

**The 2008 Amrit Kaur Ahluwalia Memorial Lecture, delivered Saturday, April
19, 2008, UC Berkeley**

**Sikh and Muslim Understandings of Baba Farid
by**

Christopher Shackle

I am grateful for the opportunities given to me by the invitation to give this lecture, both to return to Berkeley, and to spend some time revisiting some aspects of a topic I have not looked at for a number of years. It has been chastening to realize just how rapidly the intervening years have passed. As Farid said:

*dekhu far_da ju th __, d_r_ ho_ bh_ ra
aggahu ner_ _i_ , picch_ rahi_ d_ ra*

See, Farid, what's happened, your beard is now quite grey
As what was far approaches, the past slips far away [SIF9]¹

The associated idea of getting things done while there is still time to do so, which is also one of the major themes is one of the major themes of Baba Farid's poetry, was certainly at the back of my mind during the preparation of this lecture. I have tried not to cram too much into it, but have chosen to offer some observations on three topics which seem to me to be of particular interest in considering this endlessly fascinating poetry: the unique character in the *Adi Granth* of these verses by a Muslim saint; the question of the authenticity of their authorship; and some different later understandings by Sikh and Muslim critics of their special place in Punjabi literary history. As a preliminary, it may first be helpful to begin with brief sketches of the life of Farid the Sufi saint, and of the character of the Farid poetry preserved in the *Adi Granth*.

Farid the Sufi saint

Our picture of Sufism in India under the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth century is dominated by the charismatic Shaikhs of the Chishti order, most notably by the famous Delhi saint Khwaja Nizam ud Din Auliya and his teacher Shaikh Farid called Ganj-e Shakar or Shakarganj 'the Store of Sweetness'. Nizam ud Din's disciples included some of the most distinguished literary figures of the capital like the great Persian poet Amir Khusrau, also Mir Hasan Sijzi, who over the period 1308-22 compiled the *Fava'id ul Fu'ad*, his matchless first-hand record of Nizam ud Din in old age. While none of the early Chishti leaders themselves left any authentic Persian writings, the example of the *Fava'id ul Fu'ad* inspired amongst the succeeding generations a uniquely rich Persian prose literature recording the lives, teachings and miracles of the Chishti saints, of which the two best known are the *Khair ul Majalis*

¹ Abbreviated references to the *Adi Granth* follow the system set out in C. Shackle, *A Gur_ N_ nak Glossary*, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Sterling, 1995), pp. xxxi-xxxiii. Long vowels are distinguished by macrons and retroflex consonants by underlines in quotations, but are otherwise omitted.

by Hamid Qalandar and the *Siyar ul Auliya* of Mir Khurd, both dating from the middle of the fourteenth century.²

It was upon the numerous recollections of Baba Farid which are contained in these early sources that Khaliq Ahmad Nizami skilfully based his short English monograph, which since its original publication in 1955 has become the standard historical account of its subject.³ It first traces Farid's life from his birth around 1173 in the Multan area to his affiliation with Qutb ud Din and his residence in Delhi and in Hansi (now in Haryana). It then tells how after his Shaikh's death in 1238 Farid shunned the capital for Ajodhan, the remote site by the Sutlej in the western Punjab where he spent the last three decades of his life until his death in 1265.

The view of Sufi discipline governing life in his *jama'at-khana* at Ajodhan emerges from the *Fava'id ul Fu'ad* as being more narrowly severe than was the case at, say, Nizam ud Din's court in Delhi. This Shaikh Farid, as pictured through the first-hand understanding and devout memory of Khwaja Nizam ud Din and his successors, emerges as a strikingly austere and intense spiritual personality, who was particularly notable both for the strictness of his practice of poverty, even at the expense of this family's basic comforts, and for the extreme character of his personal devotions. These famously included even a performance of that ultimate Sufi exercise in the punishment of self, the *chilla-e ma'kus* or forty-day vigil which was practised while suspended upside down in a well by a rope tied to the feet.

Like those of so many great Sufi saints, Farid's tomb became after his death a major centre of devotion and pilgrimage, celebrated in the symbolic renaming of Ajodhan as Pakpatan or 'Holy Crossing'. Besides being one of the most important of the Chishti shrines whose network covered many areas of India, Pakpatan assumed an immense importance in the Muslim religious geography of the Punjab, where it took its place between the older shrine of Ali Hujviri called Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore and that of Farid's contemporary Baha ud Din Zakariya, the great Suhrawardi saint of Multan.⁴ As the Farid cult developed over the succeeding centuries the Pakpatan shrine and its hereditary custodians grew in wealth and influence. From Mughal times, some two and half centuries after his death, the devotional literature written to celebrate him in Persian, much of which was later to be translated into Urdu, came to be expanded greatly in quantity and in fantastic hagiographical exaggeration of the saint's miraculous powers. It is these legends first attested in the sources of the Mughal period which have coloured and underpinned most subsequent Muslim understandings of Baba Farid as one of the very greatest saints of the Punjab.⁵

² The *Fava'id ul Fu'ad* is available in reliable English translation as Bruce B. Lawrence (ed. and trans.) *Nizam ad-Din Awliya: Morals for the Heart* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), while the portions of the *Khair ul Majalis* which relate to Farid have been translated in Punjabi in Pritam Singh (ed. and trans.) *Sresht Goshtan* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak University, 1974). For the *Siyar ul Auliya*, there seems still be only the Pakistani re-issue of the nineteenth-century Persian printed text (Lahore: Markaz-e Tahqiqat-e Farsi-e Iran-o Pakistan, 1978).

