UNDERSTANDING GURU NANAK THROUGH A DOCUSERIES:

A Discussion with Amardeep Singh

2024 YEAR END FUNDRAISER GIFT

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A POWERFUL JOURNEY TO THE ESSENCE OF GURU NANAK'S TRAVELS AND TEACHINGS

Understanding Guru Nanak Through a Docuseries

A discussion on the insights gained from the making of the documentary series.

February 10th 2023 8.00pm-9.00pm EST



presented by **Amardeep Singh** Award winning creator *Allegory - A Tapestry of*

Guru Nanak's Travels

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In this PDF, we are sharing Amardeep's powerful journey to the essence of Guru Nanak's travels and teachings. Amardeep Singh is the producer of *Allegory: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels,* a 24-part docuseries on the travels and dialogues of Guru Nanak. This PDF is created from Amardeep's webinar with SikhNet on the making of the docuseries, where he reflected on Guru Nanak's dialogues while traveling.



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EXPLORING THE LEGACY OF GURU NANAK

At the age of 17, Amardeep was living in a place with very few Sikhs and asking himself - *Why does my father insist on speaking Punjabi at home? Why does he say we have lost so much and if we lose our language we will lose everything?*

This was the first layer of his curiosity and the beginning of his journey. **He began by delving into the region of Hindus and the Nanak Panth over the last 100 years, reflecting on how we have boxed ourselves into Sikhi rather than being followers of Guru Nanak**. As he added layers, he built a rich history of regions in India, Pakistan and Kashmir where Guru Nanak visited. Although he was working full time in the corporate world, he left his job and this propelled everything into motion; it was the beginning of the docuseries.

When one follows their heart - it often turns out to be a divine gift, a true blessing. In the last nine years, Amardeep Singh has found his true calling. Despite 19 years of education, and years of working in the corporate world, everything led him to his work exploring and cataloging the travels of Guru Nanak. Perhaps the most precious gift was learning to navigate his own life by following the pillars of





WHY IS SIKHI BOXED INTO A PUNJAB NARRATIVE, WHEN IT IS MUCH BIGGER?

Guru Nanak. His gift now is leaving behind a legacy for future generations of Sikhs.

Amardeep Singh and his wife led a team of many people - musicians, cinematographers, researchers and more - who are all responsible for the production of the docuseries, *Allegory: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels*.

The question to be answered was: "Why is Sikhi boxed into a Punjab narrative, when it is much bigger." The docuseries was made by traveling across **126 villages and towns in Pakistan**, to document the Sikh legacy in Pakistan. Many books have been written and many changes have happened since the early days of 2014 when Amardeep was embarking on the mission to document the entire history that is all but forgotten.

One of the biggest revelations of the team was the understanding that **Guru Nanak and his messages are for all humanity not just Sikhs!**

Allegory: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels was started in 2018, but it stems from over thirty years of delving into Guru Nanak's narrative. Guru Nanak traveled extensively, Sikhi is everywhere he traveled, not pinned to one area, one region. Perhaps most importantly, it isn't based around the modern way



of sending Guru Nanak everywhere except to the hearts of our people.

If you open up a Gurdwara anywhere along the Indochina border, then it is claimed Guru Nanak was there. It seems we are trying to justify Guru Nanak's travels, but we don't need to justify his travels.

Guru Nanak wrote nothing about his life, from a social geographical aspect, but with certainty we are trying to claim he has. People who write Hagiographies, accounts written by people of faith, always have biases. It is more important to ask what are the earliest sources, and what is it today we are writing ...is today the real story or narrative?



WE CAN'T BIND THE SIRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB TO ANYONE OR DECLARE WHO HAS THE POWERS TO KEEP IT. IT IS THE FAITH TOWARDS GURU NANAK THAT CONNECTS AND SUSTAINS PEOPLE.

The earliest text, written by Bhai Gurdas 65 years after Guru Nanak's death, says he traveled far and wide, but Bhai Gurdas did not write enough to create a narrative. The next consolidated writings, Janam Sakhi, specify there were only two people traveling — Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana, there wasn't a third. They say the two traveled far and wide and used many dialogues, and it is these dialogues — what he said during this time we try to focus on.



The focus in these 24 episodes is to understand Guru Nanak through 260 verses that have been documented, based on the earliest texts.

