

## 6 ‘Seeing’ My Beloved: *Darśan* and the Sikhi Perspective

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ਕਾਰਾ ਕਰੰਗ ਢੰਢੇਲਿਆ ਸਗਲਾ ਖਾਇਆ ਮਾਸੁ ॥

ਏ ਦੁਇ ਨੈਨਾ ਮਤਿ ਛੁਹਉ ਪਿਰ ਦੇਖਨ ਕੀ ਆਸ ॥੯੧॥<sup>1</sup>

*The crows have searched my skeleton, and eaten all my flesh.*

*But please do not touch these eyes; I hope to see my Beloved.*

– Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), Ang/page 1382

Sikhi, by which I refer to the teachings primarily contained in the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), are replete with references to the eyes and for a longing to ‘see’ the Divine, often referred to as the Groom and the Beloved. The term generally used for this ‘vision’ in Indian philosophy is *darśan*, derived from a verb root *drś*, ‘to see’, therefore implying a vision of the Divine, and also a vision of Reality. My discussion will focus on the concept of *darśan* from a Sikh perspective. One is inevitably, at this point, faced with the rather large task of providing a definition of Sikh identity which satisfactorily encompasses the diversity within the Sikh Panth (the global community of Sikhs), in terms of both belief and practice. In common to all faiths, Sikh practices too tend to be defined as either mainstream or sectarian. In keeping with current trends around ‘lived religion’, I will address the diversity in terms of the practical

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<sup>1</sup> References in the Gurmukhi font have been accessed from the SriGranth Online Resource developed by Punjabi University Patiala. Accessible at: [www.sriganth.org](http://www.sriganth.org) (accessed 13 June 2017).

application of *darśan* amongst the wider Sikh community, particularly so in the section dealing with Sants and Babas. A detailed insight into perspectives on Sikh identity can be found in Takhar (2005) and Singh and Barrier (1999). There is an abundance of published work available which focuses on the concept of *darśan* within the Hindu way of life as both an emphasis on ‘seeing and being seen’ by the Divine through *murtis*, images representing the various forms of the Ultimate Brahman, as well as the concept of *darśan* as a ‘vision’ of Reality which is unpacked through the Six Philosophical Schools of Indian Thought, the *Darśanas* (Eck 1998; Flood 1996; Fowler 2016). Indeed, in discussing *darśan*, it has often been stated that ‘[T]he premise in the Hindu religion is that the deity inhabits the statue’ (Rutherford 2000: 145). With its emphasis on the transcendent Ultimate Reality, there is no scope in Sikh teachings and philosophy for ‘seeing’ the Divine through *murtis*; quite simply, there are no images of the Divine according to Sikh teachings. Essentially, Sikhi refers to the Divine as gender-free. Nevertheless, in a metaphorical sense, the reference to the Divine as the Groom and to humanity as a whole as the bride is gendered. So, how is the concept of *darśan* to be understood from the Sikh perspective?

I will attempt, in what follows, to make sense of the importance of the sense of sight, of ‘seeing’, in Sikh teachings as embodied in the eternal Guru for the majority of Sikhs – the Guru Granth Sahib. My discussion will also explore the lived aspect of *darśan* for Sikhs in contemporary society. Any building which houses the Guru Granth Sahib becomes a gurdwara, the Sikh place of worship, literally translated as the ‘door/gateway to the Guru’. Unarguably, gurdwaras are central to Sikh communities, wherever in the world they have settled. The dedication with which gurdwaras are built is indicative of the importance of physically seeing the Guru Granth Sahib, that is having its *darśan*, since it is meditation and contemplation of the teachings which enable the experiential and numinous ‘seeing’ of the