³ K.A. Nizami, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-u'd-Din Ganj-i-Shakar* (Aligarh: Department of History, Muslim University, 1955).

⁴ Cf. the relevant chapters in A. Suvorova, *Muslim Saints of South Asia: The Eleventh to Fifteenth Centuries* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 35-58, 81-104, 132-154.

⁵ As graphically reflected in the place given to Farid in the pantheon of great Sufi saints in the popular art of modern Pakistani religious posters collected in J.W. Frembgen, *The Friends of God: Sufi Saints in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

The *Farid-bani*

It is the huge spiritual reputation which had progressively accrued around the saint which helps account for the inclusion within the *Adi Granth* by the Sikh Gurus of a number of short compositions labelled as being by 'Shaikh Farid'. In view of their scriptural context, these may be collectively referred to as the *Farid-bani*, although this term of course reflects a Sikh rather than a Muslim understanding of their special character.

Although there is an endless stream of books in Punjabi, English and Urdu which continues to be published about Farid and his poetry,⁶ it is important to remember just how little of the *Farid-bani* there is. It is made up of hardly more than 300 individual verses, collectively amounting to only some 7 of the *Adi Granth*'s 1430 printed pages. The equivalent of 6 of these pages is covered by 112 mostly very short *shaloks*, while four quite brief *shabads* make up the rest. The small size of this corpus, and the heterogeneous character of the individual *shaloks* make it hard to achieve any very full picture of the individual understanding of Sufi ideas they may be presumed to convey.

The importance of the *Farid-bani* is, however, unquestionable. Not only is it the only clearly defined contribution by a unambiguously Muslim saint-poet to the Sikh scripture, but it is also the only substantial collection of vernacular verses which is attributed to a Sufi saint of this early period in India, when Persian was the dominant language of Sufi expression as well as of Sufi record.⁷

The significance of the *Farid-bani* for the literary history of the Punjab is further enhanced by its poetic language, which is more specifically Punjabi in dialectal character than is characteristic of the *gurbani* as a whole. A description of this poetic language will be found in some earlier studies of mine, in which I gave it the label of the 'South-Western style'.⁸ Unlike the usual idiom favoured by Guru Nanak, which might be called a mixture of Punjabi with the Western Hindi-based Sant Bhasha, the 'South-Western' style of the *Farid-bani* is marked by the selective use of features particularly characteristic of the language of the South-Western Punjab, formerly often called Multani, nowadays relabelled as Siraeki in Pakistan.

⁶ Apart from titles specifically referred to in other footnotes here, the more useful of these studies include B.S. Anand, *Baba Farid* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1975); M. Ikram Chaghatai (ed.), *Babaji: The Life and Teachings of Farid-ud Din Ganj-i Shakar* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel, 2006); Ganda Singh (ed.) *Baba Sheikh Farid Ganj-i-Shakar* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1991); Afzal Haidar and A.A. Husain (eds), *Baba Farid Ganj-e Shakar* (Lahore: Kalasik, 1992); Afzal Haidar, *Farid, Nanak, Bullha, Varis* (Islamabad: Dost Publications, 2003); M.B. Sagar (ed. and trans.), *Hymns of Sheikh Farid* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1999); Sahib Singh (ed.), *Salok te Shabad Farid ji Satik* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1975); G.S. Talib, *Baba Sheikh Farid Shakar Ganj* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1974).

⁷ The Persian literary context is well conveyed in Bruce W. Lawrence, *Notes from a Distant Flute: The Extant Sufi Literature of Pre-Mughal Indian Sufism* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978), pp. 27-44.

⁸ Cf. C. Shackle, "'South-Western' Elements in the Language of the *Adi Granth*", *Bulletin of SOAS* 40:1 (1977), pp. 36-50, and "The South-Western Style in the *Guru Granth Sahib*", *Journal of Sikh Studies* 5:1 (1978), pp. 69-87.

In terms of its content, too, the *Farid-bani* stands out in the *Adi Granth* for the frequent vividness of its poetic imagery and for the urgency of its message of the inevitable coming of death and of the need to turn away from worldly pleasures to work on the spiritual discipline which is the true purpose of this brief human existence.⁹ Both these features are readily visible in the well-known little *shabad* in Rag Suhi Lalit beginning *bera bandhi na sakio*:

You could not build a raft; that time was lost.
How can the brimming lake now be crossed?

Let not the safflower burn your hand, my dear.

How weak she is, how strong the Lord's command!
No more than milk to teat may she be joined.

Farid says: Friends, the Lord will call the soul
Sadly to fly this body's dusty pall. [Suhif2]

The same features are characteristic of the 112 largely instructional *shaloks* which, since they make up the bulk of the *Farid-bani*, will be the principal focus of our discussion. Unlike in the work of, say, Guru Nanak, where an extended *shalok* may embrace a whole discourse in itself, most of the Farid *shaloks* are in the minimal format of the *doha*, the classic teaching couplet of medieval India. The *doha*'s restricted compass, consisting of two rhyming verses, each divided into half-verses of no more than three or four words each, has room only for the most condensed images and the most succinct messages.