Guru Nanak's narrative is not about Gurdwaras because there were no Gurdwaras at that time. Guru Nanak's narrative was, what took him to the sites he visited; what was the dialogue that was happening, and it is through this humble attempt that we try to understand Guru Nanak.

The Docuseries, *Allegory: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels*, was released one episode per week for 24 weeks in different languages. It had to be released in different languages because it holds a universal language. We can't bind the Siri Guru Granth Sahib to anyone or declare who has the powers to keep it. It is the faith towards Guru Nanak that connects and sustains people. We translated it for many people in many regions, to make it available to everyone, because this is **the story about Guru Nanak who visited those regions**.



A CALL FOR ONENESS AROSE FROM SAPTA- SINDHU

AN EMBODIMENT OF ONENESS

Guru Nanak, an embodiment of oneness, is a guiding force of many. Born in the 15th century, Guru Nanak glided over distant lands for over two decades in an altruistic pursuit to relate with people of diverse faiths and cultures, engaged in philosophical and social dialogue.

Through the medium of words and music he fearlessly challenged the binary constructs of society and relentlessly opposed gender, religious racial and class inequalities. He faced extensive challenges.

Today in the 21st century, geopolitical restrictions and cultural mandates impose enormous challenges in gracing Guru Nanak's extensive travels.

Guru Nanak taught us the essence of divinity, the one unifying force. He had one message of the oneness of humanity, that cut across all separations. Unity was his desire. He said what is the difference between you and me? An impact that not only had permanence but which was carried on.



Guru Nanak said that humanity was the greatest religion. Love for humanity was propagated by Guru Nanak.

Narratives associated with Guru Nanak's travels are embedded with philosophical expositions that aid the minds alchemy, akin to the unraveling of an allegory. Anecdotes from his travels awoke insights which facilitated navigation through the mist of life. *Allegory - A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels* became a humble attempt to understand Guru Nanak and the embodiment of oneness.



HE WAS NOT A "TRAVELER". THAT WASN'T WHAT DROVE HIM IN HIS TRAVELS. HIS LIFE WAS FOCUSED ON DIALOGUES.





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GURU NANAK CONTINUES TO TRAVEL BECAUSE PEOPLE OF FAITH TAKE GURU NANAK WITH THEM WHEN THEY ARE TRAVELING.

At 20 years of age Guru Nanak, felt the desire to visit different places and have spiritual dialogues. He was not a "traveler," that wasn't what drove him in his travels. His life was focused on dialogues, very different from Columbus, for example, who was driven with the desire to discover new lands. Originally, Guru Nanak asked Mardana to go with him, and for whatever reason it didn't happen at that time.

Around the age of 35, Guru Nanak disappears for a number of days and there are supernatural aspects around that experience, however the base of everything is the message he got from his experience: There is only one, truth.

After that experience, Guru Nanak began his first journey with Mardana. He went to East Punjab, Bangladesh, South India, Sri Lanka, and West India, eventually coming to Rajasthan and then traveling back into Punjab. His journey lasted twelve years. The Second Odyssey lasted four years and took him to the North Tibetan Plateau, up into the Himalayas. The Third Odyssey also lasted four years and brought him to the Islamic World. It is after that journey that he took a break, set up a community, Jamanwali, on the banks of Ravi river, which is called Kartarpur today. He gained acceptance among the Hindus and the Muslims in a very short period of time. Then did the Fourth Odyssey traveling through Punjab and Rajasthan.

Finally, Guru Nanak spent 13 years in Kartarpur, no longer traveling and eventually handing over the baton to Guru Angad at 70 years.

This is the life of Guru Nanak, however, even today Guru Nanak continues to travel because people of faith take Guru Nanak with them when they are traveling.

You have to be careful and use discernment. Just because there is a plaque of Mool Mantra somewhere, doesn't mean Guru Nanak was there, he doesn't need to have been everywhere. There are many mantras inscribed in places Guru Nanak never visited, that were created long after he passed.



HIS LIFE WAS FOCUSED ON DIALOGUES, VERY DIFFERENT FROM COLUMBUS, FOR EXAMPLE, WHO WAS DRIVEN WITH THE DESIRE TO DISCOVER NEW LANDS.



As per the oldest texts Guru Nanak's travels are in the regions of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia,Tibet, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Guru Nanak's entire narrative is embedded with metaphoric messages which are being understood in the docuseries by delving into the 260 verses.