Divine. The manner in which the Guru Granth Sahib is treated as the eternal *living* Guru is notable (see Cole and Sambhi 1995: 44–57) in order to understand what Sikhs actually *do* in their efforts to have *darśan* of the Divine (see Figure 6.1). The *sangat* or the congregation holds particular importance in Sikh collective worship since this is the environment in which one can be guided by highly respected, spiritual beings. This does not mean, however, that Sikhs are discouraged from quiet individual meditation. *Nam Japna*, meditation on the Name of the Divine is one of the key principles of the Sikh faith. The Guru Granth Sahib uses many Names to refer to the Divine; in popular contemporary practice the Divine is often referred to as *Waheguru*, a name used in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Traditional Indian music, using traditional Indian instruments (particularly the harmonium and tabla) is a fundamental aspect of what Sikhs *do*. Here, the sense of hearing is paramount in the singing of *kirtan*, teachings from the Guru Granth Sahib, and occasionally the Dasam Granth. It is important to note that the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib are written in accordance to *ragas*, musical notes, and are therefore intended to be sung (see Bhogal 2011; Cassio 2012). The role of the *ragi*, one who has taken training in the playing of the harmonium and tabla, therefore is essential in communal worship. The sense of smell, like that in the Greek Orthodox Church (see Lymberopoulou in this volume) is also enhanced by the burning of incense in most gurdwaras. Accompanying this is the smell of food which wafts into the main worship hall from the kitchen where *langar* is prepared and served all day long. It is an expectation that all who visit the gurdwara, Sikh and non-Sikh, should partake of the *langar* (the vegetarian meal, free to all visitors and worshippers). Gurdwara attendees are also expected to take *karah prasad*, a sweet and warm semolina and butter blessing which emphasises the concept of equality. Sikhs and non-Sikhs attending the gurdwara, thus, both practically and symbolically, enforce the concept of equality by their actions in partaking of

the *karah prasad* and the *langar*. The sense of taste is therefore also used in communal worship. Indeed, it is not unusual for gurdwaras to prepare vegetarian pizza and pasta alongside chips for the *langar* in their efforts to attract the younger generation.

### **‘Seeing’ is ‘knowing’?**

Core to the teachings of Sikhi is the concept that ultimate release from the cycle of transmigration is the responsibility of the Divine, Ultimate Reality rather than the individual. The term very often used in the Guru Granth Sahib for what roughly translates as ‘Grace’ is *Nadar* (which has strong connotations to the term *nazar* which means ‘sight’ or ‘vision’). One must remember however, that there are no images of the Divine according to Sikhi, so what exactly does a ‘vision’ entail according to the hermeneutics of the Guru Granth Sahib?

Time and time again, the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib allude to the bestowing of *Nadar* as the opportunity to transcend one’s consciousness from being *manmukh* (worldly/self-orientated) to *gurmukh* (attuned to the Divine). To become *gurmukh* is the concept of an awakened mind; according to Sikhi, a *gurmukh* is one who has ‘seen’ the formless Divine, one who has ‘heard’ the *anahad sabad* (the unstruck melody) which suggests a heightening of the senses, an awakening of the *man/buddhi*. Importantly, in Indian philosophy overall, the term *man* has a much wider connotation than simply the ‘mind’: the word lacks a satisfactory translation in English, and can also be associated with the heart, which is further allied with feelings and emotions (McLeod 1996). In verbal discourses of the Guru Granth Sahib the term *buddhi* is also often used for both the mind and the conscience. Sikh practice is replete with the singing of the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib, together with the hearing of *kirtan*, as a practical means towards the calming the *man*. The performance of

*kirtan* ‘is an art of spiritual communication’ with the Divine (Singh 2014: 397). Guru Arjan Dev clearly links *darśan* with an awakening of the *man*:

ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਲੋਚੈ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਤਾਈ ॥

*My man longs for the Blessed Vision of the Guru's darśan.*

(GGS, Ang 96)

ਹਰਿ ਦਰਸਨ ਕੰਉ ਮਨੁ ਲੋਚਦਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਪਿਆਸ ਮਨਾ ॥

