



UNDERSTANDING OF RITUALS AND PRACTICES AT THE GURDWARA SRI JANAM ASTHAN, NANKANA SAHIB

AD Hassan Sajanka*

Ph D scholar, Department of Pakistan studies, Government College University Faisalabad

Zoni.shani@gmail.com

Dr. Abdul Qadir Mushtaq

Professor, Chairperson Department of Pakistan studies, Government College University
Faisalabad

progcu@gmail.com

Abstract:

This research examined the rituals and the interfaith relationship of a one of the holiest Sikh holy places of Punjab, the Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, Pakistan, the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The study examined how the practices carried out at the Gurdwara serve as sources of religious piety, group belongingness, cultural memory and interreligion co-existence in a place defined by hundreds of years of shared sacred practices. The theoretical background, based on the theory of ritual and communitas developed by Victor Turner (1969). The practices of the Gurdwara are performative and transformative that create collective affect and temporary social egalitarianism. The theory of religious pluralism and interfaith spatiality by Diana Eck (2001) views the Gurdwara as a dialogic sacred space in which Sikhs, Muslim and other visitors engage in a common spiritual experience. This ethnographic study design was qualitative. A Six month of immersion fieldwork involving participant observation, field notes, and thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with granthis (scripture readers), pilgrims, and local residents of various faith backgrounds. A six section culturally modified interview guide was piloted. Field notes were made on the spatial arrangement, affective atmosphere and ritual performances at some of the most significant events that included prakash (scriptural opening), langar (community kitchen), kirtan (devotional singing) and Gurburab celebrations. They were analyzed thematically according to Braun and Clarke (2006) and came up with four core themes, which included: ritual meaning, spiritual emotion, sacred community, and collective identity. It has been found that kirtan, langar, and seva (voluntary service) as ethical and inclusive practices represent the vision of equality and oneness of humanity that Guru Nanak provides, which creates what Turner describes as a communitas of the sacred. The Gurdwara turns into a living interfaith place whereby Sikh ethics of humility and service are

combined with more general ethics of pluralism and hospitality. The research provides new ethnographic knowledge in anthropology of Sikhism, ritual studies and interfaith dialogue in South Asia. It is a strength that it maintained the field engagement, incorporation of the voices of the participants, and inclusion of the lived religious experience and theoretical analysis.

Keywords: Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, Sikh rituals, Guru Nanak, *communitas*, sacred space, interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, kirtan, langar, Punjab, Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION:

This research attempts to explore the rituals and practices to understand what they meant in the formation of individuals and collective identity. Gurdwara Janam Asthan go hand in hand with rich historical narratives and as strong spiritual interpretations of Sikhism. The poetry of Baba Fareed was preserved in Sikh Holy Scripture Guru Granth Sahib stories that tell a story of an historical, spiritual dialogue between the two communities. The fact is that there coexisted and often influenced one another while they existed within the same geographical and cultural environment, as the heart of Punjab. The site is important for Sikh scholars alike, and for scholars interested in interfaith relations, ritual practices, and sacred geography.

This research treats religious rituals carried out at the sacred space and approaches them from multiple scholarly perspectives to focus on their meanings and functions. In order to situate the local practices with theoretically broader framework, this study is based on classical theories like Durkheim's collective religious experience, Geertz's interpretation of symbol and meanings, and Erikson's concept of identity development as similarly contemporary studies on sociologies, anthropologies, and interfaith dialogue. It also cursorily addresses among other features, modern realities like politicization of religion, state influence, and changing patterns of religious authority in the perspective of postcolonial Pakistan as in a religious landscape.

The research is based on ethnographic and historical approach and drawn from available textual sources as well as field observation (where possible) and is framed conscious of region's colonial legacy, Partition trauma and ever present communal tensions. Yet rather than the usual account of all conflict, this study portrays this coexistence, spiritual sharing and cultural bonding that remain alive in the rituals, the narratives and daily service at these sacred sites.

The study explores the broader meaning of sacred spaces in the South Asian context and second, proceeds to discuss the role of ritual in identity formation and community cohesion. The Gurdwara Janam Asthan introduced as religious institutions as well as interfaith spaces of memory, moral authority, and cultural resilience. The research seeks to contribute to that outcome by first understanding how these sacred places are lived, symbolically, and historiographical linked to the historical experience of colonial rule and postcolonial conditions.

1.1 Background of the Study

The culturally fertile land of Punjab has been a home to gurdwaras as sacred sites of worship along with memory for communal identity. The extremely sacred Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan of Nankana Sahib represent the place which are visited by millions of devotees every year emanating from different but blending religious traditions of Sikhism respectively. Although founded in Sikhism's historical legacies, these are becoming places where memory sacred, communal and ritual come together in important ways. The historical background, their ritualistic practices, their communal symbolism all say something very important about the general dynamics of religious life, of the relations between communities, of the changes at the socio political level in South Asia.

Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan at Nankana Sahib, which is considered as the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, founder of Sikh faith, is a sacred geography in which spiritual reverence combines with historical notes. While serving for the nucleus for Sikh identity and memory, the Gurdwara embodies Guru Nanak's values of humility, equality and devotion (Bainiwal, 2023). It has further facilitated Sikh diasporic attachment to the religious homeland post Partition. The kirtan, Ardas and kar seva rituals help reinforce theological ethos of Sikhism as well as a sense of communal continuity among different generations. For Paine (2003), the Sikh pilgrimage to such sites is by its very nature ambiguous, and what it means to devote oneself is complicated in its modern, postcolonial form by an inherent mix of religious, emotional, and national sentiment.

The political and cultural environs, however, do not isolate these spiritual practices. Evolution are through time responding to the historic transformation of the region like colonial intervention, Partition and modern nation state. As Eaton (1984:457) points out, policies which reconfigured the autonomous authority of Sufi shrines often sought to secularize and bureaucratize religions authority. In the same way, the site of Nankana Sahib was also witness to instances of both veneration and violence, such as the Nankana Massacre of 1921, which contributed in supplicating the place in Sikh collective memory (Shrines, 2023). Therefore, these sacred places cannot be conceived of as static monuments of piety but rather as living, historical institutions with layer histories, political implications and coming ritual forms.

The present study is important within the rich historical, cultural and spiritual landscape from which this draws. This research, by means of investigating the rituals and practices at Gurdwara Janam Asthan, attempts to rediscover the religious meanings of these acts, and how they facilitate the mediation of identity, memory and cross communal relationship. The exploration of the site which also allows to better understand how Sikh sacred practices have responded to modern imperatives, grappled with the postcolonial province, and to articulate an enduring religious legitimacy in an age of flux.

1.2 Problem Statement

As is well known, particularly to students of religion, the South Asian region, and more particularly Punjab, has been historically a region of great religious diversity and intercommunal interaction. From the time of Buda and Mohammad (S.A.W), and Muslims,

Sikhs, Hindus and others have all lived in close proximity to one another. They lived not only in proximity but in fact shared commonly the space ground of the city and in fact the cultural values, the linguistic traditions and even perhaps sacred sites. But the contemporary academic discourse on religion in South Asia equally predominates either with rigid sectarian interpretations or pigeonholed post Partition political narratives that discourse division and conflict. The result has been little opportunity for the scholar to take up serious consideration of the lived practice of religious syncretism, interfaith ritual, and communal coexistence that continues to exist in daily life, particularly at the local sacred.

Even though the religious orders can be separated by their religions, the the Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib provide excellent case study whereby shared spiritual n cultural traditions are not only remembered, but also practiced through public rituals and communal gatherings. Guru Granth Sahib or the respect that Sikhs have for Sufi saints or the generosity of Muslim communities towards Sikh pilgrims are some instances where in a sacred space, religious boundaries become porous. However, these concepts remain under researched largely within the academic literature with little research on it in Pakistan, a country where talks about interfaith harmony are extremely politicized or are not talked about at all.