THE PILLARS ONENESS & DIVERSITY

The First Pillar

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The first pillar is Oneness, Ik Onkar. Guru Nanak visited 150 sites of many faiths, across nine countries. He visited many sites of Hindu Ttraditions, Islamic sites, Buddhist, Jain and other alternative sites. He spent his time in dialogue at all of these sites. They were life changing, and many communities have built memorials of these dialogues, but memorials were not our focus to understand Guru Nanak. The narrative is not the Gurdwara but the dialogue about oneness and unity.

Middle/Second Pillar

The middle pillar is Diversity. Guru Nanak makes a conscious journey to collate the writings of Baba Farid. He believes in inclusiveness and diversity as a space into oneness. Everyone is equal, no one is sitting up in an ivory tower.

It is thought that Nanak and Kabir met and were contemporaries, though some dispute this. Either way, the fact remains that the largest repository of Kabir's verses came to be enshrined in Punjab through the lineage of the Sikh Gurus. Nam Dev Ji was born in Maharashtra. There are verses of 15 diverse Indic saints enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. It is thought that Guru Nanak's travels and dialogues are what resulted in these verses coming to Punjab. By the time of Guru Arjan Dev, everything was compiled into the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. It can be easy to lose that perspective today, and become very divisive. Guru Nanak's shabad says, "There are six Indic philosophies, six Indic teachers of these philosophies, six doctrines (in the Indian spiritual tradition). The teacher of all teachers is the One Divine Force with various forms. Of all the systems in which the Creator's attributes are contemplated, In that rests your Greatness." (Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Today we find reasons not to accept this. We can't force anyone to align with our mind, but Diversity existed before the formation of religions. Guru Nanak acknowledged diversity and said, "among all those diverse traditions, I praise the one in which unity is contemplated on." He didn't discard them, he didn't deny them, he accepted that all the thought traditions existed, but the principle Guru Nanak taught was inclusiveness, his message of oneness.



THE PILLARS ONENESS, DIVERSITY

Guru Nanak was an advocate of **monism**, not monotheism. A lot of the books say that Guru Nanak was of monotheistic faith, but monotheism is already anchored in duality. If God is "up there," God has to be aspired to, and it means after you die you have to aspire to something, this creates a divide between you and something else; monotheism creates duality inside of you. Guru Nanak is an advocate about monism: Everything is one. You and me and me and you; what is the difference? That is the message

The 260 verses of Guru Nanak in the docuseries have to be understood and they are not about a monotheistic faith. Guru Nanak was a very inclusive person, he spoke only of the oneness of all existence.

Oneness today is very fragmented. We live in a world where we get conditioned by the energies that we live around. We should be proud of who we are, but at the same time should have the ability to think about what is being conditioned into our minds. In 2019, there were approx. 1200 Afghani Sikhs, today there are only about 200. In Pakistan, the entire



legacy has been destroyed, it is really important to have the ability to think critically and look beyond the conditioning.



WOMEN ARE NOT ALLOWED TO SING IN THE DARBAR SAHIB EVEN THOUGH GURU NANAK STOOD FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN'S EQUALITY.

Women are not allowed to sing in the Darbar Sahib even though Guru Nanak stood for women's empowerment and women's equality. We are not actually implementing Guru Nanak's messages, we are implementing our conditioned mind.

When you draw a line like the Radcliffe line between India and Pakistan and the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the natural consequence is compartmentalization. The culture which was spread between the three regions India, Afghanistan and Pakistan is now fragmented, divided into three distinct geographies on the westside, and this has impacted Guru Nanak's Panth significantly.

The other thing that has led to fragmentation with Guru Nanak's Panth is the defining of what Sikh and Sikhism is. Suddenly all the Muslim bards who used to sing Guru Nanak's Shabads had to leave because they were Muslim. These people were no longer allowed to sing in the Darbar Sahib because of the turmoil.

POLICTAL BOUNDARIES & CULTURES





BEFORE THE WORD SIKH WORD GOT DEFINED IF YOU LOOK AT ALL THE PERSIAN TEXTS, THE PERSIAN TRAVELERS REFERRED TO OUR COMMUNITY AS THE NANAK PANTH.