*My man yearns for darśan of the Divine, Nanak, my mind is thirsty.*

(GGS, Ang 133)

Therefore, ‘seeing’ according to the Guru Granth Sahib, is a realization, a mystical experience of the acceptance of the immanence of the Divine within each and every human being. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh eloquently equates ‘seeing’ as realization of the immanent Divine; for her

... *dekhai* or eyesight is, metaphysically speaking, identical with the category of *sujhai* – realization or discovery; literally, being endowed with insight into phenomena as they intrinsically are. Senses and rationality are not pitted against each other; on the contrary, they include each other. (1993: 21)

The emphasis here is upon ‘love’, a personal relationship with the transcendent Divine through *bhakti* to a gender-free, formless Ultimate Divine, which must be experienced and realized in order to awaken the conscience into the ideal state of a *gurmukh*. *Nadar*, with its synonym *darśan*, is conceived of as a gift to humanity, an opportunity to experience *sahaj*, the mystical union with the Divine through *Nam Simran* which is contemplation and meditation on the Name. An analysis of the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib indicates that

*sahaj* is the resulting mystical experience of receiving *darśan* (Takhar 2005: 43–45), which in turn suggests that *sahaj* and *darśan* are coterminous. *Darśan* is thus the realisation of the Truth, an absence of which brings sadness and suffering. The pursuit to end such suffering became a central concern for Guru Nanak (McLeod 1996: 162). The concept of *chardi kala* amongst Sikhs refers to ‘high spirits/overcoming anxiety’ and is synonymous with the controlling of the *man*. Sikh spiritual leaders very often prescribe the hearing of *kirtan* as the path towards *chardi kala* and therefore combatting mental illness and depression.

<Figure 6.1 *Kirtan*. Photograph by Sukhbir Kaur.>

In practice, these teachings are encompassed in the practice of meditation – both on the Name, *Nam Japna*, as well as in the form of *kundalini yoga*. The practice of the latter has become visibly present amongst Sikhs through the efforts of Harbhajan Singh Khalsa, popularly known as Yogi Bhajan. It is through the efforts of Yogi Bhajan in the 1970s onwards in America that the Panth has seen an influx of non-Punjabi Sikhs (Takhar 2005: 158–178). There are numerous gurdwaras across the globe offering classes on *kundalini yoga*. For many Sikhs, the practical aspect of teachings around ‘seeing’ the Divine is through the mystical experience of Union with the immanent *Waheguru* – an experience derived through such practices as *kundalini yoga* in which the climax of ‘seeing the truth’ is to open the tenth gate of consciousness. The numinosity and ineffability, to use Rudolf Otto’s terms, of ‘seeing’ the Divine transcends the conscience to its highest point, that of the *dasam duar*, the tenth gate, the highest *chakra* according to Nath yogic terminology, which is also used by Guru Nanak in his teachings. The point is succinctly illustrated by Hew McLeod:

Ascending to higher and yet higher levels of spiritual perception he [humankind] finally reaches the ultimate, a condition of ineffable union with the Eternal One in which all earthly bonds are dissolved and the cycle of death and rebirth finally brought to an end. (1996: 150–51)

Indeed such teachings form the core of *kundalini yoga* for many Sikhs across the world today. McLeod goes on to state that *sahaj* is ‘the ineffable radiance beyond the *dasam duar*’ (1996: 225). An ineffable experience can only be understood by those whom have themselves experienced it. Here again we find a connection to the concept of the *anahad sabad*, the ‘unstruck melody’ which can only be heard by one who has received the *Nadar*, and therefore a recipient of the *darśan* of the Divine, indeed an experience that is referred to in the teachings of Guru Nanak and directly linked to his own mystical union in his vision of the Divine. McLeod is of the opinion that *sahaj* is a ‘word which at once carries us back into Nath theory and beyond the Nath tradition into the earlier world of tantric Buddhism’. (1996: 153)