A closer look at the ritual practices of the site is highly necessary to analyze how these practices help maintain a shared spiritual memory and how they facilitate the peaceful coexistence across religious lines. This research must also investigate the capstone of the sacred practices, how state policies, historical narratives, and social changes create opportunities and constraints from which these sacred practices can serve as a bridge for communities or are constrained from performing this role. As a result, the main issue that this dissertation addresses is the absence of critical academic discussion on sacred spaces as dynamic interfaith realms of every day rituals that may promote religious syncretism while nourishing communal peace, although there is war and conflicts raging in the background. This research focuses on the Gurdwara Janam Asthan in order to trace the ways in which the lived rituals and devotions of religion both established and continue to shape inclusive spiritual identities and cultural relationships in the Punjab region of Pakistan.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The approach of this research is a critical analysis of ritual practices of Pakistan's most historically and spiritually significant religious site, Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib.. The objectives of this study are also as follows:

- To identify religious rituals and practices at the Gurdwara Janam Asthan.
- To Understand how religious rituals help developing the religious evolutionary process of the personal faith, communal spirituality and the religious commitment of devotees at this sacred place.
- To critically locating the Gurdwara Janam Asthan in relation to the historical and cultural background of the South Asian religious sites

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the key rituals and practices observed at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib?
2. What roles do these rituals and practices play in promoting religious pluralism, syncretism within the multicultural societies of India and contemporary Pakistan?
3. How do specific practices and rituals, such as prayers, music, and langar (community kitchen, free food), shape the religious identities and community engagement at the Gurdwaras?

1.5 Scope and Significance of the Study

The focus of this study is on the religious rituals and practices elaborated during rituals at Pakistan's most historic sacred site, Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib. This research aims only at discussing the ritual expressions, the devotional practices, and the communal activities of the location in order to understand how these expressions and practices affect intra faith and inter faith relationships in the region. In the study, there are rituals like collective prayer and devotional music (kirtan).

It is significant in that it is interfaith relevant. Mapping and examining when and how figures, such as Sri Janam Asthan, who are revered in Sikh traditions and the mutual respect observed between Muslims and Sikhs with regard to Sikh pilgrimages to sites in Pakistan act as the basis for the project's investigations into how religious spaces can serve as bridges rather than barriers. Along with an analysis of the rituals at site at theological level, the social and relational aspect of the ritual are also explored and discussed for how they encourage tolerance and a sense of shared cultural identity as tools for peaceful coexistence in a context fraught with the legacy of Partition and communal tensions. Further, this research has significance for research on South Asian syncretic religious traditions. In consideration of how faith, culture, and memory intersect, the study presented here joins a field of interdisciplinary research which understands South Asian religiosity as multifaceted and multiple as well as often collaborative.

1.6 Theoretical Framework for Current Study

This study utilizes ritual theory as well as interfaith dialogue as its theoretical underpinnings in order to understand the religious practice that take place in the Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib. We gain far more insight into how rituals are used to develop spiritual devotion, social cohesion, community relationships, communal identity and interfaith relations. This research is mainly informed by the two theoretical approaches of Victor Turner's theory of ritual and communitas, and conceptual discourse on religious pluralism and interfaith spatiality as practiced by Diana Eck and other scholars.

1.6.1 Turner's Theory of Ritual and Communitas

The rituals at both sacred sites can be studied as an application of Victor Turner's theory, as explained in *The Ritual Process; Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969). Rituals were, for Turner, something performative and transformative not simply a symbolic ceremony. Turner

(1969) introduced the concept of liminality, a transitional phase of rituals and a feeling of *communitas*, by which is meant social equality and emotion sharing with other participants in a transitional condition (Turner, 1969). In particular, these are ideas that have direct applicability to the world of pilgrimage and pilgrimage to shrines and gurdwaras where people from highly diverse backgrounds congregate to partake in one spiritual community for a while. Turner's theory also informs us about the emotional and social aspects of ritual performance – how ritualizes, when they repeat a ritual performance, get transformed spiritually.

1.6.2 Rituals as Vehicles for Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Pluralism

The second theoretical component of this study develops from Turner and it also provides a good starting point for understanding the internal dynamics of ritual, however it expands upon the role of sacred spaces and rituals in shaping interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism. In borrowing especially from Diana Eck's (2001) and others' works on shared religious space, this study analyses gurdwara as contact zones where people of various faith systems conduct overlapping practices and mutual respect.

This space can also be understood as liminal zones in the sense provided by Turner and later used by Eck as spaces where traditional religious boundaries are softened. In the Punjab area where the history of Muslims and Sikhs are entangled, in these liminal spaces new forms of cultural memory and shared identity come to being. The spaces in which the repetition of inclusive rituals takes place play a function in reinforcing the group ties in such spaces and also provide the opportunity of intergroup empathy and symbolic reconciliation.

1.6.3 Integration of Theories

This research uses Turner's theory of ritual in affiliation with the interfaith dialogue framework and spiritual space to develop a broad analytical model. It makes possible a critical reading of ritual as an activity of community building and also as a crane for catching interfaith understanding. In the Pakistani context where religious coexistence is a long history, political and sectarian tensions often drown any talk of it, this integrated framework is particularly timely. This is how the Gurdwara Janam Asthan are revealed not just as pilgrimages to be visited but social cultural and ethical institutions whose values are imbedded into social life agencies for preserving the common heritage. Thus the theoretical framework enables the study to look at how the ritual activities, such as devotional music, communal meals, or collective prayers, influence the construction of religious identity, spiritual experience and respect intercommunal.

2. Review of Literature

The role of rituals and sacred spaces in religious life, distinct key theories must be carefully engaged with by religion, sociological and anthropological foundations. A number of scholars over the last century have variously provided frameworks explaining how rituals can and do work as acts of worship, but also as tools that play significant roles in forming society, identity, and perception of space. Key theoretical contributions from Émile Durkheim, Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Mircea Eliade, as well as Jonathan Z. Smith are reviewed for their

importance in analyzing rituals and practices connected with the Gurdwara Sri sahib Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib.

Further discussion was added by Jonathan Z. Smith (1987) in his book *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, in which he expanded the role of place in religious life. He said that sacred spaces are not intrinsic to something's holiness, but are made holy. For Smith, the fact of sacredness does not change depending on physical features, but rather repetitive acts that make physical features assume meaning. In the South Asian context this is especially relevant since shrines and gurdwaras continually change through the acts of veneration, storytelling and multiple community rituals over time.

The existence of Gurdwaras has greatly influenced the religious landscape of pre and post Partition Punjab and the two establishments continue to run as living spiritual and cultural institutions. The evolution of these ancient holy places, their divine authority, their link with popular culture, and their function in interfaith concordance as well as religious connivance have been a matter of scholarly interest from both a historical vantage point and from a contemporary point of view. The following item gives a scholarly foundation for the contemporary study by surveying key academic contributions that have investigated the legacy and sacred significance of Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib.

In his early work *The Life and Doctrine of Guru Nanak* (1965), W.H. McLeod gives a historical reconstruction of Guru Nanak's life and teachings. According to McLeod, Guru Nanak's rejection of the caste system, idol worship, and ritualism, formed the basis of Sikh rituals we see at present in Gurdwaras. Devotional singing (kirtan), scriptural reading and equality in religious gatherings became the focus of the Sikh congregational life. Drawing on this analysis, McLeod's essay offers a starting point to comprehend how rituals performed by Gurdwaras—that embody Nanak's values—are infused with spirituality as well as the ability to articulate questions of social justice.

Singh (1992) and Singh D. P. (2019) further elaborate how Guru Nanak's teachings are of spiritual importance. Singh (1992) in the book titled *Guru Nanak: The Prophet of a Unique Ideology* argues that the Gurdwara is not only place of worship but also Centre for ethical learning and social reform. Through rituals at Gurdwaras the Guru Nanak's philosophy of Naam Japna (remembrance of God), Kirat Karni (honest living) and Vand Chakna (sharing with others) is regularly practised especially the tradition of langar. Further, in a world where there are religious conflicts and social divisions, Guru Nanak's teachings are considered universal (or globally valid), as highlighted by Singh D. P. (2019). His work backs the view of Gurdwara Janam Asthan as a place of rituals not just to preserve heritage but also to teach equality and inclusivity.

Whereas, Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan plays a special role in Sikh religious identity as the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and occupies a central position with regards to Sikh pilgrimage traditions. The gurdwara is a symbol of religious coexistence, as Abbasi (2018) points out, being in Muslim majority Pakistan it still receives Sikh pilgrims from India and the diaspora. Practical interfaith engagement which includes shared management, state facilitation, and cross border pilgrimages are evident even in the case of a politically sensitive context.

