

# **KNOW YOUR HERIGAGE**

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS ON  
PRIMARY SOURCES OF SIKHISM

INSTITUTE OF **SIKH STUDIES**, CHANDIGARH



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INSTITUTE OF SIKH STUDIES  
CHANDIGARH

*Know Your Heritage*  
— *Introductory Essays on Primary Sikh Sources*  
by Prof Dharam Singh & Prof Kulwant Singh

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## FOREWORD

Despite the widespread sweep of globalization making the entire world a global village, its different constituent countries and nations continue to retain, follow and promote their respective religious, cultural and civilizational heritage. Each one of them endeavours to preserve their distinctive identity and take pains to imbibe and inculcate its religio-cultural attributes in their younger generations, so that they continue to remain firmly attached to their roots even while assimilating the modern technology's influence and peripheral lifestyle mannerisms of the new age. The younger Sikh generation, especially the Sikh youth likewise, in both India and foreign countries are keenly interested in knowing about their unique Sikh heritage, as is evident from the daily inquisitive queries and questions being put forth by them on the social media. Since the bulk of original and ancient written material about the origin and evolution of Sikh religion, its history and cultural heritage is available only in Gurmukhi – Punjabi script and that to in old, archaic poetic diction (Braj Bhasha), the younger generation feels itself handicapped in accessing this treasure trove of vital information about the Sikh Gurus, their missionary lives and their teachings directly. Undoubtedly, these classics are an inexhaustible foundational source of knowledge about Sikh heritage. As is narrated in the Sikh scripture: **ਪੀਊ ਦਾਦੇ ਕਾ ਖੋਲਿ ਡਿਠਾ ਖਜਾਨਾ॥ ਤਾ ਮੇਰੈ ਮਨਿ ਭਇਆ ਨਿਧਾਨਾ॥** (*As I discovered the treasure trove of my ancestral heritage. I did feel enriched and fulfilled*) (p. 186) It is with the aim of fulfilling this long-felt need for an Introductory, informative articles on at least only ten major sources of Sikhism in English that the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh has endeavoured to prepare this volume consisting of ten informative articles on

the primary sources of Sikhism in the chronological order in English written by Dr Dharam Singh and Prof Kulwant Singh.

Moreover, these classics were written by persons who were either contemporary companions of the venerated Sikh Gurus or belonged to a period immediately after the Guru Period. Since they were also men of letters in their times and devout Sikhs of the Sikh Gurus', their writings were written for the benefit of whole mankind. **ਪਰਬਾਣਿ ਸਾਖੀ ਮਹਾ ਪੁਰਖ ਬੋਲਦੇ ਸਾਝੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਹਾਨੈ ॥** (*Great men speak legendary fables which enlighten the whole world*) (647).

I am sure that English readers of Sikh religion and Sikh history, especially the Sikh youth and younger generations, will be benefitted immensely by this elementary information. As immortal lines of H.W. Longfellow: *Lives of Great men all remind us/ We can make our lives sublime/ And, depart, leave behind us/ Footprints on the sands of time*, indicate, the modern English reading Sikh youth will find a similar stimulation in these articles.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I

Heritage is both tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage refers to physical artifacts produced, maintained and transmitted inter-generationally by a community in a society. It includes artistic creations, built heritage such as buildings and monuments, and other physical or tangible products of human creativity that are invested with religious and historico-cultural significance. The intangible heritage indicates ‘the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills’ (as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith). Examples of intangible heritage are oral traditions, performing arts, local knowledge, and traditional skills. As the UNESCO Convention (2003) states, both tangible and intangible heritage are inter-dependent though they require different approaches to preserve and safeguard them. We can also say that the heritage, tangible as well as intangible, is the sum total of the past attainments of the people living in a particular society, and it also remains the permanent source of inspiration for those people to reach heights of glory in the present and future. A community which becomes forgetful of its heritage or loses its heritage artifacts for some reason or the other, loses its distinct identity and soon becomes extinct.

Literature – whether in the field of history or anthropology or religion or any other - forms an important part of human heritage. We can also say that history and literature are not only completely independent and distinct from each other rather they are intimately entwined with each other. History is not just about power struggles, wars, names, and dates. It is about people who are products of their time

who shape with their own lives, their own times as well as the times to come. Today, the world is not like it was even a couple centuries back; people have changed largely, and without ancient classical literature, we would never know about our past, our ancestors and what they did or sacrificed to make us what we are today. Books are the carriers of civilization as they relate us to our past, to our heritage. History is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, and thought and speculation at a standstill if they do not find expression in literature. It will not be wrong to say that a study of 'literature' is a sort of leap into the past. It takes us back to the times it is placed in and helps us understand and experience the culture, beliefs and the way of life of our people of those times. This also enables us to get a view of the inside looking out, a personal view and insight into the mind and reasoning of someone else on the issues which concern our heritage, the issues which serve as the core of our essential identity and the knowledge of which is essential to inspire us for better future.

A literary text acquires its existence after a complex synthesis of its author's main sources of inspiration, his sensitivity towards his inner stimulation, his psychological introspection, experience and its resultant hypothesis as well as its intended semantics communicated through a medium best suited to his creative genius. A literary composition can be studied, analyzed and evaluated on the basis of its theme, craftsmanship, linguistic expression, diction, aesthetic nuances, imagery, symbolism and structural organization of its composition in the light of existing parameters in that genre. Literature teaches us how to live: as Tolstoy had remarked, human beings would be like beasts without literature because literature endows an understanding, an empathy in the reader, even for someone who is much separated from him by time and distance. Literature unites humankind with one another as well as with larger truths and ideas in a society because it is

a means for people to record their thoughts and experiences and makes them accessible to others. Literature especially of historical nature makes the past come alive for the reader and it also becomes the torch-bearer that helps civilizations to overcome their past lapses and move ahead with greater success. India would not have been what it is today in the absence of its scriptures, the Vedas, Puranas sacred Buddhist, Jain Texts and Sikh scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib and great epical works like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Suraj Partap Granth* and Greece would not have been ‘the mother of European civilization’ but for its great literature. Literature enables us to expand our minds and ask questions and modify our intuitions and instincts. The importance of literature to humankind can well be likened to that of the pole star by making us aware of our inspiring heritage. It successfully guides us through miseries in life of present life and build a strong future.

Sikh religion, despite its being only five and a half centuries old, also has a fairly significant member of its classical and heritage texts which have survived the onslaughts of several contemporary splinter Sikh sects and have enabled it (Sikh religion) to emerge as a distinctly (new) religion. In this respect, we know that several schismatic groups had grown up even during the early phase of Sikh evolution. Acting in an antagonistic manner, these groups did much harm to the Sikh movement. The Minas, Dhir Mallias, Ram Raias and a few other splinter groups many times worked in tandem with the Mughal government of the day which was apprehensive of the rising popularity of the Gurus and took it as a threat to their authority. These groups also created their own literature and also interpolated their views in various existing Sikh texts with a view to corrupt the authentic character of classic Sikh literature. Despite these malicious attempts, a good amount of original literature produced during their period has reached us in its pristine form. While compiling the *Adi Granth*, Guru

Arjan Dev had so numbered the hymns that it was virtually impossible for anyone to make any interpolations or additions though there are available some codices of the scripture prepared by such schismatic groups which contain apocryphal verses ascribed to (Guru) Nanak. The works of of Bhai Gurdas, *Mahima Prakash* (both the versions in prose and verse) and some other works also belong to this period. Though the leaders of the Mina group have been also charged with composing apocryphal hymns in the name of Nanak, but a few of their works such as Miharban's *Janamsakhi* of Guru Nanak have been accepted by the Sikh tradition. In the post-Guru period also various groups like the Handalias continued with their nefarious designs trying to harm the image of the Sikh Gurus and the popularity of the Sikh faith by producing literature which distorted the reality about Sikh Gurus and Sikh religion. The *Bala Janamsakhi* sponsored by the Handalias with the specific objective of lowering the image of Guru Nanak and Guru Angad Dev vis-à-vis their own leader, Handal, is one such example. Otherwise, the literary heritage of the Sikhs is quite rich.

Among the primary sources on Sikh religion and history can be included the primary Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, and works like *Vars* and *Swaiyyas* of Bhai Gurdas, *Hukamnamas* and *Rahitnamas*, and a few other chronicles. Among these early historical chronicles which narrate the history of the Sikh Gurus and the eighteenth century consist of *Janamsakhis*, *Bansavalinama* (1769), *Mahima Prakash* (1776), *Sri Gur Sobha* (1711) and *Gurbilases* (1718-1797). The *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (1841) and *Sri Gur Suraj Prakash Granth* (1843). These texts are comprehensive in their scope and apart from giving a eulogistic account of the Gurus' lives also narrate the history of the Sikhs up to the time of their composition. They constitute the canonical, theological, formulatory and historical literature and together form an important part of the Sikh

heritage. Taken together, these they are the primary sources of Sikh spiritual concepts and doctrines, theological practices, the Sikh way of life and contain immensely important historical information.

The Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, has been acutely conscious of the absence of any single volume in English which could introduce these highly important primary sources of the Sikh faith to the readers not conversant with the Punjabi medium. The Institute took first steps in this direction when Professor Kulwant Singh translated Senapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* and Ratan Singh Bhangoo's *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (popularly known as the *Prachin Panth Prakash*) and also got articles published in its quarterly journal, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, introducing these works. The readers' response had been overwhelming and the Institute earnestly desired to prepare a book comprising analytical, interpretative and evaluative articles on at least ten of these important classical works of the Sikh faith, but lack of human resources was a major hurdle. However, with the services of Dr Dharam Singh, Professor of Sikh Studies and Editor-in-Chief, Sikh Encyclopedia, Punjabi University (retd) being available, the Institute felt that it could now take up such a project. It took us some time and a couple of meetings to finalize the outline of the proposed project. Once we had the outline prepared, we immediately put ourselves on the job. The job was more difficult than we had initially anticipated and we were rather over-ambitious to commit for ourselves to the deadline of December for the release of this book. But we have done our best to come up with this book.

## II

The book, in its present form, comprises ten articles. The first article is on Guru Granth Sahib and deals with the history of its compilation, structure, metaphysics and philosophy, and

so on. It is not just the primary scripture of the Sikh faith but a living Guru to the Sikhs: a Sikh seeks guidance and inspiration from it in all ventures of his personal as well as corporate life. The Guru Granth Sahib was first compiled in 1604 under the personal care and supervision of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru of the Sikh faith. The text has since remained unaltered except once when Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, added to it, in 1706, the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru. It was a little thereafter, in 1708 to be exact, that he bestowed on the Word as contained therein, status of the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. The scripture being a treasure-house of the divine Word occupies the central place in every Sikh sacred place, called the *gurdwara* or the *dwara* (door or abode) of the Guru. The Sikh tradition believes the scriptural Word as the spirit-incarnate of the Gurus - unlike Christianity wherein Word is believed to have become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ who thus became the central focus for the followers. It is also in this sense that the relationship between the Sikh and the Guru becomes that of spirit and not of form. One implication of this being the Sikhs' firm belief that mere expression of faith in the Guru and just a glimpse of the Guru are not going to help. Man must seek guidance from the Guru, and then tread the path himself. In other words, the Sikhs must daily read some of the scriptural hymns, try to understand their true import and then put its understanding into practice in their daily life. That is what true *nam-simran* (remembrance of Divine Name) stands for.

Guru Granth Sahib also contains the wisdom of holy men, belonging to different religious denominations, caste-groups and far-off regions, spread over a period of about five centuries. It strongly holds on to the view that truth or revelation cannot be the monopoly of any particular religion, region, caste or person. This makes Sikh religion pluralist in nature. There is in the scripture an overwhelming stress on ethnic equality

of humankind and mutual love. Man is exhorted to cultivate these values of equality, love and acceptance for peaceful and harmonious social existence in the modern-day world of religious and cultural plurality.

The second article in the book is on the *Vars*, *Kabitts* and *Swaiyyas* of Bhai Gurdas who acted as a scribe with Guru Arjan to compile the first codex of the Adi Granth and also the first among pioneers to elucidate, elaborate and codify the fundamentals of Sikh theology on the basis of his understanding and knowledge of the sacred verses of the first five Sikh Gurus during his close association with four of the Sikh Gurus - Guru Amar Das to Guru Hargobind. His close association with the Gurus as well as with many of the most intimate and devout disciples of the Gurus enabled him to acquire and imbibe the spiritual philosophical vision, legacy and the gradually emerging distinct Sikh tradition and ideology of the Sikh Gurus. A study of his *Vars*, which are acknowledged as 'key to the understanding of the scriptural hymns', reveals his knowledge of all prevalent religious traditions (Hinduism, Islam, Naths, Yogis, etc.), his clear vision of the distinctness of the Gurus' philosophy, and their laying the foundation of a new and distinct faith. Blessed as he was with rare creativity and versatility of expression, he composed *Vars*, *Kabitts* and *Swaiyyas*. An effort has been made in this article to summarize the major concepts of Sikh theology as derived, interpreted, codified, elucidated and elaborated in Bhai Gurdas' compositions. While discussing his *Vars*, the article comments upon his views on the Sikh concept of God, the Guru, the *gurmat* or the teachings of the Gurus, the Sikh ideal of man (*Gurmukh*), the holy congregation (*Sat-sangat*) and so on. While discussing these and allied concepts, an effort has also been made to highlight the ultimate objective of human life and how to achieve it. The overall impact of his *Vars* has been to lay down the road map for traversing the Sikh way of

life by grasping the full import of the postulates of the Sikh religion.

Apart from these forty *Vars*, Bhai Gurdas has also to his credit a total of 675 compositions broadly known as *Kabitts* and *Swaiyyas* though there are also *Dobras*, *Sorathas* and *Chhands* among them. It seems these were composed by the poet during his earlier phase when he preached *gurmat*, under instruction of Guru Ram Das, in and around the cities of Agra, Ujjain, Lucknow, Burhanpur and Kashi. In fact, it is at Kashi/Varanasi, a famous seat of Hindu theology and Brahmanical practices, that he is believed to have composed most of these works. Being well versed in Sanskrit and the essentials of the Hindu scriptural literature and being placed in the midst of leading scholars and exponents of these scriptural texts, it was his litmus test to successfully project the distinct nature of the Sikh gospel. Since these compositions are larger in number than his *Vars*, these also include the poet's views on some peripheral and deductive Sikh beliefs and practices which are natural corollaries of the major concepts of Sikh theology.

The third article analyses and evaluates Senapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* which, despite it being a glorious portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh's persona as its title "*Sri Gur Sobha*" (In Praise of the Guru) itself suggests, it is also a highly perceptive treatise on Sikh religion, Sikh theology, spiritual oneness of the Gurus and its culmination in the bestowal of eternal Guruship on the *granth* (Guru Granth Sahib) and the *panth* (the Khalsa Panth). The Gurus are believed to have become spirit-incarnate in the Word as included in the Guru Granth Sahib whereas the Khalsa Panth is the Gurus' bodily manifestation. Consisting of twenty chapters and 935 couplets (*chhands*), *Sri Gur Sobha* revolves round Guru Gobind Singh as much for his personal charisma as his spiritual vision and divinely-ordained mandate and mission, ideology and its implementation. Not much biographical detail is known about



the poet from this work, but we learn from some other sources that the poet's real name was Chander Sain and he was the son of Baal Chand, a Maan Jat. Although his ancestors belonged to Lahore, he himself had shifted to Wazirabad. One Chandan Devidas was his literary guide and that he found himself a place in the court of Guru Gobind Singh. As he begins the first chapter of his *Sri Gur Sobha* with "*Khalsa Baatch*" instead the usual "*kavi-o-vaach*", it indicates that the poet might have by then received the Khalsa initiation. Completed in AD 1711 (though an inner evidence gives 1701 as the date of its completion), it can well be treated as the premier text in the literary tradition of *Gurbilas*.

The third article is an attempt to assess the position of *Janamsakhi* literature as a whole in the category of Sikh canonical, scriptural and classical texts of Sikh religion and assess its relevance in the overall ambit of Sikh literature. It reveals some basic facts about five different *Janamsakhi* versions such as their time of composition, contents, possible motive behind each composition and portrayal of Guru Nanak's person and his spiritual vision and several other historical, contextual and incidental circumstantial details provided in each version and then formulates an opinion about the authenticity or otherwise of each version.

The author traces the origin of the *Janamsakhi* tradition to Bhai Gurdas' *Var* I which has been called by various scholars 'the seminal and foundational work in the *Janamsakhi* tradition' and wherein he narrates some select episodes from the Guru's life to articulate his spiritual and social vision. This *Var* is a complementary work in continuation of the first and original version of *Janamsakhi Mahal Pebile ki* by Seehan Uppal which was written during Guru Amar Das' Guruship, more particularly during the last four years of his Guruship. Next in chronological sequence comes *Adi Sakhi* or *Janam Patri Babe ji ki* in 1597-1600 written by Bhai Boola (Boola Pandha), a resident of Dalla,

who was a devout disciple of Guru Amar Das. He is followed by Meharban whose work is deeply indebted to these earlier versions. All these three versions might have come before Bhai Gurdas wrote his *Var*. The next version ascribed to Bhai Bala comes thereafter and the article analyzes the controversy relating to its authorship and authenticity. The next version in the tradition is *Sakhi Adi Ant ki* or *Puratan Janamsakhi*. It is also known by several other names such as *Sakhi Babe Nanak Ji Ki*, *Vilayat Wali Janam Sakhi*, *Hafizabad wali Sakhi*, *Colebrook Wali Sakhi* or *Dehradun Wali Sakhi* and *Macauliffe wali Sakhi*. The article views that this is the latest version in the *Janamsakhi* tradition while Seehan Uppal's work is the earliest. Although a *Janamsakhi* is neither a scriptural writing nor a work of history, but it is definitely a literary chronicle of Guru Nanak's biographical, spiritual and philosophical voyage and his distinct ideological gospel which became an important component of the foundational material of Sikh religion on which the whole superstructure of Sikh religion and its metaphysics, theology, philosophy and history has been built.

The *Sri Gursobha* pays a rich tribute to Guru Gobind Singh whom he portrays, with the help of some selective incidents and anecdotes from Gurus' life, as a divine messenger who succeeded in his assigned task of creating a new class of men with a view to dismantle the existing caste-ridden bigoted, intolerant and exploitative politico-social structure and to build a structure marked by equality, love, justice and philanthropy. With his charismatic personality and soul endowed with the Divine mandate to punish the evil doers, uphold the virtuous and champion the human rights of the downtrodden and the exploited, he transformed the slavish and suppressed people into men with self-respect and dignity. Being fearless and imbued with the spirit of sacrifice and inspired by the sacrifices of their mentors and his whole family, the Khalsa could face the most formidable challenges, and developed an instinct for

survival even under the most hostile conditions and inhuman atrocities. It is this kind of indomitable spirit and profile of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa which Sainapati applauds and glorifies in his *Sri Gurbobha*. The way the poet has narrated the divine attributes of Guru Gobind Singh's personality, his creation of the Khalsa Commonwealth with its distinct code of conduct, elimination of the institution of Masands and his battles against unjust social order reveals that the poet had grasped the essence of Sikh religion in its totality. By virtue of being a close contemporary and observer of Guru Gobind Singh's conceptual and practical demonstrative deeds and their narration, this work has the genuine credentials of being one of the primary sources of a significant slice of Sikh history and a literary work of considerable merit.

*Gurbilas Patshahi Chbevin*, completed according to inner evidence in AD 1718 though some anachronistic references also point towards some later interpolations, is the earliest work to narrate a complete life-story of the sixth Guru of the Sikh faith, Guru Hargobind. Three different published versions of it are available as edited by Indar Singh Gill; Gurbachan Singh Vedanti and Amarjit Singh; and Gurmukh Singh. Scholars differ as regards the authorship of this work but the confusion arises mainly because of the author's 'reluctance', resulting from his humility, to mention his name. Composed mostly in *Chaupai* and *Dohira*, this *Gurbilas* uses more than thirty meters in all. The language used is Punjabi with a mixture of *Braj*, though some words of Sanskrit and Persian are also found scattered here and there. Though there are references to some Puranic myths, the primary objective of the author is to write with complete devotion a eulogistic account of the life of Guru Hargobind. The work provides a good amount of information on contemporary social life and is thus of great historical and sociological importance.

Notwithstanding some lapses as regards dates or

chronology of events, this text is a very significant source of information on the historical and spiritual persona of Guru Hargobind. It also provides very useful information about some of the more important Sikhs of the Guru's time such as Baba Buddha, Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Bidhi Chand and others. Each episode included herein is complete in itself and also fits in well as a part of the main plot. Each episode serves to highlight the spiritual persona of Guru Hargobind who happens to be the main protagonist of the book. It is the first source to invent the story of Baba Mohan *Pothis* serving as the main source for the compilation of the Adi Granth. It also says that Guru Arjan himself composed the *Ragmala* and that Bhai Banno was given the first codex to get it bound from Lahore. However, these views of him on Baba Mohan *Pothis*, *Ragmala* and Bhai Banno have since been rejected by modern researchers. The poet has used also the device of prophesying, references to previous existences of various characters and introduces the story of various gods/goddesses and other Puranic characters to highlight the impact of the spiritual, divine persona of the Guru.

The other two works in this genre - *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* and *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* – are attempts, in verse, at having for the first time a comprehensive account of the personality of Guru Gobind Singh. They take all the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith as spiritually one though different in body and touches upon almost all events from the tenth Guru's life and also try to highlight the mission and objective of his life. Kuir Singh's *Gurbilas* has a total of 2938 *chhands*, out of which 2901 are written in Braj and the remaining 37 in Punjabi. Interestingly, the work has also a few specimens of prose interspersed in the text which are linguistically very significant. Completed in (1808 Bikrami/AD 1751) as per the colophon of the book, but some anachronistic references make the date suspect and this has resulted in some scholars believing that the work might

belong to sometime between 1751 and 1762. Although the author makes explicit statements at more than one place saying that his work represents only what he had heard from the discourses delivered by Bhai Mani Singh, but he obviously studied, analyzed and made use of various volumes relating to the Guru's life and other tertiary literature to make his work authentic and comprehensive.