The term *visamad* refers to the feeling of being in awe in the presence of the Divine, unarguably the result of having *darśan* of the Divine through a mystical experience. ‘Seeing’ therefore is the absorption of the *man*, through *Nam Simran*, into unity with the Divine, in an inseparable relationship based on utmost love that the bride (symbolising humanity) feels at the ‘sight’ of her Beloved Groom (an allegory for the Divine). The metaphor of a wedding day, in which the bride longs to be united with her Beloved Groom is used on a number of occasions in the Guru Granth Sahib to depict the relationship between humanity and the Divine. The Guru Granth Sahib highlights the ecstatic feelings of the bride when united with her groom; it also illustrates her sorrow and sadness when separated from him. This is a concept that finds expression in the teachings of the Northern Sant tradition and referred to as

*viraha/birha*. Hence meditation on the Name of the Beloved is a remedy for the bride's longing to 'see' her groom:

[T]he practice of *nam simaran* results in experiences which develop progressively as meditation draws the individual nearer and nearer to God, and which find their ultimate perfection in the final absorption of the *man* into Him. The experience of *visamad* is, in this way, both a result of *nam simaran* and a stimulus to more exalted meditation. (McLeod 1996: 219)

In an exploration of the hermeneutics of the Guru Granth Sahib, one finds an inseparable connection between the terms *Hukam* and *Nadar*. *Hukam* is translated as the Will of the Divine, in accordance to which the *atman/jiva*, the eternal self, is granted birth into the human realm, thus bestowed with the golden opportunity to realise the Divine, to have a vision of Ultimate Reality. Indeed, the *gurmukh* is characterised by total submission to the *Hukam* (GGS, Ang 636). According to Gavin Flood, since the root verb for *darśan* is *drś*, 'to see', the term therefore implies a vision of the world, of Ultimate Reality (1996: 224), and this finds a repeated expression in the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib. *Darśan* from the Sikhi perspective therefore is not to be within the gaze of the Divine through *puja* to a *murti*, but rather to live in accordance with the *Hukam* through selfless service, *Nam Simran*, and a total submission to Ultimate Reality through *bhakti*. It is thus through *Nadar* that the experience of 'meeting' the Divine through *darśan* is bestowed upon the *gurmukh*. Individual effort is paramount in the bestowal of *Nadar*, *darśan* of the Divine is therefore the fruit of one's selfless actions and *bhakti* through *Nam Simran*:

ਤੇਰੇ ਦਰਸਨ ਕਉ ਬਲਿਹਾਰਣੈ ਤੁਸਿ ਦਿਤਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ

*I would sacrifice myself for your darśan, you have blessed me with the Ambrosial Name of the Divine.*

According to Sikh tradition, teachings, or the ‘word’ (*bani*) concerning the Ultimate Divine and knowledge relating to Reality were revealed to Guru Nanak during a three-day disappearance when he was taken to the ‘court’ of the Divine. This marks the beginning of Nanak’s Guruship, during which he, accompanied by his two closest companions, Mardana and Bala, imparted that divinely received knowledge and wisdom to his followers. It is this ‘seeing’ of the totally formless and transcendent Divine by Guru Nanak which marks the genesis of the Sikh Faith, ‘a vision which formed the foundations of the Sikh religion’ (Kaur Singh 1993: 18). Kaur Singh goes on to compare Guru Nanak’s experience with that of Arjuna’s cosmic vision of the Divine in the *Bhagavad Gita* (ibid.). Whereas Arjuna’s experience is described as the imparting of knowledge of the infinite forms of the Divine, for Guru Nanak *darśan* is the experience of Ultimate knowledge by realising the all-pervading nature of *Akal Purakh*, one of the many names for the Ultimate Divine used in the Guru Granth Sahib. Teachings emphasising the formless nature of the Divine are, therefore, fundamental to Sikh belief. Indeed, the feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the transcendent presents a ‘holistic way of imagining and experiencing sacred power that can itself be a mode of [female] empowerment’ (ibid.: 5). Mandair further places emphasis upon the *experiential* aspect of Ultimate Reality, as something that is ‘*experienced* all the time, rather than simply comprehended’ (2013: 135). Here again the practical application of such teachings is expressed through the practices of *Nam Japna* and the singing and hearing of *kirtan* for its aesthetic as well as mystical experience of *darśan*.

