeds and other spirits is that although average spirits must reincarnate within a lifeform, Shaheeds are untied from such burdens: they don't need to take on a lifeform to enter this realm, they roam about it freely and animate within lifeforms - a common form of *shaheedi pehre* that we will discuss later. Furthermore, the Guru states that Shaheeds are

of the same caliber as the nine *Naaths*<sup>6</sup>. Within the contemporary moment, anyone taking on a siddhi (paranormal powers often attained through devotion of a deity or God), the Guru exclaims that they have received it from a Shaheed! (3:41:21-22).

Although this chapter is relatively short (being half the size of an average chapter) when compared to the others within SPG, the key points outlined by Santokh Singh create the framework for understanding the role of Shaheeds: being unbound by reincarnation and realms, staggered in spiritual ranking, and holding all supernatural powers, these spirits of the martyred work in more ways than one. Looking through other chapters within SPG we will build upon this base framework and open the conversation to more examples of the Shaheed's spiritual prowess through additional historical Sikh literature. But first, more on the base understanding of the role of Shaheeds rather than their doings.

### **2.1.2 Daya Singh Converses with a Shaheed**

Looking at *Rut* 6, chapter 55, of the SPG, we find an interesting telling of a story in which a Shaheed gives a testimony for his own positionality and duties as a martyred spirit. After the battle of Chamkaur, upwards of 40 close Singhs of Guru Gobind Singh Ji attained martyrdom including three of the five *pyaare* and the two older princes of the Guru. During this time, news had already been received that the younger princes (aged 7 and 9) had also attained martyrdom with their grandmother (wife of Shaheed Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji), Mata Gujri Ji. In all, the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru had now lost his children, mother, and many Singhs in the fight against the Mughal regime.

After taking rest in a nearby village, the whole Sikh congregation began moving their caravan back north with the help of two prominent Sikhs of the area: Bhai Param Singh Ji and Bhai Dharam Singh Ji. Although Param Singh was towards the head of the procession accompanying the Guru, Dharam Singh was positioned in the back directing Sikhs who were joining the caravan at the last minute.

While walking alone, Dharam Singh sees a Sikh slowly approaching from behind and thinks to stop and wait for him so they can accompany one another. As Dharam Singh was watching him approach, he was astonished to see that the Sikh was first wearing very royal white clothes, then yellow clothing, then they turned to all black, and then red clothes; the Sikh was then making himself tall, then short, until he eventually came forward as a normal human being and greeted Dharam Singh (6:55:1-4).

Bewildered and amazed by what he just witnessed, Dharam Singh asks the Sikh (whom Santokh Singh refers to as a “Shaheed”) what amazing magic he had used in enacting the changing of clothes so quickly, and his

---

<sup>6</sup> Divine entities believed to have been blessed by God to uphold the worlds activities.

physical height so abnormally. The Shaheed Singh first responds by saying, "You are from the lineage of Sadha Rupa, a Sikh who has done a lot of seva of the Guru and traveled to far lands spreading the Guru's message - they held a lot of power and were always close to the Guru" (6:55:7). To make note of this, it is a subtle aspect of the all-knowing power that Shaheeds hold (known as "*antarjaamta*"), to be able to tell you your ancestry and lineage - often a basic conversation structure that these spirits begin with to allow a person to have a glimpse of the abilities they hold.

The Shaheed continues and says, "Hundreds and thousands of Shaheeds wander with their high intellect. Five thousand special Shaheeds take turns remaining with the Guru, staying close at hand by their throne and circumambulating it, and the rest live under the command of the Guru and watch the Guru" (6:55:8). In other words, although many Shaheeds always remain with the Guru, many more are out and about accomplishing tasks and endeavors of guidance for their supporters: "Whatever the Guru commands, we do with speed - I am one of those Shaheeds, Oh Sikh, listen carefully!"(6:55:9).

Hearing the words of the Shaheed, Dharam Singh's doubt grew as to why, if the Shaheeds are all-powerful, did they not help the Guru in his times of need while his family and Sikhs were being executed and martyred. Losing all his wealth, property, and family, the Guru is now retreating to the region of Malwa. Thinking of all this, Dharam Singh asks, "You say you are all-powerful and remain with the Guru, but why is it that the Guru lost his family and wealth in all these battles?" (6:55:9-11).

Explaining that this command was from God, the Shaheed answers and says that the loss of kingship and increase in martyrdoms was necessary to relinquish the unjust power being wielded by the Turks (6:55:14). Furthermore, explaining that this play of the Guru cannot be seen or understood by the unfaithful and those with low intellect, he continues, "If I wanted to, I could've demolished all the Turks by myself, and there are countless shaheeds like me with the Guru" (6:55:16).

Further explaining the role of these martyred spirits after death, the Shaheed explains that he and the other Shaheeds constantly ask the Guru for a command to act, but as they are told to "remain standing," the thousands and millions of Shaheeds stand by. Occasionally, however, they use their own power and intentions to push other Sikhs to live within the codes of conduct for a Sikh/Khalsa and achieve martyrdom (6:55:17). This is a pursuit also mentioned via the Gurbani of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and modern-day accounts of *shaheedi pehre*, but more on this later.

Moving the conversation forward, Dharam Singh asks his final question. Understanding that the Shaheeds hold great power, he asks how big the form of Shaheeds can be and if they remain within one body (6:55:19). Listening and only answering to Dharam Singh because he had faith, the Shaheed explains how he can change his form to whatever he desires. After saying this the Shaheed increased his height to become many miles

high, his arms stretched out to far distances and his head touched the skies (6:55:20-21).

It is interesting to note here that this form, also known as *vishvarupa* (“world-form”) is one that finds mentions across many traditions: whether that be the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) having a vision of the angel Gabriel’s body covering the skies, or Bhagwan Krishna Ji showing his great form to Arjuna in the battle of Mahabharat. Although this single act of the Shaheed can be held within a comparative study across multiple traditions, this must be examined in future research.

Seeing this frightful form of the Shaheed, Dharam Singh was afraid in his heart and folded his hands while saying "You are blessed!" The Shaheed then made his body to a normal bearable size and Dharam Singh thanked him for all the teachings and newfound understandings he gave (6:55:21-22).

This encounter is important as it gives more context to the role of Martyrs and their powers, from the mouth of a Shaheed himself. Not only do we learn how Shaheeds remain observant of the command of God/the Guru, but they also have agency in conducting their own minds' desires with the powers bestowed upon them. These actions, however, seem only to bolster the role of the Guru and the faith of the Sikhs who hold the Guru dear. In this story, Dharam Singh had doubt and a Shaheed had come to revive his dying faith after months of battle and hardship. This, however, is not the only reason a Shaheed might approach a Sikh, looking through a couple more chapters of SPG, we will see mention of how the remembrance of such Shaheeds also helps mortals upon earth in their worldly endeavors.

### **2.1.3 Three Prayers Offered to Shaheeds & An Account of Bahadur Shah**

We have learned that Shaheeds hold great power. Now taking on the role of the once-commemorated deities, these spirits of the martyred provide guidance, protection, and grant wishes to those who hold them dear. Before moving on to a different text, it is important to finish laying the groundwork from SPG which will help us understand the accounts of Shaheeds mentioned in later literature. The following section will look at two brief instances from the SPG regarding the spirits of Sikh martyrs.

The first instance is within *Rut 5*, chapter 14, where a faithful devotee by the name of Bisumbhar Daas enters the court of Guru Gobind Singh Ji to answer for the mistakes made by his son (this can be found in the prior chapter). To repent, Bisumbhar Daas asks for forgiveness and mentions how his home within the South is far from any Sikh congregation and his family is close to becoming poverty-stricken. He asks what prayer he can offer to God and the Guru in order to overcome such adversity (5:14:1 - 4).



The Guru answers that *karah parshad*<sup>7</sup> should be made with the reading of the *Jup Ji Sahib* (the first prayer read by Sikhs as a part of their daily routine) as well as the reading of *Anand Sahib* (the fifth Sikh prayer) three times over. Following such instructions and feeding this *karah parshad* to five worthy Sikhs, the Guru says, wealth will be acquired in the household and poverty will remain no more (5:14:5-7). Hearing this, Bisumbhar Daas takes on the Guru's instructions and reiterates the hardships he faces where he resides. He asks for more prayers and instructions depending on one's situation (5:14:10), to which the Guru gives a list of 101 different circumstances and accompanying prayers a Sikh should offer accordingly: thus, this section of SPG is more famously known as "101 *Ardaasa*" ("101 Prayers").

This list of prayers is quite expansive: from the prayer that should be offered when a baby is conceived, when the child is ready for martial arts training and horsemanship, to the prayers that should be offered when starting a garden and digging for a well. Moreover, the Guru goes as far as telling Bisumbhar Daas the prayer that should be offered when the lights of the crown chakra are opened and the prayer that should be done to God upon enlightenment.

Within this extensive list made by the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru, prayers number 32, 33, and 59 relate to asking the Shaheeds for assistance. Here, not only is the important role of martyrs within the Sikh community bolstered, but we get firsthand mention of Sikh being taught to pray to Shaheeds. A literal English translation of Dr. Aulakh's Punjabi translation for prayer 32 and 33 is as follows:

Thirty-two & thirty-three: this prayer is for when an enemy is causing trouble or an unseen shadow has come to you, you should ask that the enemy is destroyed, and the shadow vanishes - the army of Shaheeds will come to support you. Pain will disperse and you will be free of disease (5:14:36).

Not only are Shaheed Singhs mentioned in the original text, but it clearly encourages their remembrance to mitigate ailments. Furthermore, a similar sentiment is shared in prayer number 59 which can be translated literally to:

59: In order to stop obstacles; Shaheed Singhs are powerful beings; the opponents are stopped, and obstacles overcome (R5:14:59).

In all, these prayers highlight the Shaheeds role in helping Sikhs with both disease and obstacles. This notion does not end here within the text, however. Taking our attention to a later volume of SPG in *Ayaan 1* (equating to book 14), we see this narrative coming to light within the accounts of Bahadur Shah mentioned by Santokh Singh.

---

<sup>7</sup> A ceremonial sweet pudding made during Sikh rituals, important occasions, and times of prayer.

After Guru Gobind Singh decides to leave Northern India, Prince Bahadur Shah (son of Emperor Aurangzeb) decides to join the Guru on their travels to the South. The text mentions how Bahadur Shah, being a devotee of the Guru, worked to support his own army through the Guru's resources – especially when it came to fighting his brother, Prince Tara Aazam, for the throne of their now deceased father.

As the long battle was coming to an end, Bahadur Shah was on the brink of losing the fight against his brother and feeling defeated. The Guru provided troops under the command of *Pyare* Bhai Dharam Singh Ji, whom the prince has now come to for a final counsel. Bahadur Shah partakes in a prayer with Dharam Singh on the battlefield and asks that Tara Aazam be defeated, and victory be attained. Within the prayer, Dharam Singh mentions how the Guru protects the meek and how this is their moral obligation – it is now time to show it to the world.