Divided into twenty-one cantos or chapters, this *Gurbilas* begins with an invocation to the Supreme Divine who is the creator of the entire manifest phenomena and then briefly refers to Guru Tegh Bahadur leaving on a preaching odyssey to the eastern parts of India. It is important as the first source which portrays the complete life-story of Guru Gobind Singh. It provides very useful information about the Guru's early life, creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh as fulfillment of his divinely-ordained mission, the proceedings of the day when the Khalsa was created and passing over the office of Guru to the *granth* or Guru Granth Sahib, prescription of the Khalsa *rahit*, and so on. Another notable feature of the work is the poet's reference to the martyrdom in 1734 of Bhai Mani Singh along with several other Sikhs. As the poet names some of these Sikhs, it can be presumed that he might have been an eye witness to the entire episode. Of course, the work has certain flaws such as he invents, taking a clue from the *Mahima Prakash*, the story of *devi* worship prior to the creation of Khalsa, tries to rationalize in a dramatic manner the Guru's repeated calls for the 'head of a Sikh' by inventing the story of slaying of five he-goats, mixes up the chronological order of the battles the Guru had to fight, etc.

The *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* by Bhai Sukkha Singh, another early life-account of Guru Gobind Singh, is also a versified and detailed account of the Guru's life giving rare insights into the prevailing socio-political conditions as well as into the moral issues involved in the armed resistance of

the Guru against the Mughals. The poet worked on the *Gurbilas* when the memory of the most gruesome death sentence given and inflicted on Banda Singh Bahadur was still sharp in the minds of the older generation and the Sikhs had struggled against three different forces – Mughals, Afghans and the Marathas, but now the Sikhs were in political ascendancy and the *misl*s had already come into existence. The poet is not as interested in describing political conditions as he is in highlighting the merits of the Sikh rule. According to the poet, in the Sikh rule the weak and the hapless had no fear of the powerful and in fact the Sikh rule aimed at strengthening the weak. He makes scattered references to various religious practices of the Hindus and the Sikhs. The latter were true to the *rahit* prescribed by the Gurus; celebrated the days connected with the Gurus by singing *bani*; Khalsa initiation was given much importance as was the Akal Takht; *langar* was one of the central institutions and simple fare was served there; and protection to the saintly and annihilation of the demonic was included among the primary obligations of the Khalsa.

Sukha Singh relied on the *Bachitra Natak*, *Sri Gur Sobha*, *Mahima Prakash* and Kuir Singh's *Gurbilas* in the preparation of his version of *Gurbilas*, but he adds to all this information his own insights into the prevailing socio-political conditions and the moral issues involved in the Guru's struggle against oppressive rule of the state. He narrates in a euphemistic style the grandeur of the Guru's court which the hill chiefs especially Raja Bhim Chand envied. Machinations of the hill chiefs are also described with great insight. The details of the last days of the Guru at Nanded as given here are not found in any earlier work. All the details of goddess worship he provides in his narrative prior to the creation of Khalsa and which seem to be the product of Brahminical influence have been taken from Kuir Singh. The details of the *sis bhet* episode, pouring of puffed sugar bubbles and antecedents of the Five Beloved

Ones are almost akin to Kuir Singh's narrative.

Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshabian Ka* has been discussed as belonging to a different genre and as a very important document which is a rapid account, in rather incipient Punjabi verse, of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith, of Banda Singh Bahadur and of some other important Sikhs. Alongside this, the poet gives some quite useful information about the families of the Gurus including their wives, children, brothers and other relatives. Description of historical events and mythological elements overlap at many places in the work. A prominent characteristic of the work is the chronological details of the events relating to the lives of the Gurus and their families. The Brahminical bias, invention of some stories and presenting them as the cause of some events in the present life, inaccuracy of dates and his inability to come to terms with the contemporary Sikh situation wherein Sikhs were fighting against the enemy as well as amongst themselves are some of the weaknesses of this work. The poet is quite familiar with the contents of the Guru Granth Sahib and the *Dasam Granth* and we see that he quotes from both of them anywhere and in whichever context he likes. However, like Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahima Prakash*, the *Bansavalinama* is also neither plain history nor is it free from inaccuracies of fact.

Chhibbar follows *Bala Janamsakhi* in regard to various details of the life of Guru Nanak and that is perhaps why certain dates and other details he gives do not tally with those accepted by modern researchers. He also makes a reference to Bala Sandhu joining the Guru on his preaching odysseys. As we all know, this *Janamsakhi* has come from the heretical Handalia tradition, the details given therein cannot be trusted. He believes in the doctrine of incarnation and calls all the Gurus as incarnations of various Hindu deities although Sikhism rejects the idea of divine incarnation, but while studying the *Bansavalinama* we must keep in mind the times

when it was written. He also commits some inaccuracies of fact trying to glorify his ancestors, but his understanding of contemporary times especially of the problems facing the Khalsa is better than his understanding of the Guru-period. He takes in his *Bansavalinama* the events up to the death of Nawab Kapur Singh in AD 1754. The details of the victories of Banda Singh Bahadur over Sirhand and other territories including the dates of these battles given by him have generally been followed by later writers on Sikh history. The Sikh leaders fighting amongst themselves for the establishment of personal fiefdoms instead of working for the one Khalsa organization and their politically expedient attitude of acceptance towards the Muslims make the poet unhappy. He is unable to forget the cruelties and atrocities perpetrated by the Mughal government against the Sikhs. He calls these Sikh leaders as '*maiki sikh raule de*' (the materialist Sikhs causing anarchy). He is of the view that the Mughals lost their political power because of their sinful deeds and the Khalsa attained political sovereignty as a result of the '*didari muktian de tap*' (the meditation of the perfect Sikhs) and wants the contemporary Sikh political leadership to learn a lesson from this if they wanted their sovereignty to last. He envisions an ideal state wherein everyone might enjoy peace, prosperity and dignity.

The *Bansavalinama* is a significant document on the contemporary socio-religious life giving numerous customs and beliefs of different religious communities. It reiterates the spiritual oneness of the Gurus and records various Sikh prescriptions on Sikh beliefs and *rahit* or way of life at different places in the work: for example, he wants the Sikhs to 'hold on to Guru Nanak so that they get acquitted hereafter'; 'no one can attain liberation without the guidance and grace of the Guru'; the Panth of the Guru shall remain armed and the Sikhs will follow the Granth (Guru Granth Sahib); he who abides by the Will of God shall find a place in the Divine Presence. (X:



494). His emphasis on the inner *rahit* as well as the outer appearance of a member of the Khalsa Brotherhood is quite significant and is relevant even today.

The next article is a critique of the *Mahima Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla. Completed according to inner textual evidence in AD 1776, *Mahima Prakash* is a detailed and versified, with brief prose sections at the end, an anecdotal account of the lives of the Sikh Gurus, with numerous references to the teachings of the Gurus and the Sikh way of life scattered here and there. It has been published by the Languages Department, Punjab, Patiala, in two volumes – the first volume which comprises 65 *sakhis* from the life of Guru Nanak is titled *Guru Nanak Mahima* and the second volume, titled *Mahima Prakash*, has 172 *sakhis* from the lives of the remaining nine Gurus. At the end, these as one brief *sakhi* about Banda Singh Bahadur also. This *sakhi* as well as the last *sakhi* of Guru Gobind Singh's life is in prose. The author, who was a direct descendent of Guru Amar Das through his son Baba Mohri and grandson Baba Arjani, was well versed in ancient and Puranic literature apart from the Sikh scriptural text. He had a thorough knowledge of Indian mythology, history, tradition and culture as well as of Hinduism and Islam. He appears to be a deep devotee of the Sikh faith though the orthodox Hindu *rahini* (way of life) is never completely off his mind. Sarup Das is proud of his ancestry and throughout his work speaks very highly of his ancestors, sometimes even at the cost of factual accuracy.

The primary objective of the poet to write this work seems to give expression to his deeply eulogistic feelings towards the Sikh Gurus. He is a devout Sikh of the Gurus and proclaims Guru Nanak supreme amongst all other religious preceptors and prophets. In each episodes, he has consistently retained his focus on the personality of the Guru concerned, various episodes connected with his life and tried to highlight the

essentials of the Gurus' teachings with the help of these episodes. He believes the Gurus to be the embodiments of the Supreme Divine, spiritual oneness of all the ten Gurus, bestowal of guruship on the *granth* (or Word as enshrined in what we today revere as the Guru Granth Sahib), and highlights these and similar other issues of religious importance. At the end of each section, he gives the dates of birth and death of the Guru, the total period of his pontification and names of his offspring. *Mahima Prakash* remains an important source on the lives of the Gurus and the contemporary milieu. It preserves in its pages the persona of each of the Gurus, incidents related to their lives, information about various beliefs and practices popular among the masses, the main occupations of the times, system of education, marriage and death rites, and so on. The poet is quite familiar with the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib and he quotes with ease a hymn wherever it fits in his narrative. He is a poet of great merit and uses different meters to suit the narrative. He has used various similes and metaphors to adorn his poetic work but never lets them be a burden on his narrative. Whatever the embellishments, his main emphasis throughout remains on the reiteration of the Gurus' teachings to inspire the Sikhs to tread the path of truth and lead a spiritually and morally pious life.

The article six on the Gurbilas literature makes an attempt to analyze and evaluate the three works in this genre – *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* (anonymous) *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (Kuir Singh) and *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* (Sukkhia Singh). Although the 'Bilas' (*Vilas*) genre in Sikh literature is taken as part of the *charit kavya* in Indian literary tradition, but it differs from the latter in terms of its subject-matter as well as objective. In Sikh history, this tradition of 'Bilas' literature tries to find its roots in Guru Gobind Singh's *Bachitra Natak* and Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha*. This is perhaps the reason the first such works deal with the life-stories of the Gurus and each such work is

also titled *Gurbilas*. In the Sikh literary tradition. The *Gurbilas* genre follows the earlier *Janamsakhi* genre used to narrate the life-story of Guru Nanak, but it differs in so far as it deals with the life-stories of two other Gurus, Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. No doubt, the lives of the Sikh Gurus have been described in the (Panth) *Prakash* literature also, but the latter is more comprehensive in nature and deals with the history of the entire Sikh faith beginning with the founder of the faith and concluding with the times of the author.

Rattan Singh Bhangoo's *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (1841) has been analyzed and evaluated as written in the great literary Western and Eastern tradition of poetical epics and as one of the oldest historical chronicles about the origin and evolution of the Sikh faith. This epic work is a great work of art as well as Sikh history, especially of the blood-soaked period of over one hundred years covering the whole of 18<sup>th</sup> century (1675-1795). Bhangoo wrote this epic, in 1841, with the twin objective of rectifying the biases and prejudices in the two versions prepared by Khushwaqat Rai and Ghulam Mohi-uddin alias Boote Shah and to write an authentic and objective history of the Sikhs. All these three versions, however, resulted from the British desire to usurp Punjab then ruled by the Sikhs and for that purpose to learn about the Sikh religion and history and, as Bhangoo says, to know how the Guru bestowed sovereignty on the Khalsa. Being a good scholar of Persian, and Sikh and ancient Hindu scriptures and belonging to a Sikh family of illustrious Sikh martyrs as well as being an immediate descendant of those Sikh veterans who had participated in some of the most violent and bloody military campaigns against the Mughals, Bhangoo was fully qualified to pen down a reliable version of the Sikh history.

The central subject and main thesis of Bhangoo's *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (the very name is suggestive) is the origin and evolution of the Sikh religion, despite its not very meticulous

adherence to the chronological order of events of the Sikh history. Besides chronicling the sagas of supreme sacrifices by the Sikh Gurus and the Sikhs for upholding the values of their faith and religion, it also acquires the status of a seminal work for the preservation as well as presentation of the most basic Sikh tenets of sovereignty of *Guru Granth*, *Guru Panth*, and the Sikh tradition of *Gurmatta* and Sikh martyrdom. An effort has also been made herein on conceptualizing these tenets as well as demonstrating the technique and tradition of materializing these concepts as living role models so that the coming generations may learn to preserve and uphold this rich heritage and legacy of their faith. By accomplishing these two objectives, this epic has come to hold a unique position among the few available resources of contemporary Sikh history.

The last article in the book evaluates Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* which is an anecdotal and episodic collection narrating the biographical, spiritual, religious, ideological, pontifical life and role of ten Sikh Gurus, Sahibzadas and Baba Banda Singh Bahadur's life and contribution to Sikhism. It combines Sikh spiritualism and Sikh ethos with Sikh history and projects the Sikh Gurus' spiritual vision, philosophy and their concerted and consecutive efforts to establish and perpetuate Sikhism as a distinct religion in such a beautiful manner that the text has been authorized to be recited and explicated in the daily evening discourse in major Sikh historical Gurdwaras all over the world. Apart from its religious and historical contents, it is a rare work of literature in its epic dimensions. It is an indispensable text for a devout Sikh, a masterpiece for a literary scholar and a goldmine for a researcher of Sikh history and India's rich heritage.

Completed in AD 1843 after painstaking labour of about ten years, the work comprises about 62000 couplets and over two and half lac lines. If we include the period of preparation and finishing of *Guru Nanak Parkash* (1822-23) also, then it

took the author a period of around 21 years to complete this monumental work. Guru Nanak's life and contribution has been narrated in *Sri Gur Nanak Parkash* and that of other nine Sikh Gurus from Guru Angad Dev to Guru Gobind Singh in *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*. He has divided his text into twelve sections, each section titled as *Ras*, and each section or *Ras* having several chapters called *Anshus*. *Guru Nanak Parkash* consists of two sections - *Poorbardh* (1<sup>st</sup> half) and *Uttarardh* (2<sup>nd</sup> half) with a total of 130 chapters. It consists of around sixty episodes or *sakhsis* related to Guru Nanak on the basis of many sources but especially *Bhai Bala wala Janamsakhi*. However, he has included only those episodes from the this *Janamsakhi* which projected Guru Nanak's spiritual enlightenment. *Guru Nanak Parkash* has been the best portrayal of Guru Nanak's magnificent persona instilling and perpetuating religious faith among the Sikhs in the Sikh pathway of life as formed and propounded by Guru Nanak.

The article on the *Rahitnamas* is an attempt at the evaluation of their contribution in articulating the distinct Sikh *rahit/rahini*. An ethical and moral code and a distinctive pattern of personal appearance and social behavior was laid down for the Sikhs by the Gurus themselves. References to this moral code and the rules of social conduct can be articulated from the study of numerous scattered references in the scriptural hymns and other canonical literature such as the *Dasam Granth* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. Since most of the literature in the *rahitnama* genre was produced after the creation of the Khalsa, it also contains prescriptions about the outer appearance as stipulated by the Tenth Master at the time of the Khalsa creation. With the sole exception of the *Prem Sumarg Granth*, all the *rahitnamas* discussed are ascribed to the Sikhs closely associated with Guru Gobind Singh. Also, these *rahitnamas* are said to have been pronounced or authenticated by the Guru though none of them is directly ascribed to him.

They happen to be the earliest sources on the Khalsa *rahit* and together they have played a very significant and valuable role in the articulation of a model Sikh code of conduct (*Rebat Maryada*).

We have taken for analysis and evaluation only six of the earliest *Rahitnamas* – of Bhai Nand Lal, Bhai Prahlad Singh, Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Chaupa Singh, Bhai Desa Singh and the anonymous *Prem Sumarg Granth*. These *Rahitnamas* have been produced by persons who had been witnessing or/and participating in the new life-style evolved through the creation of Khalsa and thus felt the need to compile, for the benefit of common masses especially those who had recently received the Khalsa initiation, the rules of conduct for the life of a Khalsa. This also shows the writers' overriding desire to project a Sikh ethos different and distinct from the Brahmanical ethos. Most of such literature was written after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh for the reason perhaps because some enlightened Sikhs now felt with more intensity the need to put these rules together in black and white for the guidance of common Sikhs.

### III

All the texts analyzed and evaluated in the following pages of the book have been the primary sources on the study of Sikh religion and history. The Guru Granth Sahib is not only the scripture for the Sikhs but is their living Guru as well from whom they seek guidance and blessings in each venture of their life. This happens to be the most sacred text which occupies a unique place in the Sikh heritage. All other texts discussed hereafter also constitute a significant part of the literary heritage of the Sikhs. They portray a comprehensive picture of the historical and divine persona of the Gurus, stories from the lives of many other important Sikhs in the Sikh tradition, philosophy and theology as articulated by the

Gurus, Sikhs relations with the Mughal government at different points of time during the Guru-period and thereafter and their relations with various Rajput hill chiefs during the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the role played by various schismatic groups which worked antagonistically to the main Sikh tradition, role of Banda Singh Bahadur in leading the Sikhs towards their goal of worldly sovereignty, the severe persecution the Sikhs had to face during the first half of the eighteenth century and their rise to power soon thereafter. A study of these classical texts can help the reader attain a clear and comprehensive vision of Sikh history, philosophy and theology.

We have endeavoured to make a scientific and objective study of each of these texts so that their essence can be brought out for the benefit of the readers. Being a first attempt of its kind, we hope the book will be significant information and assistance to general readers of Sikhism and the students and scholars in the field of Sikh studies. These articles being introductory in nature, these are primarily, informative, partly, analytical and partly evaluative written primarily for the vast modern inquisitive English readership and to whet its curiosity and appetite for knowing about the rich Sikh heritage.

December 2, 2017  
Chandigarh

Dr. Dharam Singh  
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## SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB – AN INTRODUCTION –

The Sikh faith owes its origin to Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and the succeeding nine Gurus: their spirit, the Sikhs believe, has become incarnate in the Word as contained in the holy Volume now known as the Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikh Rahit Maryada also defines a Sikh as one who has faith only in the ten Gurus and their spirit-incarnate Guru Granth Sahib. In other words, after the ten person Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the Sikhs must acknowledge, for all time to come, the Guru Granth Sahib (their scripture), or more precisely the Word as contained therein, as their Guru. That is why the Sikhs are also called a 'people of the Book'.

The Guru Granth Sahib was first compiled in 1604 under the personal care and supervision of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru of the Sikh faith. The text has since remained unaltered except once when Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, added to it, in 1706, the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru. It was a little thereafter, in 1708 to be exact, that he bestowed on the Word as contained therein, office of the Guru. The scripture being a treasure-house of the divine Word occupies the central place in each Sikh sacred place, called the *gurdwara* or the *dwara* (door or abode) of the Guru.

The Sikh tradition believes the scriptural Word as the spirit-incarnate of the Gurus - unlike Christianity wherein Word is believed to have become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ who thus became the central focus for the followers. It is also in this sense that the relationship between the Sikh and the Guru becomes that of spirit and not of form. One implication of this being the Sikhs' firm belief that mere expression of faith in the Guru and just a glimpse of the Guru are not going to help. Man must seek guidance from the Guru,

and then tread the path himself. In other words, the Sikhs must daily read some of the scriptural hymns, try to understand their true import and then put that understanding into practice in their daily life. That is what true *nam-simran* (remembrance of Divine Name) stands for. For the Sikhs, the Word (and for that matter the Guru Granth Sahib since the Word is included therein) is an article of faith: they revere the Guru Granth Sahib, have faith in it and take it as the guiding spirit in all walks of life, but they do not worship it as an idol on the altar. It guides the Sikh way of life and the Sikhs receive guidance from it in their personal as well as corporate life.

The Guru Granth Sahib contains the wisdom of holy men, belonging to different religious denominations, caste-groups and far-off regions, spread over a period of about five centuries. It strongly holds on to the view that truth or revelation cannot be the monopoly of any particular religion, region, caste or person. This makes Sikh religion pluralist in nature. There is in the scripture stress on ethnic equality of humankind and mutual love. Man has to cultivate these values of equality, love and acceptance for peaceful and harmonious social existence in the modern-day world of religious and cultural plurality.

## COMPILATION AND INSTALLATION

Although we have the date when the work on the compilation of the scripture got completed, but we do not know with any amount of certainty as to on which date Guru Arjan (1563-1606) started working on this. The tradition believes that the Guru started work on compilation on the Vaisakhi day of 1660 *Bikrami*/AD 1603: this could perhaps be the date of beginning of actual writing though the Guru might have begun selecting, sifting and arranging the material much earlier. Bhai Gurdas, a poet and theologian whose work has the rare distinction of being called 'key to the understanding

of scriptural hymns', acted as an amanuensis with the Guru. The tradition holds, on the basis of what we find written in the hand of Bhai Gurdas at the head of the contents of the volume believed to have been written in his hand and now extant at Kartarpur, that the work of compilation of the scripture got completed on Bhadon *vadi ekam* Bikrami 1661 (1 August 1604). After getting this volume duly bound, it was installed in the newly built Harimandar (now popularly known as the Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple among the Westerners) on Bhadon *sudi ekam* of 1661 Bikrami (16 August 1604).<sup>1</sup> Baba Buddha was appointed the first *granthi* or scripture-reader.

The tradition is also unanimous about the place the Guru selected, keeping in view the stupendous nature of the task, a secluded and picturesque site marked by tranquil atmosphere where he could work undisturbed. The place was then a shady nook about one mile away from the city bustle. The Guru got a *sarovar* or pond dug there to make the surroundings more agreeable: he named this pond as Ramsar. This was the place where the Guru had earlier spent some time composing his *Sukhmani*. A memorial, called Gurdwara Ramsar, stands at the place where the Guru, along with his scribe Bhai Gurdas, used to sit during the writing of *Sukhmani*, the Psalm of Peace, and compilation of the scripture. The site is now on the southeastern side of the walled city closer to the Chativind Gate.

Here we must also discuss briefly the issues raised by some as to why the Guru thought of compiling the scripture and how he got hold of the hymns of his predecessors and others which he included in the scripture. Although both the questions have been answered by the Gurus in the scripture itself yet we need to answer some of the misunderstandings raised by followers of some schismatic groups and other individuals. Some of the early Sikh chronicles give different reasons why Guru Arjan Dev undertook the task of compilation and codification of the scripture. One most

commonly given argument is that the work was taken up to preserve the originality and authenticity of the genuine compositions of the Gurus. Leaders of certain schismatic groups had begun to compose hymns under the pseudonym of Nanak, passing them on as genuine hymns and thus creating confusion in the minds of common Sikh devotees. A strong need was felt to preclude any possibility of interpolation. These chronicles also differ as to how this question came up and how this realization dawned. Among the Sikh sources which consider the apprehension of interpolation as the sole reason include the *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* (1718), Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahima Prakash* (1776), Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* (1843) and Giani Gian Singh's *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* (1892).