The concept of the unity of the Divine according to Sikhi is one which sees the world, indeed the universe, and every material aspect of creation as existing within the Ultimate Divine.

Hence, the Divine is both personal, and yet also totally transcendent. The Guru Granth Sahib conceptualises the Divine as *nirguna*, which essentially alludes to the Divine as being formless, transcendent and incomprehensible. Nevertheless, one of Sikhi's core principles is that of the importance of *bhakti* as essential in the *man*'s longing for *darśan*. In this respect the Divine becomes *saguna*, manifest in creation, so that human beings can experience *sahaj*, union with the immanent Divine. Those who ignore the initial *Nadar*, which is the granting of the human birth, remain on the ignorant level of a *manmukh*, whereas the *gurmukh* is one characterised by the loss of the *haumai*, the ego, and portrays a higher level of consciousness in their daily conduct through the experience of the *darśan* of *Waheguru*:

ਮੇਰੀ ਅਹੰ ਜਾਇ ਦਰਸਨ ਪਾਵਤ ਹੇ ॥

*My ego is gone; I have obtained the Blessed Vision of darśan.*

(GGS, Ang 830)

In this respect, *darśan* according to Sikhi, is both 'seeing' as well as 'being seen' by the Divine (Beckerlegge 2001). Guru Arjan clearly makes the point that 'seeing' is indeed the realisation of the immanent Divine:

ਸੇ ਨੇਤ੍ਰ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ਜਿਨੀ ਦਰਸਨੁ ਪੇਖਾ ॥

*Those eyes which behold darśan are approved and accepted.*

(GGS, Ang 103)

*Nadar*, which is also expressed as *nazar*, 'vision', is thus expressed as 'Grace', a gift from the Divine; *Nadar* is essentially to 'be seen' by the Divine (GGS, Ang 465). 'Seeing' is used metaphorically as 'knowing'; both terms are fundamentally linked to one another. The

Sanskrit translation of the term *darśana*, as noted above alludes to both the Six Schools of Indian Philosophy (knowledge), as well as a vision of the Divine (sight). Furthermore, ‘the Sanskrit root *vid*, meaning “to know”, is etymologically related to the Latin *videre* = to see, and to the Greek *oida* = to know ...’ (Kaur Singh 1993: 20). For Guru Ram Das, good fortune, which we may interpret as the bestowal of *Nadar*, is inextricably linked to good deeds; those individuals who fail to recognise the *Hukam* are indeed unfortunate, since *darśan* is a vision of Reality for the fortunate to perceive the Truth:

ਬਿਨੁ ਭਾਗਾ ਦਰਸਨੁ ਨਾ ਬੀਐ ਭਾਗਹੀਣ ਬਹਿ ਰੋਇ ॥

*Darśan is unattainable without good fortune, the unfortunate sit and cry.*

(GGS, Ang 41)

This would imply that the repudiation of *darśan* brings misery since the *manmukh* remains attached to the temporary lures of the physical world; the term used for this attachment in the Guru Granth Sahib is *maya*. *Maya* here is not the world-rejecting concept found in the monism of *advaita*, rather Sikhi teaches that the created world is very much real – it is the *karam bhumi*, the action ground, in which the individual transcends, through effort, the conscience to that of the level of the *gurmukh*, at which *darśan* results in the experiencing and realising of the formless Divine:

ਨੇਤ੍ਰੁ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਪੇਖਤ ਹੀ ਦਰਸ ॥

*My eyes are purified, beholding the Blessed Vision of darśan.*

(GGS, Ang 201)