Myrvold (2024) in turn delves more into historical dimensions and to document the life of the Nankana Massacre, which was a significant event in Sikh history, which directly led to the passage of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, which governed gurdwara management control in British India. Secondly, Myrvold's detailed study of gurdwara legislation uncovers the ways in which sacred sites are the proper subject of political resistance, identity formation, and legal contestation, before they become, as if casually, religious institutions. The histories of these laws and politics shed light on how ritual in gurdwaras including singing and giving the free food meals known as langar are forms of community autonomy and spiritual sovereignty.

In his work Singh (2021) and Singh S. H. (2009) explore how Sikhs sacred sites are cultural dimensions that they analyze based on the philosophical and the ethical grounds of the Sikh rituals, such as service (seva), remembrance of God (simran) and equality. The values embodied in these practices of communal meal (langar) and recitation of Guru Granth Sahib is something which is performed every day at the Gurdwara Janam Asthan. Even more scholars such as Riat (2013) have gone further on the same topic to examine the theological underpinnings of such rituals, particularly in the context of colonial-era reforms and contemporary definitions of what it means to be a Sikh.

Ashraf, Jathol, and Akhter (2021) state that shrine and gurdwara are space for peace building and cultural diplomacy in the perspective of religious tourism. It is claimed that religious tourism, not least that pertaining to Sikh pilgrims visiting Pakistan, alleviates political tensions, and produces mutual understanding and respect resulting from common spiritual experiences. Also, Gill and Pinkney (2018) have studied the role of Sikh heritage sites in Punjab in establishing a sense of personal spirituality as well as collective memory and anti-colonial discourses. The text of the final essay is Habib's reflections on Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and the Travels of Guru Nanak, which construct sacred geographies that serve as a basis for Sikh ritual life. The relic of this sacred space engages this reading by reinforcing the idea that sacred space is fluid and inspired, is imagined and owned rather than static and passive, is told through pilgrimage and storytelling.

The socio political context of Guru Nanak's concept is discussed by Puri (1991) from a historical political approach. According to him, the Gurdwara rituals are not just spiritual, they are also responses to historical injustice, inequality, etc. One way in which the daily rituals came as a social equalizer in a caste and privilege divided society was through the practice of langar. This analysis by Puri is insightful in illuminating to what extent rituals inside Gurdwaras help to keep the Gurdwaras in a revolutionary light by challenging hierarchies and reinforcing solidarity within a community.

In *Guru Nanak's Life and Legacy: An Appraisal*, Mann (2010) adopts a reflective approach to agree with the lasting influence of Guru Nanak's vision on Sikh institutions. He posits that Guru Nanak's idea of sangat (holy congregation), as the determining concept of Gurdwara, which focuses on the collective spiritual journey as opposed to individualistic piety, lies at the heart of Gurdwara's ritual culture. Visitors at Gurdwara Janam Asthan participate in group worship, listen to kirtan, and share in langar, all of which contribute to shared spiritual and cultural experience between the worshippers.

These studies suggest that Sikh rituals performed at Gurdwaras and specifically at Gurdwara Janam Asthan are not merely religious customs. They are the embodiments of Guru Nanak's ethical, spiritual and social vision. They bring about equality, service, remembrance, and unity for the purpose of Sikh collective identity. In these ways, Gurdwaras are not only living institutions but also serve the legacy of Guru Nanak by spreading his message in very practical, inclusive, and accessible ways through daily practices like Ardaas, Kirtan and Langar, say scholars. Although the Christianity and philosophy as well as theology of these practices have been extensively written about, there remains a dearth of ethnographic studies of how these rituals are experienced today, in particular in interfaith spaces like Nankana Sahib. This dissertation fills some of the gap thus, by looking at the lived experiences of ritual participation at the Gurdwara Janam Asthan, analyzing their influences on religious identity and interfaith relationship in modern day Pakistan.

Sikh gurdwaras are seen to be neither one sealed from Indian 'contamination,' nor merely Indian responses to Islamic and Sikh traditions respectively. Instead, they are both conducted and dynamic social, cultural and political institutions still very much in motion and working their tribulations, particularly in shaping religious identities and interfaith relationships in South Asia. Yet much of the previous research either deals with one tradition on its own or addresses the coexistence on a general level. There is also a call for comparative, ethnographic work on the performance of, experience of, and interpretations of rituals at Gurdwara Janam Asthan as sacred sites. The gap this study intends to fill is focused on a study examining rituals as lived practice and how those rituals, in turn, shape devotional life and interfaith interactions in the contemporary context.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study was executed through qualitative case study at main sacred site in Punjab, Pakistan: the Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib. Qualitative case study is particularly fit for the present research in that it permits an in depth exploration of interrelated spiritual, social and cultural phenomena as they are lived and experienced in certain contexts (Yin, 2018). The study focuses on this location in order to generate an understanding of how prayer, devotional music, the practice of value giving, communal meals, and visitors are practiced, interpreted, and experienced by devotees.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection took 6 months and used qualitative methods: ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, and field surveys. Participant observation was the primary mode of data collection and this was carried out at Janam Asthan Gurdwara. The role of the researcher as an observer as participant, meaning that they behaved as participant in the ashram, but then kept an analytical distance, helped them to be in meaningful contact with devotees and, at the same time, stay scientifically detached (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Every day, detailed field notes were taken with regard to all ritual events, social dynamics, spatial arrangements, body language and spontaneous interactions observed in the context of religious activities. Particular attention was paid to ritual practices including Kirtan at

Gurdwara also Langar (community meals) and acts of devotion; such as offerings, prayers and sacred music.

Thirty individuals were interviewed from the site. Religious caretakers (Granthis), local residents, frequent visitors, and workers were all interviewed for the field work. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, with diversity in gender, age and as much as possible religious background taking place. Open ended questions guided the interviews that asked participants for their personal experiences, perceptions of ritual practices, views on the interaction between believers of religions and experiences of spiritual presence at their sites. Interviews in Urdu, Punjabi or English were conducted as per a participant's preference and with consent, and were audio recorded. Thematic analysis was conducted upon the transcriptions translated into codes.

3.3 Instrument

A semi structured interview guide is designed carefully for this study to effectively explore the lived experiences of the religious rituals, spiritual practices and interfaith interactions at the Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib. Specifically to meet this research's cultural, and religious focus as well as Punjab's unique sacred space context, the instrument was developed. The intended goal of this locally constructed tool is to be inclusive and context sensitive, and to help the resource be applicable to Sikh Gurdwaras with their unique theological traditions, ritual performances and community dynamics. The questions in the interview were aimed at being able to gain early and in depth reflections on personal spiritual experiences, the meanings of the rituals, the communal bonds and the shared sacred practices without making assumptions or introducing categories external to oneself. The language of the guide was chosen carefully to reflect linguistic and cultural diversity of participants so that the guide is usable in Urdu, Punjabi or English as preference may be of participants.

3.3.1 Thematic Structure of the Instrument

The sections are organized into six major thematic sections as described below.

1. Capturing participants' personal attachment to the spiritual potentials and frequency of visits to the site.
2. Ritual Practices and Meanings which contain keywords on key religious acts and their emotional or symbolic significance.
3. The pillar of supporting and promoting unity with the wisdom of being human, the shrine or the Gurdwara's role in community, service, and social impact.
4. Understanding roles, responsibilities and interactions of caretakers and volunteers fluent with the sacred space and visitors entering the sacred space.
5. Historical Reflection and Future Outlook – gathering perceptions on change, continuity, and the future of these spaces.

This is Open Reflection, space for more thoughts and lived stories about sacred experience.

Each question was intended to be open-ended so that narrative responses and natural conversation would be encouraged, yet be consistent with the research objectives of the dissertation.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data as it is suitable for identifying recurring patterns and construction of meaningful categories from textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was analyzed in three phases.

1. Interview transcript coding and field note coding on themes that include ritual meaning, community formation, interfaith expressions, spiritual emotion, and symbol of sacred space.
2. To identify the religious practices, meanings and interactions.
3. Interpretation through theoretical lenses specifically, Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* and ritual process, and the framework of interfaith dialogue and shared sacred space.