As the prayer was complete and both warriors raised their heads after bowing, they saw that the enemy armies were still marching forward while Bahadur Shah's army was continuing to fall back: Seeing this, the prince remained despaired and expected that they would lose the battle: no hope was left except for that of the Guru. As his army was ready to forfeit once again, they saw what seemed to be an ocean of flags waving in the wind, and like a falcon catching its prey, this “army of Shaheeds” (as Santokh Singh puts it) and the Guru came at once:

Oh Bahadur Shah, fold your hands and bow down to pay respect, the Guru has brought with him an army of Shaheeds [says Dharam Singh]. Holding his bow in hand and with this army, know that the Guru and the Shaheeds will bring you power on the battlefield (A1; 41).

As so, a battle pursues in which the Guru is mentioned to have been fighting with an army of martyrs that not only brought pandemonium in the enemy army, but victory for Bahadur Shah and successful pursuit to the throne. Although this account is short, similar accounts of Shaheeds find great mention in historical Sikh literature that follows suit with reference to Shaheeds helping ever so often.

#### **2.1.4 Summary of Shaheeds within Gurpartap Suraj**

In all, SPG provides a key overview of the position and importance of Shaheeds within the Sikh sphere. Not only are there references to their reverence sourced from the sayings of the Guru, but we also found instances where Shaheeds themselves aided and answered to those who looked to them faithfully. Although academic work on Sikh martyrs is limited, the inclusion of such stories and instructions of praying to the Shaheeds within key Sikh literature has enshrined their importance within each Gurdwara and institution where exegesis of this text continues. Understanding that references to Shaheeds are scattered throughout pre-colonial literature—although only the SPG was examined thus far—we can conclude that there is a place

within the Sikh tradition for Shaheeds beyond what meets the eye. Venturing further into Sikh literature, we find more examples of the altered roles of these spirits and the realms in which they perform. To explore these notions, we can move the conversation forward to *Shri Gur Panth Prakash*, a text covering the lived experiences and hagiographies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Sikh Shaheeds.

## **2.2 *Panth Parkash* by Rattan Singh Bhangu**

With preparations underway for the British to enter Punjab, General David Ochterloney entrusted Captain Murray to complete the task of collecting the history of the Sikhs. By handing this task off to Butte Shah Maulvi, an official at Murray's service and a Muslim scribe, Captain Murray was left with an account of the Sikhs which was biased against the faith and misrepresented its traditions and history. Reading Murray's final reports, Rattan Singh came to the captain and revealed the disservice that was being done to the history of the Sikh people. Motivated to write a better account, Rattan Singh began writing the history of the Sikh people from a Sikh perspective (Bhangu xx-xxi).

Translated literally as “The Illumination of the Supreme Guru's Path,” *Shri Guru Panth Prakash*, better known as *Panth Prakash*, is authored by Rattan Singh Bhangu. The text holds great significance as it is based on oral testimonies of first-hand accounts gathered from family members and acquaintances. Being the grandson of the famous Shaheed Bhai Mehtab Singh Ji — known for avenging Massa Ranghar after he captured the city of Amritsar and the Golden Temple — Rattan Singh was well-versed in the Sikh sphere and the concept of *Shaheedi*, as evident in his writings. Not only were many of his family members known to have attained martyrdom, but Rattan Singh himself is said to have achieved martyrdom in the Battle of Sobraon in 1846 as well.

In all, the text includes about 169 episodes: the first 81 regard the history of the Gurus and Sikh philosophy, while the latter half concerns Sikh history of the 1700s — an important timeframe that highlights the shift from being hunted by the Afghan empire to Sikhs establishing rule on the backs of their martyred men, women, and children. For the purpose of our exploration of Sikh martyrology, we will now analyze key stories and written histories associated with several Sikh martyrs, their supernatural powers, and the mystical realm in which they dwell post-martyrdom.

In reviewing the literature, there were close to 100 references to the term “*Shahid*” within Kulwant Singh's English translation of *Panth Prakash*— a first-of-its-kind work conducted under the tutelage of the Institute of Sikh Studies in Chandigarh. One important note: any citations within this section referred to as “Singh” will be taken to be the exact English translation given by Kulwant Singh, while “Bhangu” will denote my own English translation of the original Gurmukhi script. Although the purpose of this text, essentially, is to

learn about the lives of Shaheeds and gain inspiration to uphold righteousness, as reiterated by Bhangu in the final verses of his work:

Thus has the “Gur Panth Prakash” epic been completed,  
The way the Khalsa Panth evolved the same as has he narrated.  
Whosoever participates in war after going through its contents,  
Never would such an enlightened Singh desert the field.  
Finally, when such a warrior breathes his last,  
Instantly would his soul join the martyrs’ fraternity.  
Among the martyrs would he join as spontaneously,  
As a drop of water mixes with the ocean water. (10) (Singh 785)

The accounts and information provided by Bhangu provide key insight on how the greater community perceived Shaheeds and the myths associated with them. Analyzing this text, three key types of information come into play regarding the martyrs: the importance of the *shaheed-ganj* (sites of commemoration for Sikh martyrs), information associated with the *shaheedi mandal* (the cosmic realm of Shaheeds), and the crux of this research, *shaheedi pehre* (explained below).

To start, the term “*shaheedi pehre*” can hold many meanings. Thus far, we’ve seen in SPG how *shaheedi pehre* can encompass a moment when Shaheeds physically come to the aid of the individual in need. In later history and the contemporary moment, however, the term has evolved into a more dynamic definition. To begin, we will see how *shaheedi pehre* will refer to the severe consequences one may face as backlash for any wrongdoings. Furthermore, the use of *pehre* will also define the protection and guidance – whether that be through visions within dreams or physical consultations – by martyrs to worthy individuals. Lastly, a new alternate definition that we will come to explore is when a living body is “possessed”/taken over by the spirit of a Shaheed. With the new host of the body present, the martyr is able to hold conversations and give guidance on any matter that is brought to them. It is important to note, here, however, that the Sikh sphere also sees the healing of ailments, and possession of Sikhs in times of war as forms of *pehre* as well, however we will stick strictly to the definitions bolstered through our reference material. Within this overview of Shaheeds, we will now look at examples within Sikh literature relating to all of these definitions and build on our understanding of this concept.

Furthering our investigation of the important role of martyrs within the Sikh tradition, however, we will now

examine examples within Bhangu's text regarding *shaheedi pehre*, *shaheed-ganj*, and the cosmic *shaheedi mandal*. In all, although the text is filled with mentions of these terms and concepts, attention will be kept on the martyrdom stories associated with the two younger sons of the 10th Guru, Bhai Taru Singh Ji, and Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji.

### 2.2.1 The Shaheed Child-Princes of the 10th Guru

Turning our attention to Episode 152 of Kulwant Singh's English translation of *Panth Prakash*, this section focuses on a few types of *shaheedi pehre* including the mystical protection of Shaheeds that remains at their memorial site, and the *pehre*, in the form of torment that had befallen their executioner. Known and regarded as one of the highest ranking Shaheeds within the Sikh faith, the younger princes of the 10th Guru – Baba Zorawar Singh Ji (aged 9) and Baba Fateh Singh Ji (aged 7) – attained martyrdom while holding true to their faith within Sikhi and resisting the forced acceptance of Islam by Wazir Khan: the Mughal governor of Sirhind, Punjab, at the time.

As the young children were tormented for several days and eventually bricked alive for nonconforming to the forced conversion, their deaths marked the first well-known case of *shaheedi pehre* and the forced construction of a *shaheed-ganj*. Afflicted by stomach pain, insomnia, and fear of seeing shadows during the day, Bhangu writes about the pains faced by Wazir Khan, as he heard from his elders:

...Scared while awake, mumbling in sleep did he start,

Crying and shrieking would he run from his seat. (7)

Phantoms dressed in blue robes would he see at night,

Who, he alleged, kept beating him the whole night.

The two infants whom he had ordered to be beheaded,

Their figures with swords did he see circling around himself. (8) (Singh 613)

Not only are these symptoms categorized as the torment one may face as the outcome of *shaheedi pehre*, but we also get information on what is entailed within malevolent *pehra* which cling on to evildoers.

Moreover, these afflictions moved past Wazir Khan and started to affect the community at large. Bhangu notes how anyone who passed by the area of martyrdom without paying respect would fall to the floor feeling tied and bound. Furthermore, if anyone tried committing sacrilege in the area by urinating on the premises, the individual would be severely beaten by these spirits. With these afflictions getting worse and worse, the

sight of martyrdom for the younger Sikh princes would now be avoided by all (Bhangu 615).

Many Muslim clerics and ministers offered their assistance on the matter but to no avail. Finally, the governor of Kotkapura, Kapoora Brar, revealed the remedy to be the construction of a memorial site with the following parameters:

A lamp must they light at night there,

Thanksgiving offerings must they offer there.

With filth and rubbish must not the place be littered,

With daily sweeping must the place be kept clean. (16)

Wishes prayed for would get fulfilled there,

Those showing disrespect would have to repent.

A Sikh caretaker must be appointed there,

Who would himself make arrangements there. (17) (Singh 615)

Although Bhangu does not specifically mention to what extent these conditions were met, he does however, offer the way in which the Khalsa came to Sirhind years later to avenge the death of the young princes by ransacking the city and breaking the fort of Sirhind down, brick-by-brick.

Noting as having this account told to him by his father who was present at the building of this shrine (Bhangu 611), Bhangu goes into detail about how the Sikh warriors constructed the site of Fatehgarh Sahib in memory of these young Shaheeds. Upholding the conduct still seen in *Nihang*<sup>8</sup> Sikh encampments today, utmost importance was given to the *nishaan-nagaare* (Khalsa battle standards and war drums) by first placing them at the location of martyrdom. The next day, all the Khalsa would come together before sunrise to complete their morning prayers and begin the construction of a *shaheed-ganj*.

Bhangu, giving crucial information about the make-up of a martyr-shrine, details the following:

...A palanquin they placed after raising a platform,

A canopy did they spread over the (holy) place. (20)

---

<sup>8</sup> A sect within the Sikh tradition seen as the protectors of righteousness, the Nihangs (translated literally to “crocodile” –for their fierce personalities – or “those without attachment”) are a nomadic people who adorn the dress of the Khalsa that was said to be manifested by Baba Fateh Singh Ji under the inquiry of the 10th Guru.

...Soon did they turn the platform into a throne,

Covering it decently with silken garments.

Five armaments did they place on the throne,

Deeming these as the embodiments of the Guru. (21)

The way the Guru had his armaments worshipped,

With sandalwood paste and flowers were these armaments decorated.

A Singh with a fly whisk over these was made to stand in attendance,

As he was appointed as the caretaker of that sacred shrine. (22) (Singh 615)

An important note to make here is, although all current-day shrines and gurdwaras are seen as only being complete with the presence of *Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* (SGGSJ: current Guru of the Sikhs in the form of scripture), most pre-colonial literature including SPG and *Panth Prakash* give examples of Sikh historical locations and *shaheed-ganj*s as only consisting of a raised platform, symbolizing a throne, and decorated weaponry that would be worshipped as the living embodiment of the Guru. Although most current day shrines of Shaheeds uphold the same tenets as outlined within literature, the absence of SGGSJ has been a point of critique by contemporary Sikh schools of thought; perhaps this notion was born in relation to the Singh Sabha mindset of disenchanting and disassociating with Hindu myths and idol worship.