The above-mentioned *Gurbilas* and the *Suraj Prakash Granth* are almost unanimous in their view that Guru Arjan took up the work of compilation when the apprehensions of interpolation of *kacchi bani* (unauthentic, apocryphal hymns) were shared with him by certain Sikhs. They imply that the preceding Gurus did not think of preserving their hymns and that the idea came to Guru Arjan, and that too when some Sikhs shared their concern. The argument has very weak legs and does not stand to scrutiny. Guru Amar Das, in one of his hymns, says that 'the message of a holy man for an individual is always actually meant for the whole humankind - *parthai sakhi maha purakh bolade saji sagal jahanai*.<sup>2</sup> And a message could not be useful for the entire humanity if it is not put to pen for preservation and propagation. Guru Nanak uttered several hymns during his preaching odysseys addressing them to some particular persons in some specific historical situations. In several of these situations, the person being addressed to by the Guru was not sympathetic to him or his viewpoint. In that situation, who could write down and preserve the hymn(s) except the Guru himself? The *Varan Bhai Gurdas* and *Puratan*

*Janamsakhi*, two authentic and earliest sources about the life and times of Guru Nanak, refer to Guru Nanak carrying a notebook under his arm as he traveled around.<sup>3</sup> This obviously implies that the Guru noted down in his notebook the hymns as he uttered them so as to preserve them.

Among the modern writers, G.B. Singh is the first person to research in this direction. He agrees that Guru Nanak might have preserved his *bani* in the form of a *pothi*. He cites several reasons to support his view. However, he errs thereafter when he says that Guru Nanak did not give over this codex to Bhai Lahina when he appointed him his successor, rather this *pothi* reached the hands of Baba Sri Chand after Guru Nanak's passing away. G.B. Singh further says that Sri Chand also seems to have failed to realize the importance of this sacred *pothi*. Consequently, the codex was offered to the river Ravi along with the body of Sri Chand. Given the stature of Baba Sri Chand and his relations with Guru Arjan, the above argument fails to convince anybody.

Interpolation of *bani* by some pseudo-Gurus, no doubt, posed a serious problem and the preservation of its original character was an important issue, but it does not sound convincing at all that Guru Arjan thought of compiling/canonizing the scripture only after the suggestion came from some devotees. Similarly, it is incorrect to presume that the preceding Gurus did not realize the importance of preserving *bani*. On the contrary, we are of the view that the work of preserving/compilation of *bani* had already started with the preceding Gurus, beginning with Guru Nanak himself. The Gurus were well aware of the importance of *bani* and thus had already started the process of preserving and compiling their hymns.

A modern-day scholar and exegete, Professor Sahib Singh, has also argued that Guru Nanak preserved his compositions in writing and bestowed on his successor as the time came; the

following Gurus preserved this codex, added to it their own hymns and each one of them handed it over to his successor.<sup>4</sup> There is also a view that the compositions of Guru Nanak were earlier recorded perhaps in different anthologies, but during his last years at Kartarpur Bhai Lahina was entrusted the job of arranging all these compositions into a *pothi*. Thus, this first redaction of Guru Nanak's *bani*, now turned into a codex, was bestowed on Guru Angad at the time of his appointment as successor to Guru Nanak.

There has also been available enough internal evidence as well to suggest that *bani* of the preceding Gurus was available with each of the successor-Gurus. The later Gurus have composed their verses generally in the same *ragas* which were earlier used by Guru Nanak. There has been close proximity, both of thought and even of words, between some verses say of Guru Nanak and Guru Angad or Guru Amar Das or Guru Ram Das. This could have been possible only if the later Guru had the text of the *bani* of the preceding Guru with him. The aim throughout had been to preserve the *bani* as guiding principle for humankind for all times to come and also to retain the originality of the Gurus' hymns against any attempts at interpolation by the pseudo-Gurus who had begun to compose their own verses under the name Nanak. The Gurus are also believed to have codices prepared of their genuine sacred writings for subsequent circulation among various *sangats* and individual devotees.

The question of how and from where Guru Arjan got the material including hymns of his predecessors has partly been answered in the preceding pages. As we have said in the preceding pages, Guru Nanak recorded in a note-book his own hymns as well as those of some other holy persons from wherever he could get them during his preaching odysseys. As Bhai Gurdas testifies, the Guru always kept this note-book with him as he travelled to different places. Also, there is

proximity of thought and even similarity of words between several of the hymns of Guru Nanak and those of later Gurus, between some *slokas* of Farid and other Bhagats and of Guru Nanak, between the hymns of some Bhagats and later Gurus. This shows, on the one hand, that *bani* of Farid was available with Guru Nanak and, on the other, that the later Gurus also had access to the *bani* of Guru Nanak as well as of the Bhagats. In other words, the *bani* of Guru Nanak and of the Bhagats he might have collected during his preaching odysseys and preserved with him was handed over to his successor at the time of succession. Thus changing hands, the entire corpus might have reached Guru Arjan.

However, there are some scholars who continue to hold on to the view that Guru Arjan depended on *Goindwal Pothis* which the Guru had to borrow from the descendants of Guru Amar Das and which they deem ancestral to the *Adi Granth*.<sup>5</sup> It is also said that these two codices containing *bani* of the first three Gurus was scribed by Sahansar Ram, son of Baba Mohan and grandson of Guru Amar Das. They argue that the material thus received served as the main source while compiling the scripture. A story has been invented to explain how the Guru was able to borrow these codices. The first such reference occurs in Sarup Das Bhalla<sup>6</sup> who says that Sahansar Ram (son of Baba Mohan and grandson of Guru Amar Das) used to write down *banis* of the Gurus and that Bhai Gurdas requested the Guru to get these *pothis* from Sahansar Ram to facilitate the work of compilation. As Sahansar Ram declined the Guru's request, the Guru recited the hymn "*mohan tere uche mandar mahal apara....*"<sup>7</sup> The recital of the hymn highly moved Baba Mohan and he persuaded his son to accede to the Guru's request and hand over these *pothis*.

As it is, the entire story does not stand the test of logic. The *Mahima Prakash* first names Sahansar Ram in possession of these *pothis* but soon hides him behind Baba Mohan whom

it tries to paint as a very helpful person. If he were so helpful, Bhai Gurdas would not have referred to him in such damning terms in one of his *Vars* while referring to the unbecoming behaviour of the biological sons of preceding Gurus - Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das (both sons of Guru Nanak), Datu and Dasu (both sons of Guru Angad).<sup>8</sup> Obviously, Bhai Gurdas will never make such a derogatory remark about a person who might have been so helpful. Also, the Ahiyapur Pothi gives 1652 Bikrami/AD 1596 the year of the scribing of the codex, a period coinciding with that of the pontificate of Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606).<sup>9</sup> The argument that it was scribed under the personal care of Guru Amar Das (1479-1574) stands falsified as the Guru passed away in AD 1574.

As it is, there is in the entire Guru Granth Sahib absolutely no hymn praising any individual other than the Gurus and God, this story which is woven around a couple of verses of Guru Arjan seems to have been invented for obviously an ulterior motive. Balwant Singh Dhillon<sup>10</sup> has rejected the theory on several other counts as well. One, arrangement of hymns in the *Goindval Pothis* as well as of *ragas* in these *pothis* does not match with those of the scripture. Two, the *pothis* do not comprise the entire *bani* of the first three Gurus: a sizeable number of hymns of Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das are missing. Even Guru Nanak's *Siddha Gosti* and Guru Amar Das' *Anandu* are incomplete. Three, quite a few apocryphal writings also form part of these *pothis*: about 36 compositions attributed to various authors forming part of these extant *pothis* have not found acceptance in the scripture.

Giani Gian Singh, in his *Tavarikh Guru Khalsa*, gives a different view as to how Guru Arjan Dev got hold of the *bani* of the preceding Gurus. He says that the Guru sent out messengers with *bukamnamas* addressed to individual Sikhs as well as to congregations in areas far and near requesting them to send or bring to him any hymns of the preceding Gurus



they might have in their possession. Thus, the Guru took several years collecting *bani* from different sources and then sifting the genuine from the fake. Talking of Baba Mohan, he says that the codices of hymns with him had very little *bani*. On the other hand, he refers to a rather heavy manuscript with Bhai Bakhatu (of Jalalpur village in *parganah* Hasan-Abdal) who is said to have resided with the first four Gurus and had prepared a copy of their hymns. Bhai Bakhatu responded to the Guru's call and brought the volume to his presence. This codex contained a large number of hymns and it served, he says, as the source material for the scripture.

Just like the earlier view, this also has several discrepancies. If the first view depends on the *Goindwal Pothis*, this view negates the significance of these *pothis* by saying that it had but very little *bani*. Also, both these views presume that Guru Nanak and Guru Angad Dev had given over the codices of their hymns to their respective successors as the time came. Then it does not stand to reason that Guru Amar Das did not give these over to his successor, Guru Ram Das, but instead gave them to his son, Baba Mohan. Reference to Bhai Bakhatu in the second view is obviously exaggerated. One, a codex with only the hymns of the first four Gurus cannot be as voluminous and heavy as depicted in the chronicle. Second, Bakhatu could not possibly have lived such a long life as to obtain signatures of all the four Gurus on this copy as claimed in the *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*.

Now a brief comment on how the *bhagat-bani* was collected, selected and included in the scripture. Although among the contributors other than the Gurus, there are Sufis, Bhattas and others along with the Bhagats, but for the sake of popular understanding all of their compositions are clubbed together as *bhagat-bani*. There is a view that the entire *bhagat-bani* has been interpolated in the post-Guru Arjan era through the intrigues of Prithi Chand and Emperor Jahangir. Thus, the

entire *bhagat-bani* should, according to this view, be treated as *kacchi bani*. This view has been convincingly and thoroughly rejected by almost everybody except the followers of the Panch Khalsa Diwan of Bhasaur.

According to the *Suraj Prakash Granth* and the *Gurbilas*, these Bhagats came to Guru Arjan in their subtle bodies. They were led by Kabir and they had come with the request to get their verses included in the Holy Volume he was going to prepare. The author of the *Tavarikh* does not seem to be clear on the issue: he refers to the two views but does not say which he believes to be true. One, the souls of these Bhagats came, presented themselves to Bhai Gurdas and dictated their hymns. Two, Guru Arjan selected the *bhagat-bani* from the *pothis* he borrowed from Baba Mohan. To us, all these views seem to be far from truth and they have been rejected by most of the scholars. The *bani* of these holy men as collected by Guru Nanak during his various preaching odysseys and preserved by him changed hands at the time of spiritual succession and reached Guru Arjan.

Thus, it becomes apparent that the origins of the Sikh scriptural text can be easily traced back to Guru Nanak. No doubt, these hymns were remembered and sung by many followers but this oral tradition, also known as the *kirtan sampardai*, was neither the first method nor the only way of preserving *bani*: rather, oral tradition in Sikhism, though a popular mode, follows the scribal tradition which is the mother tradition. Guru Nanak and then his spiritual successors tended to record it on its very manifestation. The scribal tradition was the premier tradition and it flourished under the watchful eyes of the first four Gurus: it had been an ongoing process which was co-extensive with the pontificate of the preceding Gurus and came down to Guru Arjan on his succession in a well nurtured form. Scribing of volumes of *bani* had developed into a pastime with the more devout among the Sikhs. No doubt,

the oral tradition which involved remembering hymns for singing also continued alongside the scribal tradition but it had no independent origins or growth, rather it thrived purely on the latter tradition.

We seem convinced that the material received through the preceding Gurus served as the primary source when work on compilation was taken up, though the Guru on his own might have also made efforts by sending out letters and messengers to collect any left out hymns of the Gurus. After securing this material from different sources, the Guru scrutinized it to ascertain its authenticity/genuineness. Bhai Gurdas did the job of writing down the main text of the scripture which he completed on Bhadon *vadi ekam* Bikrami 1661 (1 August 1604). Guru Arjan put a seal of authority by inscribing the Mul Mantra in his own hand at the first folio of the manuscript. The holy volume was then called Pothe (literally volume) or Pothe Sahib (*sahib* is an honorific used here as a suffix). After getting this hand-written volume duly bound, it was installed in the newly completed building of the Harimandar Sahib at Amritsar. The manuscript copy preserved in a family at Kartarpur is traditionally believed to be the one written in the hand of Bhai Gurdas under the supervision of Guru Arjan.

At that time, the scripture contained compositions of the first five Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Arjan Dev, apart from those of some other holy men. It has since then remained unaltered except the inclusion of the hymns of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. This was done by Guru Gobind Singh during his stay, in 1706, at Talwandi Sabo, also called Damdama Sahib, in the present-day Bathinda district, while on his way to the south. Guru Gobind Singh got this manuscript prepared in the hand of Bhai Mani Singh (d. 1738), scholar and martyr well known in Sikh history. This manuscript which had the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur included

in it is no more extant today. It is believed that it was lost/destroyed during the Vadda Ghallughara or the Great Holocaust which took place on 5 February 1762 at Kup-Rahira, near Malerkotla. In this carnage, the Sikh loss of life is estimated at about 25 to 30 thousand.

Bhai Gurdas, the scribe, while recording the fact of completing the job of compilation, called it the Pothi. It was a little later that it came to be called the *Adi Granth*: the word *adi* means the premier as well as the eternal, and the *granth* implies the volume or the book. It might have been given this nomenclature perhaps to distinguish and differentiate it from the volume of compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. The latter came to be called the *Dasam Granth* or the volume containing compositions of the tenth (*dasam*) Guru vis-à-vis the volume prepared earlier which was premier historically as well as in importance. It went through another change in nomenclature when it was called and acknowledged as the Guru Granth Sahib: it was in 1708 just before his passing away that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed on it the office of the Guru. Ever since then the Sikhs have revered and addressed it as the Guru Granth Sahib.

Any insinuations (for example, Pashaura Singh's doctoral dissertation on 'The Text and Meaning of the Adi Granth') in the name of textual criticism to challenge the authenticity of the scripture have been strongly refuted by various scholars. We need not go into details of this issue, but only state that 'the problem of correct canon, textual criticism, etc. can arise only when a scripture is compiled and finalized after the demise of the prophet and many man-made versions of the scripture or part of it become available between the demise of the prophet and the date of its final compilation. For example, in the case of Jewish and Christian scriptures, there are innumerable intervening manuscripts suggesting one inference or the other which gives unlimited mass of material to scholars

to exercise their intellectual ability or give vent to their idiosyncracies, some of them being malicious. Unlike the Torah, the Bible, the Dhammpada and the Quran, the Guru Granth Sahib has been the only scripture compiled and finalized under the personal care and supervision of the Sikh Gurus. Thus, all suggestions to the effect that the work of compilation and editing of hymns went on even after the compilation of the scripture by Guru Arjan are misleading'.<sup>11</sup>

As soon as the scripture was completed, it was taken to the Harimandar Sahib in a procession with due respect and ostentation. The tradition holds that the Baba Buddha carried the scripture, containing the revelatory Word, on his head as the Guru himself walked behind barefoot waiving the flywhisk. Many accompanying Sikhs also walked barefoot up to the Harimandar. Obviously, the Guru showed respect to the Word and wanted the devotees to realize that the Word was the Guru's spirit and it was even more respectful than the body of the Guru. The scripture reached the Harimandar and it was installed there. Baba Buddha, a much venerated holy man in Sikh tradition, was appointed the first *granthi* or officiant. For installation the scripture was placed on *manji sahib* (literally a small cot) and the Guru, once again as an act of respect for the Word, himself sat on the floor, i.e. the lower platform.

As the scripture was installed, Baba Buddha was asked to read out the *vak*, i.e. the first hymn appearing at the beginning of the left page of the scripture when opened at random. The tradition holds that the *vak* read out on that occasion was the composition of Guru Arjan and it appeared under *raga* Suhi available at page 783 of the now available printed edition of the scripture. The *vak* began with the words *santa ke karaji api khaloia hari kammu karavani aia rama* which translated into English would imply that 'God Himself supports the cause of the saints and helps them through all the ventures they undertake'. It is also believed that the Guru composed this

hymn as thanksgiving at the completion of the digging of the *amritsar* tank.

## STRUCTURE

In its present form, the Guru Granth Sahib contains hymns of six of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and those of some holy men from other traditions including the Bhakti movement and Sufi tradition. Among those coming from the Bhakti movement include Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Trilochan, Jaideva, Dhanna, *et al.* In this category of holy men are also included the Bhattas who composed *swaiyyas* eulogizing the Gurus, and Rai Balwand and Satta, two bards, who used to sing hymns in the court of Guru Arjan and who also composed a *var* in Ramkali measure which apart from other things stresses the spiritual oneness of all the Gurus. Those from the Sufi background are the famous Sufi saint, Shaikh Farid, and Bhikhan. There is another category in which we can include persons coming from the Gurus' families and others who were otherwise closely connected with the Gurus, and this includes Baba Sundar, the great-grandson of Guru Amar Das, who contributed one *Sadu* included in the Guru Granth Sahib under Ramkali measure and Bhai Mardana who accompanied Guru Nanak on his preaching odysseys. All these contributors other than the Gurus are popularly called Bhagats; the *bani* of all these contributors except Sundar and Mardana is clubbed under one nomenclature *bhagat-bani*. Theologically, all the scriptural hymns, may they be of Guru Nanak or Farid or Kabir or Ravidas are held in equal respect by the Sikhs: none is superior or inferior to the other. These hymns of the Gurus as well as of the Bhagats as a whole constitute the *bani* which has been given the status of the Guru, the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs.

As it is, the scripture now available in printed form comprises 1430 standard pages. For the sake of accuracy of the printed text and for the sake of showing due respect to the

Word while under print, the rights to publish it are vested only in the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, a democratically-elected body of the Sikhs to manage their shrines as well as to look after other religious affairs of the community. The entire scripture is in verse, most of which is assigned to different *ragas* though there are a few verses which have not been assigned to any particular *raga*. The contributors other than the Gurus belong to different parts of India and come from different caste groups including the so-called *sudras*. Ideological affinity was the sole criterion for the selection of *bani* of these latter authors.

It has been an age-old tradition that writers/scribes invariably invoke God or some deity, before beginning with the main body of work, to seek the latter's blessings for the successful completion of their venture. In secular literature also the same practice has been prevalent. In the latter case, however, such an invocation is used both to seek Divine blessings as well as to secure financial assistance/rewards from the worldly patron. Even in our daily routine, a religious person would begin each of his ventures even to the small job of writing a letter with an invocation. If the literary work - may it be of spiritual or secular content - happened to be divided into several sections and sub-sections, the practice was to repeat the invocation at the head of each section and even sub-section. Sometimes the invocation was also repeated when the job of the author/scribe was half way through. However, it was the prerogative of the author to use the invocation in full or in part at any of the above given places.

The word '*om*' or '*oan*' is invocatory and has been used as such in the beginning of the Vedas and the Upanishads. In the case of the Puranic literature which includes the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, etc., use of such invocation was universally popular. The poet would invariably invoke either the supreme Lord or the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Saraswati, or some

other deity at the very start of the work. In the case of the Islamic scripture, the Quran, the invocation is also made in the beginning: this invocation reads as follows: *bismillah-i-rahmanurrahim* (O Compassionate Lord, I begin with Thy grace). The Sikh scripture opens with what is popularly called the *mul mantra*, though not so titled as such. The text of the *mul mantra* comprises a few words/terms suggesting the attributes of God as articulated by the Sikh Gurus. Transliterated into Roman script, the text of the *Mul Mantra* would run as follows:

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ  
ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ  
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ  
ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

A free rendering into English of the above text would read as follows:

*The Creator-Lord is one; Call Him Eternal Truth;  
He is the supreme Creator-Being immanent in the creation;  
He knows no fear and is at enmity with none;  
His Being is formless and beyond time;  
He is not subject to birth in any form, and He is self-existent;  
Realization of God is attainable through True Guru's grace.*

It seems the *mul mantra* has been used here as an instructional invocation: in this kind of invocation, the author sings praises of what he is going to deal with in the following text. This invocation thus also introduces the person or idea the author/authors is/are going to deal with in the coming pages. The 'invocation' here eulogizes God as articulated by Guru Nanak, and this Real One in all its aspects and with all its immenseness happens to be the subject-matter of the following text of the scripture. We also find this *Mul Mantra* repeated at the head of different sections and sub-sections of the scripture: it is found written in five different forms - sometimes in full and sometimes in various abbreviated forms.

The scripture has, broadly speaking, three parts. The first



part (pp. 1-13) is not assigned to any *raga* and comprises compositions such as the *Japu*, *So Daru*, *So Purakh* and *Sobila*, popularly called *Kirtan Sobila*. Of these compositions, the *Japu*, popularly known as *Japuji Sahib*, by Guru Nanak is part of the Sikhs daily regimen of morning prayers. This work is also believed to contain the gist of the entire scriptural corpus. The *Sobila* is recited by the devout Sikhs daily before retiring to bed in the evening. *So Daru* and *So Purakh* are also found repeated later on under the *Asa* musical measure: these along with some other hymns also form part of the Sikhs' evening prayer popularly known as the *Rahiras*.

The second part (pp. 14-1353), the largest of the three, comprises thirty-one sections, each assigned to a different *raga*. When Guru Arjan first compiled the scripture, it had only thirty *ragas*, and *raga Jaijwanti* in which only Guru Tegh Bahadur composed his hymns came to be included when Guru Gobind Singh made the latter part of the scripture. These thirty-one *ragas* are as follows: *Siri*, *Majh*, *Gauri*, *Asa*, *Gujari*, *Dergandhari*, *Bihagara*, *Vadhans*, *Sorath*, *Dhanasari*, *Jaitsari*, *Todi*, *Bairari*, *Tilang*, *Subi*, *Bilawal*, *Gaund*, *Ramkali*, *Nat Narain*, *Mali Gaura*, *Maru*, *Tukhari*, *Kedara*, *Bharau*, *Basant*, *Sarang*, *Malar*, *Kanara*, *Kalian*, *Parbhati* and *Jaijwanti*. Of these thirty-one *ragas*, Guru Nanak has composed hymns in nineteen *ragas*; Guru Angad has composed only *slokas* and these have not been assigned to any specific *raga*; Guru Amar Das has his *bani* composed in seventeen *ragas*; Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan have both composed *bani* in twenty *ragas*, each; and Guru Tegh Bahadur's *bani* is available in fifteen *ragas*. Similarly, the *bani* of Kabir and Namdev is found included in the scripture under eighteen *ragas*, of Ravidas under sixteen *ragas*, of Trilochan and Beni under three *ragas*, of Dhanna, Jaidev and Farid under two *ragas* each, and of Bhikhan, Sain, Pipa, Sadhna, Surdas and Parmanand under only one *raga*.