The Farid *shaloks* are individual miniatures, so while there are some natural pairings and mini-sequences in the order in which they appear towards the end of the *Adi Granth*, no overall pattern can be discerned without much artificial effort.¹⁰ Since the *Shalok Farid* are a miscellany of individual items, it would be inappropriate to expect them to provide a systematic presentation of Sufi ideas, although they individually reflect the well-known Sufi teachings, whose goal is to foster a love and awareness of God through turning away from the attractions of this world. Occasionally this goal receives a sharply lyrical expression, as in the vivid local imagery of such *shaloks* as:

Although for friends I seek, not one in ten is real
Like burning dung I reek, for my beloved One. [SIF87]

⁹ The thematic emphases of the *Farid-bani* are well characterized in D. Matringe, "The Future has Come Near, the Past is Far Behind": A Study of Shaikh Farid's verses and their commentaries in the *Adi Granth*", in A.L. Dallapiccola and S.Z.-A. Lallemand (eds), *Islam and Indian Regions* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 417-42. This volume also contains the attempt made to indicate the wider literary and linguistic context in C. Shackle, "Early Vernacular Poetry in the Indus Valley: Its Contexts and Its Character", pp. 259-89.

¹⁰ This has not prevented several attempts to impose order on the *Shalok Farid*, which range from the methodical if ultimately unconvincing seriousness by the great commentator Sahib Singh in his *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan* (Jalandhar: Raj Publishers, 1964), vol. 10, pp. 298-302, to the bizarre arrangement by English keywords in H.S. Shan (ed. and trans.) *So Said Sheikh Farid* (Chandigarh: Department of Guru Nanak Sikh Studies, Panjab University, 1975).

Their dominant mode however is didactic, with a heavy focus on the theme of *memento mori* ‘remember that you must die’, a theme which has a naturally sharper resonance in a religion like Islam, in which each human life is extinguished in the grave, than in religions of the Indic tradition like Sikhism with their conception of the cycle of rebirths. The theme is conveyed in a variety of striking formulations, like the call to contemplate the fate of kings who cannot escape the grave which is the ultimate fate of every Muslim:

Umbrella-shaded kings whose praises
Bards to drumbeats cried
Have gone to slumber in the grave
With orphans at their side. [SIF45]

The most frequently mentioned figure from the Islamic pantheon is consequently Azrael, the angel of death, who comes to all, however beautiful they may once have been:

The lovely pot is broken, its rope has frayed away.
In whose house is Azrael a guest today? [SIF68]

At the heart of Sufi teaching is that the true purpose of life is to counter the lack of awareness, or *ghaflat*, and come to an awareness of God who is ever mindful of us. There are, after all, no second chances in a religion which does not believe in rebirths:

Night ends, but still you sleep; you die while living yet.
Though you forget the Lord, still He does not forget. [SIF107]

In many of the Farid *shaloks* the message is thus conveyed quite directly, with an unadorned gloomy power. Others give it added point through the use of local imagery, as in the warning cry of the ferryman to his passengers:

In pain the day is spent, in grief the night is passed.
‘Upon the shoals,’ he cries, ‘the ferry is stuck fast. [SIF85]

It is these simple images which make many Farid *shaloks* attractive and memorable, like this picture of the fate of the soul which finds itself temporarily in the world like a migrant wild goose:

Upon the brackish pond, the geese came to alight.
They dip their beaks but drink not, burning to take flight. [SIF64]

Questions of authenticity

As these selective illustrations should have shown, there is therefore nothing in the *Farid-bani* which is inconsistent with the expression of a certain kind of medieval Sufi understanding, one in which expressions of love for the divine are powerfully counterpointed by the continual reminder of the transitory nature of existence and the futility of worldly attachments. In this very real sense of its Sufi content, the *Farid-bani* may thus be said to be broadly compatible with what is known of the Chishti Shaikh Farid from the early Persian sources.

We cannot hope, however, to go beyond this and prove from internal evidence that Farid was the sole author of the *Farid-bani*. It cannot be dated to earlier than the sixteenth century on linguistic grounds, both because its language is similar in chronological profile to most of the rest of the *Adi Granth* and because we lack reliable comparators in the form of thirteenth century vernacular texts. Nor is much reliance to be put on the apparent references to the ascetic practices associated with Farid, such as his *chilla-e ma'kus*, or the loaf of wood he is said to have used to chew upon to stave off the pangs of hunger, the so-called *qurs-e chobin* which is preserved as a relic at Pakpatan. Some have seen autobiographical expression in the verse:

My bread is made of wood, and hunger is my salt:
Those eating buttered bread will suffer pain's assault. [SIF28]

But it is hardly conceivable that the saint would have ostentatiously drawn attention to himself in this way, and it is surely easier to suppose that this is a verse dating from after Farid's death, produced by a devotee inspired by his legendary example.