Moreover, Bhangu further reiterates a notion emphasized often within his text: reverence and devotional worship at these locations facilitates the fulfilling of desires and wishes:

Offering... *Karah Prashad* in large quantities,

Many an offering did the Khalsa Panth make at the shrine. (23)

Circumambulating around the holy site Singhs recited *Gurbani* (Sikh scripture) verses,

Every wish, whatever one longed for, came to be fulfilled.

Asking the *Rababis* (stringed instrument players) to recite and sing *Gurbani* verses,

Thus did the Khalsa Panth establish this sacred shrine. (24) (Singh 615)

In its entirety, along with *nishaan-nagaare* and weaponry on display, the shrine of a Shaheed will include many aspects linked to devotional worship such as a *jot* (a ghee-lamp with a twisted cotton wick), incense, flowers, and the ceremonial making of *karah parshad* or *shaheedi deg*h (which we will discuss later) as

offerings of gratitude and thankfulness.

In all, this chapter brought to light a form of *shaheedi pehre* and furthered our survey of what Shaheeds and their earthly shrines entail. Analyzing the broader repercussions felt by both Wazir Khan and the surrounding community, we gain insight into *shaheedi pehre* and the mystical consequences one faces until amends are made, which, in this case, meant the construction of a *shaheed-ganj*. To look to another prime example within the text, we can look to an interesting account that Bhangu notes having heard from the initiator of the *shaheedi pehre* himself, brought upon the governor of Punjab.

### **2.2.2 Shaheed Bhai Taru Singh Ji**

Turning our attention to Episodes 111 and 112, we will now analyze the story of Shaheed Bhai Taru Singh Ji and his vows that caused the demise of Zakariya Khan (Governor of Punjab from 1726 - 1746). During an era of persecution and slaughter of the Sikh people, the majority of Sikh communities had gone into hiding and formed militias within the jungles in order to resist the bounties placed on their heads by the Mughal regime (Bhangu 229 - 231). Confused about how such communities were still able to survive after such persecution, Zakariya Khan was informed that these militants of the jungles were only being sustained due to the Sikhs living in rural farm areas which would offer help through rations of food and money – one of these supporters being a Sikh by the name of Taru Singh (Bhangu 231 - 233).

As Taru Singh was eventually captured and brought to court, he too, like many other Sikhs of the time, was being forced to accept Islam. After many failed attempts by Zakariya Khan and his ministers, the governor now ordered Taru Singh to be beaten on the head with shoes and for his hair to be cut, which is seen as a cardinal sin within the Sikh tradition. As the barbers approached Taru Singh with the razor, they would find their hands going numb or their vision impaired. Thinking that Taru Singh had cast a spell on the executioners, Khan then ordered that the scalp of the Sikh be removed in front of the court. Rejoicing and chanting “*Akaal! Akaal!*” (a proclamation of happiness towards the Eternal God), Taru Singh was content with these orders as it meant his hair and Sikhi would remain intact (Bhangu 291).

As the act of removing Taru Singh’s scalp came to an end and he was free to go back to his village, Taru Singh would invoke *shaheedi pehre* by vowing that Khan’s actions would not go without consequence:

[Taru Singh,] Warning the Nawab to get ready to meet his nemesis [death] at last,

He would kill him by getting his urinary and intestinal tract blocked.

Warning him to be ready for being damned forever in hell,



He would chase the Nawab with shoe beatings to the doors of hell. (35)

The moment Bhai Taru Singh let out his prophetic warning,

The Nawab developed a blockage in his urinary tract... (Singh 295)

As this prescient vow was evoked, Bhangu remarks that Zakariya Khan became restless, often lying down one minute and then stretching the next, he was unable to find peace with this new ailment given to him by Taru Singh. Furthermore, similar to the torment that Wazir Khan faced after executing the young princes of the 10th Guru, Zakariya Khan began to feel the presence of the Shaheed spirits, as well:

Appearing in the guise of blue robes with heavy clubs in hands,

Did the spirits of martyred Singhs thrash the Nawab with heavy clubs.

The more the clerics invoked the Muslim spiritual prophets,

The more did the spirits torture and punish the Nawab. (4)

Directing the wicked Nawab to crawl ahead of them,

Did the Singhs' spirits chastise the Nawab in this way.

Noticing the Singh spirits standing in front of him,

Did the Nawab see them brandishing their daggers and quoits. (5) (Singh 297)

An interesting notion found in this chapter is that the position and power of the Shaheeds that are explained in SPG, can be seen here as well. With the onset of Khan's torment with the *shaheedi pehre*, the more he called to other spirits to help him, the more the Shaheeds would chase them away and increase their *pehre*. Not only does this show the governor the dominance they have over him, but the spirits he prays to as well.

Once Zakariya Khan began to undergo the torment of the martyred spirits, Bhangu notes that many Muslim clerics were brought to the governor in hopes that they would help ease the pain of Zakariya Khan through more spiritual means by using incantations and spells to harbor the aid of prophets who have passed. However, this came to no avail as the shaheeds would ward them off with the touch of their daggers and weaponry (Bhangu 297).

Eventually, Zakariya Khan gave in to the torment and requested the aid of Sikhs from Lahore. Along with freeing Bhai Subeg Singh Ji from the state prison, he hoped that these actions would make amends with the Sikh people and lessen the punishment he was receiving from the Shaheeds. After conversing with the governor, Subeg Singh made his way back to Taru Singh and the Sikh militia encampment (Bhangu 300 -

307). Here, after much discussion of what Zakariya Khan should do to atone for his sins, the Sikhs decided to command the governor to return the 12 villages that were currently under his martial law as well as fulfill the vow made by Taru Singh – that the beating of his shoe would bring him relief from both his mental stress and the pain of living (Bhangu 311 - 315).

Before getting to Subeg Singh's return to Zakariya Khan, I must add an interesting piece of information that is brought up within his conversation with the Sikh community. As all of the Sikhs were deciding upon the ruling, Taru Singh began to praise the Khalsa (the collective Sikh warriors) towards the end of the meeting in which he refers to their prayers and deeds as the only reason he was able to remain astute in the face of torment and death. Because of their prayers and throwing of *nugde* (translated to "cannabis husks" by Singh, 315), the Shaheeds were present and supportive in their endeavors.

To interject here, I find it important to elaborate on the throwing of *nugde*. Made as a ceremonial offering to the martyred spirits, the process of offering "*Shaheedi degh*" (literally "drink of the martyrs") is still upheld within present-day Nihang encampments as well as numerous gurdwaras/sites linked with martyrdom. Made from mixing sugar water with ground-down almonds, melon seeds, black peppercorn, cardamom, and the leaves of cannabis, this offering is put together with the reading of Sikh scripture (often that which evokes the warrior spirit) and then offered ceremonially to the martyrs. After straining these dry ingredients repeatedly within sugar water, the leftover components are then fashioned into a small ball—known as a *nugda*—and thrown in the direction where obstacles are prevalent, or protection and assistance is needed; it is then believed that the Shaheeds listen to such prayer and their energies are evoked.

Not only does this drink find mention within a plethora of Sikh literature throughout Sikh history, but it comes up several times within Bhangu's own accounts as well. As we will see later in the retelling of Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji's martyrdom, *shaheedi degh* was consumed routinely by Nihang Singhs to help with reenergizing and renourishing their nutrient-depleted bodies constantly active in guerilla warfare. Furthermore, with heightened senses and focus on the task at hand, this elixir would often be the last thing a Sikh would drink before attaining martyrdom on the battlefield – perhaps it is because of this regular consumption and final ingestion of *shaheedi degh* that it is now used to both evoke and offer as a sacrament to the Shaheeds.

Most notably, this drink finds heavy consumption on the festival of Holla Mohalla within the city of Anandpur Sahib and within Nihang groups on the days associated with martyrdoms. More noticeably, *shaheedi degh* is made and offered three times a day at Takhat Sachkhand Shri Hazur Sahib: the location where the 10th Guru instilled themselves within the Khalsa and current-day Sikh throne of authority within the Deccan. Although much analysis and research can be done on the topic of *shaheedi degh* and other

offerings given to commemorate and call upon the Sikh martyrs, this will be an endeavor for future research.

As Zakariya Khan is still feeling the wrath of the *shaheedi pehre*, he is relieved seeing Subeg Singh return and ready to follow the instructions laid out by the Khalsa that will cure his urine blockage, restlessness, and insomnia – by honoring the vow of Taru Singh and hitting his own head with the Sikh’s shoe. Following such instruction, the *pehre* of the Shaheeds came to an end and the governor passed away shortly after (Bhangu 317 - 319)

Not only does this chapter bring insight into how Sikhs implemented *pehre* against their enemies, but it further shows how both Shaheeds and living Sikhs engaged with those on the brink of martyrdom. Moving to episode 114, Kulwant Singh translates the title of this two-page section of the text as “(Another) Episode About the Bhai Taru Singh [ and how he] was declared the greatest Martyr among Martyrs.”

As the word of the governor’s death reached the Khalsa encampment, Taru Singh instructed the Sikhs to prepare his funeral pyre at last. Overwhelmed with joy, the living-martyr requested that the sacred water from Amritsar Sahib's pool be brought to bathe him. Upon bathing, the offering of *karah parshad* was made and the prayers of *Jup Ji Sahib* and *Anand Sahib* were recited – as so, Taru Singh had left his mortal frame on his own accord (Bhangu 321). The description that Bhangu notes after this point, however, is of key importance as it relates to the *shaheedi mandal*.

Reciting hymns from the scriptures while playing stringed instruments, the Shaheeds themselves came from the skies to receive the soul of the beloved Taru Singh. Seating the new martyr within a decorated palanquin amongst the martyrs, celestial horses then led the procession of Shaheeds forward. All the while, the soul of Zakariya Khan was met with the messengers of death who arrived from hell. Armed with spears and shoes, they pushed the soul forward to hell where it was given the command to undergo constant shoe beatings (Bhangu 322).

Furthermore, once Taru Singh’s soul reaches the realm of the Shaheeds, we are given one of the first accounts within Sikh literature of this space. Kulwant Singh translates this key stanza to:

Offering a place of honor in the heavenly abode,

Was Bhai Taru Singh declared the greatest among the martyrs.

The section harboring the holy spirits of Guru’s four revered sons,

Of that entrance was Bhai Taru Singh made in charge. (10) (Singh 323)

Not only do we learn that this sacred realm holds significance, as the four sons of the 10th Guru –all having

attained martyrdom—reside here, but the notions of Shaheeds holding different rankings and positions (as mentioned in SPG) is confirmed as well with the mention of Taru Singh’s newfound responsibility as head gatekeeper. Further bolstering this notion, Bhangu mentions the presence of Shaheed Bhai Mani Singh Ji—a revered scholar of the Sikh tradition who is known for having up to 22 martyrs within his family and giving his own life by being cut joint-by-joint— within this realm as well:

[Seeing] Bhai Mani Singh’s spirit stationed on the right,

Bhai Taru Singh found a spot adhering to the left [of the celestial gates].