*Darśan* in popular Sikh practice also refers to the physical act of bowing down, in respect, to the Guru Granth Sahib. This is usually carried out in the gurdwara, where the burning of incense activates the mind in sacred space. In this respect, *darśan* is indeed the vision (knowledge) of the Divine, as encapsulated in the revealed *bani* of the Gurus and the Hindu and Muslim Bhagats whose *bani* is contained in the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. It is useful to repeat here that the term gurdwara translates as the ‘door to the Guru’, that is to the eternal Guru installed within the throne-like structure of the *palki*. A gurdwara is not ‘the house of God’. The very use of the term ‘God’ is problematic in the Sikh context due to its masculine connotations which contradict the gender-free and utterly formless Divine according to the Sikhi perspective.

Returning to the *darśan* of the Guru Granth Sahib, the implications of its online availability deserves a mention. Sikhs go to great lengths to preserve the sanctity of the eternal Guru such as placing it at a higher level, covering it in special cloths (*rumalas*) and other practical measures with underlying symbolic significance which emphasise its status of royalty and hence utmost importance. A tremendous level of care and respect is undertaken by Sikhs to avoid any *beadbi*, disrespect, towards the eternal Guru. But how does this operate in cyberspace? How does one ensure that there is no *beadbi* towards the online Guru? Scheifinger (2008) explores the implications of *darśan* online for Hindus and acknowledges some interesting issues associated with online authority in the Hindu world; however, this is often overlooked in relation to online versions of the Guru Granth Sahib.

### **The inseparable relationship between *bhakti* and *darśan***

The human predicament is the *atman*'s (the eternal self/soul's) entrapment in *samsara*, the cycle of continuous death and rebirth. Such transmigration of the eternal self is the result of

attachment to worldly pleasures, as characterized by the predominance of the *haumai*, the ego. As remarked earlier, birth into the human realm is, according to the Guru Granth Sahib, the golden opportunity through which the Divine can be realised through *darśan* (GGS, Ang 176), which is synonymous with *Nadar*, the gift of ‘vision’. It is emphasised however, that the human birth is regarded as the highest of all births in Sikhism. It is the human birth alone, through which individual effort is of paramount importance towards *mukti*, the atman’s release from the cycle of *samsara*. Since the *haumai* is the obstacle in Divine realisation, it must be overcome through a personal and loving relationship with the Divine through *bhakti*. Contemplation on the Name of the Divine, which has become the core foundation of *Nam Simran* in Sikhi, is a distinguishing pillar of Sikh thought. Hence the path, the *marga*, of *bhakti* is placed on a pedestal in Sikh philosophy. However, the final release from *samsara* is dependent wholly upon the bestowal of *Nadar*, individual efforts alone cannot guarantee *mukti*. The *manmukh* remains alienated from the Divine and chooses not to respond to the bestowal of *darśan/Nadar*, and hence remains bound to the cycle of *samsara*.

The path to God involves primarily meditation upon the Name of God, that is *Nam Simran*. The *gurmukh* who meditates upon the *Nam* (Name) stands in opposition to the five vices of *kam* (lust), *krodh* (anger), *lobh* (greed), *moh* (attachment) and *ahankar* (pride). Meditation on the Name enables the *gurmukh* to become detached from the *samsaric* hold of worldly attachments. The path towards *mukti* can also be found through *Sabad*, listening to the words of the Guru Granth Sahib. The concept of *Sabad* was incorporated into Guru Nanak’s theology from the Northern Sant tradition, to describe the mystical ‘sound’ experienced at the climax of the *hatha-yoga* technique (McLeod and Schomer 1987: 229–250).