Nor do the early Persian sources provide much in the way of external evidence. While they may be agreed to give a wonderfully authentic picture of Farid as a Sufi Shaikh, and of his oral teachings, they do not have much to say about him as a poet. They certainly locate him in the world of Persian poetry, whose texts formed the basis of the central Chishti ritual of the *sama*'. He was closely associated with such figures as his immediate disciple Jamal ud Din Hansavi, a significant Persian poet as well as a notable writer in Arabic, and Farid is quite often himself recorded as quoting Persian, sometimes even Arabic verses apposite to a particular occasion, although it is unclear how many of these *shi'rs* and *ruba'is*, if any, he actually composed.¹¹ So far as the vernacular then loosely called 'Hindawi' is concerned, much has been made in modern times of the occasional passing mention of his having said something in an Indian language. Among the early Persian records, however, only in the *Siyar ul Auliya* is there a single instance of a vernacular verse uttered by Baba Farid. But unfortunately the scribal misunderstanding which has generally corrupted the reading of early Hindawi verses embedded in Persian texts means that the proper sense of this verse is hardly recoverable.¹²

While it may seem surprising that there should be no evidence from the Punjab for any early tradition independent of the *Adi Granth* of the transmission of a collection of vernacular verses by Farid, this may be accounted for by the almost exclusively Persian focus of the early Sufi records. A few years ago, however, important early confirmation of the Gurmukhi record of the *Farid-bani* was discovered from the Deccan, by Professor Carl Ernst in the course of his research the early development of the Chishti centre at Khuldabad, which was established by Nizam ud Din Auliya's disciple Burhan ud Din Gharib (d. 1337).

The richest of these sources is the *Hidayat ul Qulub* compiled between 1344 and 1367 by one Mir Hasan, which records the *malfuzat* of Zain ud Din Shirazi (d. 1371), who as Burhan ud Din's principal successor was a member of the fourth generation of

¹¹ Cf. S.A.H. Abidi, "Baba Farid as a Persian Poet", in G.S. Talib (ed.) *Baba Sheikh Farid: Life and Teachings* (New Delhi: Baba Farid Memorial Society, 1973), English section, pp. 58-62.

¹² Cf. the discussion of this and other verses in M. Asif Khan, *Akhyar Baba Farid ne* (Lahore: Pakistan Panjabi Adabi Board, 1978), pp.99-109.

spiritual descent from Farid. The *Hidayat ul Qulub* quotes seven *dohas* introduced by the phrase *shaikh ul islam Farid ud Din farmuda ast* “the great Shaikh Farid has said”. One, which has become quite well known from my reading published in Professor Ernst’s 1992 monograph *Eternal Garden*,¹³ is a close variant of SIF7 in the *Adi Granth*. This teaches the virtue of turning the other cheek:

jo tujha m_re mukkiy __, tissu ma m_re ghummi
t__j_e_ghari_pane, pagga tinh __re cummi

Do not turn round and hit the one who strikes you blows.
 Just make your way back home, once you have kissed their feet.

The *Hidayat ul Qulub* thus provides important independent confirmation of the circulation within mid-fourteenth century Chishti circles of vernacular verses by Baba Farid. Unfortunately, the earliest available manuscripts of the *Hidayat ul Qulub* go back to only the late seventeenth century, so the usual corruptions have affected the transmission of these Hindawi verses, which are further garbled in the nineteenth century Urdu translation.¹⁴ None of the other verses appear in the *Adi Granth*, and in their present form some are clearly incomplete, others virtually unintelligible.¹⁵ But in two examples at least seem to have the authentic Faridian ring. One describes the power of the pain of love called *biraha*:

mani birah_deha kall __, ekasa s __laggi
hiyar_birahe_j_li __, kih_kares_aggi

Alone, the One Lord’s love fills the mind with pain.
 Will fire affect the heart which love has set ablaze?

There are also reminiscences of the *Shalok Farid* in the phrase “these foolish folk know not” (*gahil_loku na j_nad_SIF65*) in another *doha*, which is quoted on two separate occasions in the *Hidayat ul Qulub*:

ajju mil_je sajjan __, kosa ath_r__calli
gahil_loka na j_na __, kih_par_je kalli

Today’s the time for meeting, however far the way.
 These foolish folk know not, what will the morrow bring?

While the text of most of the other Farid verses in the *Hidayat ul Qulub* is too corrupt to allow a proper reading, the opening of one of them does deserve quotation:

ko_giraha an_r __, ko_l_je gandhi
kisah_degahi chhup_la __, kisah_d_je randhi . . .

¹³ Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: SUNY, 1992), pp. 167, 329.

¹⁴ Originals are of all the relevant verses are posted at <http://www.unc.edu/%7Ecernst/FaridMss.pdf>.

¹⁵ But now see the interpretations offered in Pritam Singh, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib vale “Sekh Farid” di Bhal* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2008), pp. 123-43. [It was not possible to take proper account of this substantial monograph in the preparation of this lecture.]

Some knots may be clumsy, while others are well tied
Some are hidden in the pot, and some are fully cooked . . .

These mysterious lines, along with what can be made out of some other verses, lend support to the interesting conclusion drawn by Professor Ernst from my tentative reading of a verse from another Khuldabad text, that such verses are typically to be understood as riddling instructions from a Sufi Shaikh to his immediate disciples, rather than, as in many modern understandings of medieval Sufi poetry, as a means of spreading the Sufi message more widely, even as a way of planting the seed of conversion to Islam amongst an often non-Muslim audience.¹⁶

All in all, therefore, the Farid verses in the *Hidayat ul Qulub* confirm in one case that a Farid *shalok* found in the *Adi Granth* is attested long before the compilation of the scripture, in other cases that the *Shalok Farid* are no more a complete collection of the Farid verses then in circulation than are, say, those compositions by Kabir which are included in the *Adi Granth*.