Being honored as a chief among the heavenly Shaheeds,

Bhai Taru Singh resided at the forefront of the martyrs. (11) (Bhangu 322)

As Bhangu comes to the end of his account of Taru Singh’s martyrdom, the last piece of information he shares is how this story of sacrifice for righteousness does not go in vain. Mentioning how a flag now stands tall at this hallowed site, the villagers and people of the Sikh faith now use this space as a point of veneration and prayer to the Shaheeds. For whatever peace and belonging one may ask for—whether it be livelihood, wealth, or prosperity— all boons and desires will be fulfilled by Bhai Taru Singh Ji (Bhangu 322-323). Furthermore, Bhangu adds:

Whosoever listened to the legend of Bhai Taru Singh,

Would he receive boons of good health and peace of mind.

Neither would the dread of death threaten such a devotee,

Nor would he get scared by the demons from hell. (14) (Singh 323)

In all, the account of Bhai Taru Singh Ji’s martyrdom reveals greater insight into the notion of *shaheedi pehre* within the Sikh community and how it is dealt with within this sphere. Furthermore, although the cosmic realm of the Shaheeds was only briefly touched upon, its inclusion within the text makes a point of reference to its importance when looking at the concept of Shaheeds as a whole. Lastly, incorporating *shaheed ganjs* as a point for memorialization and commemoration of martyrs only further expands and solidifies their position within the Sikh sphere. Moving further, we will look to our last example within *Panth Prakash* of how a Sikh warrior, upon attaining martyrdom, is received within the realm of Shaheeds and how he is sent back to earth a few years later. Not only is this section of key importance as it gives us greater knowledge of the *shaheedi mandal*, but it also demonstrates how this cosmic realm directly relates and interacts with the Sikhs on Earth.

### 2.2.3 Shaheed Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji

Held as one of the longest episodes within *Panth Prakash*, Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji's martyrdom has been described by Bhangu within various poetic meters that add up to a total of 120 stanzas. The title translating literally to "Story of the ever-young Nihang Gurbaksh Singh Shaheed Ji (marrying death, headless, and receiving kingship as the dowry)," Bhangu narrates the account of how Gurbaksh Singh attained martyrdom within the holy city of Amritsar and joined the ranks of the Shaheeds. Although we will not be able to do justice to Gurbaksh Singh's martyrdom within the confines of this research, the focus of this account will be on the last moments of the martyr's life, the detailed information given about the *shaheedi mandal*, and the prophetic narration of Gurbaksh Singh's next life on Earth.

With an upbringing in the village of Leel, near Khemkaran, Gurbaksh Singh was blessed with *amrit*<sup>9</sup> by none other than the renowned scholar, and later Shaheed, Bhai Mani Singh Ji. Becoming a member of the Khalsa army, Gurbaksh Singh would uphold the conduct known to the Nihang regiments. Always wearing blue and armed to the teeth with weapons, Gurbaksh Singh would be ever ready for battle and dying for justice. Speaking to Gurbaksh Singh's personality and characteristics, Bhangu writes:

...A dose of cannabis would he partake every morning,

Daily ablutions would he perform thereafter. (2)

Early in the morning would he take a bath,

Gurbani, would he recite while donning his turban.

Armaments of steel would he pay obeisance to,

Those armaments would he carry after worshipping these. (3)

A rosary made of steel beads and steel would he wear,

With bracelets of steel would he adorn his wrists.

Steel Quoits and chains would he wear around his turban,

Protection of these steel armaments would he seek. (4)

Steel gloves on [his] hands and steel club [on his] waist would he wear,

---

<sup>9</sup> Translated to "immortal nectar": this sacrament is made by adding sugar to water and mixing it with a double-edged sword while reading selective Sikh scriptures.

Undergarments made out of one and quarter yard of cloth he would wear.

With steel armor would he cover his whole body,

A daily religious congregation would this Nihang hold. (5) (Singh 631)

It is important to note here that the description that Bhangu is mentioning here is of a Nihang Sikh who, after initiation into the Khalsa, would always remain prepared for martyrdom at a moment's notice. Another important place where the term “Shaheed” comes up within this literature is the mention of the Shaheedi Misl<sup>10</sup> (Bhangu 91): a regiment of the Khalsa army that would fight on the front lines of every battle and be made up of Nihang Singhs nicknamed “*jioonde Shaheed*” (“living martyrs”) due to their courageous willingness to die for their faith.

After the martyrdom of Nihang Baba Deep Singh Ji in 1757, Gurbaksh Singh was made head of the Shaheedi Misl and stationed at the Akaal Bunga (now known as the Akaal Takhat Sahib) in front of Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar. As news spread of another impending invasion of Punjab by Ahmed Shah Abdali, then ruler of the Durrani empire (current-day Afghanistan), panic spread widely among the Sikhs and locals. Gurbaksh Singh offered to sacrifice himself to protect the sanctity of Amritsar Sahib; he exclaimed to the congregation that he would now be marrying death and needed groomsmen by his side (Bhangu 635).

Invoking the warrior spirit within the community, Bhangu mentions the conditions outlined by Gurbaksh Singh and his rationale in attaining martyrdom. Found quoted in the scripture of *Chandi Astotar* (more commonly known as *Bhagauti Astotar*), written by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, it is said that those who attain martyrdom on the battlefield are reborn as kings to rule over the lands while those who win and survive gain sovereignty right away (Bhangu 637) – entailing a win-win situation for the martyr. Moreover, referring back to the martyrdom of Taru Singh, Gurbaksh Singh calls upon the Sikhs to stop Abdali’s tyrannical reign just as Taru Singh did for Zakariya Khan (Bhangu 635).

As Ahmed Shah heard of the whereabouts of the Sikhs who now controlled most of the Punjab, he changed his trajectory from Lahore to the city of Amritsar. As the Durrani army was approaching, Bhangu records the preparations that were being made by the small group of living martyrs who remained: based on their personal desires, some dressed in blue, some in white, and some in yellow. Preparing *sukha* (“the giver of peace”; a synonym for *shaheedi degh*), and some Singhs taking in *feem* (opium), to proactively subdue the pain and afflictions that were to be felt in battle, the small group was now ready for martyrdom (Bhangu 636 - 639).

---

<sup>10</sup> The Misls (or “regiments”) of the Sikh confederacy were a culmination of 12 predominant groups established in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century to combat the Durrani empire up until Sikh rule.

Ready for battle, the Singhs then prepared the ceremonial *karah parshad* and recited hymns from the SGGSJ. Treating this martyrdom as a wedding with death, wedding songs were sung by the onlookers and perfumes were applied to the bodies of the warriors who resembled grooms. While on the other end, the groom, Gurbaksh Singh bathed in the sacred pool of Amritsar and adorned himself with a new set of clothes, weaponry, and a wedding-plume atop his turban. Being honored with the rain of flower petals by the Sikh congregation, Gurbaksh Singh was now ready to become a martyr (Bhangu 639 - 641).

Although the focus of this analysis will remain on the aspects of Gurbaksh Singh's martyrdom that relate to the community's view on the impending deaths and the *shaheedi mandal*, the waging of the battle by Abdali's forces and the fight of the Khalsa can be read from stanzas 55 to 84 (Bhangu 643 - 649). To summate, Gurbaksh Singh and his tribe of Singhs partook in a battle at the gates of the Akaal Takhat Sahib but ultimately all gained martyrdom. Interestingly, it is said that Gurbaksh Singh continued miraculously fighting headless against the enemy and was a warrior who had to be cremated with his sword still in hand due to his tight grip even after death. Furthermore, Bhangu narrates one of the most detailed and extravagant accounts of a post-martyrdom entrance into the realm of Shaheeds and the counsel that occurred there.

In the same manner as Taru Singh's soul was received, Bhangu notes that celestial flying chariots and horses had been arranged glamorously by the Shaheeds to retrieve Gurbaksh Singh's soul, along with his companion martyrs. Led with Shaheeds adorning blue and holding the *nishaan-nagaare* (battle standards and war drums), the Shaheeds joyfully came down singing hymns of the Guru's scripture and playing stringed instruments to accept the new martyr amongst their ranks (Bhangu 649).

Moreover, invoking the head Shaheeds of the cosmic realm, Bhangu notes the coming down of both Mani Singh and Taru Singh from their stationed posts within the realm of martyrs to retrieve Gurbaksh Singh:

The great...martyr Mani Singh's spirit came himself,

Gurbani verses was he reciting from the Guru Granth Sahib.

In his compatriots' company did Martyr Taru Singh come,

Pulling Khan Bahadur with a leash was his spirit seen. (88)

Those who gave shoe beatings to Khan Bahadur were seen to be there,

Their severe shoe-beatings were stripping (the wicked Nawab's) skin.

All those wicked (Mughals) who had tortured the Singhs,

Surely were they ordered to be pallbearers of Gurbaksh Singh's spirit. (89)

Coming near, martyrs greeted Gurbakhsh Singh with Khalsa greetings,

Bowing in respect, all the martyrs took him in their embrace... (Singh 649)

Interestingly, Bhangu reiterates the fate of Zakariya Khan and his counterparts who are still suffering the consequences of their wrongdoings on Taru Singh, Bhangu then redirects the readers to the enemies of Gurbakhsh Singh who will ultimately have the same fate in the world hereafter.

Upon reaching the *shaheedi mandal*, Gurbakhsh Singh stands in front of the Guru and offers his plea in veneration. He speaks about the Khalsa that had been established by the Guru which is now facing much torment and suffering from the oppressors. Furthermore, Gurbakhsh Singh emphasizes that all of Punjab's resources have been taken out of the hands of the Sikhs and been stolen by invaders from the South and West, like Ahmed Shah Abdali. Praying, he then asks, "May God's own Khalsa be strengthened to fight, and may all the wicked invaders be decimated by the Khalsa (93)," and as the Guru heard this prayer, with glee, they exclaimed "So be it" (Bhangu 651). Bhangu notes that as this prayer was directed to the Guru within the upper realms, the Khalsa began to prosper down on Earth, but this was not where the conversation ended. Bhangu tells the reader to continue reading and "be dyed in the color of love and devotion."