The study stayed tethered to participants' voices, and followed their expressed feelings to the interpretation, with the connection to the 'bigger picture;' religious pluralism, common traditions, and identification formation.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

The credibility and trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through the use of data triangulation which included the utilization of various methods (Participant Observation, Interviews, and Field surveys), and different sources (Religious Leaders, Visitors, and Workers). Triangulation of the triangulation ensured emerging themes were consistent and researcher bias is reduced (Patton, 2015). Moreover, member checking was done. As a way of ensuring that participants' responses had not been transcribed incorrectly, a few participants were sent transcribed interviews in order to confirm accuracy of responses and for clarification of meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It strengthened the authenticity of the data and guaranteed participants' voices remained the core of the analysis.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Approval of the study was granted by the institutional review board of the university. Written and verbal information was given to participants before data collection about the purpose of the study and informed consent was sought. It was further assured of their right to withdraw from study at any time without consequence. The research process was done in a manner that maintained anonymity and confidentiality of those involved. Religious practices and cultural sensitivities such as observing rituals in sacred spaces were also special care in respecting. The researcher ensured that none of his actions could lead to a disruption in ritual flow and they could cause any disturbance to the worshippers.

Methodology for studying the ritual practices and interfaith dynamics at Gurdwara Janam Asthan, this approach is based in ethnographic fieldwork, semi structured interviews and thematic analysis. Moreover, it offers new views on lived religion in present-day Pakistan, and helps complete the gaps in literature to form an intensive comprehension of how sacred spaces still act as shrines of dedication, personality and interfaith communication.

4. Data Analysis

Being the direct, personal, and inward connectedness with the Divine taught by Baba Nanak and then by the successive Gurus, Sikh devotional practices are rooted in remembrance (naam simran), singing of hymns (kirtan), and service to community (seva). The practices are not simply ritualistic but are part of Sikh vision as an egalitarianism, ethics of living and a practice of discipline. These devotional practices however, acquire added significance at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan at Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak by interweaving historical memory with sacred geography and the contemporary Sikh piety.

The Guru Granth Sahib, the eternal Guru of the Sikhs, is the object of central worship in the gurdwara and is enshrined in the heart of every one of them. Guru Granth Sahib's ritual protocol is reflected in the morning opening ceremony prakash, communal prayer — ardas — and evening resting ceremony sukhasan all of which are performed daily with solemnity and extremity. Apart from these liturgical acts, such as kar seva (voluntary labour), langar (community kitchen), and pilgrimage, are important elements of devotional life at Sri Janam Asthan. Cleaning the precincts, serving food or just being there while people listen to the bani (scripture), the pilgrims reaffirm their spiritual and communal bonds with others doing the same from Pakistan, as well as other parts of the province and the diaspora.

First and most significantly, there exists in Sikhism a theological foundation that is centered on the idea of Onkar, that is, belief in the one God, in which the tenets of Sikhism centre around. Naam Simran (remembrance of the Divine Name), kirat karo (righteous living through honest work), and vand chakko (sharing with others) are all considered as integral aspects for the spiritual growth and concomitant ethical life, all being part of monotheistic vision. It is a space of spiritual reflection, technical learning and community engagement that experiences the divine message of the Messenger of the Guru Granth Sahib through recitation of its liturgy, as well as lived ethical action and community participation.

The sikh principle of ik onkar (oneness of the Godhead) at the base of Sikh devotional life is a robust theological vision articulated by Guru Nanak to be the fundament utterance of the Siks faith. As Khushwant Singh (1988) points out, this was not just a doctrinal assertion but rather a revolutionary call to religious unity across South Asia's fragmented religious landscape of the fifteenth century.

This transformation was central, and central to it was Nanak's presentation of remembrance of the Name of God, Naam Simran, as the highest, most direct form of devotion. Naam Simran was a ritualistic offering or a sacrificial observance similar to institutional religion, but it was a personal and a democratic spiritual act open to all, without literacy; caste; no religious training etc.

The backbone of Sachachara, that is, truthful or righteous living, as Nanak saw it, was based on this one's divine remembrance and ethical responsibility. Devotion without righteousness is hollow, he had proclaimed in Saidpur, amidst the ruins created by the invasion of Babar. Afterwards, when he saw the atrocities, his compositions mourned the violence which, in turn, also damned for the lack of religious and political authorities to uphold justice. Nanak

criticized not only Hindus but Muslims, who, according to him, lived to amass power, engage in ritual, or take pride in sectarianism.

4.1 Ritual Observations and Interviews

Detailed participant observation was carried out during fieldwork conducted during that period at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan on open and closed, daily and major Gurburab, celebrations such as the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. These observations were substantiated by semi structured interviews with 30 different participants from granthis, sevadars, local pilgrims and diaspora visitors, these offered rich, texture rich insights in the lived experience of devotion, sacred discipline and inclusivity at the site.

There was a heightened rhythm of ritual activity during the Gurburab events, pre-dawn Asa di Var recitation; ceremonial Prakash of Guru Granth Sahib ; kirtan, akhand path, langar, and nagar kirtan performed daily from the morning time on. Between each ritual moment, the atmosphere was electric and spirit anchored, with history anchored in the sense and respect. For the elderly granthis, the Prakash is a “daily rebirth of light”; for the young sevadars, “tucking the Guru to go to rest with a prayer.” Yet, metaphors overlapping amongst interviews stated these were also very emotionally resonant ways of internalizing symbolic gestures.

Both participants and observers kept track of themes of sacred discipline. The repetition of sacred gestures in the meticulous folding of rumalas and in the rhythmic cadence of Ardas, as well as in the repetition of actions such as spinal bending and hand mudras, cultivated a collective sensibility which stemmed from the ethic conducts and mindfulness embodied by Nanak. People described how they participate in rituals as a means to transform themselves saying, “I feel washed inside” or “when I attend Prakash I start my day with balance.”

A theme of inclusivity was prominent in times of langar and nagar kirtan; differences of caste, class, gender, and nationality were wiped out. Some interviewees from the diaspora stated they felt emotional connection to the space, as one interviewee said: it is a ‘home away from home’ and ‘a link back to our Guru’s feet.’ But here is how the egalitarian ethos of Guru Nanak was not just preached but lived: local pilgrims pointed out that a street cleaner and an overseas visitor sat on the same mat for pangat and shared the same food. “This is one place where I’m not reminded that I am poor”, said one elderly woman from Sheikhpura.

Therefore these observations indicate that the rituals at Janam Asthan are anything but static traditions but demonstrations of how Sikh identity is expressed through ritual, through emotional devotion, through collective memory, through ethical intentionality. Apart from acts of worship, they function not only as instruments of community building, spiritual transformation, and sacred discipline but also as signifiers of Guru Nanak’s vision, lived and preached in Talwandi of his Sri Kartarpur for which Sahibzada Zorawar Singh Sahib and Sahibzada Fateh Singh Sahib were martyred by the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb and in Saidpur to Mecca.

4.2 Rituals at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan

Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib is an environment of deep imbedded rituals in its theological and ethical vision that connect Guru Nanak's historical presence and contemporary devotional life. From fieldwork, several visits by some of the same, and interviews with thirty sevadars, pilgrims and granthis, it was evident that what were in fact symbolic practices were vehicles through which a shared moral and spiritual identity could be cultivated among the visitors. The early morning recitals of Japji Sahib and Asa di Var with a handful of ever growing number of worshippers — many of whom spoke with interviews saying that beginning their day with bani (scriptures) allowed peace and direction into their lives start each day.

The practice of Kirtan is very central to the spiritual experience at Janam Asthan; there is Kirtan all day long and in particular at the mid-morning and the mid-evening hours. With the utmost reverence and discipline, the practices of Prakash (morning installation) and Sukhasan (evening repose) of scripture are being carried out as an expression of the living presence of the Guru and the community's commitment to the order and respect towards the divine. The granthis' ritual precision and the sangat's silent attention during these moments served as embodied expressions of reverence and routine, to take place during participant observation.

In addition, Langar at the place of Guru Nanak's birth is a continuous Vakhti of Guru Nanak's egalitarian teachings. This practice in which you will see some communal dining will not only bring the body food to eat but will also affirm the equality of all. Serving food is 'the highest prayer' Sevadars can offer. "One young volunteer, who was serving the pilgrims with water, pointed out that 'Langar brings all the difference out'. All we eat together, all we sit together. This is Nanak's world." Sitting in Pangat, eating with strangers of all backgrounds, and in the act of preparation and clean up, is the act that Nanak envisioned in Kartarpur (Khushwant Singh, 1988; Sewa Ram Singh, 1988).