The incorporation of the *Farid-bani* in the *Adi Granth*

We may now turn to the *Farid-bani* and some of the questions it has raised in Sikh understanding. Within the *Adi Granth*, the *Farid-bani* is classified as being a part of the *bhagat-bani*, the category of compositions by saints other than the Sikh Gurus. Discussion of the vexed question of the precise status of the *bhagat-bani* need not be gone into here, although it is worth observing that the category of ‘not-quite full scripture’ to which it is commonly consigned has many parallels in other, unrelated religious traditions.¹⁷

We may, though, instead suggest, against the general tendency to treat the *bhagat-bani* as a unitary category, that the *Farid-bani* is in a rather special class of its own. Linguistically, the common idiom of most of the hymns of the other Bhagats is the Hindi-based Sant Bhasha widely cultivated across northern India, whereas the poetic language of the *Farid-bani*, as we have seen, links it specifically to the south-western Punjab, lying on the opposite side of the central territory of the early Sikh Gurus. This geographical and linguistic distinction reinforces the primary religious distinction between the Sufi Farid and all the other Bhagats, including the nominally Muslim Kabir, with their generally strong affiliation with Hindu *nirgun bhakti*. This reinforced dichotomy holds true even of those minor Bhagats who might prima facie seem to be exceptions. So, although Sadhna from Sehvan in Sindh is the only other Bhagat born in the South-West, his hymn in Rag Bilaval¹⁸ is in straightforward Sant Bhasha, while it would be difficult to tell from the strongly Vaishnava expression of the two hymns of Bhikhan,¹⁹ the only other Sufi Bhagat, apparently from the Lucknow region, that he was a Muslim at all.

More detailed consideration of the place of the *Farid-bani* within the *Adi Granth* has found its natural starting place in the direct comments by the Sikh Gurus on verses of

¹⁶ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, pp. 165-8.

¹⁷ Cf. the status of the Book of Revelation in many Christian understandings of the New Testament, or that of some of the Writings, as opposed to the Law and the Prophets, in the Jewish Tanakh.

¹⁸ *Adi Granth*, p. 858.

¹⁹ *Adi Granth*, p. 659.

Farid, or in clear echoes of his hymns in their compositions. The 112 *Shalok Farid* are interspersed with 18 *shaloks* by the Sikh Gurus. As has often been observed, the general tenor of these verses is to moderate the expression of ascetic ideals and to reinforce the Gurus' message of the ever present hope of divine grace rather than the fiercer understanding of the consequences of spiritual backsliding typically expressed in the Farid *shaloks*.

The views of modern Sikh scholarship as to how the *Farid-bani* became incorporated into the *Adi Granth* have tended to be coloured by the understandings of the *janamsakhis* of the purpose of the scripture and the superior spiritual authority over all other religious leaders of Guru Nanak. These understandings are typically expressed through roundabout attempts to engage with the scriptural text through the provision of an often garbled narrative context and the suppletion of non-canonical verses to help fill in the gaps.

Two different *sakhis* are relevant here. The first, in the *Puratan Janamsakhi*, describes a meeting between Shaikh Farid and Guru Nanak in the imaginary land of Asa.²⁰ After an opening exchange of apocryphal *shaloks*, Farid's *shabad* beginning *bera bandhi na sakio* is capped by Guru Nanak with the closely similar hymn in Rag Suhi beginning *japa tapa ka bandhu berula*. This similarity has been taken by most scholars, including Professor Pashaura Singh in the chapter on Farid in his study of the *bhagat-bani*, as proof of Guru Nanak's familiarity with the Farid hymn, and hence as evidence that it was the first Guru who was responsible for incorporating the *Farid-bani* at a very early stage into the Sikh proto-scriptural tradition.²¹

It has recently emerged, however, from Professor Mann's study of the Goindwal Pothis that the hymn traditionally supposed to be by Guru Nanak is there assigned to Guru Amar Das. Professor Mann therefore plausibly questions the assumption of Guru Nanak's familiarity with the Farid verses, and suggests that the isolated verses by Guru Nanak interspersed in the *Shalok Farid* may have been copied there by the later Gurus.²²

The same *sakhi* provides a sketchy narrative setting for some of the scriptural juxtapositions which place a *shalok* by the Guru after one by Farid. So *Shalok Farid 112* reads:

Prayers in the first watches blossom to fruit in the last
They who remain without sleep get their gift from the Lord.

The *sakhi* follows this with Guru Nanak's apposite verse which appears in *Adi Granth* as *Shalok Farid 113*, as well as in *Srirag ki var*:

Gifts are the Lord's to bestow, unpersuaded by men
Some stay awake unrewarded, while others are roused and receive.

²⁰ *Puratan Janamsakhi*, ed. Vir Singh (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1979 [1926]), pp. 86-94.

²¹ Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh Self-Definition and the Bhagat Bani* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 54-64.

²² G.S. Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 103-9.

Professor Mann's strict reading of the textual evidence would suggest that the juxtaposition is the result of later editorial intervention, presumably by Guru Arjan, cannot be shown to go back to Guru Nanak himself.