This second part constitutes the major bulk of the corpus. All the *raga*-sections have almost the similar structure: each such section opens on a fresh folio/page and begins with the *mul mantra* and is broadly divided into two parts - the first carries the hymns of the Gurus and the second comprises *bhagat-bani*, i.e. hymns of contributors other than the Gurus. Each part has several sub-sections, and each sub-section begins with the *Mul Mantra* in its full or abbreviated form and comprises hymns of different authors under one poetic *genre*. For example, the first sub-section begins with the *padas*, first of Guru Nanak, followed by those of his successive spiritual successors. Thereafter follows the *bani* in another poetic *genre* comprising the same order, author-wise. The order of the *genres* included in the scripture begins with the *padas* (including *ikpada*, *dupada*, *tipada*, *chaupada*, *panjpada*, and so on) and is followed by *chhant*, miscellaneous smaller compositions, larger compositions and *vars* at the end. Since all the Gurus composed hymns under the pseudonym of Nanak, Guru Arjan has put *Mahla* I, II, III and so on at the head of these hymns to indicate the specific authorship of a given hymn.

After the *banis* of the Gurus (*padas*, *chhants* and the titled compositions including both the smaller and the longer ones) in each *raga*-section is included what we popularly call Bhagat-Bani. This section begins with the verses of Kabir and is followed by those of Namdev, Ravidas, Jaideva and so on. Interestingly, order is strictly followed in the case of the *bani* of the Gurus, but in the case of Bhagats the order is not strictly chronological. The reason may be the uncertainty about their years: scholars have not been unanimous on the dates of these contributor-Bhagats even till date. The hymns of the Bhagats are not found in all the *ragas*, and scholars hold different opinions as regards the question whether they did or did not originally indicate the *raga* at the head of their compositions or they just composed verses in different poetic meters, and

not in any *ragas*. It seems some of them might have indicated *ragas* and in the case where *raga* was not indicated Guru Arjan might have used his editorial prerogative to assign those verses to the appropriate *ragas*.

The following third part comprises miscellaneous compositions which are not assigned to any particular *raga* but have been composed in different poetic meters. We can call them metrical compositions because they all have been titled after various poetic meters. This section (pp.1353-1430) begins with the *Sabaskriti Slokas* by Guru Nanak (4) and Guru Arjan (67) and concludes with the *Ragmala*. In between these two compositions are placed the *Gatha*, *Phunbe*, *Chaubole*, *slokas* by Kabir (243) and Farid (130), *swaiyyas* both by the Gurus and various Bhattas, and *slokas* by different Gurus, Kabir and Farid. Guru Arjan's *Mundavani* is a sort of epilogue to the scripture. The exegetes have interpreted the word '*mundavani*' variously. Some take it to mean a riddle while more commonly it is taken as seal or stamp: by affixing his seal to the holy writ, the Guru precluded the possibility of any apocryphal additions or interpolations. It has two parts: in the first part, the scripture has metaphorically been called a salver containing three articles – truth, contentment and contemplation. Then the fourth viand is mentioned – the nectar of Name Divine which sustains all. Those who partake of this fare are saved. In the second part, there are two couplets by way of thanksgiving. Herein the Guru recites the paeon while rendering his gratitude: 'Thou made me worthy of this task, Lord. I know not the limit of Thy favour. Sans all merit am I. That was Thine own mercy....'

However, as it happens, the scripture in its present printed form concludes with the *Ragmala* which comes after the *Mundavani*: the authorship of the *Ragmala* has been a matter of controversy and how it came to be added to the scripture has so far remained an unsolved riddle. Of course, it has no thematic affinity or integrity with the other compositions

included in the scripture, and it has no spiritual or instructional significance. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* or the Sikh Code of Conduct, which governs the Sikh way of life, also fails to take a clear position on the issue. Controversies arose several times during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarding its validity or otherwise. It is also said that in the first draft of the *Rahit Maryada* prepared in 1836, *Ragmala's* inclusion was rejected. However, thereafter in an inexplicable manner it has come to be a part of the printed edition, and with the rare exceptions, notably at the Akal Takht, it is included in the full-scale recitations of the scripture. As of now, the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* prescribes that the printed version of the scripture must carry the *Ragmala*, though the question of its recitation as part of the preceding hymns has been left to the local practice.

Thus, we see that the scripture follows the standard pattern of beginning with an invocation and concluding with a prayer of thanksgiving. This invocation also introduces us to the subject-matter being dealt with in the coming pages. The prayer of thankfulness is a part of the hymn titled *mundavani* which is also taken as a seal beyond which nothing can be added. Like the invocatory *mul mantra*, *mundavani* also tries to sum up the contents of the scripture as a whole.

## WORD AS GURU

The Guru Granth Sahib is the result as well as the foundation of the belief-systems of the Sikh religion. It is the result in the sense that it verbalizes the revelation as experienced by the Gurus. It is also the foundation because this revelatory experience, as uttered in mundane language, is the permanent point of reference for all creedal articulations of the Sikh faith. We must, however, bear in mind that the real foundation is the 'experience' but we revere the scripture because this 'experience' is recorded in it. Besides, it is also normative

because it serves as the basis of the code of conduct and ethics for the followers as well as the bond to keep the community together.

There are several references in the scriptural text confirming its revelatory character and equating it with the Guru. Guru Nanak calls the hymns uttered by him as *kehasam ki bani* (the Divine Word) which he communicates to humankind as it comes to him. Guru Amar Das says: *vahu vahu bani nirankar hai tisu jevadu avar na koi* - hail, hail, the Word of the Guru, which is the Lord Formless Himself; there is none other, nothing else to be reckoned equal to it.<sup>12</sup> Again, Guru Ram Das, the fourth among the ten Sikh spiritual preceptors, reiterates the idea of identity of the Guru and the Word as he says: *bani guru guru hai bani* - the *bani* or the Word is the Guru and the Guru is the *bani* or the Word.<sup>13</sup> Guru Arjan, in one of his hymns, calls the *pothi* or volume containing the divine Word as the dwelling-place of God.<sup>14</sup> However, the conferment of the pontifical office on the Holy Volume was, as we said earlier, made only in 1708 by Guru Gobind Singh when he put an end to the institution of person-Gurus.

There have been some schismatic groups within Sikhism which refuse to accept the fact of the scripture being given the status of the Gurus. For example, the Kukas or Namdharis prefer to have person Gurus even though they pay reverence to the scripture as well. Curiously, after Guru Gobind Singh they acknowledge Baba Ram Singh their Guru in spite of his very explicit command to the contrary in several of his letters known as *bukamnamas* by his followers.<sup>15</sup> The recent mushroom growth of *deras* with largely the Sikh following is also a dangerous development. In the name of the propagation of the Gurus' message, the leaders of these *deras* pose as person Gurus and in the process prescribe a *rahit* or code for their followers different from the mainstream. This trend needs to be rectified since it violates the Sikh principles and causes

schism in the community. We need to take some urgent steps in this behalf. But in the present context, it would suffice to present certain empirical evidences to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh put to end the institution of person-Guru and instead bestowed the office of Guru for all times to come on the scripture.

There are available several contemporary sources testifying to this fact. One such source is an entry in the *Bhatt Vahi Talanda Parganah Jind*. A free rendering into English of an entry in this *Vahi* would read as follows:

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Maser, son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, greatgrandson of Guru Arjan, of the family of Guru Ram Das, Surajbansi Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, *parganah* Kahlur, now at Nanded, on the Godavari bank in the Deccan, asked Bhai Daya Singh, on Wednesday, *shukla chauth* of the month of Kartik, 1765 Bikrami [16 October 1708], to fetch the Granth Sahib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the congregation: 'It is my commandment: "Own Sri Granth Ji in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will save him. Know this as the truth."'”<sup>16</sup>

Some of the Bhatt, hereditary panegyrists, genealogists or family bards who came into the Sikh fold in significant numbers at the time of Guru Arjan Dev recorded events of the lives of the Gurus in their scrolls called *vahis*. Some of these scrolls are extant even to this day in some Bhatt families, especially at the village of Karsindhu in Jind district (Haryana). The script used in these scrolls is called Bhatakhshari - a kind of family code like *lande* and *mahajani*. According to Giani Garja Singh, the only known scholar to have worked on these manuscripts, the author of the entry quoted above, is one Narbud Singh Bhatt who was with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded at that time.

The second such testimony is a letter issued by reference of Guru Gobind Singh's wife, Mata Sundri. This letter, still preserved with a family of Bhai Rupa village in Bathinda district, exhorts all Sikhs to have faith only in ten human preceptors (from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh); to believe in any one else is called a mortal sin. The letter goes on further to say: "Go only to the ten Gurus in search of the Word.... The Guru resides in *sabda*. The Lord has merged His own self in the Guru through whom He has revealed His Word. The Word is the life of all life, for, through it, one experiences God". The letter also makes a clear injunction against Ajit Singh (the adopted son of Mata Sundri) posing as Guru.

Bhai Nand Lal was one of the court-poets of Guru Gobind Singh and he spent long years at Anandpur: he has also been known for his elegant Persian poetry. In his *Rabitnama*, i.e. code of conduct, he testifies to the above fact:

He who would wish to speak with him,  
Let him read and reflect on (the Word in the) Granth.  
He who would wish to hear my word,  
Let him listen to the (Word in the) Granth being recited.  
Deem the Granth my own image, and  
Do not consider an iota of difference  
(between me and the Granth).<sup>17</sup>

Kuir Singh, in his *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* which the author completed in 1808 Bikrami/AD 1751 and is perhaps the first complete life-story of Guru Gobind Singh, refers to the Guru's command putting an end to the institution of person-Gurus in the following words:

This is not the age for a person-Guru to be anointed;  
I shall not put the ceremonial mark on anyone's forehead;  
Entire sangat is now owned a Khalsa  
and is placed under the shelter of the Real One.  
Attached they are now to the Word;  
He who believes becomes the Sikh *par excellence*.<sup>18</sup>

In another *Rabitnama* also, the same idea is reiterated in the following

words:

Following the command of the Real One

Was the Khalsa Panth initiated.

It is my directive to all the Sikhs:

Acknowledge the Granth as the Guru.<sup>18a</sup>

Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshabian Ka*, a work he completed in 1826 Bikrami/AD 1769, also says that the Guru commanded the Sikhs to abide by the divine Word and acknowledge none else as the Guru; he also warned that those who deviate from it will suffer in the cycle of continued transmigration.<sup>19</sup>

In the Sikh tradition, Guru stands as much for the human teacher or preceptor as for the Divine, and we find the word used in both the senses. However, this identification of the Guru with God is not the identification of the person of the Guru with God, but Guru conceived as *sabda* or Word as revealed by Him. As a human preceptor, Guru in Sikh tradition means the ten spiritual preceptors, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh; no other person however pious or enlightened can claim or can be accepted as such. Thereafter, it has been the *bani* (Word) uttered by the Gurus which has been called and acknowledged as Guru. It is the Gurus' Word, believed to be divine revelation, which leads man on the way to *mukti*. Since the Word as communicated by the ten spiritual preceptors and as contained in the scripture is Divine, the Sikh tradition sometimes uses the words God (the source of the Word or revelation), the Word (divine message) and Guru (the instrument used by the Divine to communicate that message to humanity) as synonyms.

The Guru as a person is neither God nor God's incarnation. There have been repeated references in the scripture to the effect that God never incarnates in any form. Guru Gobind Singh, in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak*, is unequivocal as he warns his followers that he be not treated or taken as



God: he who calls him God must suffer the pangs of hell. Rather Guru Gobind Singh calls himself the son and slave of God.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, this idea of 'God's son' here must not be mixed with the Christian view of Jesus being the son of God. The Sikh tradition takes the Gurus to be perfectly realized souls whom God selected as His instruments to communicate His Word to humanity in general. It is through them that God's Word or revelation enters human history. In other words, Guru is the voice of God, God's self-revelation. He is, no doubt, a vital link in man's spiritual progress, but he only shows him the way: he is only the exemplar and the guide, but the man has to tread the path himself. In fact, the scripture reiterates that the guidance of the Guru is so essential that no spiritual gain can come without it. But the Guru is not an intercessor and, as such, does not take the disciple to a higher stage of spirituality as if on crutches or through miracle.

The Sikh tradition believes that the body of the Guru has been the repository of the Light Divine. This body has been the medium for the articulation of the Divine Word as it came from God. So this body is worthy of reverence, but what deserves a devotee's worship is the Word or the divine Word. That is why in Sikhism the Guru is an object of veneration but not a deity to be worshipped. The historical Guru or the person-Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, were the focal point of the congregations and the living example of truth they happened to bring to light through divine revelation. They received the divine message, articulated it and communicated it to humanity in mundane language and they themselves lived up to the message they imparted to others. Thus, of real importance is the Word coming through them.

Since the scripture is not a systematic philosophical treatise, we do not find any specific text or texts dealing with the concept of Guru, though there are numerous references scattered throughout the scripture expressing the importance

and role of the Guru. Among the metaphors most often used for him are the *tirath* or the place of holy pilgrimage, the *kbevat* or the one who takes man across the world-ocean, *dipak* or the lamp which lights up the entire world, *joti* or the light which illumines the world, *data* or the donor of right wisdom, *paras* or the philosopher's stone which turns even the base material into gold, *sura* or the hero whose sword of knowledge rends the veil of darkness, and so on.

In the scripture, the words 'Guru' and 'Sabda' or Word are also juxtaposed. They have also been used synonymously and also as one word, i.e. *sabdaguru*. The word *sabda*, taken from Sanskrit but of obscure etymology, can be rendered as sound voice, utterance, speech or word. In the distinctive Sikh usage, it stands for any hymn or composition as found included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Here it stands for the Word or message or revelation as it came to the Gurus direct from God. As the *sabda* in the Sikh context is believed to be spoken by God, it implies the voice or the utterance is divine. And, the utterances as received from the Lord are communicated in mundane language by the Guru for the benefit of humanity. This means that the Word or *sabda* originally belongs to God and that the Guru is the instrument or the vehicle through which it is articulated and communicated.

### SIKH WORLD-VIEW

The Sikh scripture is an attempt to put into mundane language intelligible to people in a particular spatio-cultural context what was revealed to the preceptors and what they uttered without any addition or alteration on their part. These utterances describe as well as prescribe the human ideal. The scripture as a whole also provides the general framework of structure in which that ideal is to be realized: it is as a kind of constitution, a sort of framework of structure following which the objective of socio-political and religious transformation is

to be realized. The Khalsa as created by Guru Gobind Singh in fulfillment of Guru Nanak's mission is the agency to which the task of this social transformation has been assigned. However, both the structure and the agency must function in harmony to bring about peace and co-existence, love and compassion, equality and justice in human social affairs. That is why Sikhism is also called a way of life lived according to the world-view enunciated by its spiritual preceptors in their hymns.

The scripture is not a formal philosophical treatise dealing in different sections with different aspects of life. It is an anthology of inspirational poetry, revelatory in character. Nevertheless, one can easily come across repeatedly allusions to various metaphysical concepts, doctrines and values which concern and affect man. We shall here try to briefly bring out the Sikh perception of God, man and the world as well as their relationship *inter se*. We shall also try to touch upon the human spiritual ideal and the important moral and ethical values man must imbibe and also the evils which hinder man from taking the right path.

### **(i) God**

The Gurus take God as self-evident, and thus they felt no need of any proof or an effort to prove or establish the divine existence. Guru Arjan Dev makes an explicit statement saying that God is apparently obvious - *nanak ka patisah disai jahara*.<sup>19</sup> Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Japu*, which forms part of the daily regimen of prayers of a Sikh, also emphasizes that God is *hajra hajur* and *zabha zabur*, i.e. apparently obvious. God is perceived to be manifest in all the material phenomena around us, present in all the directions and at all the places. However, this does not equate God with or limit Him to the manifest material phenomena. The latter are in essence divine but fail to contain the Divine in its entirety.

The idea of oneness of God is central to the Sikh metaphysics and the Sikh scripture lays much emphasis on it: plurality of deities is straightaway rejected. The scripture opens with the term *ikoankar*, a term which occurs many times in the following text. The frequent use of the term is suggestive of the significant and central place the concept of the unity of God occupies in Sikh ontology. The term *ikoankar* is, in fact, a compound of three words, i.e. *ik*, *oan* (or *om*) and *kar*. The word *oan* or *om* stands for the supreme Reality. In the Upanisadic literature also, the word *om* has been used to convey the means of meditation as well as the object of it: here the word describes both the supreme means of meditation and the goal to be reached through meditation. The Sikh Gurus have invariably used the word with the prefix '*ik*' and suffix '*kar*'. In fact, the prefix '*ik*' is not a word, but a numeral and as such is very specific and certain in its meaning. The prefix '*ik*' has primarily been used to emphasize the oneness, non-dual nature of Reality but it is also significant insofar as it shows a clear departure both from Hinduism which leans towards plurality of Godhead and the *sramanic* tradition which altogether denies the existence of a supreme creator and sustainer of the world.

The use of suffix '*kar*' to the word '*om*' or '*oan*' is indicative of the creative aspect of God who does not remain static but becomes dynamic as creator and sustainer of the manifest material world. There have been numerous references in the scripture suggesting the creative aspect of Reality: God has been referred to as *Karta Purakh* who, of His own will and from His own self, has created the entire manifest phenomena. In other words, we can also say that *ikoankar* stands for the non-dual dynamic God who wills Himself from Being to Becoming, and thus becomes transcendent as well as immanent. The Creator-Lord of the Sikh perception is also immanent in the creation: the scripture is quite specific in its reiteration that this immanence of God in the plurality of beings and

things of the material world does not in any way affect either its unitary character or its transcendent nature. God in His unmanifest state is transcendent as well as *nirgun*: in this state, He is beyond human comprehension. But when He manifests Himself, *qua* spirit, in the material phenomena, He becomes immanent as well as *sagun*: it is this aspect of God that we humans try to understand. Since the entire manifest phenomena do not exhaust God in His entirety, the human understanding of Him is ever incomplete. He is not just creator but is also sustainer as well as destroyer of the entire creation: He has been called Universal Father whereas the entire humankind forms universal brotherhood.

God apart from being creator of all is also the sustainer and destroyer of everything. As for God being the sustainer of His creation, we find in the Guru Granth Sahib various attributes used for Him indicating His concern and feelings of love, justice and compassion for His creation. He has been given various epithets taken from familial relations such as *mata* (mother), *pita* (father), *sakha* (friend), *data* (giver), *palak* or *palanhar* (preserver), *piara* (the loved one), and so on: in our mundane life all these relations are supposed to bring us up and take care of our wellbeing. This creator and preserver God is also the destroyer of all that He creates. All the different forms and shapes emanate from Him and finally submerge within Him. The metaphor repeatedly used in the Sikh scripture is that of the waves which arise from water and ultimately merge in it. Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Akal Ustati*, uses an extended metaphor to explain this relationship between *jivatma* (individual soul) and *paramatma* (supreme Soul):

As out of a single fire  
Millions of sparks arise;  
Arise in separation  
But come together again  
When they fall back in fire.

As from a heap of dust  
Grains of dust swept up  
Fill the air, and filling it  
Fall in the heap of dust .

As from a single stream  
Countless waves rise up;  
And, being water, fall  
Back in water again.

So from God's form emerge  
Alive and inanimate things;  
And since they rise from Him,  
They shall fall in Him again.<sup>21</sup>

God is, no doubt, creator of everything, but He Himself is self-existent and self-effulgent. He was in existence when none else existed: other creation came into existence when the un-manifest, impersonal God willed self-manifestation. In Sikh philosophy, this process has been called a transformation from being or pure consciousness to becoming or manifestation in real historical time. Thus, the entire manifest phenomena including man and all other forms are a part of this becoming. However, He Himself is, as says the scripture, *saibhan* or self-created. Everything else has His spirit (*joti*) manifested in it, but no other or outside spirit manifests in Him. He has no father or mother as we human beings have, and he depends on no outside source for His existence. He was when nothing else existed except chaos and darkness, He is and He shall ever be. Another allied term with *saibhan* that is used for God is *ajuni* which means unborn. He is never born in human or any other form. He is free from the cycle of transmigration.

The idea of God being present, as Spirit, in each being leads to the essential oneness of the creation and the Creator,

leaving no place for dualism, thus rejecting both the static metaphysical system of Vedanta and the Semitic concept of the transcendental (impersonal) nature of God. The Sankha theory of dualism between Purusa and Prakriti is also rejected. Unlike these metaphysical systems, the Sikh dynamic ontology, on the one hand, encompasses the ‘otherness’ of created elements within the all-comprehensive structure of non-dual One, and on the other, identifies with Himself, *qua* spirit, all sentient and non-sentient elements. These latter are visualized as His manifest units. Thus, the entire manifest phenomenon becomes intrinsically one with God and is taken as a relative reality. However, this intrinsic oneness does not equate the creation with the Creator. The creator-creation relationship has in the scripture been explained with the examples of sea water and waves, sun and sun rays, and so on. The waves can never become equal to the sea and the rays can never equal the sun, similarly the creation is ever subservient to the Creator: the former cannot become equal to Him.

Thus, God is all-powerful, unequalled and there is absolutely no check on Him except His own self-regulative creative principle (*bukm*). He is without any rivals (*nirsarik*) and without any relations (*nirsak*). Therefore, He fears none (fearless or *nirbhan*). Since He has created the entire world of phenomena, the created beings are His own children who ever function under His will. He need not have enmity towards His own children, rather He has, in the scripture, been called sustainer, ameliorator, master of the patrons of the poor and the hapless, and so on. This is unlike the anthropomorphic and polytheistic tribal gods of the earlier Indian tradition who are found many times engrossed in mutual enmity and hatred. However, the Sikh concept of God takes Him above these sectarian and tribal considerations and rather makes Him belong to the entire creation.

The scripture also calls God *akal* (*akal* means beyond

and not subject to *kal*, i.e. time and death) *murati* (being). The word *kal* means time and death, and the addition of the prefix ‘*a*’ to it on the one hand turns the noun into adjective and on the other gives it a negative connotation, thus implying one beyond and not subject to *kal*. God of the Sikh conception had been before time, is beyond time and will ever be. Unlike all other created beings who in their embodied form exist in historical time are subject to death and decay, God never gets embodied as He is never born in any form and is beyond all these limitations. In other words, God in his impersonal aspect transcends *kal* but His manifestations are immanent in time. Let it be stressed here that God transcends temporality and encompasses *kal*, but it is neither exclusive of time nor timeless, rather it subsumes *kal*.