Many visitors to the well and preserved room they had come to believe marked Nanak's birth made a point to be quiet in reflection, or some visitors would just circle the space silently. During field observations, it was also observed that sevadars repeatedly reminded visitors that Nanak's real memory does not lie in ritualistic behavior but in Nam Simran, Seva, and righteous conduct. Interviews echoed this, for instance, multiple respondents mentioned that the experience of visiting Janam Asthan inspires them to "live better," to "speak truthfully," to "serve others," and other such ways of living the continuation of Guru Nanak's teachings.

In short, rituals at Gurdwara Janam Asthan are not performed in isolation from ethical living, shared memory and communal devotion. As forms of embodied theology, they combine remembrance and action, reverence and equality, and the past and present spiritual practice. Participant observation and firsthand accounts are evidence that this is a living center of Sikh spirituality, and that Guru Nanak's teachings are regularly re acted in practices in the everyday lives of his followers.

4.2.1 Prakash and Sukhasan of Guru Granth Sahib

Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is one among the most revered and symbolically rich daily rituals which is observed at the Prakash and Sukhasan ceremonies of the Guru Granth Sahib. While these rituals do not mark the mere books being opened and closed for the sacred scripture, they are a living presence of the eternal Guru in daily life of the Sikhs. It was found that by going on field visits and carrying out thirty semi-structured interviews of granthis, sevadars, old devotees and young pilgrims, these ceremonies appear to possess profound emotional and spiritual meaning, acting as a dealing tying communal reverence and personal discipline. The Prakash ritual is a ceremony in the early hours before a dawn when the Guru Granth Sahib is ceremonially brought from its resting place, a side room of the Gurdwara, carried on the head of a granthi under a silk canopy. I wasn't there to witness the atmosphere during this procession but during field observation, you can see that the atmosphere is still and calm even with sevadars sweeping the path and a few early devotees bowing in silent prayer.

Repeatedly during my interviews with people, the care with which the Guru Granth Sahib is handled—from cleaning the space before Sukhasan to proper folding of cloths was a matter of discipline, humility and love. “To see true devotion, look no further than this, says one elderly granthi: When we wake, and (God) when we rest our Guru.” Every motion must carry love.” It is fully congruent with Nanak's central teachings of external actions having no meaning at all, if not grounded in reverence and ethical living (Sewa Ram Singh, 1988).

Consequently, the Prakash and Sukhasan rituals at the Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan cannot be just sacrosanctic routines, but they must live performance of Guru Nanak's theological vision. Every day, they remind the community of the word that divinity is near, and real, of the word (Shabad), and the order of the sangat sharing reverence. Also, these are the spiritual legacy of Nanak, who talked to empeors, faqirs and people of all level during his udasis (Harbans Singh, 1969; Bhai Gurdas, Var I, 28–31). As the field has shown and thirty participants affirmed, these are daily reenactments of Nanak's living philosophy: centered on the divine in every moment of ordinary time with extraordinary love.

4.2.2 Symbolic meanings of divine presence, discipline, and reverence

There are profound symbolic meanings embedded in the rituals of Prakash (illumination) and Sukhasan (retirement) at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan that reflect Sikh theological ideas of the spirituality of presence, disciplined spiritual practice, and embodied respect. Based on thirty semi-structured interviews conducted on field visits between the granthis, sevadars, pilgrims and locals, these rituals emerged as not only structured ceremonial but as an emotional and pedagogical moments that continue to sustain the communal connection to the eternal Guru. Rituals at the shrine which took place during several early morning and late evening rituals were indeed found to be spiritually transformative experiences for many people. “One of us sewadars said, ‘When we lift the Guru Granth Sahib during Prakash, it's not lifting a book but bowing before the Word that we live and live by,’” a young sewadar described.

4.2.3 Ardas (Prayer)

Theological, emotional, and social resonance attached to the ritual of Ardas at the Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is what made it a cornerstone of Sikh devotional life and collective memory. On the basis of thirty semi-structured interviews carried out at the site through fieldwork and several participant observations of the ritual in different time slots, it has emerged that Ardas has little to do with a fixed liturgical act, but is quite a living expression of spiritual surrender and of the communal unity. As 'soul of the Sangat' and 'a bridge between remembrance and responsibility,' says many respondents including sevadars, granthis, pilgrims and local devotees 'Ardas' was indispensable. Created through its structure, tone and symbolism, Ardas is the reflection of the basic teachings of the founding Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak, which is submission to the will of the divine (hukam), ethical life and unity in diversity.

Research from field notes showed that Ardas sometimes turns into a refuge for individual reflection, but is also a space where solidarity is public voiced. Take for instance, a midweek service when one middle aged lady openly wept going through the recitation and later in interview said that "Ardas is where I give my pain to the Guru." I feel seen and heard." Ardas thus mirrors Guru Nanak's blending of benevolent and collective prayer (Naam Japo) and the spiritual song (Kirtan), as practiced in his travels to Mansarowar, Saidpur and Multan by virtue of which prayer is irreducible to ethical consciousness and remembrance (Khushwant Singh, 1988; Sewa Ram Singh, 1988).

4.2.4 Structure and significance of daily congregational supplication

The daily congregational Ardas (formal prayer) from its structure and its significance at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan does not only represent a formal prayer, but also it is deeply embodied expression of Sikh of historical memory, ethical commitment, and spiritual continuity. Twenty fieldwork interviews and sustained observation during morning, evening, and prayer nights at this Hiluster make clear that Ardas is both a spiritual mooring and a communal beat at this sacred site. Rehras Sahib at dawn, Rehras Sahib at sunset, and Sohila Sahib at night, the prayer is recited routine after Asa di Var at dawn, and recited at sunset and at night during the prayer of Rehras Sahib and Sohila Sahib respectively, it keeps the rhythm and pauses the person and the community to take refreshment, realign with divine will (hukam), and reaffirming the collective purpose.

Often, respondents pointed to the emotional and historical aspects of Ardas. According to a few elders, "It's a spiritual inheritance that we were passed down by our Gurus." Younger attendees, school age students even, said, "It's the uniting of remembering and praying which is one in the same." The structure starts with the invocation of the ten Gurus, especially Guru Nanak Dev Ji and then recalling the sacrifices of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and all the innumerable undying Sikhs who stood for truth and justice. This memory is not ornamental: on visits to the field, devotees' emotion is visibly traced as they shed tears or remain in silent mourning. "This isn't just a script" was what one granthi explained, during an informal conversation, when asked about the Durbar situation. No, our soul, our history in prayer form."

4.2.5 Community and individual dimensions of spiritual request and gratitude

The Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan (place of the birth) Ardas (prayer), serving in the role of a deeply layered spiritual act, merges the two aspects of devotion, individual and collective, which are woven in Sikh theology and embodied ritual practice. Drawing on thirty semi structured interviews with pilgrims, sevadars, local granthis and visiting guests, and based on extensive Observations of field, it becomes apparent that Ardas is much more than a formal prayer; instead it is, a lived experience of surrender, remembrance, and communal strength. Collected through ethnographic immersion, these insights are informed by qualitative methodology and the study's themes of bridging the interior life of the individual to the shared consciousness of the sangat in Ardas.

Together with the congregation, the prayer becomes an event of participatory devotion as the shared response is "Waheguru" or "Bole So Nihal...Sat Sri Akal." Many elderly visitors and even young volunteers responded to the interviews indicating that Ardas acts as a "binding force," a tool that "reminds us that even though we come from different places, we are one sangat." This view is corroborated by Nanak's fundamental dialogues of the faiths and geographies such as Mecca, Baghdad, where Nanak claimed that there is no room of the divine truth within the realm of the religions, and that it is grounded in the oneness of the human hood (Sewa Ram Singh, 1988; Narang, 2008).

4.2.6 Kirtan (Singing of Shabads)

Kirtan at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is the ritual of shabads (hymns) from Guru Granth Sahib in the form of Sikh devotional life which is profound and affective. Through fieldwork and thirty interviews with pilgrims, granthis, raagis (musician-singers), and local sevadars, it is evident that Kirtan is not a musical performance but a sacred transmission of divine wisdom. At the birthplace of Guru Nanak, at the Janam Asthan, the Kirtan is more spiritual because it recalls Guru himself singing praises of the One (Ik Onkar) with Bhai Mardana, sometimes with the rebab, in the early mornings while meditating together at Kartarpur (Gandhi 2007 and Khushwant Singh 1988).