But a counter-argument is suggested by the next exchange of hymns reported in this episode of the *Puratan Janamsakhi*, where Farid's *shabad* in Rag Asa beginning *dilahu muhabbati jinna* is similarly capped by Guru Nanak's hymn in Rag Suhi called *Suchajji*.²³ We do not need to assume an actual exchange here, simply to recognize that the language of the *Suchajji* hymn aligns it with several other compositions by Guru Nanak which make deliberate use of the South-Western style characteristic of the *Farid-bani*. While Guru Nanak uses the style to express his own ideas, it is quite clear that he must have had an existing poetic model in mind for it, and even if we assume there was once much more poetry in this style in circulation, it is hardly to be imagined – given Farid's great spiritual prestige -- that Guru Nanak was unaware of the verses attributed to him.

This linguistically based argument is for a general awareness of the Farid poetry on the part of Guru Nanak. For the evidence of specific textual cross-reference we may wait with Professor Mann for Guru Amar Das, whose interpolations in the *Shalok Farid* – like his hymn in Rag Suhi – clearly do involve textual knowledge. So it may well be that it was Guru Amar Das who first actually collected all the *Farid-bani* as we now know it (although the Goindwal Pothis provide direct evidence only for the Farid hymns in Rag Suhi). If this was the case, we must assume the third Guru obtained it from a source rather different from those which yielded the work of the other Bhagats to whom he seems closer by religious background. It equally remains possible, of course, that it may have been Guru Nanak who first collected some or all of the existing *Farid-bani*, and that this was added to by Guru Amar Das.

It is, however, with Guru Arjan that the definitive process of weaving together the various elements of the *Adi Granth* is most completely realized. Unlike Guru Amar Das, Guru Arjan followed Guru Nanak in making enthusiastic use of the South-Western style in several of his compositions, like the *shaloks* which he labelled *dakhane* (with a South-Western retroflex *d*) which systematically precede the stanzas of his *vars* in Rags Jaitsari and Maru.²⁴ It is also to be assumed that Guru Arjan was responsible for arranging the responses by earlier Gurus which are presently found scattered in *Shalok Farid*. As the most fluent contributor to the *Adi Granth* as a whole, Guru Arjan is himself responsible for almost as many customized responses of his own than all the others put together. It is likely that Guru Arjan, who devoted such careful editorial attention to the placement of *shaloks* in the *vars* of the scriptural text, was responsible for the final selection and arrangement of the *Shalok Farid*, including of course the *shaloks* by the Gurus interpolated therein.

Besides the *Puratan Janamsakhi* account of the meeting between Guru Nanak and Farid, all the main *janamsakhis* feature a separate *sakhi*, which describes Guru

²³ *Adi Granth*, p. 762.

²⁴ Cf. Shackle, "The South-Western Style in the *Guru Granth Sahib*", pp. 80-6; "Early Vernacular Poetry", pp. 276-8.

Nanak's visit to Pakpatan.²⁵ There he met not Shaikh Farid himself, but his historical successor as ruling Pir, the Guru's contemporary called Shaikh Braham. In this *sakhi* too, the dialogue proceeds in the usual way, with the the Shaikh's opening question leading through a fairly extended exchange of *shaloks* to his ultimate acknowledgement of Guru Nanak's spiritual authority. As is common in the *janamsakhis*, the verses put in the mouths of the protagonists are a creative mixture of non-canonical apocrypha with quotations from the *Adi Granth*. McLeod provides a suitable cautious assessment of the historicity of this *sakhi*, which certainly provides no evidence for the theory which is sometimes advanced, that it was on this visit that Guru Nanak acquired the *Farid-bani* from its Muslim keepers. The further suggestion that it was Shaikh Braham who was the real author of the *Farid-bani* is a question we shall return to a little later.

Sikh and Muslim understandings of Farid and the Punjabi literary canon

Sikh writers in the post-*janamsakhi* centuries were less interested in querying the authorship of the *Farid-bani* than in confirming its authenticity as the first and last Muslim Punjabi text. In the eighteenth century, Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahima Prakash* includes 'the perfect gnostic Shaikh Farid' (*kamal araf shekh farid*) in a summary list of the scriptural Bhagats. A fuller account of the incorporation of the *bhagat-bani* into the *Adi Granth* is constructed in the *Sikkhan da Bhagatmala* and further elaborated in Santokh Singh's *Suraj Prakash* of 1843.²⁶ Reflecting later pre-modern Sikh understandings, this describes the failure of others figures to get their verse into the new scripture. These included two Punjabi Muslim poets, namely Pilu and the Lahore Sufi Shah Husain, who were thus expressly excluded by Guru Arjan from the canonical ranks of the *Adi Granth* Bhagats.

Consequent upon such pre-modern understandings, the isolation of Farid as not just a Punjabi Muslim poet but, more importantly, as a Bhagat of the *Adi Granth* created some awkwardness when in the early twentieth century the task of writing the history of Punjabi literature was undertaken by Sikh authors as a part of the campaign to increase awareness of the importance of Punjabi to the newly defined Sikh cultural identity.

These early modern Sikh understandings of the place of the *Farid-bani* in Punjabi literary history were affected by the idea that it was not actually the work of Farid himself at all. In the Pakpatan *sakhi*, three of verses supposedly uttered by the Pir are from the *Shalok Farid*, and it seems this led to the notion popularized in the early twentieth century by Macauliffe,²⁷ that the *Farid-bani* as a whole was the work of this Sheikh Braham, readily identifiable with Shaikh Ibrahim (d. 1554), the twelfth *sajjada-nashin* of the Pakpatan shrine, who bore the title of Farid Sani or 'Farid II'. Besides its seeming to be more in line with history, always a telling argument with

²⁵ *Puratan Janamsakhi*, pp. 105-12. See also the discussion of this *sakhi* in W.H. McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 131-5, which gives references for the parallel versions (p. 133, n. 1).