## **(ii) World and Man**

Complete absence of any material *a priori* to the creation of this material world supports the theory that God constructed the world and all that inhabits it out of His own self and of His own will. When the Divine will began to work and how it operates is not known to any human mind: only He who created it knows - *thiti var na jogi janai ruti mahu na koi/ja karta sirathi kau saje ape janai soi*.<sup>22</sup> However, when God created this world, He made Himself immanent in it. His immanence in the mundane world results in the spiritualization of the material reality. This world becomes the dwelling-place of God, and since God resides in this world, man must not renounce it, rather efforts be made to transform it into *sach khand* or the Kingdom of God on earth. The idea of searching for Him in forests and mountains is futile and like going away from God.

All religions and philosophies revolve around man, and no religion or philosophy can exist or be complete without referring to, analyzing and establishing the nature and purpose of human life. In the Sikh thought, man is deemed not only



central figure in the whole universe but also the supreme creation among numberless creations of God. His status is the highest and he is at the head of all living beings: all other beings are subordinate to him - even the gods long to be born as humans, says the scripture.<sup>23</sup> Man is called the supreme amongst all beings because he is the only conscious being with the potential to develop his consciousness to such a level as to realize his true self and achieve mystical oneness with the Divine. This consciousness is a pre-requisite to reach the stage of self-realization or God-realization. There are references in the Sikh scripture to the effect that human body is made of five perishable material elements but God has put in it a sixth element which is the life force of body and which is not perishable like the other five elements which constitute the body. This everlasting sixth element, called *atman*, is also called a divine particle. Thus, all human beings are one, in spirit, with God and equal amongst themselves. It also implies that the human body becomes the temple of God, and the scripture advises man to keep it pure – in thought, word and deed. It is this body which is going to serve as means for the soul to realize God. This explains for the Sikh preference for the proper upkeep of body rather than put it to any hard penances. Let this be clarified here that human soul is divine in nature, but it is not identical with Divine.

Essential oneness of man with God and the relative reality of the manifest world form basis of the Sikh stress on householder's life *vis-à-vis* asceticism. Rejecting the idea of life-negation and world-negation, the scripture advises man to aspire and strive for his spiritual ideal while living a normal life of familial and social obligations. Instead of renouncing the world, man must have total commitment to God and should ever remember Him as the sole power in each being and behind each action. He should ever feel and realize His presence in each being and at every place. This would mean spiritual

enlightenment or inward illumination having its natural corollary in a certain specified social behaviour marked by the values of love, equality, justice, altruism, service, etc.

An important postulate of Sikh metaphysics as articulated in the scripture is its belief in *avagavan* or transmigration of soul. Man is born in this world, lives a specific span of life herein and passes away. All this happens under the divine Will like everything else taking place in the world. Sikhism does not adhere to the theory of certain gods in charge of birth and of death. It is the supreme One under whose will everything moves. Dharamraj and Yamduts or angels of death in Hindu metaphysics and mythology, are spoken of as destructive forces of nature or are brought in while discussing the beliefs of other traditions. Similarly, Chit and Gupt, two angels in Hindu mythology responsible for recording all actions, good as well as evil, of man, are not accepted as reality: they represent conscious and unconscious actions of man. The physical death of man and, for that matter, of other beings does not mean the total annihilation because the essence within being divine is eternal. It only implies change of one manifest form into another.

Every deed done by man, every word uttered by him and even every thought that came to his mind, may that be good or bad, conscious or unconscious, leaves behind an impress which clings to him. Dharamraj represents the idea of the divine reckoning of man's deeds. Man's present birth is influenced by the *karma* of his past lives, and the *karmanas* of his present life are bound to influence his future. In other words, we can say that the principle of transmigration is directed by the quality of human actions, and the human birth is attributed to the quality of the actions of the previous existence and the state of the soul at the time of death. Thus, the idea of transmigration is ethically-oriented, and rebirth in a particular life or shape is the result of the quality of one's actions - good actions leading

to the sovereign human birth whereas bad actions leading to animal or other lower existence.

According to the Sikh metaphysics, the spiritual ideal of man is love for God: it rejects both *raji* (or acquisition of a kingdom; the highest objective man can aspire for in mundane life) and the achievement of *mukti* (the highest spiritual ideal according to most of the world religions) for the sake of this idea. Also, it sees no inherent contradiction between love for the Divine *vis-à-vis* liberation. Man's union with Divine in an expression of selfless love implies a stage of consciousness when he lives a bodily existence in this world but is ever mystically one with God. When such a man discards his bodily vesture, his soul coalesces with the Divine and he is free from the cycle of transmigration. The former stage is *jivan-mukti* and the latter *videh mukti*. In other words, the former is synonymous with love for the Divine and the latter is a natural corollary of the former. It rejects both the extremes of asceticism and hedonism, rather exhorts man to live an active and robust but a righteous and contented social life.

The idea of love, equality, etc. is just not an intra-religious issue in Sikh thought rather it extends these values to the inter-religious and inter-community relations as well. In modern-day society of religious and cultural pluralism, man must learn to live and live peacefully with other faiths and faith-communities. The attitude of religious exclusivism is sure to cause bad blood in inter-religious relations which no one can today afford because, as says a famous theologian, "there will be no peace among nations without peace among religions; and there will be no peace among religions without greater dialogue among them."<sup>24</sup> Sikhism acknowledges the validity and genuineness of each faith and appreciates all prophets irrespective of their spatio-cultural affiliations. It does not condemn any scripture rather condemns those who do not reflect on them and act upon them. No doubt, it is critical of

some of the arid and effete practices prevalent in some traditions. It rejects polemic, and instead recommends dialogue to sort out intra-religious or inter-religious issues. It recommends first listening to the ideas and views of the other before expressing your own.

As we said earlier, man is in essence one with God, but he fails to realize this essential oneness because of his egotistical attitude of dualism caused by his ignorance. This causes his differentiation from God and consequently from other human beings. *Haumai* makes man degenerate – spiritually as well as morally. Spiritually, it keeps *jivatma* separated from the *paramatma*, thus keeping it in bondage leading to man's continued transmigration; socially, it causes man's differentiation from other beings leading to strife among individuals, communities and nations. Such a person, called *manmukh* or self-oriented in the scripture, becomes alienated, spiritually as well as socially: this alienation denotes a mental state, a sort of veiling of the consciousness of man. However, the scripture calls *haumai* two-pronged: it is both the malady and the remedy. It is flexible to lean to the other side as well – towards God, to feel His presence and realize His will. In this situation, the veil of darkness thins away and the malady gets transformed into remedy and blessing. The darkness of ignorance disappears, sense of duality ceases and man can see and realize the Lord. This identification of the individual will with the divine will makes man happy and healthy in mind and person - *khudi miti tab such bhae mana tana bhae aroga*, says the scripture.<sup>25</sup>

The pentad of evils – *kam*, *krodh*, *lobh*, *moh* and *abankar* – are the corollaries of *haumai*, and there are numerous such other references in the scripture where these five are referred to in a variety of ways; at places it also makes reference to certain other evils along with these and they include *kusangat*, *trishna*, *ninda* and others. Man is advised to guard himself against

these evils which 'break into the human body and plunder the nectar of Divine Name'. All actions performed under the influence of *haumai* or its correlates go against the will of God whereas it becomes man to make continuous volitional efforts to negate the individual will's egoity vis-à-vis the Divine will and instead identify the former with the latter. This connotes a mental state when man gives God the credit for whatever he does. This identification of two wills also implies one's spiritual unity with Divine as well as with other human beings.

The scripture recommends *nam-simran* as the only means to achieve this end. However, man must cleanse his mind of all traces of *haumai* because it stands in binary opposition to *nam*. No doubt, *nam-simran* has been a key concept in the scripture, but it is not explicitly defined or explained. We agree that like any other feeling, it is also beyond perfect definition yet different scholars have given different definitions. It is certainly not the repetition of one or the other names of God or just reciting one *bani* or the other. Of course, reading and reciting *bani* is necessary but it has to be followed by understanding of the text and then by trying to live its precepts in one's social life.

Last but a very crucial factor in enabling man realize the ultimate ideal is the divine grace. Of course, Sikhism does not view divine grace in isolation from human love for God best expressed through deeds of love and altruism for humankind in general. Implicitly, human endeavours become complementary to divine grace for the attainment of spiritual objective, thus distinguishing it from the Christian concept which treats it as all-inclusive and self-sufficient. In Sikhism, divine grace is no doubt a pre-requisite because it blesses man with the perception that enables him to understand the Word and thus discern God within and around himself. The Divine grace reveals the way, Guru guides him on the way, but it is the man who has to tread that path, who has to participate in

social activity – sharing his perception with others and in the process cleansing the society of all evils and building a social structure which is conducive to let this perception flourish. In fact, it is this human quest, human endeavour which leads to the spiritual ideal revealed to man by the divine initiative. This has been beautifully explained in the *Japu(ji)* with the help of Panj Khands wherein the seeker's quest ends with his arrival in Sach Khand, the last and the apex of the integrated multi-dimensional progress where he realizes oneness with God as also with entire humankind.

## CONCLUSION

The Guru Granth Sahib is the sacred text of the Sikh faith but it is also much more. It is the living Guru for the followers who revere it as such. It is an article of faith with them and guides their individual as well as communal life. The Word, as contained therein, is revelatory and the spirit-incarnate of the Gurus. It occupies a central place in each of the Sikh shrines and the devotees bow before it, though they do not worship it as an idol at the altar. Its catholic teachings advocate oneness of God, ethnic equality of humankind, mutual love and respect, tolerance and acceptance of other faiths and faith-communities, etc. Though a product of medieval times, it addresses to several problems facing man today and, as says Arnold Toynbee, in the coming days the Sikh scripture 'will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world'.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Harbans Singh, Ed. The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Vol. IV, pp. 241-42.
2. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 647.
3. See *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, I: 32; see also Bhai Vir Singh, Ed. *Puratan Janamsakhi*, p. 114

4. Sahib Singh, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan*, Vol. III, p. 820
5. Among those who support this view are Bawa Prem Singh Hoti, Giani Gurdit Singh, Piara Singh Padam, Pashaura Singh, Gurinder Singh Mann. Their views have been discussed and rejected by Balwant Singh Dhillon, *Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition: Myth and Reality*, pp. 89-98.
6. *Mahima Prakash*, p. 208.
7. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 248.
8. *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, XXVI:33.
9. *Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition*, *op. cit.*, p. 145. See also Daljeet Singh and Kharak Singh Mann, "Goindwal Pothis – A Post-1595 Production" in Bachittar Singh Giani, Ed., *Planned Attack on Aad Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 118.
10. *Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition*, pp. 94-96.
11. Daljeet Singh and Kharak Singh Mann, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-17.
12. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 515.
13. *Ibid.*, p.67.
14. *Ibid.*, 1226.
15. Ganda Singh, in his *Guru Gobind Singh's Death at Nanded: An Examination of Succession Theories*, convincingly rejects the Namdhari tradition of person-Gurus. Letters of Baba Ram Singh, also quoted in this book (pp. 87-88) also specifically accept the Word as Guru.
16. As quoted in *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. IV, p. 245
17. "Rahitnama Bhai Nand Lal" in Piara Singh Padam, Ed., *Rahitname*, p. 55.
18. *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, XXI: 96-101.
- 18a. "Rahitnama Prahlaad Singh" in Piara Singh Padam, *op. cit.*, p. 67
19. *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshabian Ka*, Charan XIV;221, 300, 307
20. *Bachitra Natak*, VI: 29 and 32-33.
21. *Akal Ustati*, 87.
22. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 4.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 1159
24. Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, p. xv

## **VARs AND KABIT SWAIYYAS OF BHAI GURDAS** **– AN INTERPRETATIVE TREATISE ON SIKH** **THEOLOGY –**

### **I**

Bhai Gurdas (1551-1637) is the first among the Sikh pioneers to elucidate, elaborate and codify the fundamentals of Sikh theology on the basis of his understanding and knowledge of the sacred verses (Gurbani) of the first five Sikh Gurus during his apprenticeship of Guru Arjan Dev. While the latter was compiling the sacred Sikh scripture called *Pothi Sahib* and later on named as Sri Guru Granth Sahib, he utilized the services of Bhai Gurdas as the official scribe/amanuensis of the House of Nanak. His close association with the most intimate, devout disciples of the first six Sikh Gurus as narrated in his Var 11 and his own apprenticeship and intimate relationship with the later four Gurus enabled him in acquiring and imbibing in his own person the spiritual philosophical vision, legacy and the gradually emerging distinct Sikh tradition and ideology of the Sikh Gurus. His, (i) brilliant scholarship and knowledge of the philosophy of the major spiritual streams of existing Hinduism, Islam and Nath Jogis; (ii) his complete understanding of the clear distinction between these spiritual philosophies of hitherto prevailing schools of thought and the Sikh Gurus' unique distinct spiritual vision; (iii) his clear comprehension of the Sikh Gurus' complete departure from the earlier religious streams and; (iv) their (Sikh Gurus) laying down the foundations of a completely new religious order – all four factors enabled him to make an enlightened choice for his own personal allegiance to the new dispensation and



become its first theologian and elucidator. Thus, he became the man of the moment. This ideal combination of the man and moment coupled with his God-gifted talent of poetic creativity in the language of the masses, the vernacular Punjabi, made him the most competent and qualified scholarly theologian to elucidate and codify the fundamentals of Sikh theology which lay randomly scattered all over the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. Combining his close observation of Sikh Gurus' personal conduct and precept, his own scholarship and creativity, Bhai Gurdas skillfully made proper derivations of the major fundamentals of Sikh theology, interpreted their essential meaning and modes of practical application and elucidated their proper modes of practice and their emancipatory efficacy. Being endowed with rare creativity and versatility of expression, he poured his genius into popular literary genres of *Vars*, *Kabits* and *Swaiyyas* in the popular folklore tradition. The end product not only became an authentic reliable and highly readable poetic treatise on Sikh theology but a literary masterpiece as well. In this paper, we shall make an attempt to summarise the major concepts of Sikh theology as derived, interpreted, codified, elucidated and elaborated in his forty *Vars* and 675 *Kabit* in this article. Before taking up these concepts, it would be appropriate to briefly delineate Bhai Gurdas' biography and comment upon Bhai Gurdas's choice of *Var* as a literary genre in the spiritual sphere for which it has been rarely employed earlier.

Born around 1551 at Basarke, Bhai Gurdas was the nephew of Guru Amar Das, and received his initial education under the his tutelage at Goindwal and his religious education in Sikhism under the discipleship of Guru Ram Das. Therefore, he was appointed as a Sikh preacher at Agra for a few years during which he composed his *kabits* and *swaiyyas*. Thereafter, he stayed for a long span of twenty five years in close association with Guru Arjan Dev during which he participated

in every important Sikh activity including compilation of the Sikh sacred text, construction of Harimandar Sahib at Amritsar, and engaged himself in a forceful rebuttal of the activities of the splinter Sikh sect of dissenting Meenas. He spent the last twenty nine years of his life in association with the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib and composed his *Vars*. Having listened to the exposition of Sikh theology (*Gurmat*) continuously for a long span from the congregational sermons of Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind and having learnt the Gurbani grammar, script, diction and syntax of sacred verses (Gurbani) during his years of being an amanuensis of the fifth Guru and having been a life-long Sikh preacher, Bhai Gurdas became thoroughly well-versed in Sikh theology and highly competent to further elucidate the fundamental posulates of Sikh theology.

Bhai Gurdas' choice of *Var* as a literary genre for his verses as a poetic medium for his elucidation of Sikh theology was also unique although we find a few composed by Sikh Gurus themselves in the Sikh sacred scripture as well. Traditionally, *Vars* have been narrative ballads written in praise of heroic deeds, acts of bravery, sacrifice and martyrdom performed by warriors both religious and secular in fierce battles and wars. *Vars* have been composed in a racy, recitative, fluent, speedy communicative poetry meant to be sung by the folklorist ballad singers to the accompaniment of music played on traditional string and percussion instruments to evoke feelings of chivalry, patriotism and intense allegiance to the territorial sovereignty or religious faith of the listening audience. Thus, *Var* as a literary genre belongs to the sphere of martial arts and their fantastic display. Bhai Gurdas' choice and successful use of this literary genre for the expression of an internal and life-long battle for spiritual victory over vices in the human heart, mind and soul of man through his steadfast allegiance to the chosen religious ideology and treading on its prescribed

path throughout one's life is truly superb and imaginative. This paradigm shift in using the literary genre of *Var* for the expression of a more arduous and life-long spiritual battle is indeed a masterstroke in the Sikh literary canon. It also elevates the status of Sikh Religion and Sikh community as deeply rooted in deep spiritual, meditative discipline from the common perception about Sikhism as a religion of a people steeped in martial activities. Thus, by employing *Var* as a literary genre, as a Sikh theologian and a religious poet, Bhai Gurdas has highlighted the relative significance of Sikh Religion based on a deeply spiritual metaphysics by following which a seeker could become thoroughly enlightened and get a glimpse of the divine mystique. After having acquainted the reader with the major contours of Bhai Gurdas' biographical and literary profile, let us now endeavour to summarize the major postulates of Sikh theology as elucidated and codified in his verses. Prominent among these are Sikh concepts of God, Guru, Sikh Gurus, Gurmata, Gurmukh, Sikhi, Gursikhi, Ideal Gurusikhs and Sikh virtues.

**God** or the Divine Reality – as revealed to Guru Nanak and the successive Sikh Gurus in their intuitive and rare moments of mystical illumination and expressed as such in their verses as elucidated by Bhai Gurdas in his *Vars* – is the sole mega creator, forever present, immanent, permanent, immortal, eternal, the primary cause, cause of all causation, ever-flowing cosmic energy, formless yet embodied in all forms, uniformly, indiscriminately benevolent without any human attributes of fear or malice. It is an inexhaustible source of energy which energizes every animate and inanimate life on earth, sky, and sea and the entire universe. It is immanent, inclusive and exclusive, invisible as well as manifestly visible. Several verses – spread across the spectrum of forty *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas – bring out these attributes of the Divine. Only one or two specimen verses will suffice to illustrate this

causational and immanence attribute of the Divine power:

੧. ਇਕ ਕਵਾਉ ਪਸਾਉ ਕਰਿ ਓਅੰਕਾਰ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ॥
੨. ਓਅੰਕਾਰ ਅਕਾਰ ਲਖ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ਬਣਾਇਆ॥
੩. ਪੰਜ ਤਤ ਉਤਪਤਿ ਲਖ ਤ੍ਰੈ ਲੋਅ ਸੁਹਾਇਆ॥
੪. ਜਲ ਬਲ ਗਿਰ ਤਰਵਰ ਸੁਫਲ ਦਰੀਆਉ ਚਲਾਇਆ॥
੫. ਲਖ ਦਰੀਆਉ ਸਮਾਉ ਕਰ ਤਿਲ ਤੁਲ ਨ ਤੁਲਾਇਆ॥
੬. ਕੁਦਰਤ ਇਕ ਅਤੋਲਵੀਂ ਲੇਖਾ ਨਾਂ ਲਿਖਾਇਆ॥
੭. ਕੁਦਰਤ ਕੀਮ ਨ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਕਾਦਰ ਕਿਨਿ ਪਾਇਆ ॥

1. With one sound did God utter the word “Onkar”.
2. From “Onkar” were millions of worlds created.
3. From five elements millions of worlds were created in three regions.
4. With earth, Water, mountains, rivers, fauna and flora were they invested.
5. (But) even the waters of millions of rivers can never fathom God’s extent.
6. Thus is His creation unfathomable beyond any reckoning.
7. His creation being immeasurable, how can His own extent be gauged?

(Var 13 Pauri 11)

੧. ਪਵਣ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਰਾਗ ਨਾਦ ਵਿਚਾਰਾ॥
੨. ਮਾਤ ਪਿਤਾ ਜਲੁ ਧਰਤਿ ਹੈ, ਉਤਪਤਿ ਸੰਸਾਰਾ॥
੩. ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਰਾਤਿ ਦਿਹੁ ਵਰਤੈ ਵਰਤਾਰਾ॥
੪. ਸਿਵ ਸਕਤੀ ਦਾ ਖੇਲੁ ਮੇਲੁ ਪਰਕਿਰਤ ਪਸਾਰਾ॥
੫. ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਘਟ ਚੰਦ੍ਰ ਅਕਾਰਾ॥
੬. ਆਪੇ ਆਪਿ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਨਿਰਧਾਰਾ ॥

1. Guru’s utterance becomes Guru’s word (*Gurshabad*),  
Leading to contemplation over celestial symphony of spheres.
2. With water as father and earth as mother has this universe been created,
3. Alternating between day and night, the universe keeps existing.
4. With the infusion of consciousness in inert matter,  
Nature keeps on expanding.
5. God being the perfect creator,  
His presence like Moon’s in water gets reflected in nature.
6. His immense will pervades the whole universe on which rests  
a Gurmukh’s faith.

(Var 2, Pauri 19)

The other verses highlighting the above-mentioned attributes of God are verses (*Pauris*) 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19 and 20 of *Var 2*. Bhai Gurdas being a son of the soil and a master craftsman brings out the nature of this embryonic and mysteriously energizing power of the Divine through the use of similes, metaphors, parallelisms and symbolism of Carbon-processing in Coal and diamond, ingestion of heat, light and moisture during the growth of vegetation, processing of cotton, sugarcane and milk etc. What makes Bhai Gurdas a unique interpreter, elucidator and communicator of Sikh theology is his choice and successful use of imagery from the common contemporary occupations of agriculture, metallurgy, metal smithy, weaving, etc., and the related verbal terminology and every day idiom of the masses. As a result, his verses strike an instant rapport with the readers. Similarly, his expression of the inscrutable will and design of the Divine creator is equally fluent and communicable. He elaborates and elucidates the Sikh Gurus' perception that the Divine power is eternal, immortal whose writ runs eternally throughout according to its own will and design which is inscrutable, mysterious and beyond all dimensions of time and space. He states:

੧. ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹਾ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹ ਹੈ ਅਬਿਚਲੁ ਰਾਜੁ ਵਡੀ ਪਾਤਸਾਹੀ ॥

੨. ਕੇਵਡੁ ਤਖਤੁ ਵਖਾਣੀਐ ਕੇਵਡੁ ਮਹਲੁ ਕੇਵਡੁ ਦਰਗਾਹੀ॥

੩. ਕੇਵਡੁ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਲਾਹੀਐ ਕੇਵਡੁ ਮਾਲੁ ਮੁਲਖੁ ਅਵਗਾਹੀ॥

੪. ਕੇਵਡੁ ਮਾਣੁ ਮਹਤੁ ਹੈ ਕੇਵਡੁ ਲਸਕਰੁ ਸੇਵ ਸਿਪਾਹੀ॥

੫. ਹੁਕਮੈ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਭ ਕੇ ਕੇਵਡੁ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਬੇਪਰਵਾਹੀ॥

੬. ਹੋਰਸੁ ਪੁਛਿ ਨ ਮਤਾ ਨਿਬਾਹੀ ॥

1. (God) being sovereign over the sovereigns,  
Immortal is his sovereignty.