Kirtan is usually performed several times a day with four in particular, Asa di Var in the morning and Rehras Sahib in the evening being the primary ones. This devotional gathering is focused around the Guru Granth Sahib that is placed in the central hall of the Gurdwara on the manji sahib under a richly adorned canopy. In particular, they begin by sitting on a slightly higher removable platform and recite and sing verses from scriptures with the traditional instruments such as harmonium and tabla, occasionally aided by the chorus of the congregation. When observed during field visits, most of these sessions seemed emotional in the sense that the participants—of varying ages, genders and regional background—would tend to close their eyes, sway gently or cried while listening to the sound. One elderly devotee told me that they 'feel Guru Nanak's presence in the air when it comes to the kirtan here and I feel like he is singing with us.' Another Canadian cooling it that 'listening to Chan Kirtan connects me to my transformation - not simply music, but home.'

4.2.7 Daily and special event performance of sacred hymns

Sacred hymns (shabads) daily and special event performance at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan contributes to keep the spiritual pulse of the site running, to infuse in it Guru Nanak's message in the everyday and ceremonial life. Observational data from multiple field visits and the result of thirty semi-structured interviews were used to find out that the musical rendition of Gurbani is a spiritual exercise as well as a device to bring community together and reflect on moral values. All days start with reciting Asa di Var followed with Shabad singing from time to time during the day, and ending with Rehras Sahib in the evening and Sohila Sahib in the night. The daily recitations in these assemblies are a meditative environment where the congregation (sangat) is moved to the state of collective mindfulness in accordance with Nanak's spiritual practices at Kartarpur (Khushwant Singh, 1988; Gandhi, 2007).

In the interviews, sevadars and granthis also emphasised that Kirtan on special days is special and is also prepared with higher dedication. Hymns selected to match the theme of the occasion are new birth, martyrdom, or an interfaith commemoration.

4.2.8 Langar (Community Kitchen)

One of the most visible embodiment of Guru Nanak's egalitarian and service-oriented vision are the practice of Langar (community kitchen) done at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan. Langar grows from the values of equality, humility and the shared humanity, which do not constitute a mere charitable act, but rather a spiritual and social transformation. By talking to thirty people involved in this living tradition — sevadars, granthis, pilgrims and visiting researchers — about their experiences, there are observations that attest to the fact that Janam Asthan Langar is not a mere anachronism, but is rather utilized every day in daily devotional life as well as the communal responsibility.

The systematic organization of Langar, i.e., cooking, washing, serving, eating, etc., was field observations notched out of voluntary service (kar seva), none of the people involved seen talking down to others or each other. Male volunteers and female volunteers (both young and old) come together, prepare rotis, cut vegetables, serve dal, and wash utensils. Notably, several interviewees, including especially female interviewees, emphasised the empowerment in seva that the kitchen becomes a spiritual space where devotion, in the form of labor, is expressed. Visiting person of Amritsar said one: 'Whenever I roll rotis here, I feel as if I am praying with my hands. As a part of me, this kitchen is my mandir,' said the young woman. A young man who had traveled from Canada said of the same, 'This is the message of Nanak here in the real way not in the sermons but in sitting and eating together.' That Langar does not only function as a devotional practice but as a way of inclusiveness is reflected in these testimonies.

The seating arrangement in the pangat practically a line in which all sit together to eat (eliminating therefore any social distinctions) renders people equal. Sikh or non-Sikh, rich or poor, young or old people all sit on the floor together—a radical act of equality which only recently, in caste bound South Asia, would have been completely revolutionary and still possesses powerful transformative potential today. On field visits, many travelers always

showed up with large families seated side by side all clustered with solitary travelers who spoke to each other, ate meals together, and shared a bit of talk here and there, even if the languages or regional differences were there. In my village also they do not care about status but here no one says ‘who you are,’” said one elderly devotee from Lahore. Everyone is Guru’s guest.” According to some of the international visitors who were interviewed for the fieldwork, Langar is a model of social justice and spiritual inclusivity with global appeal and some showed interest about adopting a similar community kitchen practice in their own religious centers.

4.2.9 Daily meal preparation and distribution

Daily meal Preparation and Distribution at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is a spiritual, smoke filled, seva (selfless service), samanntha (equality) and Sampardha (Harmony) process. As fieldwork in 2024 and 2025 involved a number of visits from March until November on each occasion, and semi structured interviews with thirty of the sevadars, granthis, pilgrims and international visitors, it became clear that the Langar operation is not simply logistical, but profoundly devotional and pedagogical in nature. Much before dawn volunteers arrive with pots and pans for the utensils, to knead the flour or for the stoves. Consistently, throughout the course of his interviews, Sevadars focused attention on each act — from chopping vegetables to stirring pots — to be done remembering Waheguru as, oftentimes, accompanied by recitation of shabads or quiet Naam Simran.

Notably, women were involved in the preparation and distribution process with many of them leading the provision of chapatis at their stations and the cleanliness of the kitchen. Three elderly women who were interviewed in one visit talked of how they participated long in Langar, both as spiritual offering and social bonding, even if 'we're not just feeding bodies, we are feeding hearts'. When we are preparing meals, we pray for everyone who we are going to feed.” This is in line with the utterances of Guru Nanak at Kartarpur, where he ruled out any sanctity of earning and sharing via dishonest labour (kirat karni) as well as universal nourishment (vand chhakna) (Khushwant Singh, 1988; Gandhi, 2007).

In this methodological sense, Participant Observation as well as interviews allowed the capturing of both the affective and the operational dimensions of daily Langar. It became clear in repeated interactions that volunteers return often not out of an obligation but because of the felt connection to the community and the Guru’s hukam. The transmission of values was seen reflected in the fact that even young children were helping out at the serving process.

4.2.10 Akhand Path and Recitation of Guru Granth Sahib

The ritual of Akhand Path and day to day recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib that takes place at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is the living presence of the Guru in the continuous remembrance (Naam Simran and sacred narration). The uninterrupted recitation is also observed to be much more than a textual ritual: it is a spiritually immersive experience that unites an individual and community through the shared cycle of devotion and ethical reflection entailed within devotion, historical continuity, and tying off of the devotee.

The Akhand Path of 48 hours and more is a reading of the whole Guru Granth Sahib uninterrupted by anyone through a relay of trained readers (paathis). It is also often received with solemnity, and is cherished, as noted during site visits, as a mark of important milestones, such as Gurburabs, anniversaries and such. The interviewees talked about the Akhand Path to be ‘a river of sound that washes the mind’, indicating the affective and purifying effects of the same. Sheikhpura's one of the female sewadar said: Others echoed the emotional and the spiritual impact of it, even a retired army officer saying, it reminded him of Nanak's voice before dawn. In every word he is there."

In brief, devotional acts of Akhand Path and playing of Guru Granth Sahib at Janam Asthan are above the textual devotion. They apply the Sikh theological principle of the Shabad as Guru; attest to the spiritual inheritance of teaching of Nanak's remembrance, and create a sacred life deeply enmeshed within the daily life of the community.

4.2.11 Continuous reading of the entire scripture on Gurburabs

One of the most powerful expression of spiritual devotion and collective remembrance is the continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib i.e. Akhand Path especially on Gurburabs at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan. It is thus not just a textual tribute to the eternal Guru but a massive communal exercise that symbolizes the celebration of Guru Nanak's birth and other important Sikh anniversaries with sacred solemnity. At the site, particularly on the Gurburab of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, while doing field work and participant observation, it was apparent how this ritual makes the atmosphere peaceful, rhythmic, and spiritual awakening to everyone.

Thirty interviews with devotees, sevadars and pilgrims reported that the Akhand Path brought out a consistent emotional and theological resonance. One elderly respondent, a local sewadar, said, "The Akhand Path begins and it feels as though the Guru has come himself." A young pilgrim from Faisalabad also echoed this sentiment and said: "It's a spiritual wave that keeps coming even if you get in and out." These days, the recitation goes round the clock – granthis and specially trained volunteers read from the scripture from the perspective of relay fashion, without pause, as is bound by Sikh maryada (principal of conduct). All these things—of handover of readers, the impeccable pronunciation of the text by the reciter, respect with which the Guru Granth Sahib is treated—all point to continuity of Guru Nanak's insistence upon the Word (Shabad) as divine guide and presence (albeit in different terms than used by him, see Gandhi, 2007; Khushwant Singh, 1988).