²⁶ Cf. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, ed. G.S. Lamba and Khazan Singh (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1971), vol.2, p. 371; *Sikkhan da Bhagatmala*, ed. T.S. Bedi (Patiala: Punjabi University), 1994), pp. 122-3; Santokh Singh, *Sri Gurpratap Suraj Granth*, ed. Vir Singh (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1963), vol. 6, pp. 2116-7.

²⁷ M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), vol. 6, pp. 356ff.

modern apologists for Sikh hagiographic tradition, the Farid Sani thesis has also proved appealing to some Sikh scholars through its seeming to diminish the relative authority of the author of the *Farid-bani* by making him a contemporary of Guru Nanak rather than a famous saint born some three centuries earlier.

Much ink has been spilt by Mohan Singh Divana²⁸ and a good many others on the subsequent controversy about whether it was Farid or Farid Sani who was the author of the *Farid-bani*. Rather than go over this well-trodden ground here, it is hardly conceivable that the Gurus would have included the *Farid-bani* in the scripture unless they understood it to be by Farid himself. We may further suggest, on the evidence of the *Hidayat ul Qulub*, that at least some of the *Farid-bani* goes back to Farid himself, but that at least some of the verses bearing his signature are of later origin. Even disregarding the doubtful evidence of the later apocrypha of 72 Farid *shaloks* collected from the *janamsakhis* and other sources by Piara Singh Padam,²⁹ we also know from the verses in the *Hidayat ul Qulub* that not all the Farid poetry in early circulation was included in the *Adi Granth*. And we may further suppose some editorial shaping of the corpus by the Gurus, as may also be indicated by the general absence of esoteric riddling verses from the *Shalok Farid*.³⁰

The natural desire to give primal importance to Guru Nanak has affected the writing of histories of Punjabi literature from a Sikh perspective. The pioneer in this field, Bava Budh Singh, explicitly took up the Farid Sani hypothesis in his influential *Hans Chog* of 1915, which while honouring Farid makes him somewhat subordinate in status and temporally subsequent to Guru Nanak. This is conveyed in an imaginatively constructed dual portrait:

Look, the head of this court is a holy man of aged appearance . . . Do you know who this holy man is? It is Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji. Right next to him sits an aged Muslim fakir with a turban on his head and clad in a long tunic. The presence of a crowd of disciples around him shows that he too must be a person of authority or a spiritual leader. Because he is next to the Guru, the old man talks to him quietly, sometimes smiling and nodding his head as if agreeing with his utterances. This holy man is Shaikh Farid ji.³¹

The Farid Sani theory³² has found less favour in most later Punjabi literary histories written by Sikh scholars in India, who generally wish to emphasize how far back the Punjabi literary tradition extends, although they too have to take account of the implications of Farid's dual status as Muslim Sufi poet and *Adi Granth* Bhagat.

²⁸ In his "Baba Farid Ganj-e Shakar (rahmatullah 'alaihi), Shaikh Ibrahim aur Farid Sani", a lengthy study published in Urdu in *Oriental College Magazine* in 1938-9 in several parts (14:2, pp. 75-81; 14:3, pp. 25-37; 14:4, pp. 88-90; 15:1, pp. 67-84; 15:2, pp. 44-71): cf. also in English the same author's *A History of Panjabi Literature (1100-1932)*, 2nd edn (Amritsar: Kasturi Lal, 1956), pp. 20-2.

²⁹ P.S. Padam, "'Bir' ton baharli 'Farid-rachna'", in G.S. Talib (ed.) *Baba Sheikh Farid: Life and Teachings* (New Delhi: Baba Farid Memorial Society, 1973), Punjabi section, pp. 48-57.

³⁰ Apart from, perhaps, the puzzling blacksmith with an axe on his shoulder and a pot on his head in SLF43.

³¹ Budh Singh, *Hans Chog*, 2nd edn (Amritsar: Phulvari Agency, 1921), p. 34. See further C. Shackle, "Making Punjabi Literary History", in C. Shackle, A.S. Mandair and Gurharpal Singh (eds), *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), pp. 97-117.

³² This was given further currency in English through its uncritical inclusion in Lajwanti Rama Krishna, *The Panjabi Sufi Poets A.D. 1469-1900* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 1-11.