Gurbakhsh Singh, understanding that the Guru is the fulfiller of desires and wishes, asks if he may remain with the Shaheeds in their realm, as opposed to *Sachkhand* (the realm where the soul merges back into God). To which the Guru responds,

You have all our happiness [Gurbakhsh Singh], may you be born again within the Khalsa, and let it be known that as many steps as a Sikh takes towards martyrdom: they will have the equivalent amount –in the thousands– of soldiers under their command. Know that you too will become the leader of thousands because of the martyrdom you achieved against the Pathans (Bhangu 654)

Hearing this conversation, the rest of Shaheeds then conferred and brought their proposal to the Guru: that Gurbakhsh Singh remain with the Shaheeds in their realm for 12 years and then take birth again within the Khalsa. Bhangu adds within the text that the Guru is never far from the Sikh, and the Sikh is never far from the Guru, and so, all agreed on this recommendation. Gurbakhsh Singh then asked how he would be able to follow such a command, to which the Guru reiterated that Gurbakhsh Singh would now hold great power in light of his martyrdom, and that he has been bestowed sovereign command. Furthermore, once Gurbakhsh Singh was reborn, the Guru says that:

The whole Khalsa Panth would abide by his command,

Vanquished he be whosoever dared to fight against him. (114)



Whomsoever did he look down upon,

Instantly would that person be annihilated.

Howsoever defiant and formidable he might be,

Finally defeated would he surrender before him. (115) (Singh 657)

Gaining resilience from the Guru's word, Gurbaksh Singh had one final question: Into whose household would he be born? The Guru pondered the question and thought that it must be someone who all the Khalsa could vouch for, someone who has killed the enemy without retreating on the battlefield and sacrificed himself for the Khalsa and its welfare. Thinking of this, the Guru then looked upon the Shaheeds who died fighting within the *Vadda Ghalughara* ("the Greater [Sikh] Genocide") of 1762 and posited this question to them. As these Shaheeds pondered, they came to the unanimous consensus that Gurbaksh Singh take birth in the house of the esteemed warrior and leader of the Sukerchakia Misl (a leading regiment amongst the Sikh confederacy), Sardar Charat Singh Ji.

As avid readers of Sikh history will know, Sardar Charat Singh was a prominent leader within the Sikh sphere and mentioned often in Bhangu's text. He led the Sikhs during the *Vadda Ghalughara*, where over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Sikh population was massacred in the span of 10 hours. As so, Sardar Charat Singh's household was given great respect and admiration by all. Moreover, the prophecy of Gurbaksh Singh's birth within this lineage came true with the birth of Charat Singh's grandson, Ranjit Singh, who became to be known as the sovereign Maharaja ("great king") of Punjab, as well as the *Sher-e-Punjab* ("the Lion of Punjab") for his heroic bravery on the battlefield and his warrior-like nature. It is this same Maharaj Ranjit Singh Ji who established the Sikh Empire and rule over the Punjab.

In ending, as these actions were being decided within the *shaheedi mandal*, the Sikhs of Amritsar were searching for the bodies of the martyred Singhs to be cremated. Holding them in profound respect both before and after their deaths, it was decided that a *shaheed ganj* should be erected in the name of these martyrs who served the community until their death. Bhangu notes both the sentiment shared within the community about these martyrs as well as what the site becomes known for over time:

Praise be to such a martyr did everyone cry,

Praise be to his parents who begot such a martyr.

*Shaheed Ganj*, a memorial did they raise in his memory,

Wishes prayed for at his shrine would get fulfilled. (103)

Such a hallowed reputation did this shrine acquire,  
That those possessed with evil spirits got exorcised.  
Many an offering of *Karah-Parshad* did the Singhs offer there,  
Many a fond wish of the devotees came to be fulfilled. (104) (Singh 653)

Constructed on the backside of the Akaal Takhat, the memorial for Nihang Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji Shaheed and his handful of men still stands today. Interestingly, we can draw a connection from the small notice on the martyrs' shrine that Bhangu outlines back to concepts within Santokh Singh's SPG. Just as Guru Gobind Singh Ji outlines in prayer 33, of the "101 Prayers" section, that Shaheeds should be prayed to when unseen shadows are causing distress, we see this coming into play within the reputation of this *shaheedi ganj*.

In all, the account of Gurbaksh Singh gives us vital information that not only supports concepts from within the SPG but provides information about the *shaheedi mandal* very rarely seen in Sikh literature or studies. We have learned that not only do these martyrs hold positions within a realm outside of this one, but their conversations and agreements with the Guru also affect the Sikhs on Earth. Although Shaheeds play a pivotal role within the Sikh tradition, failure to analyze lesser-known accounts regarding *shaheedi pehre* and the *shaheedi mandal* does an injustice to the field at large. Exploring such information on Shaheeds provided through SPG and *Panth Prakash*, we will now look to a very short case of a *shaheedi pehra* that comes up in 19th-century literature but is absent from Sikh martyrology conversations. Thereafter, we will turn to post-colonial sources on the matter for further information.

### **2.3 Naveen Panth Prakash by Giani Gian Singh Ji**

Written by *Giani*<sup>11</sup> Gian Singh Ji, of the esoteric Nirmala school, *Shri Guru Panth Prakash* (completed in 1889 CE), more commonly known as *Naveen Panth Prakash* (NPP), is a reiteration of Bhangu's *Panth Prakash* but now in the poetic language of Braj as opposed to the original Punjabi. Understanding that Bhangu had written his work in a time of crisis, Gian Singh looks to revise the previous *Panth Prakash* by adding in extra accounts of the mentioned history as well as reworking the poetic meters and stanzas used. Although we can situate Gian Singh in the time frame of the Sikh empire and after, the British presence in Punjab was significant – as mentioned within the text as well. It is important to note, however, Sikh scholars of this era had not yet fully begun to defend the Sikh identity in light of colonial thought and its prejudices. As Louis Fenech mentions within *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, disenchantment and protection of a unique Sikh

---

<sup>11</sup> A term used to denote an individual "holding knowledge."

identity would come about later with the onset of the Singh Sabha movement and its scholars.

Like *Panth Prakash*, the text has been split up into two volumes; the first volume entails the main history associated with the coming of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (the first Sikh Guru) up until the life of Guru Gobind Singh Ji. And the second volume concerns itself with the life and battles of Baba Banda Singh Ji “Bahadur” and his martyrdom in 1716, to the end of the Sikh Misl period before the brink of Sikh rule within Punjab (in the late 18th to the early 19th century). Although there is much more information and twice the amount of poetry when compared to the stanzas and chapter lengths of Bhangu’s work, we will only focus on one small account of a *shaheedi pehra* that is mentioned towards the end of the compilation. Furthermore, it is also important to note that because little academic work has been done on this vast text, it unfortunately remains only in its original Braj poetry in Gurmukhi script – all English translations within this section will be done by myself.

Thus far within the research, we have looked at *shaheedi pehre* in terms of protection of the faithful and torment of the evildoers. Looking to NPP, we will see an account where a Shaheed will give his wife – now a widow after his martyrdom – visions of himself and a handful of Sikhs. Not only will this confirm an early account of post-martyrdom guidance given for the betterment of the community, but it will open the door to understanding later testimonies and accounts of *shaheedi pehre* that find no mention within Sikh research. Finding it relevant to focus on this short account, we will now turn our attention to chapter 52 entitled “The Khalsa’s fight against Shahanchi Khan; The martyrdom of Baba Raam Singh Bedi; The death of Shahanchi; Maharaja Ranjit Singh taking over Lahore.”

### **2.3.1 Shaheedi Pehre of Baba Raam Singh Ji Bedi**

As Shah Zaman follows the footsteps of his grandfather, Ahmed Shah Abdali, in invading Punjab, he is made to retreat and suppress another rebellion within his territory. He leaves close to 12,000 troops under the command of his general, Shahanchi Khan, to maintain their occupation of the lands North-West of Lahore and Punjab. Although this battle between Shahanchi Khan also included the evoking of *shaheedi pehre* by Baba Raam Singh Ji Bedi<sup>12</sup> and the Khalsa, for the purposes of our research we will look to the events that occurred after the conflict.

Noted as having fought headless against Shahanchi Khan and wreaking havoc upon the battlefield, Raam Singh, along with his troops of around 8,000 Sikhs, attained martyrdom at this battle in 1776 at Sialkot, Pakistan. The surviving Pathans then took the heads of these martyred Sikhs to show Shah Zaman and parade within the city of Lahore. As per the custom, they would then throw the dismembered body parts into a well-

---

<sup>12</sup> Being a descendent of the first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Baba Raam Singh Bedi held a significant role within the Sikh faith.

known to history as “*Shaheeda’n Singha’n - Singhniya’n da khooh*”: translated literally as “The well of the martyred lions and lionesses.” This well was used to store the dead bodies and heads of the Sikhs killed within the Mughal and Durrani Empires.

Although martyrdom was attained by Raam Singh, Gian Singh writes that he evoked *shaheedi pehre* to his now widowed wife to comfort her in this time of sorrow. Showing her his form just as it was when he was alive and well – better known as giving *darshan* – Raam Singh addressed his wife, saying:

...Do not abandon your wedding jewelry and signs of marriage,

[Although it is custom to do so when widowed] see me as forever alive. (246)

So continue to adorn your garments of marriage and apply your *attar* perfume,

and sit atop our bed within our quarters.

Just as a wife waits for her husband’s love,

I will come to you every day and be with you. (Gian Singh 999)

Following these instructions, Raam Singh’s wife did as such and continued adorning her jewelry and garments of marriage, as opposed to taking them all off and wearing simple white clothes as was customary for a widow of the time. Furthermore, whenever she focused on her martyred husband with faith and concentration, Raam Singh would come to her in the form of *darshan* at a moment’s notice.

There was, however, a caveat: “If you reveal this secret to anyone” Raam Singh said, “I will not come to give you my vision again” (Gian Singh 999). Following these strict orders and remaining dressed as a newlywed bride, many years passed but her faith in her Shaheed husband was constant despite the ridicule she would receive from her family and friends. After some time, however, her parents-in-law finally came to her and recalled her husband’s death. Ridiculing her for wearing the jewelry and garments of a wife and implying that she might be doing so for other selfish desires or public show, her mother-in-law pressured her to the point of finally revealing her secret about Raam Singh’s daily *darshan*.

Upset with her parents and family, she screamed “You have now made me a widow! Now I am forced to wear the clothes of someone who has lost her husband because he will now longer come to me!” Hearing these words, her parents-in-law were amazed but also became distraught and grief-stricken, longing to have a glimpse of their son. Seeing their pain, Raam Singh’s wife prayed to him with full faith that he might give a glimpse one last time to her and their parents. As so, he did. After this, however, Gian Singh notes that the Shaheed never came again, and his wife dressed thereafter as a widow in only white garments. This account

was not just important enough to add within NPP, but Gian Singh notes that this story was known well by the people of Sialkot up until his writing of it almost a century later. Furthermore, Gian Singh goes on to tell another interesting account of *shaheedi pehre* by Raam Singh that played vital importance within the Sikhs.

Being on good terms with Shah Zaman before his death, Bhai Lehna Singh Ji, of the Bhangi Misl, was both a general within the Khalsa army as well as leader amongst the Sikh people. Residing in Lahore at the time, he heard the story of Raam Singh Bedi's *shaheedi pehre* and immediately began meditating on the name of the Shaheed asking for the gift of a son. Not only does this show the faith the greater community had for Shaheeds at the time, but they also held them as the fulfillers of wishes and desires. By Lehna Singh's good fortune, the very same night Raam Singh came in the form of *supan darshan* (*darshan* within a dream) and instructed the Bhangi leader to not only capture the fort of Lahore but erect a *shaheed ganj* in the name of the martyred Sikhs of the past. The outline given by Gian Singh of Raam Singh's instruction are translated as follows:

In front of the city circle known as "Nikhaas" [where markets are held],

there are many heads of Singhs who have fallen (become Shaheed) there.