Therefore, the tradition of continuous reading through the entire Guru Granth Sahib during Gurburabs at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is a tradition, not merely that, but an experiential reaffirmation of the living Guru belief as held by Sikhs; inasmuch it is a communal act of remembrance, and deeply affective encounter with divine truth. Theologically based on Guru Nanak's teachings and historically in tune with the tradition of liturgical practice of the Sikhs, the Akhand Path becomes their collective means of bridging their remembrance (Naam), action (Kirat), and divine grace.

4.2.12 Nagar Kirtan

Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is made of a series of vibrant, mobile expressions of Sikh spirituality, communal identity and collective devotion, realized in the form of the Nagar Kirtan procession. Repeatedly, the ritual was described as “an emotional march of faith”, “a moving Gurdwara” that “made the Guru people.” Based on interviews with 30 participants during Nagar Kirtan, a field observation of a march during Guru Nanak’s birth anniversary of the ritual, the ritual was described as an emotional march of faith. Children, elders, and pilgrims from all over Pakistan and abroad reminiscent from other corner of world converged to this spiritual parade of singing, flag waving and bare foot show of reverence. According to many of the interviewees, they felt spiritual elevation and pride. A young woman from Faisalabad says she feels Guru Nanak himself when she walks behind the palki. 'It is a way to tell people that peace, love and justice is not confined inside Gurdwara, it walks with the people,' a senior sewadar said.

4.2.13 Processional hymn singing during major festivals

During major Sikh public holidays – especially Guru Nanak Gurpurab — the ritual of processional hymn singing as part of the Nagar Kirtan traditional procession to Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan does become an immensely spiritually immersive as well as communally electrifying phenomenon. The continuous singing of shabads is always the hallmark of these processions, when the respectfully carried Guru Granth Sahib is on a beautifully adorned palki sahib (palanquin). In rhythmic devotion, the Panj Pyare (Five Beloved Ones) dressed in saffron robes lead the sangat though Nankana Sahib, raagis sing the hymns amplified over loudspeakers and the congregants join in chorus, sometimes moved to tears or to spontaneous prostration. Martial display of gatka by young volunteers distributing water and sweets, elders recite Naam with prayer beads, through this gatka, procession is accompanied by the landscapes of moving reverence similar to that of Guru Nanak's Udasis from Kashmir to Mecca (Gandhi, 2007; Sewa Ram Singh, 1988).

From fieldwork and interviews with 30 participants: local sewadar teams, pilgrims and international visitors — the processional kirtan was ‘a journey of remembrance through the town’, ‘a song that walks’, ‘Guru Nanak’s presence in motion ... a moving Guru Nanak’. An elderly devotee said, “That is the way the message of Nanak is carried on its breath, of those, who sing.” A young sewadar from Lahore says that, ‘We clean the streets, before the palki, not because they are dirty, but it is because we believe the Guru’s word is sacred, and should thus be welcomed.’ Observations revealed that the ritual was inclusive of those from all religious communities which listened or even participated with respect, some even offering water or rose petals for sure to the interfaith resonance of Nanak’s message.

5. Discussion

In the context of transnational Sikh identity, spiritual yearning, and transnational interfaith diplomacy, pilgrimage to Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan has become a powerful symbolic representation of how Gurdwara Kartarpur Corridor framework can be utilized as the modern avenue for interfaith diplomacy. Since the corridor was opened to allow Indian Sikh pilgrims the visa-free access to Gurdawara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, there has been a rise in

pilgrimages to Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib, though it is out of the present line of Kartarpur. Interviews with 30 participants in 2024–2025 mostly who were diaspora Sikhs in the UK, Canada, and Malaysia, and visitors to Indian Punjab led to a common feeling that the pilgrimage is not a religious journey but an act of historical and emotional restoration.

Guru Nanak's birth place is a site many pilgrims have described as displaying the opportunity to walk on the same land on which Guru Nanak had walked as a long awaited dream, one passed from parents and grandparents to the next generation as a sacred wish. One of the middle aged Sikh pilgrims from Amritsar recalled to weeping when he reached the threshold of Janam Asthan, "stepping into the womb of Sikh history". Like diaspora visitors, they drew parallels between the journey and a longer history of South Asian sacred geography that was shared by the divided mass of humanity and now seen through the artificial barriers of borders. A pilgrimage for one sphere of Canadian Sikhs was spiritual, but also political, it was a reclaiming of our right to access our Guru's legacy that has been exiled by partition and tense Indo-Pak relations.

While the fieldwork undertaken at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan between 2024 and 2025 was not focused exclusively on pilgrims, sevadars, granthis and visiting non Sikh observers, these narratives came most frequently in narratives of shared reverence, particularly through interviews. Sikhs might feel a deep spiritual devotion, a desire for cultural wholeness, often in these narratives; the emotional tone often blends Janam Asthan (birthplace of Guru Nanak) as not only a holy place for Sikhs but also as a mnemonic space for the community before partition. Many of these thirty interviewees drew vivid memories that were passed on from elders in Nankana Sahib or in the vicinity of Nankana Sahib who lived before 1947. The oldest of all pilgrims, one of them from Ludhiana and visiting Pakistan for the first time since partition, told how his father narrated visiting the Gurdwara barefoot in reverence and how his parents used to tell him: 'One day, I hope you come to visit the Gurdwara barefoot, the same way you imagine.' He said it feels like a lost piece of himself has come back as he listened to the morning Asa di Var with tears in his eyes.

Like in Nankana Sahib, Baba Nanak was not considered solely through sectarian lens only, as there was Muslims who were also in the town of Nanka Sahib also felt that he was a local saint whose teachings are beyond the religious boundaries. Local interviewees in the area described Baba Nanak as a 'peer of all' with messages of universal compassion and the oneness of the God (Ik Onka) that still appeals to both Muslims as well as Hindus. The recollections of one Muslim elder of his father playing his part in the pre partition practice, when Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs went together to honor local Sufi and Bhakti saints , visiting Gurdwaras among them on Guru Nanak's birth anniversary to offer handmade chaddar, is one such. The intent of this nostalgia was not merely an unsuccessful effort to revive the old coexistence but a heartfelt undertone of mutual respect among faiths still present in local memory.

The nerves were inherited among visiting diaspora but also aspirational, amongst visiting diaspora, especially second generation Sikhs from Canada, UK and Malaysia. They spoke of telling stories of Guru Nanak's birthplace, which had been part of their raising, via family prayers, Janam Sakhis (or stories), and visits to diasporic Gurdwaras bringing replicas or models of Janam Asthan. A visitor from Toronto of 20 years old said, 'It's as though I came

here to visit a grandfather I never knew, but I always loved.’ The way that sacred geography functions beyond physical presence is through ritual, narrative, and memory: Emotional bonding of this sort shows how geography is sacrificed socially and reinvigorated ritually, narratively and through memory. Moreover, these observations of langar, kirtan, and Ardas showed this nostalgia is performed, vested in gestures of humility, offerings, and tears of reverence.

Essentially, the Gurdwara comes to be a ceremonial and re-lived site of shared reverence across constellations of communalizations and generations. Longing, unity, and spiritual continuity are all that it carries with it. Not only does Janam Asthan cultural nostalgia reinforce the place of Guru Nanak’s birthplace in the Sikh psyche, but it also rekindles a collective longing for the moral and spiritual unity for which Guru Nanak’s teachings are symbols.

The Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan is paramount for propagating equality, seva (selfless service) and spiritual discipline in accordance with guru nanak’s teaching ethos. Fieldwork observations (2024-2025) and thirty semi structured interviews with granthis, pilgrims, local youth and diaspora visiting responded indicate that shrine is the place of worship but also a moral and ethical training ground built on Sikh ethos. Values such as humility, cooperation and mutual respect are infused into daily practices that include preparing Langar, reciting kirtan, praying in collective Ardas, routine cleaning and so on. Local sevadars insisted that the acts are not obligatory but are an expression of spiritual commitment, and it was communicated that, as Nanak had done, the divine remembrance must be coupled with social commitment.

Ritual as continuity and resistance at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Pakistan is fully engendered in the complicated politics of post-Partition Pakistan, in which Sikh identity is as sacred as contentious. So in this context, acts like kirtan, langar and ardaas are not just religious practices, but acts of cultural continuity and symbolic resistance to continue a spiritual tradition which was historically uprooted in 1947. The performance of these rituals which anchor the Sikh community to the niche of Guru Nanak’s birthplace, and as resilient reaffirmations, are for a state where Sikhs are a small religious minority, and have to thread the needle between state secularism and historical erasure.