BHAI MARDANA'S LEGACY — MUSLIM BARDS



In many Gurdwaras, descendents of Rababi (Muslim Bards) tradition would perform "keertan" (singing of the spiritual verses)

"Bhai Lal Ji was born in Goindwal Sahib. My eldest paternal uncle was appointed to perform "keertan" at the Sis Ganj Gurdwara. Our paternal and maternal grandfather, Bhai Chiragh Din, were appointed to perform keertan at Goindwal Sahib. After partition, the tradition of Rababis performing keertan at gurdwaras was totally finished. Ashik Ali Bhai Lal Ji, my father, was a renowned personality, who after migration, went through many hardships, and therefore started singing ""Qawwalis" (Sufi Songs). We are 19th generation of Bhai Mardana. We earn a living through labour. During festive congregations, when visitors come to Pakistan, we perform Keertan. We are trying our best not to quit this tradition. We seek Guru Nanaks blessings to continue." The present conditions of the descendants of the Rababi tradition working as laborers in Lahore; their forefathers were preservers of Bhai Murdana and Guru Nanak's legacy, there is no presence of them in East Punjab. Is it because they are Muslims that we are shying away from them? **Have we defined ourselves so strongly that we can determine who can sit on a stage and perform Keertan?**

" O Divine companion, My friend is a Hindu and I am a Muslim, O Divine Companion, in love for my friendship, I sweep the Dharmashal, his place of worship,"

The Dharmashal is now destroyed, but 30 or 40 years ago when the Gurdwara was intact, they used to visit the Gurdwara and the homes of Sikh and Hindu friends. They would all enjoy participating in their religious functions. No matter what religion, everyone had an excellent relationship with their community. Now the Gurdwara is demolished and the community has left.

Before the word Sikh got defined if you look at all the persian texts, the persian travelers referred to our community as the Nanak Panth.



NANAKPANTHI SINDH & BALOCHISTAN

When you go down into the lower Indus Region where the five rivers merge and into Sindh and Balochistan, the entire shaded region is the Nanakpanthi.

This entire legacy has been all but wiped out but there are still a lot of Nanakpanthis living there. From the East Punjab perspective, they are called Hindus, probably because they read both the Gita and the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, even though Guru Nanak is an integral part of their belief system.

A Sindhi by the name of Dada Rewa Chand did a translation of the entire Guru Granth Sahib in 24 volumes in the Sindhi language. Is he less passionate about Guru Nanak because of his location?



The local people are Sindhi Nanak Panthis. They revere Guru Nanak. People of Balochistan who come here, those who are from our community, especially



Hindus, they also believe in Guru Nanak. Temples in this area, no matter the religion, have the "Guru Granth Sahib" enshrined in them.

Mind is illusionary

Mind is a wanderer

Mind is like a bird flying in the sky. Thieves(senses) which mislead the mind Are controlled by spirited wisdom (Guru Nanak) Mind wanders like a bird in the sky of illusion, Desiring to accumulate worldly wealth.

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Dada Rewa Chand - Local Resident

NANAKPANTHI SINDH & BALOCHISTAN



Sindhi Children reciting verses from "Guru Granth Sahib"

Guru Nanak didn't teach us to divide ourselves, or to separate ourselves. Guru Nanak's message was about oneness, diversity, imparting love to all and staying humble. The study and documentation of Guru Nanak's travels invites us to dig in and see exactly how diverse and inclusive he was. It invites us to set down our mental constructs of divisions, borders, and us vs. them, to see the world through Guru Nanak's eyes. We are all invited to remember oneness, inclusiveness, diversity and unity.



ABOUT THE SERIES

ALLEGORY: A TAPESTRY OF GURU NANAK'S TRAVELS

The docuseries is available at TheGuruNanak.com in all the languages below.

This pdf lecture Understanding Guru Nanak Through a Docuseries: A Discussion with Amardeep Singh is available to watch as a lecture on https://youtube.com/live/p4YQrzU7YrU

Amardeep sees the Docuseries *Allegory: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels* as spiritual langar. It was released on thegurunanak.com so that enough support can be mobilized for the development of the series. With that plan successful, it is also being made available on youtube, so that it can be more widely accessible.

HOW TO WATCH THE DOCUSERIES

This is a large body of work that takes time to process. It is recommended by Amardeep Singh to watch one episode per week. Binge watching or watching in a greatly reduced time is not advisable. It is not possible to understand it at a deeper level, it takes time and commitment to take in and process everything shared. Consistency is also important, watch until the end!

"The Ocean is for you to dip into."

This PDF was created with permission from Amardeep Singh.

Watch Docuseries at TheGuruNanak.com English / Punjabi / Hindi / Shahmukhi