The picture is somewhat different across the post-1947 international border, where most modern Muslim understandings play up the pioneering role of Baba Farid as a missionary for Islam responsible for converting many tribes of the Western Punjab, even though the careful research of Richard Eaton has shown that these conversions date only from the Mughal period, and were inspired by the Pakpattan shrine and its later custodians rather than by the saint himself.³³ It is in this later period that the miracle-working figure of Baba Farid thus naturally comes to join the company of the Panj Pir, the five great saints who use their special powers to help Ranjha in his quest for Hir in Varis Shah's great eighteenth century romance:

Perfect scion of the family of Chisht,
From his devotion Patan flourishes.
When Shakarganj made this his living- place
He quite removed all sorrow from Punjab.³⁴

Later, in the nineteenth century, a self-conscious tradition of an historic line of Muslim Punjabi poets begins to emerge, beginning with the catalogue in the conclusion to Maulavi Ahmad Yar's *Ahsan ul Qasis*,³⁵ completed just before the *Suraj Prakash* in 1842. Two decades later, this inspired Mian Muhammad Bakhsh to include in his great romance *Saiful Muluk* (1863), the better known catalogue which firmly places Farid at the head of his list of great Punjabi Muslim poets, immediately before the later Sufi poets Sultan Bahu and Bullhe Shah:

First stands Shaikh Farid, the saintly Shakarganj,
Whose every word's a guide to truth and righteousness.³⁶

A century later, when histories of Punjabi literature began to be written in Pakistan, the continuing prestige of Baba Farid's reputation as one of the primal circle of major saints, whose stylized representations still form such an important theme in the popular religious art of the region, has generally assured his unquestioned place at the head of the Pakistani canon of Punjabi Muslim literature, a canon in which Guru Nanak and his successors find only the most marginal of places. Here the figure of Farid is seen as the great precursor of later Punjabi Sufi poets, whose canonical line runs through Shah Husain, then on to Sultan Bahu and Pihu in the seventeenth century, then through Bullhe Shah and Varis Shah in the eighteenth on to Mian Muhammad Bakhsh and Khwaja Ghulam Farid in the nineteenth.

While it may be acknowledged that all Persian script texts of his poetry derive from the Gurmukhi text of the *Adi Granth*, Farid is no Bhagat in this world, where the Koran is the sole scripture, simply a great Muslim saint. It is true that some critics have felt unease at the great time-gap between Baba Farid and the sixteenth century

³³ Richard M. Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of B_b_Far_d", and "Court of Man, Court of God: Local Perceptions of the shrine of B_b_Far_d, Pakpattan, Punjab", in *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 203-46.

³⁴ *Hir Varis Shah*, ed. M. Sharif Sabir (Lahore: Varis Shah Memorial Committee, 1986), p. 3, v. 5:4.

³⁵ Cf. Shahbaz Malik, *Maulavi Ahimadyar: Fikar te Fan* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1999), pp. 208-10.

³⁶ Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, *Saiful Muluk*, ed. M. Sharif Sabir (Lahore: Sayyid Ajmal Husain Memorial Society: 2002), p. 487, v. 9020.

Shah Husain, who is nowadays usually placed next in line after him. Some Muslim critics, like the poet and pioneering literary historian Maula Bakhsh Kushta who was close to Sikh circles in pre-Partition Amritsar, have accordingly taken up the Farid Sani hypothesis.³⁷ Given the keenly contested nature of issues of Pakistani cultural identity, however, most Punjabi critics have naturally preferred to safeguard claims for the antiquity of Punjabi literature through the traditional identification of the poetry with Baba Farid himself.

Given the linguistic character of the Farid poetry, though, this same chronological isolation has allowed other claims for its place at the head of other poetic traditions. For the modern Siraeki cultural nationalists of the south-western Punjab whose position is explicitly defined against the Lahore-based protagonists of Punjabi in Pakistan, Farid's rightful place is at the head of the tradition of Siraeki literature. Yet another claim, which even more strikingly evinces the understandings of modern linguistic chauvinism, is for Baba Farid as an early Sindhi poet.³⁸ While this is a case which demands some special pleading, it helps draw attention to the instructive comparisons to be made between the *Shalok Farid* and the sixteenth-century Sindhi *dohas* of Qazi Qadan of Sehvan³⁹ – for whom a fairly recent discovery has produced the same total of 112 verses as in the *Shalok Farid*. Given the absence of contemporary material from the Punjab, such a comparative study might help illuminate the general cultural context of early Muslim regional verse in which the *Farid-bani* is historically to be cited. This is only one of several possible lines of inquiry which may be developed in the future study of the *Farid-bani*.

As the Pakistani critic Najam Husain has observed, Farid “stands at the far end of Punjabi poetic tradition in an eminent isolation.”⁴⁰ We can perhaps never hope to break down that isolation completely, but I hope to have shown something of the fascination of the Farid poetry, with its many uncertainties and differing interpretations. Its enduring importance for understandings of the cultural history of the Punjab will certainly ensure that it long remains a topic whose study others will take up in their turn, so that they too may one day recognize the melancholy truth of this verse of Farid:

*Shekha haiy_t_jagi, na ko_ thiru rahi_
Jisu _sani hama baithe, kete baisi gai_ [AsF2:5]*

O Shaikh, no living thing endures for ever in this world.
Upon this seat of ours how many have sat down before!

³⁷ Maula Bakhsh Kushta, *Panjab de Hire* (Amritsar: Dhani Ram Chatrik, 1939), pp. 1-7

³⁸ Cf. Agha Salim (ed. and trans.), *Baba Farid Ganj-e Shakar ja Doha* (Jamshoro: Institute of Sindhology, University of Sindh, 1990), pp. 26-30.

³⁹ H.J.L. Thakur (ed.), *Qazi Qadan jo Kalam* (Hyderabad Sindh: Sindh Tahqiqi Board, 1996).

⁴⁰ Najm Husain Syed, *Recurrent Patterns in Punjabi Poetry*, 2nd edn (Lahore: Punjab Adbi Markaz, 1978), p. 23.