Amongst those Singhs, my head remains there as well,

within the water well next to the Mosque. 249

Upon our skulls you will find lines and writings:

[upon my forehead,] look for the *Oankar Satnam* that is written.

And where you see the phrase "*Vaheguru ki Fateh*,"

know this to be the skull of Shaheed Bhai Mani Singh Ji. 260

And the other thousands of Shaheeds whose foreheads you locate,

you will find the term "*Vaah*" or "*Akaal*" written on them.

Moreover, wherever you see the script of Gurmukhi present,

know these to be the bodies and skulls of the Shaheeds. 261

Recognize us all to be the beloved children of the Guru,

Who have such letters on the foreheads of their skulls.

Retrieving us from this water well and performing our funeral rites,

Construct a great *shaheed ganj* in our names. 262

Doing so, your desire [to have a son] will be fulfilled as well... (Gian Singh 1000 - 1001).

Hearing these words and having the *supan darshan* of the Shaheed, Lehna Singh ecstatically began digging around the well. And just as Raam Singh had described in every detail, the Gurmukhi letters and symbols were found on the skulls of these Shaheeds. Gian Singh notes that the Sikh community that gathered to help excavate the bodies all gained faith and began bowing to each and every skull where they read Gurmukhi.

In preparing for the cremation ceremony, the Sikhs showed their respects by trying to make the best arrangements for these martyrs. They eventually gathered more than 200 lbs. of sandalwood and arranged two separate funeral pyres: one with the head of Raam Singh, and another with that of Mani Singh and the other martyrs. After the ceremony, Gian Singh notes that two shrines were erected here, one in the name of Raam Singh and the other for Mani Singh. Raising platforms and covering them with delicate and luxurious clothes, the Sikhs then decorated both shrines with weaponry and their own respective battle standards. Gian Singh ends the chapter by noting “Thus Sardar Lehna Singh, did service for the Shaheeds. Not only was his wish granted, but he was blessed with the gift of two sons. 278” (Gian Singh 1002).

Going into further detail, Gian Singh explains how the first caretaker of these shrines was a Sikh by the name of Gian Singh from the Arora caste. Being faithful towards the Shaheeds, he would hold great congregations every new moon where the pains of the Sikhs would be alleviated upon paying respect to the shrines. Upon Gian Singh’s passing, his son, Bhagat Singh, became head caretaker of the shrine and was known for bringing Sikhs all the way from Nankana Sahib (the birthplace of the 1st Guru) and holding great community kitchens at the shrines. Gian Singh notes that he himself had met Bhagat Singh, and even though the lands are now governed by the British while the writing of this account, Bhagat Singh had done a good job of upholding the livelihood and faith of the Sikhs and guests who would visit these *shaheed ganj*.

In all, this short account of Raam Singh’s post-martyrdom *pehre* gives insight into several ideas that help us expand on the concept of Shaheeds. First and foremost, we are given two accounts of *pehre*: one consisting of *darshan* to the beholder, and one in the form of *supan darshan*. The vision given to his wife and family remained personal, denoting a form of agency within the Shaheed, to show himself other than for the community’s betterment or guidance in the time of war. In other words, this *pehra* was strictly outlined between a martyred husband and his wife, and it would have gone unnoticed if it were not for Raam Singh’s mother castigating her daughter-in-law. This raises the question, how many *shaheedi pehre* go unnoticed within the Sikh faith?

The second *pehra*, however, was much different. It involved a less personal vision, but its information strictly

related to the building of a *shaheed ganj* and honoring the remains of the Sikh martyrs. Not only was this *pehra* for the betterment of the community to establish shrines where Sikhs would eventually come to hold community kitchens and have their desires fulfilled, but it also worked to enshrine respect for Shaheeds that perhaps the Sikhs of Lahore were oblivious to. In other words, Raam Singh had to advocate for the making of a *shaheed ganj* after his own martyrdom, impressing upon present and future Sikhs that respect for the Shaheeds is paramount.

Considering these more nuanced definitions of the workings of Shaheeds and their post-martyrdom *pehre*, we further consolidate these concepts and notions, most of which have not been analyzed in the studies of Sikh martyrology. Thus far, we have looked at texts from both the 18th and 19th century that delve into the lives and workings of Sikh martyrs, before and after death. We will now, however, look to a 20th century source compiled well after the British departure from the Punjab that holds precious information on accounts of *shaheedi pehre* from the last century.

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature

### 3.1 *Do Gursikh Nirmolak Heerey* by Giani Kirpal Singh Ji

Published for the first time in 1997 under the patronage of 96 *crori Jathedar*<sup>13</sup> Baba Santa Singh Ji—commander-in-chief of Budha Dal (known as the predominant army of the Sikhs established by the vows of the 6th Guru)—this hagiography looks to the life of *Akali Baba* Mitt Singh Ji and his "life-companion" Baba Dharam Singh Ji. Penned by Giani Kirpal Singh Ji "Varaich" – known famously as the scribe for Budha Dal – this biography covers the times of the two Nihang-saints: Mitt Singh (1892 - 1944) and his life-long companion, Dharam Singh (1832 - 1957). With a total of 868 pages, this text goes beyond the lives of the two saints and is a critical source of information on the Nihang Sikhs and their traditions, and a history of the numerous Gurdwaras and historical Sikh sites that they served and visited.

The accuracy of this two-part hagiography is asserted by its author, Kirpal Singh, who not only has been initiated within the Budha Dal but honored with the position as head writer and scholar of the Nihang Sikhs. Furthermore, having stayed with both Mitt Singh and Dharam Singh for almost a decade, he recalls vividly the accounts he witnessed firsthand or from conversations with these two saints and their students. Although the term "Shaheed" comes up numerous times and there are upwards of 20 chapters relating to martyrs, for the purpose of this research, we will look at three different accounts of Shaheeds mentioned within this text: those occurring in Mitt Singh's early life at the turn of the century, the early 20th century occurrences of *shaheedi pehre* at Takhat Hazur Sahib, and lastly, a *pehra* that evoked the possession of a Sikh child's body in the early 1980s.

Before we begin, it is important to note that although this work was published well past the Singh Sabha movement and the Sikh scholars who looked to disassociate with other faiths and disenchant Sikh history, Kirpal Singh's writing is one from a perspective of faith towards the accounts he is dealing with. Time and time again, whenever an account of a Shaheed is brought up, Kirpal Singh must add footnotes for the reader, in light of the miraculous phenomenon, to state that such accounts should be read with faith and admiration to the powers and beings that lie beyond the seen world. Furthermore, similar to NPP, the text remains in its original Punjabi and all translations have been done by myself. In all, this text holds critical importance to the study of Sikhism and Sikh martyrology, yet this will be the first time it is being brought to light.

---

<sup>13</sup> As readers may remember, this term links back to the SPG section and denotes the number of destined Sikh Shaheeds. The *Jathedar* (Commander/Head in-charge) of Budha Dal is seen as harboring the high position of being a general of these martyrs.



### 3.1.1 Akaali Baba Mitt Singh Ji

Known for his life filled with miraculous experiences and unwavering faith in God, the role of Shaheeds played an integral role within the life of Mitt Singh. Although we will not be able to do justice to the phenomena and experiences faced by Mitt Singh, we will look to a specific instance of the saint's early life that is recalled and held dear by all Nihang Singhs and Sikhs alike. Being known to the community as the child always absorbed in meditation at the local *shaheed ganj*, the people of Mandiana grew to admire the young child's devotion towards God and the Shaheeds.

The first mention of Shaheeds in Mitt Singh's life is in a short account at the beginning of the biography: villagers would often ask the young 7-year-old Mitt Singh why his hands were always oily to which he would reply, "The Shaheeds have just given me *karah parshad*" (Kirpal Singh 47). Offering to take his friends and villagers to receive this holy sacrament as well, they would often refuse out of fear of these spirits and the powers they hold. As a result, Mitt Singh spent much of his early childhood alone at the local shrine for Shaheeds. This changed, however, after Mitt Singh was given *darshan* of five Shaheeds who baptized him and put him on a pedestal amongst the Sikh community.

Seeing his father, Sardar Karam Singh Ji, as a baptized Khalsa, the young Mitt Singh wished to receive *amrit* as well. Sending his child off to the local Gurdwara Sahib, the head priest, *Jathedar* Waryam Singh Ji, informed the young child that he had just missed the recent *amrit sanchaar* ("giving of amrit" ceremony) and would have to wait for Budha Dal<sup>14</sup> to come back to the village again. Hearing this, Mitt Singh became distraught and hid atop a banyan tree that was halfway between his house and the Gurdwara Sahib. Back home, Karam Singh thought that his son might be staying at the Gurdwara Sahib for a few days after receiving *amrit*, while the priest, Waryam Singh, thought that the young child went back home out of enmity. Both were wrong, however, as Mitt Singh stayed at the tree for several days crying and yearning for *amrit* (Kirpal Singh 49).

Awoken and bewildered by a great illumination before daybreak, Mitt Singh saw five Shaheed Singhs dressed in all blue and armed with weapons, holding a double-edged sword and iron bowl filled with *amrit*. Astonished at this site, he heard a voice that he later described as "sweet like the essence of nectar" that told him: "Get ready now! Why are you in such sorrow? Your prayer has been heard by *Kalgidhar Ji*<sup>15</sup> and your devotional prayers have been accepted" (Kirpal Singh 50).

Hearing these words, the young Mitt Singh wiped away his tears and walked forward. Astonished and

---

<sup>14</sup> In these days, only Budha Dal and other institutions they recognized had the authority to administrate *amrit*.

<sup>15</sup> "The One who adorns the plume" referring to the 10th Guru.

intrigued, he asked questions about who they were and how they found him. Stopping this line of questioning, they remarked “Don’t get lost in thought, hurry now! We don’t have a lot of time allotted to us by the 10th Guru to remain on Earth in this form” (Kirpal Singh 50). Administrating the *amrit* according to the traditions of the original ceremony, the Shaheeds then blessed Mitt Singh with a blue chola (traditional dress of the Nihang Sikhs) and adorned him with weaponry.

Upon reaching home, Karam Singh is joyful and delighted at the sight of his son who has just joined the Khalsa. He tells Mitt Singh that they will go back to the Gurdwara Sahib the next day and prepare *karah parshad* in celebration. In reaching the Gurdwara, Karam Singh is surprised that Waryam Singh is just as joyful as he is. The priest asks, “Was Mitt Singh that eager to take *amrit*? How beautiful he looks in his new attire! Where did you go to take *amrit*?” (Kirpal Singh 51). This left Karam Singh astonished as he thought the child was baptized by him. When they asked Mitt Singh to explain, he replied, “The Guru sent Shaheeds to me and they baptized me under the banyan tree. I was sad and kept praying to them, and the next morning before sunrise they woke me up, gave *amrit*, put on this attire and disappeared!” (Kirpal Singh 53). Surprised by his account, both elders and the Sikhs of the community were both joyful and astonished hearing these words from the mouth of a young boy.