The impact of Kirtan sung at Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan on the emotive, theological and aesthetic level is deeply felt by devotees; ethnographic observations and analytical interpretations based on 30 field interviews are presented. Theologically, the shabads sung in the Gurdwara are not just artistic expressions; they are direct vehicles of divine revelation — a reality expressed by the Guru’s word that Shabad (the Divine Word) is the true Guru. Themes of oneness (Ik Onkar), resting in the name of God (Naam Simran), and renunciation of the ego, divine love, justice, and remembrance (Naam Simran) are themes of the hymns, which are centered on the Guru Nanak’s own compositions and those of other Gurus and Bhagats in the Guru Granth Sahib. In the hands of the singing of these verses within the sacred geography of Nanak’s birthplace, they are endowed with additional spiritual weight. "Listening to Nanak sing hymns told by the same people may have told him here brings tears," as one elderly respondent had described. ‘I have the feeling that the Guru is still speaking.’”

Many interviewees became emotionally catharsis, peace, and spiritually elevated during kirtan. On certain field visits, you could find listeners weeping silently, bowing massively, right beside closing eyes in meditative absorption. Chilling one young woman said, 'I didn't understand every word, but I knew every word in my heart.' This seems to refer to the embodied and affective quality of kirtan, where the joining of raag (melody), taal (rhythm), language are traversing the intellect to reach the inner self. Such attitudes reveal Nanak's own view expounded in his dialogues in Mecca, Baghdad and Saidpur, that true devotion is not in the head but in the soul (Harbans Singh, 1969; Gandhi, 2007).

In 2024–2025, through fieldwork interviews with thirty participants, we discovered a strong consensus that sevadars, pilgrims, and granthis regard kirtan and langar as rituals that have extremely important meaning in the Pakistani context. One sewadar from Nankana added, "In a place where few of us live, but where still it is our way of saying that we are still here and we remember." The remembrance that follows is performative and political. Shabads are communal sung during Gurburabs and Nagar Kirtans as a sonic presence that enters the public sphere establishing Sikh presence and autonomy. Like langar, with its radical focus upon caste, class, and religious inclusiveness, langar is a daily performance of Guru Nanak's egalitarian vision, a subtle undermining of divisions in society and the assertion of an ethical sovereignty of the way of life of the Sikh.

6. Conclusion

The Gurdwara practices that are conducted and witnessed in Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib are a living representation of universal doctrines of Guru Nanak and they are done through organized worship, community service and openness to other religions. The ethnographic approach to the study based on the ideas of ritual and *communitas* offered by Victor Turner (1969) and the concept of religious pluralism and interfaith spatiality used by Diana Eck (2001) helped to understand that every ritual, whether Prakash and Sukhasan of the Guru Granth Sahib or Ardas, Kirtan, and Langar, accomplishes personal and collective memory. Through thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006), patterns of sacred emotion, equality, and ethical discipline were identified, which are interconnected with each other and demonstrate that these rituals support the Sikh theological principles Ik Onkar (divine unity), Naam Simran (remembrance of the divine), Seva (selfless service). They practice a lived community in which eating, praying and serving create religious idealism into social equality. The fact that Muslim and Hindu visitors are welcomed, interfaith hospitality and the involvement of the cross-border participation by the Kartarpur Corridor indicates that the Gurdwara is still playing the role of a bridge of peace and mutual spirituality. Therefore, Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan goes beyond its sanctity of history to be the place of remembrance, service, and continuity- continuing the Sikh moral and spiritual heritage in post-Partition Pakistan by way of devotion, education and interfaith peace, as Guru Nanak envisaged it to be the case to the future generation.

Theologically, the rituals affirm the Sikh understanding of divine immanence, the centrality of the Word (Shabad), and the spiritual sovereignty of the Guru Granth Sahib. Religiously, they establish social environments wherein eating communally, praying collectively and serving together configure egalitarian interaction. In essence, Gurdwara Sri Janam Asthan does more than merely exemplify a site of sanctified history; it marks the foundation for a

place of remembrance, service, and solid resistance. The Janam Asthan continues to uphold its spiritual legacy in post-Partition Pakistan's often largely subsumed Sikh heritage through moral clarity and embodied practices, even in its work living in the post-Partition world. Rituals here become another manifestation of sense of devotion, education, diplomacy, resistance, as Guru Nanak envisaged it as a trans boundary inherited spirituality for future and present generations.

Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad is a researcher focused on public-sector governance, institutional reform, and economic policy. His work emphasizes evidence-based strategies for improving the performance of state-owned enterprises, particularly in developing economies like Pakistan. With a strong interest in comparative international models, he analyzes successful global reform trajectories to identify actionable lessons for Pakistan's public institutions. His research aims to support policymakers in promoting efficiency, accountability, and long-term financial sustainability within the country's SOEs.

REFERENCES

- Abbasi, A. S. (2018). Nankana Sahib as 'A symbol of religious coexistence'. In *Religious tourism in Asia: Tradition and change through case studies and narratives* (pp. 138–148). Wallingford, UK: CAB International.
- Ahmad, A., & Akhter, N. (2018). The tomb of Hadrat Baba Farid Ganj Shakkar: A source of harmony and interfaith among Muslim and Sikh community. *Acta Islamica*, 6(2), 45–62.
- Ahmad, Z., Ahmed, S., & Adnan, M. (2024). Muslim–Sikh dialogue: A comparative study of the teachings of Baba Farid and Baba Nanak. *Al-Mahdi Research Journal (MRJ)*, 5(3), 356–377.
- Ashraf, M. I., Jathol, I., & Akhter, M. S. (2021). Peace building through religious tourism in Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Science Review*, 3(2), 204–212.
- Bainiwal, T. S. (2023). The Gurdwara. In *The Sikh World* (pp. 94–102). Routledge.
- Bell, C. M. (1997). *Ritual: Perspectives and dimensions*. Oxford University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Durkheim, É. (1912). *The elementary forms of the religious life*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Eaton, R. M. (1984). The political and religious authority of the shrine of Baba Farid. In *Moral conduct and authority: The place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (pp. 333–356). University of California Press.
- Eliade, M. (1959). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books.

- Gandhi, K. (2007). *Religious pluralism and cultural dialogue in South Asia*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.
- Harbans Singh. (1969). *The heritage of the Sikhs*. Asia Publishing House.
- Khushwant Singh. (1988). *A history of the Sikhs: Vol. 1. 1469–1839*. Oxford University Press.
- Mann, G. S. (2010). Guru Nanak's life and legacy: An appraisal. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 17(1–2), 1–12.
- McLeod, W. H. (1965). *The life and doctrine of Guru Nanak* (Doctoral dissertation, University of London, SOAS).
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Myrvold, K. (2024). Gurdwara legislation. In *Sikh News in India, 1864–1924* (pp. 2031–2149). Brill.
- Paine, C. (2003). Sikh pilgrimage: A study in ambiguity. *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 10(1–2), 143–162.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Puri, S. (1991). Socio-political context of Guru Nanak's thought. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 52, 361–368.
- Riat, P. K. (2013). *A historical and theological evaluation of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham).
- Sewa Ram Singh. (1988). *Guru Nanak and his message*. Patiala: Punjabi University Press.
- Shrines. (2023). Sites of memory. In *Regional perspectives on India's Partition: Shifting the vantage points*. Oxford University Press.
- Singh, D. (1992). Guru Nanak: The prophet of a unique ideology. In G. S. Singh, J. S. Mansukhani, & N. G. K. Singh (Eds.), *Fundamental issues in Sikh studies* (pp. 25–42). Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies.
- Singh, D. P. (2019). Universal relevance of Guru Nanak's teachings. *Religious Studies Review*, 45(3), 311–325.
- Singh, S. H. (2009). *Faith and philosophy of Sikhism* (Vol. 4). Gyan Publishing House.
- Smith, J. Z. (1987). *To take place: Toward theory in ritual*. University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Cornell University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ysseldyk, R., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2010). Religiosity as identity: Toward an understanding of religion from a social identity perspective. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(1), 60–71.

Ahmad, N. R. (2025). *From bailouts to balance: Comparative governance and reform strategies for Pakistan's loss-making state-owned enterprises.*