What then is the ultimate deciding factor in whether a vision of the Divine is granted? Is it human effort or Divine Grace? Surely, in order for the human birth to be regarded as the golden opportunity to ‘see’ the Divine, effort on part of the individual is paramount? This dilemma is examined in the context of what is known as the *panch-khand*. This is the transition from the *manmukh* to the *gurmukh* via five stages or ‘realms’. The *panch-khand* concept unites both concepts of individual effort and Divine ‘Grace’ in ‘seeing’ and thus realising the Divine through each evolutionary stage in elevating the conscience to the higher level. The first stage is that of *Dharam khand*, an understanding of the law of cause and effect in the universe both physically and morally. This stage is where the Divine has bestowed *Nadar* on the *atman* to be reborn into the human realm. The next *khand* is that of *Gian*, translated as the realm of knowledge (*gian* is synonymous with the term *jnana* in a dualistic understanding of Reality) in the sense that it widens an individual’s spiritual consciousness. It is in this realm that one’s *haumai* is overcome as a result of acknowledging the *Hukam*. The third stage in the progression of elevated consciousness is that of *Saram khand* – the realm of effort. This inevitably is the stage of selfless actions and utmost devotion to the Divine as a result of the vision of the Divine through *darśan*. The next evolutionary stage is that of *Karam khand*, the realm of Ultimate *Nadar*. The ultimate goal of Sikhi is to enter the final and fifth realm of Truth, *Sach khand*. This is the realm of the *jivanmukt*, the one whose *atman* has united with the Divine. Importantly, this five-stage transition is based on the concept of dualism, where the Divine is always over and above all that has been created.

### ***Darśan* of Sants and Babas**

The term Sant, used interchangeably with Baba in a Punjabi context, refers to a person of spiritual piety, and bears similarity to the concept and role of a Saint in popular usage. The role of the Sant and/or Baba is becoming increasingly important in contemporary Sikh

practice in relation to the concept of *darśan*. Living Sants and Babas are becoming the channels through which many Sikhs perceive *darśan* very much in the context of *seeing and being seen* (Eck 1998: 3). Followers of such Sants and Babas flock in their masses to have *darśan*, 'to see' these perceived personifications of elevated conscience, very often conceived of as possessing divinity themselves in the eyes of their followers. It would thus not be incorrect to label many of these followers as the devotees of such individuals whom are believed to have powers to bestow *darśan* on their followers (Cox and Robinson 2006). Although Sikhi is generally cautious about such elevated individuals, many Sants and Babas in the Sikh context have become rather renowned for a 'back to Sikhi' approach, as Tatla highlights:

Among the factors which have sustained the religious and cultural orientation of Sikhs in Britain, the role of the visiting Sants is of crucial importance. Sants have shaped the lives of many of their Sikh disciples directly, inspiring others to uphold the religious ideals, and have contributed in several ways to the community's causes and institutions (1992: 349).

Diversity amongst the Sikhs in relation to Sant-orientated groups have been discussed in Takhar (2005). Of particular importance here are the Namdharis and the followers of the Sants of the Nishkam Sewak Jatha. The former are often regarded as heretics by the Panth (global Sikh community) since they explicitly refer to their leaders as Gurus, in continuation of the line of Sikh human Gurus, thus rejecting the fundamental Sikh belief in the Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs, as proclaimed by Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 CE. Takhar (2005: 59–88) provides a detailed discussion of the Namdhari rejection of the Adi Granth<sup>2</sup> as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Namdharis do not place the Adi Granth in the *palki*,

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<sup>2</sup> The term Adi Granth was used for the Sikh scripture when it was compiled by the fifth Guru Arjan in 1603–1604. In 1708, according to popular Sikh belief, it became the eternal Guru for the Sikhs, hence the term Guru Granth Sahib was used. Because the Namdharis deny this belief, they do not acknowledge the Adi Granth as the eternal Guru.

and *darśan* in their places of worship, referred to as *bhawans*, revolves around a photograph of the present living Guru in his physical absence. The Namdhari Guru is believed to possess divine powers to bestow *darśan* on his followers. His visit to Britain for example, is a time for British Namdharis to assemble in mass in order to have ‘sight’ of him and thus receive his blessing (Takhar 2014: 354–356).