Moreover, a few months after this incident, Mitt Singh had the desire to don a *farara* (more commonly known as a “*farla*”): a piece of cloth that is left flowing from the top of an esteemed Nihang Singh’s turban that symbolizes the Khalsa battle standard and one’s perfection in the Sikh codes of conduct. Seen as a symbol of high authority amongst the Khalsa and Sikh community, only those who have served within a Khalsa regiment for upwards of 12 years were given the right to wear a *farla*. Mitt Singh, however, was blessed with the *darshan* of five *farla*-wearing Shaheed Singhs who undertook the ceremony of tying his *farla*. Kirpal Singh goes on to note how the holder of a *farla* is also one who has achieved great spiritual progress in life and a *farla* being a symbol of a wearer who has control over their crown chakra (Kirpal Singh 57 - 60): all attributes believed to be possessed by Mitt Singh at such a young age.

In a footnote titled “Shaheed Singh” Kirpal Singh notes how these stories of Shaheeds might sound outlandish or taboo to current and future readers, however he quotes hearing these stories from 96 *crori Jathedar* Baba Santa Singh Ji himself. Who not only lived with Mitt Singh during, but also completed much of their Sikh studies from them as well. Kirpal Singh finds that it takes faith and understanding to read such accounts but also mentions that those who have experiences with Shaheeds should keep them secret. Revealing them will only increase one’s ego, albeit subtly, and block one’s spiritual progress. Perhaps this intentional unwillingness by Sikhs to not share their experiences is why so little research and study has been done on the matter. Although this might be a problem for future researchers and anthropologists who will conduct

fieldwork and acquire firsthand testimonies and accounts, it is important to know that there is still more than enough within Sikh literature in need of analysis and study on the matter of Sikh martyrology.

From receiving *amrit* and a *farla* from the hands of Shaheeds, Mitt Singh was then known as *Akaali Baba Mitt Singh Ji*: *Akaali* referring to distinguished Nihang Singhs who hold a *farla*; and *Baba* referring to his wisdom equivalent to that of an elder or holy priest. In all, although these occurrences were all during his childhood, Kirpal Singh goes on to write of many encounters *Akali Baba Mitt Singh Ji* had with Shaheeds in this hagiography. From describing every physical feature of a Shaheed upon reaching Takhat Hazur Sahib after a seven-month barefoot walk, to having his final wishes be the making of a gigantic cauldron of both *karah parshad* and *shaheedi degh* to please the Guru and his martyrs – all in all, the life stories of Mitt Singh require more work and written analysis on encounters regarding the *pehre* of Shaheeds.

Moving past this information on the life of the Saint, we will now look to specific testimonies written by Kirpal Singh on the matter of Shaheeds and their *pehre* outside the specific context of this biography. First, we will look at firsthand experiences of Shaheeds shared with Kirpal Singh from *Pujari*<sup>16</sup> Maan Singh – the head caretaker of Takhat Hazur Sahib at the time.

### **3.1.2 Accounts of Shaheeds at Takhat Hazur Sahib**

Within a lengthy footnote starting on page 209 of the text titled “The Strict Sternness of the Shaheeds within the Original *Sachkhand* Location” Kirpal Singh goes into detail about the harshness of the *shaheedi pehra* that lived within a 24-mile radius of Takhat Hazur Sahib. It is noted that besides the visitation of a celibate Sikh or Saint, access to the historical site was very difficult. Furthermore, even upon reaching it, only those who had taken *amrit* were able to enter the temple. Anyone who entered this 24-mile perimeter with ill-intent or lacking devotion to God would turn back right away due to the uneasiness of the *pehre* they felt. Furthermore, if anyone were to make it to the Takhat, uninitiated Khalsa prospects who entered the building would fall instantly to the ground and wail in pain. Specifically, Kirpal Singh mentions there was an entrance to the building known as the *shaheedi darvaja* (“the door of Shaheeds”) which was used to test the intentions of the visitor. Anyone who failed would feel the rath of the martyred spirits (Kirpal Singh 209). This door, however, has since been shut.

On page 280 of the text, he reiterates this story in another footnote. While collecting information on the life of Akali Baba Mitt Singh Ji, Kirpal Singh went to the sacred shrine of Takhat Hazur Sahib to pay homage

---

<sup>16</sup> Translated literally to “worshipper,” the prefix *Pujari* is given to signify that an individual is seen as a religious custodian/caretaker of a specific shrine.

after his evening prayer. During the *ardas*<sup>17</sup>, however, he witnessed a Nihang Singh crying out in pain and asking for forgiveness for his faults. Surprised by this and the congregation's lack of empathy towards the man, Kirpal Singh went to the head *Pujari* of the time, Baba Heera Singh Ji, to ask what had happened.

Heera Singh explained that before his time, and *Pujari* Maan Singh's time, there was a *shaheedi pehra* so strong around the vicinity that remnants of it are believed to still remain. A Saint by the name of Attar Singh from Mastuana had once come to meditate at the Takhat and it is due to his prayer that the *shaheedi pehra* became less strict. Although he fulfilled all his desires and had *darshan* of the 10th Guru through their voice within his ear, he realized that the strict conduct one must follow to remain here is not achievable by the average person. *Pujari* Maan Singh agreed to this due to his own experiences while caretaking for the shrine, and so both the Saint and Maan Singh came to a consensus that an *ardas* be done.

Filling two great cauldrons with *karah parshad* and *shaheedi deggh*, they did *ardas* to both the Guru and the Shaheeds: realizing that as time went on dharma would decrease in the world and people would become less faithful, both holy men asked for a decrease in *shaheedi pehre* as well. In doing so, they hoped that Sikhs and other faithful visitors of the future still have the chance to reach the holy shrine and have their wishes fulfilled. Since then, both the *shaheedi darvaja* remained closed, and the *pehra* spanning 24-miles had declined so that any visitor was able to reach the shrine without consequence from the spirits (Kirpal Singh 281 - 284).

After narrating this account, Heera Singh then told Kirpal Singh that he had seen many *shaheedi pehre* at both this location and other Gurdwaras as well. Although they have decreased in number, that does not mean they will ever be gone all together. Coming back to the Nihang Singh that Kirpal Singh had seen falling to the ground and screaming in pain, Heera Singh said that he must have lied about the Guru or done an *ardas* stemmed in falsehood which provoked the Shaheeds to set their harsh *pehra* on him. In ending, Heera Singh stated "This is not to say that the *pehra* has vanished all together! From time and time, I or other Singhs come to feel its presence" (Kirpal Singh 284).

In all, from these accounts written by Kirpal Singh we learn that there is a thread of *pehre* present within history that can be examined and the importance they play within both the Sikh community and the sentiments of their faith. Although it is clear from our reading that talk of *shaheedi pehre* had become taboo by the way Kirpal Singh must defend them ever so often when he mentions them, it is important to realize how each saint, caretaker or Sikh involved with his writings talked about them as if they were a normal occurrence. We will expand on this notion later. For now, we will look to our last example of a *shaheedi pehra* before coming

---

<sup>17</sup> A standing prayer done after the end of any Sikh congregation or reading of scripture: *ardas* is performed to both thank God and ask for forgiveness for any mistakes that might have been made obliviously.

to conclusions on this historical analysis of the matter.

### 3.1.3 Shaheedi Pehra within a Child (Bachitar Singh Ji)

Speaking of an experience that Kirpal Singh witnessed with his own eyes, he recalls a *shaheedi pehra* that occurred in 1982 while he was at Gurdwara Shergah Sahib<sup>18</sup> that left him baffled. While reading the evening prayer of *Rehras Sahib*, one of the two small child-Nihangs mistakenly misread a sentence of the scripture, and Kirpal Singh scolded them, “How many times must I tell you the correct pronunciation of these scriptures you read every day?” (Kirpal Singh 463).

It was only a matter of Kirpal Singh finishing his scolding that *shaheedi pehra* was invoked within the young child, named Bachitar Singh Ji, whose voice become deep and stern stating, “Are we not present? Those who you are reading this scripture incorrectly to...?” (Kirpal Singh 863). Baffled by this change in demeanor, the child had been taken to a private room and Kirpal Singh immediately picked up reading the scripture where Bachitar Singh had left off. Upon Kirpal Singh finishing the nightly routine of putting to rest both SGGSJ and *Dasam Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*<sup>19</sup> (DSGGSJ), the Shaheed then returned by possessing Bachittar Singh’s body and called Kirpal Singh to the private room.

As he entered, the Shaheed first looked to *Jathedar* Rann Singh Ji, the head caretaker of the Gurdwara, and angrily scolded him. “You call yourself the *Jathedar* of this location however you only do rituals and actions with us out of sight! You speak while cooking in the community kitchen, get spit within the food, and then expect us [Shaheeds] to take that impure food as an offering?” (Kirpal Singh 463). Hearing this, Rann Singh fell silent.

Turning his gaze towards Gurdial Singh Ji, the head priest of the Gurdwara Sahib at the time, the Shaheed said “We are not some lady who you could dress in clothes of floral and colorful patterns. Our astral body has now adorned all white, adorn our shrines and both scriptures with white clothes now.” Hearing this, Gurdial Singh joined his hands together begging for forgiveness for his mistake.

Lastly, it was now Kirpal Singh’s turn. Noting his humility, Kirpal Singh writes that he went to the feet of the child and bowed before him out of respect for the Shaheed that was now the host of his body. The Shaheed spoke and said, “Even though you may be a scribe and scholar [for Budha Dal] you have made a mistake,” He continued, “eight days ago people of the community came to pay their respects at our shrines where you

---

<sup>18</sup> A historical location where the 10th Guru liberated a tiger that was stuck in the cycle of reincarnation from the times of Bhagwan Krishna.

<sup>19</sup> Know more commonly as the *Dasam Granth*, this scripture contains the writings of the 10th Guru and holds the same prestige and veneration as the SGGSJ within esoteric Sikh institutions and pre-colonial sects.

were writing our history, instead of moving to the side you sat right in front of us and showed us your back while talking to them. You must have thought we were in the corner of the room, but we were sitting right in front and watching from our shrine” (Kirpal Singh 464).

Hearing this, Kirpal Singh apologized for the disrespect he had shown them unknowingly and prayed that he would never make such a mistake again. He asked the Shaheed if he could speak, to which the Shaheed granted permission. Kirpal Singh asked, “If this incident happened eight days ago, I wished you would have told me in my mind then, so I could have moved out of the way instantly and stopped my sacrilege.”