2. Immeasurable being His majestic seat,  
Unlimited are his palatial abodes and courtiers.

3. His grandeur being beyond any praise,  
Illimitable are his treasures and territories.

4. His honour and His majesty being beyond any reckoning,

Innumerable are his armies and soldiers.

5. Everyone being under His Sovereign Command,  
None can dare to flout His directions.
6. Being accountable to none else but Himself,  
He never seeks anyone else's counsel.

*(Var 18, Pauri 12)*

## **GURU - SIKH GURUS**

The concept of Guru is central in Sikh theology, Guru in the form of living human Gurus through their personal example till the Guruship of ten Sikh Gurus and that of the “Shabad”, word (Gurbani) of the Gurus thereafter. Guru is the chief mediator and facilitator for the communication and communion and union between the human and the Divine. Guru is the spiritual guide, mentor and leading light of the devout Sikh for this spiritual voyage because of Guru's own acquirement of spiritual enlightenment through the exercise of his intuitive, mystical faculty and a recipient of divine realization. Since the Guru has himself traversed this arduous spiritual journey and acquired a State of Divine bliss, he is completely competent and qualified to lead his flock across this traversed path. On the basis his glimpse of the four living Sikh Gurus and his knowledge of the Guru's role as narrated in their sacred verses, Bhai Gurdas portrays the Sikh Gurus as eternal Guru's living embodiments. Guru is a paragon of all virtues whose guidance and association wipes out all vices from the lives of his flock. Guru is the interpreter of all human maladies, identifier of all psychic disorders and a faith healer of these deeper malaises through his steadfast motivation and infusion of virtues in his flock. Being a founder of the “Nirmal Panth” based on unquestionable faith in the Divine and being a proponent of a direct communion with God through direct meditational remembrance of his sacred name and gradual inculcation of God-inspired human virtues without any worship of lesser

Gods and practice of mortifying austerities, the Guru occupies the role of a role model, a trustworthy guide and a companion and a responsible teacher. Bhai Gurdas has portrayed Guru as a dependable boatsman, an honorable bridegroom leading a wedding party, and a power house of knowledge whose knowledge surpasses those of the *Vedas*. At the ultimate stage of trust and faith in the Guru, the Guru becomes synonymous with the Divine or an alter ego of God himself. The Guru becomes the Satguru. The Guide to the Divine merges with the Divine. There are more than a dozen verses in the total repertoire *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas which highlight the pivotal role of the Guru in Sikh theology. Some of these are *Var* 6, Pauri 7/1, 3/21, 15/1, 23/1, 24/1, 26/19, 49/1/ We give below the English translation of three representative *Vars* in this context alongwith and their original text.

੧. ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਗੁਣੀ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਣ ਕਰਿ ਬਖਸੈ ਅਵਗੁਣਿਆਰੇ॥

੨. ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਵੈਦੁ ਹੈ ਪੰਜੇ ਰੋਗ ਅਸਾਧ ਨਿਵਾਰੇ॥

੩. ਸੁਖ ਸਾਗਰੁ ਗੁਰਦੇਉ ਹੈ ਸੁਖ ਦੇ ਮੇਲਿ ਲਏ ਦੁਖਿਆਰੇ॥

੪. ਗੁਰ ਪੂਰਾ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਹੈ ਨਿਦਕ ਦੋਖੀ ਬੇਮੁਖ ਤਾਰੇ॥

੫. ਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਸਦਾ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਜਮ ਡਰੈ ਉਤਾਰੇ॥

੬. ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਸੁਜਾਣੁ ਹੈ ਵਡੇ ਅਜਾਣ ਮੁਗਧ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ॥

੭. ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਆਗੂ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਬਾਹ ਪਕੜਿ ਅੰਧਲੇ ਉਧਾਰੇ॥

੮. ਮਾਣੁ ਨਿਮਾਣੇ ਸਦ ਬਲਿਹਾਰੇ ॥

1. Satguru (Guru) being a treasure house of all the virtues,  
He is a bestower of virtues and redeemer of sinners.
2. Satguru being the perfect physician and healer,  
He is the curer of the five incurable psychic maladies.
3. Gurdev being the repository of all joys and comforts,  
He is the provider of comforts and scourer of the sufferers.
4. Guru being completely free from any malice,  
He is the emancipator of the slanderers, the malevolent and the apostates.
5. Guru being completely without any fear forever,  
He is the dispeller of the fear of repeated births and deaths.
6. Satguru being sagacious and spiritually enlightened,  
He is the emancipator of the ignorant and the naïve.

7. Satguru being the renowned guide and leader,  
He leads the ignorant by holding their hands,
8. (Satguru) being the bestower of honour on the honourless,  
Praise and sacrifice be unto such a Satguru indeed.

(Var 26, Pauri 19)

Sikh Gurus living during Bhai Gurdas's life time from whom he imbibed Sikh ethos were the living embodiments of the institution of Guruship. He sums-up their role in the following verse.

੧. ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਉ ਆਪ ਉਪਾਇਆ॥
੨. ਗੁਰ ਅੰਗਦੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖੁ ਬਬਾਣੈ ਆਇਆ॥
੩. ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰ ਅਮਰ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਭਾਇਆ॥
੪. ਰਾਮਦਾਸੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਦਵਾਇਆ॥
੫. ਗੁਰੁ ਅਰਜਨੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖੁ ਪਰਗਟੀ ਆਇਆ॥
੬. ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖੁ ਹਰ ਗੋਵਿੰਦ ਨ ਲੁਕੈ ਲੁਕਾਇਆ ॥

1. Satguru (Guru Nanak) came into being through Divine blessing,
2. Guru Angad became Guru through traditional association.
3. Guru Amar Das after being a Gursikh became Satguru
4. Guru Ram Das from being a Gurusikh came to be called the Guru
5. Guru Arjan from being a Gurusikh became known as the Guru,
6. Guru Hargobind being a Gursikh could not remain unknown.

(Var 20, Pauri 1)

Later on, Gurshabad (words of the Gurus/ Gurbani) takes over this role of being the Guru performing the same function. Bhai Gurdas points to this dispensation in one of his verses as follows:

੧. ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੁਰ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਹੋਇ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨ ਚੇਲਾ॥
੨. ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਚਖੰਡ ਵਿਚਿ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਭਗਤਿ ਪਰਚੇ ਹੋਇ ਮੇਲਾ॥
੩. ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਸਿਮਰਣ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਕੁੰਜ ਕਰਮ ਹੰਸ ਵੰਸੁ ਨਵੇਲਾ॥
੪. ਬਿਰਖਹੂੰ ਫਲ ਫਲਤੇ ਬਿਰਖੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖ ਸਿਖ ਗੁਰ ਮੰਤ ਸੁਹੇਲਾ॥
੫. ਵੀਹਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਵਰਤਮਾਨ ਹੋਇ ਇਕੀਹ ਅਗੋਚਰੁ ਖੇਲਾ॥
੬. ਆਦਿ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਆਦੇਸੁ ਕਰ ਆਦਿ ਪੁਰਖ ਆਦੇਸ ਵਹੇਲਾ॥
੭. ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਲਾਹਣ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਵੇਲਾ ॥

1. Acknowledge Guru's word (Gurshabad/ Gurbani) as the Guru,  
And a devout Sikh (Gurmukh) meditating on Guru's word as



- the disciple.
2. Immersed in devotion among the pious company of the virtuous,  
A Gursikh comes to achieve communion with the Guru.
  3. Through the practice of enlightenment, concentration and meditation,  
A Gursikh becomes as conspicuous as a seagull, a swan and a tortoise.
  4. As a tree results in blossoming and fruition and fruition into seed and sapling,  
So does the Guru descend unto a Sikh and both unite through Gurshabad.
  5. What has always been existing though in a dormant state,  
Becomes strikingly apparent and begins manifesting.
  6. Beginning with a supplication to the eternal Guru,  
The supplicant finally unites with the Eternal.
  7. Meditation in the ambrosial hours bestows this boon.

*(Var 7, Pauri 20)*

### **GURMAT – SIKHI – GURMAT GAADI RAAH**

Gurmat, or the religious pathway laid down by the teachings of Sikh Gurus as stated repeatedly in their sacred verses is the fulcrum of Sikh theology. It is a pathway based on a Sikh devotee's firm, unshakable faith in the Guru and for that matter in God, devotional remembrance and meditation upon his sacred Name (Bhagti) and imbibing the divine attributes in his own (devotee's) words, deeds and conduct. It involves in developing a consciousness and a conscience in which every thought, word and deed that emanates from within gets cross-checked by the inner-voice of the Divine Guru before its execution. It is a pathway by following which a Sikh devotee passes through a cleansing process of thought and attaining emotional equilibrium and spiritual rejuvenation. Bhai Gurdas elaborates and elucidates this pathway which is at once extremely arduous as well as easy to tread. He calls it a "Gaadi

Raah” a path already travelled and demarcated by the Guru. It is arduous because it requires hard disciplining of the mind and its ever fluctuating habit through waves stimulated by its mental and sensory antennas. It has to be disciplined through continuous remembrance of God’s name and meditating upon it. Bhai Gurdas has specified and codified this name or Mantra for the Sikhs for repeated chanting as “*Waheguru*” in verse 49, *Var I* (BVS, p. 40) The word “*Waheguru*” uttered, recited and chanted with faith and concentration provides an ecstatic thrill and establishes a line of telephatic communication with the enlightened Guru who is an embodiment of the divine. It is this mental and complete psychic conditioning which makes the ‘Gurmat pathway an arduous journey. Bhai Gurdas describes it through the metaphors of walking on a razor’s edge, a sort of blade running exercise, licking of a tasteless rock and passing through a channel narrower than the radius of a human hair. He states:

੧. ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਬਾਰੀਕ ਹੈ ਖੰਡੇ ਧਾਰ ਗਲੀ ਅਤਿ ਭੀੜੀ॥
  ੨. ਓਥੈ ਟਿਕੈ ਨ ਭੁਣਹਣਾ ਚਲ ਨ ਸਕੈ ਉਪਰਿ ਕੀੜੀ॥
  ੩. ਵਾਲਹੁ ਨਿਕੀ ਆਖੀਐ ਤੇਲੁ ਤਿਲਹੁ ਲੈ ਕੋਲੁ ਪੀੜੀ॥
  ੪. ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਵੰਸੀ ਪਰਮਹੰਸ ਖੀਰ ਨੀਰ ਨਿਰਨਉ ਚੁੰਜਿ ਵੀੜੀ॥
  ੫. ਸਿਲਾ ਆਲੂਣੀ ਚਟਣੀ ਮਾਣਕ ਮੋਤੀ ਚੋਗ ਨਿਵੀੜੀ॥
  ੬. ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਚਲਣਾ ਆਸ ਨਿਰਾਸੀ ਝੀੜ ਉਝੀੜੀ॥
  ੭. ਸਹਜਿ ਸਰੋਵਰਿ ਸਚਖੰਡਿ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਚ ਤਖਤਿ ਹਰੀੜੀ॥
  ੮. ਚੜ੍ਹਿ ਇਕੀਹ ਪਤਿ ਪਉੜੀਆ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਸਹੀੜੀ॥
  ੯. ਗੁੰਗੇ ਦੀ ਮਠਿਆਈਐ ਅਕਥ ਕਥਾ ਵਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਬਚੀੜੀ॥
  ੧੦. ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੁਖ ਫਲ ਸਹਜਿ ਅਲੀੜੀ ॥
1. Gursikhi pathway is as steep and sharp as razor’s edge,  
Its passage is through a very narrow alley.
  2. Lower species cannot hold on to this sharp pathway  
Nor can they traverse through its narrow passage.
  3. The path being narrower than the radius of a hair’s thickness,  
The (Gursikh) pilgrim is destined to be squeezed like a sesame  
seed in an oil extractor.
  4. Gurmukh being a superior being like a Swan among its own  
species,

He is equipped with the sense of discriminating truth from falsehood.

5. Gursikhi pathway being as arduous as licking a tasteless rock, Its pilgrim has to explore newer forms of nourishment.
6. Gurumukh in order to pursue the Gursikhi pathway of life, Needs to lead a life of detachment and keenest sense of discrimination.
7. Gurusikhi pathway being an ocean of equipoise and calmness, Company of the virtuous makes a steady platform on it.
8. Those who ascend this slope crossing the material barriers. They get immersed in the Guru and the Divine.
9. This experience being as indescribable as a dumb person's taste of sweets,  
The Gurusikh savours indescribable droughts of ecstasy.
10. Such an ecstasy and equipoise are the reward of a Gurmukh pilgrim.

(Var 11, Pauri 5)

But once this mental groove gets created, it becomes an automatic process and a way of life. It starts generating its savoury juices and a distinct flavour which enable its practitioner to shun all base instincts, errant behavior and acts of unbecoming conduct. After this stage, it is a smooth journey on the track laid down by the Guru which Bhai Gurdas calls Gurumukh's "*Gaadi Raah*". He elaborates on its whole route map:

੧. ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਚਾ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹੁ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਗਾਡੀ ਰਾਹੁ ਚਲਾਇਆ॥
੨. ਪੰਜਿ ਦੂਤ ਕਰਿ ਭੂਤ ਵਸਿ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਦੂਜਾ ਭਾਉ ਮਿਟਾਇਆ॥
੩. ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਲਿਵ ਚਲਣਾ ਜਮੁ ਜਾਗਾਤੀ ਨੇੜਿ ਨ ਆਇਆ॥
੪. ਬੇਮੁਖ ਬਾਰਹ ਵਾਟ ਕਰ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਚੁ ਖੰਡੁ ਵਸਾਇਆ॥
੫. ਭਾਉ ਭਗਤਿ ਭਉ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਦੇ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸ਼ਨਾਨੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਇਆ॥
੬. ਜਿਉ ਜਲ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਕਮਲ ਹੈ ਮਾਇਆ ਵਿਚਿ ਉਦਾਸੁ ਰਹਾਇਆ॥
੭. ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਇ ਨ ਆਪੁ ਗਣਾਇਆ ॥
1. Satguru being the true sovereign guide,  
He laid out the Gursikhi (Gurmukh) Pathway.
2. Keeping the chaotic five vices under leash,  
He demolished the craving to indulge in these.

3. Concentrating on Gurshabad and carrying on with it,  
Phantoms of fearful death do not come near.
4. Turning away from the twelve fold Yogic pathways,  
A heavenly ambience is created in the company of the pious.
5. Bestowing the boon of devotion and faith on Gurmukh  
A life of complete immersion in God's name is ensured.
6. Like a lotus flower remaining above the waterbed,  
A life of detachment amidst the world is laid out.
7. Even being detached is omitted from looking detached.

(Var 5, Pauri 13)

Once adopted, Gurmat, Sikhi becomes a way of life. This Sikh religious stream originated during the last years of Guru Nanak who institutionalized it at Kartarpur and passed on this legacy to his disciple who became the second Sikh Guru, Guru Angad Dev. Its functional activities kept on increasing and expanding under the pontification of the successive Sikh Gurus. Bhai Gurdas calls it a religion of ancestral heritage of “Babeeni Peeri” and elaborates it in *Var 26*.

੧. ਬਾਬਾਣੀ ਪੀੜੀ ਚਲੀ ਗੁਰ ਚੇਲੇ ਪਰਚਾ ਪਰਚਾਇਆ॥
੨. ਗੁਰੁ ਅੰਗਦੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਅੰਗੁ ਤੇ ਗੁਰੁ ਚੇਲਾ ਚੇਲਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਭਾਇਆ॥
੩. ਅਮਰਦਾਸੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਅੰਗਦਹੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਤੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸਦਾਇਆ॥
੪. ਗੁਰੁ ਅਮਰਹੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਰਾਮਦਾਸੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਹੋਇ ਸਮਾਇਆ॥
੫. ਰਾਮਦਾਸਹੁ ਅਰਜਣੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਬ੍ਰਿਖਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਫਲੁ ਲਾਇਆ॥
੬. ਹਰਿ ਗੋਵਿੰਦੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਅਰਜਨਹੁ ਆਦਿ ਪੁਰਖ ਆਦੇਸੁ ਕਰਾਇਆ॥
੭. ਸੁਝੈ ਸੁਝ ਨ ਲੁਕੈ ਲੁਕਾਇਆ ॥

1. House of Nanak Started with Guru's initiation of his disciple.
2. Guru Anged being Guru's initiated disciple became the Guru.
3. Amar Das initiated by Guru Angad came to be called the Guru.
4. Guru Ram Das with Guru's service of Guru Amar Das became the Guru.
5. Ram Das receiving elixir from Guru Arjan became the Guru.
6. Hargobind descending from Guru Arjan received Guruship's mandate.
7. The sunrise (of Guruship) could never be eclipsed.

(Var 26, Pauri 34, p. 426)

This spiritual, religious pathway was as much the result of Guru Nanak's mystical revolutionary experience as the natural corollary and an urgent need of prevailing societal, cultural, and historical compulsions. The period of Guru Nanak's physical presence was marked by two extremes of religiosity, one consisting of elaborate Brahminical rituals, Yajnas and even sacrificial propitiation of an endless plethora of gods, goddesses and deities and the other consisting of the extreme austerities and bodily mortifications of ascetic, semi-naked ash-smeared Nath Jogis who shocked and awed the masses with their esoteric feats of Yogic practices of stopping their breaths, feeding on air and walking on fire and water etc and holding whimsical threats of curses and promises of blessings upon the gullible masses. These pathways left the masses bewildered and frustrated. Combined with this religious and cultural turmoil, was the economic exploitation of the people by the ruling elite in close collaboration with the clergy of the two mainstream religious streams, Hinduism and Islam. Bhai Gurdas provides a graphic description of this chaotic religious socio-cultural and political scenario in some of the verses in his very first *Var*. He says:

੧. ਚਾਰਿ ਵਰਨ ਚਾਰਿ ਮਜਹਬਾ ਜਗ ਵਿਚਿ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੇ॥
੨. ਖੁਦੀ ਬਖੀਲਿ ਤਕਬਰੀ ਖਿੱਚੋਤਾਣ ਕਰਨਿ ਧਿਛਾਣੇ॥
੩. ਗੰਗ ਬਨਾਰਸਿ ਹਿੰਦੂਆਂ ਮਕਾ ਕਾਬਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੇ॥
੪. ਸੁੰਨਤਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣ ਦੀ ਤਿਲਕ ਜੰਝੂ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਲੋਭਾਣੇ॥
੫. ਰਾਮ ਰਹੀਮ ਕਹਾਇਦੇ ਇਕੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਦੁਇ ਰਾਹ ਭੁਲਾਣੇ॥
੬. ਬੇਦ ਕਤੇਬ ਭੁਲਾਇਕੈ ਮੋਹੇ ਲਾਲਚ ਦੁਨੀ ਸੈਤਾਣੇ॥
੭. ਸਚ ਕਿਨਾਰੇ ਰਹਿ ਗਇਆ ਖਹਿ ਮਰਦੇ ਬਾਹਮਣ ਮਝੁਲਾਣੇ॥
੮. ਸਿਰੇ ਨ ਮਿਟੇ ਆਵਣ ਜਾਣੇ ॥

1. With four prevalent castes and four religions,  
The whole world is ridden with the Hindus and the Muslims.
2. Filled with egoistic pride and calumny against each other,  
They are constantly engaged in clashing strife.
3. Ganga and Benares being sacred to the Hindus,  
The Mecca and Kaaba are sacred to the Muslims.

4. Circumcision being the tag of Muslim identity, Safron mark on forehead and thread are Hindu identity tags.
5. With Hindus addressing God as Ram and Muslims as Rahim, Both have gone astray by naming the same God with two names.
6. Ignoring the essence of their scriptures – the Vedas and the Katebas, Both have been caught in the snares of monetary greed.
7. With truth being driven to the edge and bypassed, Both Brahmins and Maulvis (Muslim clerics) keep on clashing.
8. None of them are capable of bringing about emancipation and redemption.

(Var 1, Pauri 21)

It is out of this religious and political chaos, that Guru Nanak founded his unique “Nirmal Panth” the Gurmat, Sikhi pathway of spiritual, religious and socio-economic composite life based on the holistic triple principles of earning one’s livelihood through earnest hardwork, sharing it with the needy and meditating upon the sacred name of God. Both Gurbani and Bhai Gurdas’s verses term it as the *Sahaj Marg* or the *Gurmukh Gaadi Raah*. It neither believes in the coercive subjugation of genuine bodily or biological urges nor believes in unnecessary taboos of caste, gender inequality nor in any senseless ritualistic propitiation of mythological deities. It is a householder’s religion which thrives on legitimate economic, materialistic activity and believes in community living, with faith in the Guru, God and Community service:

੧. ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਭਲਕੇ ਉਠ ਕਰਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੇ ਸਰੁ ਨ੍ਹਾਵੰਦਾ॥
੨. ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨ ਉਚਾਰਿਕੈ ਧੁਮਸਾਲ ਦੀ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਕਰੰਦਾ॥
੩. ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਜਾਣਿਕੈ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਸੁਣੰਦਾ॥
੪. ਸੰਕਾ ਮਨਹੁ ਮਿਟਾਇਕੈ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਿਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੇਵ ਕਰੰਦਾ॥
੫. ਕਿਰਤ ਵਿਰਤ ਕਰਿ ਧਰਮੁ ਦੀ ਲੈ ਪਰਸਾਦ ਆਣਿ ਵਰਤੰਦਾ॥
੬. ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖਾਂ ਨੇ ਦੇਇ ਕਰਿ ਪਿਛੋਂ ਬਚਿਆ ਆਪੁ ਖਵੰਦਾ॥
੭. ਕਲੀਕਾਲ ਪਰਗਾਸ ਕਰਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਚੇਲਾ ਚੇਲਾ ਗੁਰ ਸੰਦਾ॥
੮. ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਗਾਡੀ ਰਾਹੁ ਚਲੰਦਾ ॥

1. A Gurmukh gets up early in the ambrosial hours and takes

ablutions.