The leaders of the Nishkam Sewak Jatha are referred to as Sants and Babas rather than Gurus. In this respect the Nishkam Sewak Jatha and its followers are readily accepted as Sikhs within the Panth at large, due to the fact that they revere the Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru and place great emphasis on becoming initiated into the Khalsa fold. However, the position of their Sants and Babas, amongst followers, is an indication of their belief that *darśan* of the present living Baba, Mohinder Singh, is akin to being bestowed with Divine blessings (see Takhar 2005: 38–58).

Both Baba Mohinder Singh, as well as the Namdhari Guru, Udhay Singh, are able to physically see and touch their followers, and they are believed to be, in the eyes of their followers, direct pathways to the Divine. In this respect, the senses of touch and sight both become relevant in the bestowal of *darśan* in the contemporary sense of living Gurus, Sants and Babas (Eck 1998: 9). Cox and Robinson’s (2006) detailed study of the Sachkand Nanak Dham Sants, as well as Nesbitt’s research on the Nanaksar Sants (1985) also observe such veneration of living spiritual leaders by their devotees and followers. Juergensmeyer, through his work on the Radhasoami Sants, the followers/adherents of whom float on the fuzzy boundaries between Punjabi Hindu and Sikh identity,<sup>3</sup> succinctly states that:

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<sup>3</sup> The fuzzy boundaries between a Hindu, Sufi and Sikh Identity is particularly relevant to the Sindhi community. See Ramey, S. W (2008). *Hindu, Sufi or Sikh: Contested Practices and identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

[a]mong village followers of the movement especially, the sacred sight (*darśan*) of the living Master has powerful, even healing qualities. I have seen mothers rush to hold up their sick children as the automobile of the present Master ... hurries past .... (1987: 342).

The concept of *darśan* thus remains pivotal in many Punjabi traditions which may not sit neatly within the boundary of either being Hindu or Sikh, a further example of which is the Wolverhampton-based *Ek Niwas* following of Baba Balaknath (see Takhar and Jacobs 2011). LaBrack's observation of the veneration of Sikhs towards living Sants in America, is easily transferable to beliefs amongst Sikhs on a global level. He states:

[T]he presence of a Sant is in itself edifying and a spiritual boost to the community. The ideas and concepts associated with *darśan* are still very much alive, even among second-generation American-born Punjabi Sikh children .... (1987: 266).

He also makes the point, however, that such veneration is not supported in the teachings of Sikhi (ibid.: 268).

In conclusion, Sikhi – that is the body of teachings primarily from the Guru Granth Sahib – acknowledges that 'seeing' the formless, incomprehensible Divine involves utmost acceptance of the Divine Will, the *Hukam*. A prerequisite to such knowledge is the abandonment of the ego, the *haumai*. With its etymology in the Sanskrit root *dṛś* (to see/vision), *darśan* in its relation to a 'sight and seeing' is the sense that is discussed at length in the Indian religions, particularly Hindu and Sikh, and all those that fall within the blurred boundaries which lie between the two. So how does 'seeing' the divine through a *murti* compare with the seeing of the Divine according to Sikhi? For the latter, there are numerous teachings in the Guru Granth Sahib which imply that *darśan* is the 'experiencing' of the immanence of the Divine, 'seeing' the self in relation to Ultimate Reality, where sight is used as a metaphor for the experience of *sahaj*. The practical steps towards *sahaj* and thus *darśan*

of the Divine is through practices such as keeping the company of the *sangat*, the singing and hearing of *kirtan*, and individual as well as communal meditation in the form of *Nam Japna* and physical yoga. Sikh sectarian movements with living Sants, Babas and Gurus, have their own unique practices associated with the concept of *darśan*, the most prominent of which are the seeking of blessings from the revered spiritual leader.

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