The Shaheed laughed in appreciation after hearing this and began to explain, “If we had only put this thought within your head, how would the rest of the congregation come to realize that we remain ever-present at all our shrines?” He continued, “In numerous places, Sikhs have ignorantly put their backs on our shrines, or they point their feet towards us: this unknowing disrespect shrouded in ignorance has increased greatly within the common Sikhs, and we do not approve of it one bit!” (Kirpal Singh 463).

The Shaheed then continued to outline the sacrilege occurring within the Sikh communities around the world: from the upholding of shrines, the lack of faith remaining for Shaheeds, and decrease in unconditional love for God. Taking all this in, Kirpal Singh thanked the Shaheed repeatedly for pointing out the mistakes that he and the other Singhs made and bringing to light the obliviousness of the Sikhs. He then asked, “What can be done to deter the disrespect that is happening within your shrines and Gurdwaras? What conduct shall we follow that will ensure the happiness and gratitude of the Shaheeds?” (Kirpal Singh 465).

The Shaheed smiled and told Kirpal Singh to grab his pen and paper. The conversation and information acquired from the Shaheed that day is thus noted from pages 464 to 470 within the text. Separated into seven different sections, Kirpal Singh penned instructions related to the following conduct and regulations:

1. The conduct of the Guru’s court that should be followed both at sunrise and sunset (this section contains an extensive 12-point list outlined by the Shaheed that Sikhs should follow).
2. The everyday conduct of the morning prayers.
3. The offering of food as a sacrament in the morning.
4. The rules regarding putting both SGGSJ and DSGGSJ on their thrones in the afternoon.
5. The offering of food as a sacrament in the evening.
6. The rules behind putting both SGGSJ and DSGGSJ to peace/rest, and the conduct around reading the nightly prayer.

7. Several strict regulations to always keep in mind (that Kirpal Singh condensed to a four-point list).

Although these pages hold vast amounts of information on both Shaheeds and the conduct they find fit for the Guru's court, the study of this section will have to be left for future research and analysis.

In all, not only does this section highlight *shaheedi pehre* (in the form of a possession) within a child who goes on to give a vast amount of knowledge to Kirpal Singh and the other Singhs, but it plays towards the sentiments of current day Sikhs by bringing to light their unfaithfulness and ignorance within Gurdwaras and shrines. Promoting greater faith within religious duties, the Shaheeds emphasized the adhering of these duties and reiterating that the martyred spirits as alive and watching. This last account of Bachittar Singh only occurred 43 years ago, and it not only bolsters the importance of regarding Shaheeds as omnipresent but shows that they too recognize a decline within faith amongst many communities. In all, however, it raises more questions regarding the field of Sikh martyrology than it provides answers. For example, if Shaheeds take on new forms within their astral bodies and adorn their desired apparel, how can current Sikhs come to honor their respective likings? Furthermore, if such instances of *pehre* do occur from spirits who have been martyred for the Sikh faith, would it not be wise to follow their post-death guidance on the organization and uphold of all existing shrines and Gurdwaras within Punjab and the diaspora? Taking Kirpal Singh's writings and the entirety of this historical analysis of the different literature into account, we will now move into finding summations and conclusions of our referenced works and surveys.

## Conclusions

Through the re-examination of previously referenced sources and current scholars who hold weight within the field of Sikh martyrology, it is evident that numerous concepts within the study have either been reduced or overlooked altogether. Although Louis Fenech has done amazing work within his book, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'*, the majority of the field holds concern with the symbolism behind the terms “Shaheed” and “Shaheedi” rather than the martyr’s themselves, and their post-death actions. In conducting this research, we first and foremost looked at two texts already mentioned within this field.

Starting with *Suraj Prakash*, we re-analyzed a chapter of history that finds mention in the life of the 10th Guru. As the Sikhs of the time ask about the Shaheeds, they are told about their positionality, power, and great control for the first time. Building from this notion, we examined an account of this power being put to display in front of a faithful Sikh, Dharam Singh. Having witnessed a Shaheed’s miraculous changing of appearance and stature, we are shown a peak into the agency that these beings hold but also come to learn that their overall duty is to remain under the Guru’s command. Then, in another chapter of the text, we are told that the Guru himself instructs Sikhs to uphold prayers to Shaheeds in times of need. This is further bolstered by the short account of Shaheeds providing protection when prayed upon by Bhai Daya Singh Ji and Prince Bahadur Shah in a time of battle. In all, not only does this source hold the groundwork for further research, but it cements the role of these beings within the Sikh tradition by incorporating them in such a well-known and cited historical text for the Sikh people. Here, we learn of *shaheedi pehre* as a means of protection and support.

Then, we furthered our analysis by studying *Panth Prakash* and its key accounts often mentioned within Sikh martyrology. We come to realize that these accounts have been reduced to simplified summaries of the stories – this simplicity, however, does no justice. When looking at the accounts of the martyred younger princes of the 10th Guru, and the episode regarding Shaheed Bhai Taru Singh Ji, we come to learn about *shaheedi pehre* in the evolved form of both protection and torment to evildoers. When analyzing the first account, we learn of the martyred children coming in the form of their own *pehre*, but in the case of Taru Singh, we learn that *pehre* can be invoked by the living as well as through ritual offerings and faithful commemorations.

Moreover, in the case of Taru Singh and Shaheed Baba Gurbaksh Singh Ji, we learn how the community engages with those on the brink of martyrdom: whether that be by regarding them as saints, or joyfully showing love by offering flowers and perfumes to adorn as gifts before death. Furthermore, in the case of Gurbaksh Singh, we are given key evidence of the *shaheedi mandal*: a cosmic realm that finds little mention in the sphere of Sikh study today or in past works. Lastly, in the culmination of all three accounts, we come



to find the important role that the *shaheed ganj* holds, a sentiment that would be reiterated in our next source as well.

Keeping all these previous notions in mind, we then opened the conversation to new literature not yet analyzed by scholars. By looking into *Naveen Panth Prakash*, we unveiled an account of *shaheedi pehre* that gave new meaning to the term. Investigating the account of Shaheed Baba Raam Singh Ji Bedi, we learned that this martyr held great agency within his own *pehre* by means of showing himself in both private and public forms. Furthermore, although the Shaheeds of SPG regarded their actions as “under the command of the Guru,” we learn that martyrs also show concern when it comes to their rites, shrines, and ritual commemoration. Furthermore, they enact the use of divine visions and voices to help bolster their desires. In all, we learn that the *pehre* of Shaheeds also entails the giving of *darshan* both physically and through dreams.

Lastly, by looking towards these more nuanced definitions of the workings of Shaheeds and their post-martyrdom doings, we further solidify these concepts by examples from the dual-biography of Baba Mitt Singh Ji and Baba Dharam Singh Ji within *Do Gursikh Nirmolak Heerey*. Being posited for the first time within the sphere of Sikh martyrology, we first look to how *shaheedi pehre* were miraculously witnessed by Mitt Singh when he was a child to fulfill his desire of receiving *amrit* and adorn a *farla*. Moving the conversation forward, we are then provided with accounts of *pehre* at Takhat Hazur Sahib that overwhelmed the saints of the Sikh faith so much that they had to be decreased through the ritual offering of sacraments and prayer. From these sections, we add more to our inventory about just how dynamic *shaheedi pehre* can be as well as how nontransparent the concept remained at the turn of the century.

Further creating a more nuanced and dynamic role of the term, we are then given an account within the text whose concepts finds little discussion in the academic conversations about Sikh Shaheeds. Although the previous accounts of *pehre* work to install points of information within the somewhat existing field, the eyewitness account of Bachittar Singh’s body being used as a medium of communication to the living Sikhs creates a brand-new definition of *shaheedi pehre* and establishes grounds for further research. Put differently, although historical Sikh texts finds *shaheedi pehre* as evoking protection and support as well as torment to the unjust, the examination of newer literature shows that the term may also mean the possession of a host body by a Shaheed to hold counsel with those in attendance.

Looking at the direction this field might venture, however, there has been a plethora of Sikh literature, media, and autobiographies of relevance that still require fitting within the study of Shaheeds that has purposefully been left out for the sake of the dissertation’s length. For example, although the esoteric Nihang sect was most referenced within this work, there have been mention of *shaheedi pehre* amongst other Sikh groups

spanning both before and post-colonialism: such as the Udaasis, Nirmale, Naamdharis, Nanaksar, and Akhand Kirtani Jatha to name a few. Academic endeavors into their respective groups – whether that be through fieldwork or analysis of their key literature – is still needed.

Furthermore, with all these avenues of research left to explore, we also have multiple directions that the study of *shaheedi pehre* may venture in light of this dissertation. For example, although we have learned of the different types of *shaheed ganj*, is it worth undertaking fieldwork at such shrines to examine the current lived practices of the Sikhs there and updated accounts of *pehre*?

Moreover, after examining the boons given to Gurbaksh Singh upon reaching the *shaheedi mandal*, have similar prophecies been made to more recent Shaheeds who died in the Sikh struggles of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries? And although Gurbaksh Singh remained within the cosmic realm of Shaheeds for 12 years, are there other martyrs destined to take birth who have not done so yet?

Furthermore, taking our attention to the possession of Bachitar Singh, can such *pehre* be evoked amongst other Sikhs for current-day guidance and counsel on contemporary political or spiritual matters? If so, are there rules against who the host body shall be, and can such a host be nurtured into existence for the betterment of the community?

Taking all these questions and information into account, it is evident that there is much research to be done within Sikh martyrology. Although scholars of the field have examined the ambiguous symbolism behind Shaheeds and their portrayal in light of historical Sikh struggles, we are left with overviews of the concepts rather than detailed examinations of the matters more intimate and sentimental towards the Sikh people. In all, this dissertation has been written with its incomplete harboring of the field in mind. Rather, this work should be used as a source for future research and surveying of concepts relating to *shaheedi pehre* within the Sikh sphere and literature alike. In all, while the examination of their symbolism and use in Sikh media and ideologies is equally crucial, understanding the maneuvering of these spirits within their actions, realms, and shrines has been greatly overlooked and in need of more deliberate further examination.

## References

- Singh, Santokh. *Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth* (Vol. 10 and 11). Translated by Dr. Ajit Singh Aulakh. Bhai Chattar Singh Jeevan Singh Press, Amritsar. 2007.
- Fenech, Louis. *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Mandair, Navdeep. "Martyrdom (Sikhism)" in: Mandair, Arvind-Pal S. (eds) "Sikhism". *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*. Springer, Dordrecht. 2017. [https://doi-org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/10.1007/978-94-024-0846-1\\_585](https://doi-org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/10.1007/978-94-024-0846-1_585)
- Singh, Gian. Sri Guru Panth Prakash, Purabaradh.  
<https://archive.org/details/PanthParkash1/mode/2up>
- Singh, Gian. Sri Guru Panth Prakash, Uttarakadh.  
<https://archive.org/details/PanthParkash2/page/n1007/mode/2up>
- Singh, Kirpal. Do Gursikh Nirmolak Heerey. Hemkunt Printing Press, Amritsar, 1996
- Bhangu, Rattan S. *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (Volume 1 & 2). Translated by Kulwant Singh. Institute of Sikh Studies Chandigarh, 2010.