2. With recitation of Guru's words (Gurbani) he proceeds to Dharamsal.
3. Joining the congregation, he listens to Gurbani recitation devoutly with devotion.
4. Effacing all apprehensions, he engages in community service.
5. Earning and rendering service with faith, he shares with others.
6. After sharing with the devout Sikhs, he partakes the rest.
7. Feeling thus enlightened in Kaliyuga, he gets united with the Guru.
8. Thus does the Gurmukh tread the pathway laid down by the Guru.

(*Var 40, Pauri 11*)

**Gurmukh** in Sikh theology is a living embodiment of Sikhi or Gurmat theology. By virtue of having chosen the Sikh pathway of life, a Sikh not only follows its prescribed instructions but also endeavours to inculcate and practice these precepts in his words, deed, and thought. Reposing complete faith in the Guru and the Divine, he keeps on imbibing and integrating those virtues in his day to day life. Bhai Gurdas, in his innumerable verses spread across his forty *Vars*, particularly the majority of the verses of three *Vars* 18, 19, 20 catalogues the major personality traits of a Gurmukh. A Gurmukh is a man of abiding faith, God-fearing, compassionate ever-ready in welfare and service of others, meditative, introspective, introvert, humble, focussed, streamlined, detached, contented, truthful averse to slander, malice, praise and egoistic display of his pride. Apparently simple and innocent but highly enlightened inside, discriminate, analytical and sophisticated in his silent judgement of men and matters. He is legitimately ambitious without being greedy or selfish, engaged in daily economic activity, desirous of emancipation in this life itself and not unduly concerned about after life and salvation. He lives a life of poise, contentment and steadfast optimism. His daily routine consists of early rising, ablutions, prayer, meditation and honest performance of his duty. He is modest

in eating, sleeping and sensual responses. He is not given to avarice, lust and other temptations. Being enlightened, conscious and accountable to his own conscience, his moral character is free from blemish. Gurmukh is an ideal human being, rarest among the rare. Bhai Gurdas has chosen the metaphors of *Chandan* (Sandal wood), *Hans* (Swan), pure gold, Diamond (*Hira*) and lotus flower (Kanwal) and numerals of one to thirty four (*Var 7, Pauri 1-15*) to enumerate the virtuous qualities of a Gurmukh. Given below is one specimen verse embodying a Gurmukh's profile:

੧. ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਭੈ ਵਿਚਿ ਜੰਮਣਾ ਭੈ ਵਿਚਿ ਰਹਿਣਾ ਭੈ ਵਿਚਿ ਚਲਣਾ॥
੨. ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਭੈ ਭਾਇ ਵਿਚਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਵਛਲੁ ਕਰਿ ਅਛਲੁ ਛਲਣਾ॥
੩. ਜਲ ਵਿਚਿ ਕਵਲ ਅਲਿਪਤ ਹੋਇ ਆਸ ਨਿਰਾਸ ਵਲੋਵੇ ਵਲਣਾ॥
੪. ਅਹਰਣਿ ਘਣ ਹੀਰੇ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਨਿਹਚਲੁ ਅਟਲੁ ਨ ਟਲਣਾ॥
੫. ਪਰ ਉਪਕਾਰ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਜੀਅ ਦਇਆ ਮੋਮ ਵਾਗੀ ਢਲਣਾ॥
੬. ਚਾਰਿ ਵਰਨ ਤੰਬੋਲੁ ਰਸੁ ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਇ ਰਲਾਇਆ ਰਲਣਾ॥
੭. ਵਟੀ ਤੇਲੁ ਦੀਵਾ ਹੋਇ ਬਲਣਾ ॥

1. A Gurmukh lives and abides by God's will from birth to death.
2. He tricks the otherwise undeceivable God by piously abiding by His will.
3. He remains detached amidst hope and frustration like a lotus flower.
4. He remains as steadfast in his Gurus faith as a diamond caught between anvil and hammer blows
5. His heart melts with compassion like wax for other's welfare and concern.
6. He mixes himself with people of all castes as easily as the four flavoured ingredients do in a betel pack.
7. He spends his life like a wick in an oil lamp for others' welfare.

(*Var 18, Pauri 17*)

Thus, Gurmukh, Gursikh is rarest among the rare and an epitome of all the human virtues and all that is best in human nature.

## SAT SANGAT – SADH SANGAT

The congregational community of the Gursikh followers



of the Guru is the organized entity of Sikh theology. It is the favourite haunt of the Gurmukhs, a spiritual hub which provides the proper environment and ambience for spiritual rejuvenation and daily reiteration and concretization of faith and religious commitment to the Guru and his religious pathway. Daily association with followers of one's faith, choral recitation of Gurbani verses, listening to the sermons, sitting crosslegged on the floor after paying obeisance to the Guru, making an offering for charity, participation in community services, standing up, joining hands in prayer, listening to Guru's commandment, reflecting on its import — participation in all these activities is a meditational regimen which binds the community as well as provides spiritual sustenance to the followers of Sikh pathway of life. Thus, Sat Sangat is the institutional component of Sikh theology. Bhai Gurdas has eulogized this institution in his several verses. He compares this congregational assembly to a Mansarovar lake where rare species of Swans take a dip and feed themselves. It is a sacred, hallowed and sanctified place where men of faith congregate to purge themselves of all vices and acquire all the virtues. Bhai Gurdas narrates:

੧. ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ਸਾਧਿ ਲੋਭ ਮੋਹ ਦੀ ਜੋਹ ਮਿਟਾਈ॥
੨. ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਦਇਆ ਧਰਮੁ ਅਰਥੁ ਸਮਰਥੁ ਸੁਗਰਥੁ ਸਮਾਈ॥
੩. ਪੰਜੇ ਤਤ ਉਲੰਘਿਆ ਪੰਜਿ ਸਬਦ ਵਜੀ ਵਾਧਾਈ॥
੪. ਪੰਜੇ ਮੁਦਾ ਵਸਿ ਕਰਿ ਪੰਚਾਇਤੁ ਹੁਇ ਦੇਸ ਦੁਹਾਈ॥
੫. ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਹੈ ਪੰਜ ਮਿਲਿ ਲੇਖ ਅਲੇਖ ਨ ਕੀਮਤਿ ਪਾਈ॥
੬. ਪੰਜ ਮਿਲੇ ਪਰਪੰਚ ਤਜਿ ਅਨਹਦ ਸਬਦ ਸਬਦਿ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਈ॥
੭. ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਸੋਹਨਿ ਗੁਰ ਭਾਈ ॥

1. (Gurusikhs) Associate in Congregation (Satsangat) after overpowering lust,  
They wipe out the traces of greed and attachment from their lives.
2. Acquiring virtues of truth, contentment, compassion, discipline and skill to earn where withal,  
They become self-reliant, formidable and distinguished.

3. After crossing the bodily barriers made of five elements  
They begin to rejoice in the celestial symphony of the spheres.
4. Having mastered all the five faculties mentioned in yogic lore  
Their reputation spreads all over the region.
5. Since God is himself present wherever such five persons  
congregate,  
Their merit is beyond any reckoning and estimation.
6. Having given up every pretence such pious people congregate,  
They remain engrossed in continuous meditation.
7. Thus, do fellow Gursikhs appear in pious congregation.

*(Var 29, Pauri 6)*

Besides these major concepts of Sikh Theology, Bhai Gurdas' Verses repeatedly stress upon the virtue of humility, politeness, process of self-purification and refinement of character through hard, arduous mental and spiritual conditioning through the similes of processes of ginning of cotton, squeezing of oil from oil seeds, blossoming and fruiting of pomegranate, preparation of jaggery through crushing sugarcane and boiling of its juice, opium extraction, formation of rubies from a raindrop in the coral shell. Sikh theology also employs various the mythological figures across the three Yugas who became spiritual icons through the pathway of meditation and unwavering faith and devotion to God, the pathway being identical with Sikh religious pathway. Bhai Gurdas's verses eulogize all these prominent icons of India's spiritual heritage in conformity with their glorification in the sacred Sikh scripture. This list consists of Dhru Bhagat, Prehlad, Raja Bal, Ambrik Bhagat, Raja Janak, Bidar, Dropti, Sudama, Jaidev, Namdev, Dhanna Bhagat, Tarlochan, Kabir, Ramanand, Sain, Ravidas, Balmik, Ajamal, Ganika, etc. Since the verses of some of these saints have been incorporated in the Sikh scripture, they are the integral part of the Sikh spiritual heritage as well.

To Conclude, Bhai Gurdas emerges as a brilliant theorist

and theologian who has systematically, derived, interpreted, crystallized, elucidated and codified the major concepts of Sikh theology which have been lying randomly scattered in the verses of Sikh Gurus in the sacred Sikh scripture. He has clearly laid down the road map for traversing the Sikh Path way of life and facilitated the grasp of the full import of these postulates of Sikh spiritual and religious pathway. No wonder, Bhai Gurdas's verses have been universally acknowledged as a "Key" to the sacred Sikh scripture and Bhai Gurdas as "The St Paul of Sikhism".

## II

Besides Vars, Bhai Gurdas had composed a large body of poetic verses broadly known as *Kabit*. These are a total of 675 of these compositions which consist of 8 couplets in the form of *Dobras*, *Sorthas* and *Chhands*, 658 *Kabits*, 6 *Swaiyyas* and 3 *Dobra Chhands* ( $8+658+6+3=675$ ). Despite various variations in poetic meter, all these compositions are broadly termed as *Kabit Swaiyyas*. This body of literature belongs to the earlier phase of Bhai Gurdas' poetic career when he was sent as a Sikh preacher by Guru Ram Das to cities of Agra, Ujjain, Lucknow and Burhanpur to project and propagate the Sikh gospel after Bhai Gurdas' successful apprenticeship in Sikhi under the tutelage of Guru Amar Das. During the later part of this assignment, Bhai Gurdas shifted to Kashi – Benaras, the seat of Hindu theology and Brahmanical practices where he successfully propagated the Sikh gospel. It was at Benaras where he is believed to have composed majority of his *Kabit Swaiyyas*. Being well-versed in Sanskrit and the essentials of *Vedas*, *Shashtras*, *Smrities* and other Hindi classics and being placed in the midst of leading scholars and exponents of these texts, Bhai Gurdas could project and propagate the distinct Sikh gospel through a large number of allusions, references,

similes, metaphors, parallelism and several other literary modes of embellishments. His choice of the literary genre of *Kabit* also has a valid reason. *Kabit* was the most popular mode of expression in the contemporary Hindi literature as *Saloka* had been the mode of expression in the earlier Sanskrit literature. While Tulsi Das composed his *Ramayan* (*Ram Chrit Manas*) in *chopais* (Quatrains) and Surdas composed his *Sursagar* in *Padas* or lyrics (*geet*) and Hirday Ram his *Hamuman Natak* composed their compositions in *Kabits*, Bhai Gurdas, following this tradition, also composed his poetic works mainly in *Kabits*. According to Piara Singh Padam, *Kabit* as a literary poetic genre goes well with the liberal, large-hearted bold, and accommodative nature of the native Punjabi temperament. Its comparatively lengthier poetic meter was suited to both the expository and explanatory style of the Sikh preacher poet. Its rudimentary version in the form of “Baints” has been found to be widely used in the Punjabi poetry of the period before Bhai Gurdas. The most favourite style of Bhai Gurdas in these *kabits* consists of his employing several examples, parallelisms and references from various sources easily comprehensible to the contemporary readers in the first three lines of each *kabit* in a very bold, extensive way and delivering his essential message in a comparatively mild, compact manner in the last and fourth line. This technique appears to be very successful, impressive and effective. The comparatively longer and bigger lines of this literary device called *kabits* not only enabled him to reveal his vast scholarship and knowledge of classics, Indian beliefs and Indian culture but also to prove the distinctiveness and superiority of Sikh gospel stated in the fourth line in comparison to the existing belief systems narrated in the first three lines. It also provided him an opportunity to demonstrate his poetic craftsmanship. Majority of the literary similes, metaphors and parallelisms in his *kabits* consist of visual, demonstrative and illustrative images such as those of

Sandalwood (*chandan*) tree (*Birchh*) crow (*Kaag*), Swan (*Hans*), boatsman (*Malah*), gold (*Kanchan*) Husband (*pati/ kant*) and wife etc. For employing these metaphors successfully, a poet needs to have knowledge of a vast range of disciplines as well as a literary and poetic skill to bring out appropriate comparisons and contrasts. Bhai Gurdas was profusely endowed with both of these two faculties.

Having been groomed well in Sikhi both by Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das and his having studied the major Hindu scriptures and having clearly understood their concepts and practices and his interactions with the leading lights of the contemporary faiths in and around Benares during this period and having crystallized in his mind, the clear distinction between the spiritual and religious beliefs and practices of these faiths and *Sikhi* during his sermons and preaching sessions, Bhai Gurdas dwells upon the basic tenets of *Gurmat* and *Sikhi* in these *Kabit Swaiyya* compositions. His expression of *Gurmat* tenets first in these *Kabit Swaiyyas* and later on in his *Vars*, makes him the first theologian who has codified the major *Gurmat* concepts into well-defined terminology and distinct phraseology. However the major features which differentiate his *Kabit Swaiyyas* from his *Var* is his diction and linguistic flavor. While *kabits* have been composed in hybrid Braj Bhasha, the *Vars* have been written in pure and chaste Punjabi.

The major issues and subjects touched upon in both the compositions remain more or less the same. *Kabits* being larger in number than that of *Vars*, these include Bhai Gurdas's views on some peripheral and deductive Sikh beliefs and practices as well which are natural corollaries of the major concepts of Sikh theology. Bhai Gurdas gives elaborate expression to Sikh concepts of God, *Satguru*, *Gurusikh*, *Gurmukh*, *Sat Sangat* and Sikh meditational pathway called *simran*. It is an instinctive, spontaneous natural and effortless manner called *Sehaj marg* as opposed to the performance of complicated rituals of

Hinduism and painful, mortifying practices called Hatha Yoga of Nath Jogies.

Since all the major Sikh concepts codified by Bhai Gurdas as narrated in his *Vars* have already been summarized in the preceding pages, there is bound to be some repetition in our discussion on *Kabit Swayyas* as well, though these verses are couched in a distinctly different language and poetic diction. Therefore, in order to lessen the burden of repetition on the reader, let us first analyse the contours of Sikh spiritual voyage or the Sikh pilgrim's progress of a devout Sikh following the meditational regimen or Sikh pathway of meditation as narrated elaborately in his *Kabit Swayyas*, before summarizing the other major Sikh concepts in these compositions.

Bhai Gurdas makes repeated attempts in his more than thirty *Kabits* to narrate the Sikh meditational path called *simran* to seek and arrive at a human communion with the Divine. This meditational path, contrary to the maze of Hindu, Brahmanical rituals and esoteric tortuous yogic practices, is based on a gradual step by step repetition and remembrance of God's sacred name with a firm and unshakable faith in the Divine power as the stepping stone. As a Gursikh launches on this spiritual odyssey, his consciousness about the omnipresent immanence and eternal presence of the Divine keeps on increasing and expanding.

Before summing up Bhai Gurdas' narration of this Sikh meditational pathway, it would be more appropriate to provide a specimen out of his most representative *Kabits* about this concept. It States:

੧. ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਲਿਵ ਗੁਰਸਿਖ ਸੰਧਿ ਮਿਲੇ, ਪੰਚ ਪਰਪੰਚ ਮਿਟੇ ਪੰਚ ਪਰਧਾਨੇ ਹੈ ॥
੨. ਭਾਗੇ ਭੈ ਭਰਮ ਭੇਦ, ਕਾਲ ਅਉ ਕਰਮ ਖੇਦ, ਲੋਗ ਬੇਦ ਉਲੰਘਿ ਉਦੇਤ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੇ ਹੈ ॥
੩. ਮਾਇਆ ਅਉ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਸਮ ਦਸਮ ਦੁਆਰ ਪਾਰਿ, ਅਨਹਦ ਰੁਣਝੁਣ ਬਾਜਤ ਨੀਸਾਨੇ ਹੈ ॥
੪. ਉਨਮਨ ਮਗਨ ਗਗਨ ਜਗਨ ਜੋਤਿ, ਨਿਝਰ ਅਪਾਰ ਧਾਰ ਪਰਮ ਨਿਧਾਨੇ ਹੈ ॥੨੯॥
1. As a Gursikh's consciousness gets aligned with Gurushabad, the five human vices start disappearing and five virtues start

taking precedence.

2. As all doubts, discriminations and temporal impact of human deeds gets resolved, a Guru - induced enlightenment superior to that of Vedas and traditional pathways dawns upon.
3. As the creator and His creation become one in this enlightened state (*Dasam Duar*), a melody of the unheard symphony of spheres is heard.
4. As an ecstatic feeling of a higher blissful presence is felt, an unstoppable experience of immersion in spiritual bliss gets lodged in (Gursikhs soul).

– Kabit 29

Adoption of this Sikh meditational pathway called *simran* takes a Gursikh devotee on a spiritual voyage. As he traverses along this meditational, spiritual path, his inclination to indulge in human vices keeps on declining and the urge towards inculcation of human virtues keeps on becoming stronger and stronger. As this voluntary, spontaneous remembrance and repetition of God's sacred name (*Wahguru*) gains momentum, all kinds of fears, doubts, feelings of discrimination against self and others keep on receding and a sense of continuous blissfulness takes over. It is a state of complete psychic purification and spiritual transformation where all cravings for worldly possessions recede and finally die. It is a state of desirelessness, perfect peace poise and equilibrium. It is a launching step for the liberated human soul to establish human communion with the Divine where the creator and his cosmic creation including the meditating Gursikh become inseparable and indistinguishable from each other. In Gurbani parlance, it is called the opening or awakening of *Dasam Duar* where human soul feels completely illuminated and enlightened. What is unique about this Sikh spiritual journey and meditational pathway is its technique of natural, instinctive, effortless mental concentration without any act of renunciation of one's worldly responsibilities, or ascetic mortifications of body or

adoption of esoteric rituals aimed at appeasing some lower deity. It is a process of awakening human consciousness through reiteration of faith in the Divine presence and remaining devotedly aligned to this feeling. Bhai Gurdas consistently endeavors to stress upon the distinct nature of this Sikh meditational pathway and its cultivation by a devout Sikh devotee while living a householder's life without escaping or shirking the obligations of either his human body or his societal life. It is a life thoroughly streamlined, thoroughly detached mentally and spiritually and yet bodily and socially involved at the same time. It is a process of striking a balance between the two contraries – the material and the spiritual – a gradual path way, a *Sabaj Marg*, a gradual awakening of consciousness and arriving at a state of complete detachment called *turiya avastha*. What goes to the credit of Bhai Gurdas is his systematic cataloguing of all the road-signs and milestones on this distinct and unique Sikh meditational pathway of spiritual voyage in his skillfully crafted *Kabit* verses so that this Sikh technique of spiritual emancipation gets permanently etched in the Sikh collective consciousness and becomes an indispensable tenet of Sikh theology as well.

The other prominent themes narrated in *Kabit Swaiyyas* are almost identical with the themes expressed in Bhai Gurdas's *Vars*. Some of these are Sikh concepts of God, *Satguru*, *Gurmukh* or *Gursikh*, *Gurmat*, *Sat Sangat*, dichotomy between thought and deed, essential meaning of human life and its significance, and a few other universal home truths. Despite being repetitive, these concepts need to be summarized as visualized and stated in Bhai Gurdas's *kabits*. Bhai Gurdas declares that the Divine power is invisibly visible, eternal, transcendent as well as immanent, all-pervasive, inscrutable and inexpressible in its mystique and its apparently paradoxical attributes:

੧. ਦਰਸ ਅਦਰਸ ਦਰਸ ਅਸਚਰਜ-ਸੈ, ਹੇਰਤ ਹਿਰਾਨੇ ਦ੍ਰਿਗ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਅਗਮ ਹੈ ॥
੨. ਸਬਦ ਅਗੋਚਰ ਸਬਦ ਪਰਮਦਭੁਤ, ਅਕਥ ਕਥਾ ਕੈ ਸੁਤਿ ਸ੍ਰਵਨ ਬਿਸਮ ਹੈ ॥



੩. ਸਾਦ ਰਸ ਰਹਿਤ ਅਪੀਅ ਪਿਆ ਪ੍ਰੇਮਰਸ, ਰਸਨਾ ਥਕਤ ਨੇਤ ਨੇਤ ਨਮੋ ਨਮ ਹੈ॥  
੪. ਨਿਰਗੁਨ ਸਰਗੁਨ ਅਬਿਗਤਿ ਨ ਗਹਨ ਗਤਿ, ਸੁਖਮ ਸਬੂਲ ਮੂਲ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਹੈ॥੧੫੩॥
1. Being beyond the knowledge of six classic texts, invisible and mysterious, Divine (Waheguru) is beyond the vision of human eyes.
  2. Being beyond the expression through words, being mystical, the buzz of His indescribable mystique sounds ecstatic to human ears.
  3. The elixir like essence of His Name being beyond worldly flavours, Human tongue gets exhausted reciting and repeating His name.
  4. His mystique being beyond the temporal and the transcendental, He is the foundation of both the concrete and the abstract.

– *Kabit* 153

Despite this mystic and mystical attributes, the Divine power is essentially compassionate and indiscriminately energizing and empowering to the lowest of the low and the weakest among the weak.

੧. ਨਿਰਾਧਾਰ ਕੋ ਅਧਾਰੁ ਆਸਰੋ ਨਿਰਾਸਨ ਕੋ, ਨਾਥੁ ਹੈ ਅਨਾਥਨ ਕੋ ਦੀਨ ਕੋ ਦਇਆਲੁ ਹੈ॥  
੨. ਅਸਰਨਿ ਸਰਨਿ ਅਉ ਨਿਰਧਨ ਕੋ ਹੈ ਧਨ, ਟੇਕ ਅੰਧਨ ਕੀ ਅਉ ਕਿਰਪਨ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲੁ ਹੈ॥  
੩. ਅਕ੍ਰਿਤਘਨ ਕੋ ਦਾਤਾਰ ਪਤਤਿ ਪਾਵਨ ਪ੍ਰਭ, ਨਰਕ ਨਿਵਾਰਨ ਪ੍ਰਤਗਿਆ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਾਲੁ ਹੈ॥  
੪. ਅਵਗੁਨ ਹਰਨ ਕਰਨ ਕਰਤਗਿਆ ਸ੍ਵਾਮੀ, ਸੰਗੀ ਸਰਬੰਗਿ ਰਸ ਰਸਕਿ ਰਸਾਲੁ ਹੈ॥
1. He (Waheguru) being succor to the destitute and the helpless, He is compassionate to the orphaned and the indigent.
  2. He being provider of shelter and aid to the unsheltered and the needy, He is guide to the ignorant and liberal to the miserly.
  3. He being magnanimous to the ungrateful and emancipator of sinners, He is committed to liberate the fallen and sustain them.
  4. He being eliminator of vices and an omniscient companion of human deeds, He is the fountain head of all the virtuous thoughts.

– *Kabit* 387, p. 245

The other prominent verses highlighting the multiple facets of the Divine, covering every aspect of his creative power, his creation and operative design as visualized in the text of the sacred Sikh scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib have been further amplified and elaborated by Bhai Gurdas in his *Kabit* verses 232, 273, 274, 302, 303, 304, 387, 436, 555, 623,

624, 671.

## SATGURU/ SIKH GURUS

Bhai Gurdas reiterates that the Divine God has manifested himself in the bodily form through the lives of ten Sikh Gurus (Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das during this phase of Bhai Gurdas's own life). He calls them by the honorific *Satguru*. *Satguru*, through his word and deed, is a living embodiment of the Divine and inseparable from the Divine. *Satguru* being the *Sargun*, visible manifestation of the invisible *Nirgun* Divine, association with him and his guidance facilitates the communion of devout Sikhs with the Divine. He is the best mentor, the best guide, the best facilitator and the best intermediary who cajoles, persuades, motivates and inspires his flock to launch on a spiritual voyage. His presence has a sobering influence and his aura creates an ambience of meditation (*simran*) and cleansing of human body and soul of all the dross of ego and other human vices. His glimpse, his graceful looks, his polite, loving, blissful gestures, words and commands are full of benediction and well-being. Paying obeisance to Satguru surpasses the worship of all gods, goddesses and efficacy of all traditional rituals and chanting of *mantras*. There are a host of Bhai Gurdas' *Kabits* narrating innumerable attributes of *Satguru* notably *Kabits* 85, 110, 140, 141, 142, 146, 150, 178, 189, 213, 214, 217, 218, 249, 270, 276, 277, 294, 295, 344, 354, 356, 357, 358, 364, 371, 378, 379, 396, 406, 417, 418, 421, 425, 246, 534, 536, 541, 561, 583, 612, 614, 619, 644, 678. We reproduce only one such verse to provide the readers with the essence and flavor of these verses:

੧. ਰਿਧ, ਸਿਧ, ਨਿਧ, ਸੁਧਾ, ਪਾਰਸ, ਕਲਪਤਰੁ, ਕਾਮਧੇਨੁ, ਚਿੰਤਾਮਨਿ, ਲਛਮੀ ਸ੍ਰਮੇਵ ਕੀ ॥
੨. ਚਤੁਰ ਪਦਾਰਥ, ਸੁਭਾਵ, ਸੀਲ ਰੂਪ, ਗੁਨ, ਭੁਕਤ, ਜੁਕਤ, ਮਤ ਅਲਖ ਅਭੇਵ ਕੀ ॥
੩. ਜੁਲਾ ਜੋਤਿ, ਜੈਜੈਕਾਰ, ਕੀਰਤਿ, ਪ੍ਰਤਾਪ, ਛਬਿ, ਤੇਜ, ਤਪ, ਕਾਤਿ, ਬਿਭੇ ਸਭਾ ਸਾਧ ਸੇਵ ਕੀ ॥
੪. ਅਨੰਦ, ਸਹਜ ਸੁਖ ਸਕਲ, ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ ਕੋਟਿ, ਕਿੰਚਤ ਕਟਾਛ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਜਾਂਹਿ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਕੀ ॥

Satguru's Grace

1. Excels in boons of all affluence, miraculous powers, elixir, philosopher's stone, three mythological gems\* and goddess of wealth herself. (*Kalpataru*, *Kamdbenu* and *Chintamani*)
2. Exceeds benefits of four values, all noble thoughts, gentle nature, beauty, virtues, consumption, stratagems and techniques of uniting with the unfathomable and mystical Divine.
3. Outshines the joys of flame like brilliance, worldly applause, fame, charisma and glory as well as the spiritual benefits of meditative, revolutionizing and efficacious boons of a saint's meditational regimen.
4. Such indeed is the sense of complete bliss, comforts and joys, and myriad times greater brilliance that flows out of the tinniest bit of God's grace.

– *Kabit* 612, p. 360

### GURMUKH/ GURSIKH

Bhai Gurdas narrates all the attributes of a devout Sikh steeped in *Sikhi*. He calls him a *Gurmukh* or *Gursikh*. The portrait of a *Gurmukh* or *Gursikh* that emerges from over a hundred *Kabits* is one of an ideal human being in whose all the physical mental and spiritual ingredients have been coordinated and synchronized to such an extent that his persona acquires an appearance of grace and rare blissful disposition. Having adopted the Sikh pathway of life consisting of daily performance of assigned occupational duties, earning of honest livelihood and cultivation of meditational remembrance of God's sacred name, he is a thoroughly streamlined and thoroughly enlightened person. Being a man of abiding faith and *simran* being his priority, a *Gurmukh* becomes an introvert, withdrawn, simultaneously engaged consciously in physical, material engagements and unconsciously engaged in *simran* and spiritual pursuit. He is capable of being detached even while being engaged, a man of a world yet being otherworldly. Bhai Gurdas describes him as a person, who has reached the highest step on the meditational ladder termed as the *Dasam Duar* in

Gurbani perlane, a person in a state of mind in which the symphony of the spheres called *Anhad Naad* is heard and draughts of elixir called *Amrit* are relished. As a result of this spiritual enlightenment, a Gurmukh or Gursikh becomes immune to all kinds of human temptations, vices and weaknesses of flesh and blood. He becomes moderate in eating; modest in speech and modest in sleep. There is hardly any dichotomy between his words and deeds, precept and example, and his claims and conduct. Bhai Gurdas uses metaphors such as those of Sandalwood (*Chandan*), Philosopher's Stone (*Paras*), Lotus (*Kamal*), Swan (*Hans*), pure gold (*Kanchan*) and diamond (*Heera*). There are more than one hundred *kabits* highlighting the various attributes of a Gurmukh or Gursikh. Only one specimen of these *kabits* will suffice to illustrate Bhai Gurdas' concept of a Gurmukh:

੧. ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਨ ਬਚ ਕਰਮ ਇਕਤੁ ਭਏ, ਪਰਮਦਭੁਤ ਗਤਿ ਅਲਖ ਲਖਾਏ ਹੈ ॥
  ੨. ਅੰਤਰ ਧਿਆਨ ਦਿਬ ਜੋਤ ਕੋ ਉਦੇਤੁ ਭਇਓ, ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਨ ਰੂਪ ਘਟ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਦਿਖਾਏ ਹੈ ॥
  ੩. ਪਰਮ ਨਿਧਾਨ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨ ਕੋ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਭਇਓ, ਗੰਮਿਤਾ ਤ੍ਰਿਕਾਲ ਗਤਿ ਜਤਨ ਜਤਾਏ ਹੈ ॥
  ੪. ਆਤਮ ਤਰੰਗ ਪ੍ਰੇਮਰਸ ਮਧ ਪਾਨ ਮਤ, ਅਕਥ ਕਥਾ ਬਿਨੋਦ ਹੋਰਤ ਹਿਰਾਏ ਹੈ ॥੬੪॥
1. A Gurmukh being thoroughly synchronised in word, deed and thought, he witnesses a mystical spectacle of the unfathomable Divine.
  2. A Gurmukh being perfectly tuned with the resplendent Divine, he feels the Divine presence in all the three regions of the universe.
  3. A Gurmukh being fully illuminated with the knowledge of the Divine, he has the vision to see through across all the dimensions of time and space.
  4. A Gurmukh being thoroughly saturated with the sumptuous flavour of Divine elixir, he relishes the ecstatic thrill of being one with indescribable Divine.

The other representative verses in this context are Kabits 114, 116, 117, 119, 121, 133, 137, 138, 139, 170, 172, 179, 181, 184, 185, 190, 216, 245, 272, 278, 281, 293, 301, 325, 335, 336, 366, 367, 388, 374, 377, 380, 392, 393, 394, 409,

410, 411, 414, 423, 424, 427, 429, 433, 568, 620, 621, 645.

## GURMAT

Another distinct attribute of Sikh Gurus' teaching that finds excellent expression in Bhai Gurdas' *Kabit Swaiyyas* is the Sikh religious pathway of life which he terms as Gurmat. It is a pathway which was being laid down brick by brick by the Sikh Gurus and consolidated by Bhai Gurdas' and his venerated veterans. Instead of providing a more precise definition of this religious pathway as he did later on in his *Vars*, Bhai Gurdas narrates the psychic benefits of adopting this path and traversing this pathway of life. This pathway imbibed and followed with faith and devotion, bestows innumerable benefits on its Gursikh followers and brings about his spiritual transformation. As a Sikh pilgrim launches on this religio-spiritual path, his mind stops responding to all the outward stimuli and signals that comes through his bodily antennas. It becomes less feverish and keeps on shredding all the clutter of baser instincts and pushing these into his mind's garbage bin. As the concentration and meditation on God's sacred name and journey along the Gurmat Pathway picks up momentum, the urge to indulge in vices and undesirable vicious deeds keep on declining and craving for cultivation of *Gurmat* related virtues and virtuous deeds like selfless service, compassion, humility and goodwill keeps on getting stronger. It is journey from indulgence towards self-restraint, from ego and pride towards humility, from discrimination and duality towards universal love and compassion, from sensual pleasures towards spiritual bliss, from belief in superstition and ill omens and bad portends towards faith in God's will. In short, it is a pathway leading to emotional, mental and spiritual cleansing and spiritual rejuvenation of the Sikh pilgrim. *Gurmukh*, *sant* and *Brahmgyani* are ascending stages of this spiritual blissfulness and enlightenment. Bhai Gurdas narrates the benefits of this

pathway through the metaphors of *Majeeth* the permanent coloration of red dye extracted from a tuberous plant as against the temporary coloration of *kusumb*, safflower, *parambans* (swan) as against ordinary birds and *Chandan* (sandalwood) as against ordinary forest trees. The most representative *kabit* in this context runs as follows:

੧. ਜੈਸੇ ਤਉ ਮਜੀਠ ਬਸੁਧਾ ਸੈ ਖੋਦਿ ਕਾਢੀਅਤ, ਅੰਬਰ ਸੁਰੰਗ ਭਏ ਸੰਗ ਨ ਤਜਤ ਹੈ ॥
  ੨. ਜੈਸੇ ਤਉ ਕਸੁੰਭ ਤਜਿ ਮੂਲ ਫੂਲ ਆਨੀਅਤ, ਜਾਨੀਅਤ ਸੰਗੁ ਛਾਡਿ ਤਾਹੀ ਭਜਤ ਹੈ ॥
  ੩. ਅਰਧ ਉਰਧ ਮੁਖ ਸਲਿਲ ਸੂਚੀ ਸੁਭਾਉ, ਤਾਂਤੇ ਸੀਤ ਤਪਤਿ ਮਲ ਅਮਲ ਸਜਤ ਹੈ ॥
  ੪. ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਉਚ ਨੀਚ ਨੀਚ ਉਚ, ਜੀਤ ਹਾਰ ਹਾਰ ਜੀਤ ਲਜਾ ਨ ਲਜਤ ਹੈ ॥
1. As the red dye is prepared from the uprooted tuberous plant, its permanent red colour does not fade from its dyed cloth.
  2. As the temporary colouring manifests itself on the safflower, it fades very soon from the surface of the safflower.
  3. As water always flows from higher to a lower plane and fire always rises upwards, the water always remains cool and clean while the fire creates heat and soot.
  4. So does *Gurmat* uplifts the humble while *durmat* humbles the arrogant, as the former turns the vanquished into conqueror, while the latter turns victory into defeat and makes the vicious shameless.

– *Kabit* 136

Three other representative *Kabits* highlighting this Sikh pathway are *Kabits* 24, 25, 26 of which *kabit* 26 is the most representative which runs as follows:

੧. ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਬੈਰ ਨਿਰਬੈਰ ਭਏ, ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗੁਰ ਸਰਬ ਮੈ ਜਾਨੇ ਹੈ ॥
  ੨. ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਭੇਦ ਨਿਰਭੇਦ ਭਏ, ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਬਿਧਿ ਨਿਖੇਧ ਖੋਦ ਬਿਨਸਾਨੇ ਹੈ॥
  ੩. ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਬਾਇਸ ਪਰਮਹੰਸ, ਗਿਆਨ ਅੰਸ ਬੰਸ ਨਿਰਗੰਧ ਗੰਧ ਠਾਨੇ ਹੈ ॥
  ੪. ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਕਰਮ ਭਰਮ ਖੋਏ, ਆਸਾ ਮੈ ਨਿਰਾਸ ਹੁਇ ਬਿਸ੍ਵਾਸ ਉਰ ਆਨੇ ਹੈ॥
1. Those traversing the *Gurmat* pathway become amiable shedding animosity/ rancour, as they perceive God's presence in every one around.
  2. Those being groomed in *Gurmat* become impartial shedding discrimination, as all sense of duality and slandering gets wiped away.
  3. Those indoctrinated in *Gurmat* become as prudent as the swan,

as all their baser instincts get refined by their enlightenment.

4. Those being grounded in Gurmat become free from rituals and superstitions, as they become detached through their faith in the Divine.

— Kabit 26

In addition to these four *kabits*, the other appropriate *kabits* are 27, 95, 176, 177.

### SAT SANGAT/ SADH SANGAT

Another subject that finds elaboration in Bhai Gurdas' *Kabit Swaiyyas* is the significance and relevance of the congregational assembly of Gurmukhs or Gursikhs called *Sat Sangat* or *Sadh sangat*. It is an assembly of the likeminded spiritual seekers and the faithful who sit, sing and pray together in an environment of faith and devotion. It creates an ambience of spiritual bliss and ecstasy where Guru's presence is felt which leads to spiritual rejuvenation and inculcation of all the virtues which are integral to the Sikh pathway of life. Bhai Gurdas eulogizes the significance of *Satsangat* through the verses of proverbial metaphors of *Mansarovar* where the swan-like devout Gursikhs regularly assemble. They establish an unbreakable bond of religious and spiritual affinity which is far more superior to one's family bonds or blood relationships. He highlights its importance in Kabit 100 as below:

੧. ਨਹੀਂ ਦਦਸਾਰ ਪਿਤ ਪਿਤਾਮਾ ਪਰ-ਪਿਤਾਮਾ, ਸੁਜਨ ਕੁਟੰਬ ਸੁਤ ਬਾਧਵ ਨ ਭੂਤਾ ਹੈ ॥
੨. ਨਹੀਂ ਨਨਸਾਰ ਮਾਤਾ ਪਰਮਾਤਾ ਬਿਰਧਿ ਪਰਮਾਤਾ, ਮਾਮੂ ਮਾਮੀ ਮਾਸੀ ਔ ਮੌਸਾ ਬਿਬਿਧ ਬਿਖਾਤਾ ਹੈ ॥
੩. ਨਹੀਂ ਸਸੁਰਾਰ ਸਾਸੁ ਸੁਸਰਾ ਸਾਰੇ ਅਉ ਸਾਰੀ, ਨਹੀਂ ਬਿਰਤੀਸੁਰ ਮੈ ਜਾਚਿਕ ਨ ਦਾਤਾ ਹੈ ॥
੪. ਅਸਨ ਬਸਨ ਧਨ ਧਾਮ ਕਾਹੂ ਮੈ ਨ ਦੇਖਿਓ, ਜੈਸਾ ਗੁਰਸਿਖ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤ ਕੇ ਨਾਤਾ ਹੈ ॥
1. Neither the human bond with one's older paternal relationships.  
Nor his bond with any of his family younger, fraternal relations,
2. Neither the human bond with his older maternal relationships,  
Nor his bond with any of their younger maternal relations,
3. Neither the human bond with one's inlaws' older and younger relations,  
Nor his bond with his family's priest and mendicants,

4. Nor even the human bond with one's wealth and mansions,  
Is as strong and enduring as a Gursikh's bond with the  
congregation of the virtuous (*Sadh Sangat*).

— *Kabit* 100

The other *Kabits* endorsing the benefits and boons of *Satsangat* are 122, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 145, 157. 159, 166, 169, 309, 310, 323, 324, 326, 361, and 560.

Besides these prominent Sikh virtues enumerated in the *Kabit smaiyyas* verses, several other concepts associated with human psyche and Sikh orientation are those of material aspects of human life (*maya*), supremacy of a householder's life (*Garihasat jeewan*), *Gursikhi* and idol worship, intricacies of human mind, dichotomy between human words and deeds and their resolution, pangs of separation and the blissful moments of human communion with the Divine during the highest stage of Gursikh's spiritual voyage. In these verses, Bhai Gurdas lays emphasis on the recognition of the reality of materiality of life and need for striking a balance between an unavoidable attachment to it as well as cultivation of a detached outlook. The best strategy for leading a balanced life which is a Sikh pathway of life is to live the life of a householder rather than denying and escaping from the primary responsibilities of life. Through a surfeit of comparisons and metaphoric distinctions, he stresses upon the supremacy of a householder's life.

੧. ਜੈਸੇ ਸਰਿ ਸਰਿਤਾ ਸਕਲ ਮੈ ਸਮੁੰਦ੍ਰ ਬਡੇ, ਮੇਰ ਮੈ ਸੁਮੇਰ ਬਡੇ ਜਗਤੁ ਬਖਾਨ ਹੈ ॥
  ੨. ਤਰਵਰ ਬਿਖੈ ਜੈਸੇ ਚੰਦਨ ਬਿਰਖੁ ਬਡੇ, ਧਾਤ ਮੈ ਕਨਕ ਅਤਿ ਉਤਮ ਕੈ ਮਾਨ ਹੈ ॥
  ੩. ਪੰਛੀਅਨ ਮੈ ਹੰਸ ਮ੍ਰਿਗ ਰਾਜਨ ਮੈ ਸਾਰਦੂਲ, ਰਾਗਨ ਮੈ ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਪਾਰਸ ਪਖਾਨ ਹੈ ।
  ੪. ਗਿਆਨਨ ਮੈ ਗਿਆਨ ਅਰੁ ਧਿਆਨਨ ਮੈ ਧਿਆਨ ਗੁਰ, ਸਕਲ ਧਰਮ ਮੈ ਗ੍ਰਿਹਸਤੁ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਹੈ॥
1. As an ocean is the largest in size among all the water bodies,  
So is the mount Sumer highest among the mountain peaks.
  2. As Sandalwood tree is the best among all the trees,  
So is gold the most precious among all the metals.
  3. Swan and Lion are supreme among birds and animals,  
So are Sri Raag and philosopher's stone supreme among



melodies and precious stones.

4. As the spiritual enlightenment and meditation is supreme philosophical contemplation,

So is a householder's life supreme among all path ways of life

— *Kabit* 376

As in the Gurbani text of the sacred Sikh scripture so in Bhai Gurdas' *Kabits*, there are repeated references to the essentially wanton, flirtatious-forever-flip-flopping and slippery nature of human mind and need for taming it and channelizing its energy through the practice of Sikh meditational technique of *Simran*. Bhai Gurdas highlights this psychological trait of human mind in *kabit* 230. He states:

੧. ਖਗਪਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਬਲ ਪਰਾਕ੍ਰਮੀ ਪਰਮਹੰਸ, ਚਾਤੁਰ ਚਤੁਰ ਮੁਖ ਚੰਚਲ ਚਪਲ ਹੈ ॥
੨. ਭੁਜਬਲੀ ਅਸਟ ਭੁਜਾ ਤਾਕੇ ਚਾਲੀਸ ਕਰ, ਏਕ ਸਉ ਅਰ ਸਾਠਿ ਪਾਉ ਚਾਲ ਚਲਾ ਚਲਾ ਹੈ ॥
੩. ਜਾਗ੍ਰਤ ਸੁਪਨ ਅਹਿਨਿਸਿ ਦਹਿਦਿਸ ਧਾਵੇ, ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਨ ਪ੍ਰਤਿ ਹੋਇ ਆਵੇ ਏਕ ਪਲ ਹੈ ॥
੪. ਪਿੰਜਰੀ ਮੈ ਅਛਤ ਉਡਤ ਪਹੁਚੈ ਨ ਕੋਉ, ਪੁਰ ਪੁਰ ਪੁਰ ਗਿਰ ਤਰ ਥਲ ਜਲ ਹੈ ॥

1. As strong, formidable and capable of a fast flight as the blue Jay/ Heron, Human mind is equally agile, fleet footed and clever.
2. As mighty as the proverbial deity with eight arms, forty feet and one hundred sixty feet, Human Mind is unstoppable in its sweeping flight / movements.
3. However restless while a sleep or awake throughout day and night, Human mind can travel across three worlds in an instant.
4. Although a bird is incapable of taking a flight while caged inside a cage, Human mind, even while caged inside a human body can take flight over earth, ocean and sky, unchecked.

This highly volatile wanton, flirtatious tendency of human mind can only be stilled by the practice of meditation or *simran*:

੧. ਜੈਸੇ ਪੰਛੀ ਉਡਤ ਫਿਰਤ ਹੈ ਅਕਾਸਚਾਰੀ, ਜਾਰਿ ਡਾਰਿ ਪਿੰਜਰੀ ਮੈ ਰਾਖੀਅਤਿ ਆਨਿ ਕੈ ॥
੨. ਜੈਸੇ ਗਜਰਾਜ ਗਹਬਰ ਬਨ ਮੈ ਮਦੋਨ, ਬਸਿ ਹੁਇ ਮਹਾਵਤ ਕੈ ਅੰਕੁਸਹਿ ਮਾਨਿ ਕੈ ॥
੩. ਜੈਸੇ ਬਿਖਾਧਰ ਬਿਖਮ ਬਿਲ ਮੈ ਪਤਾਲ, ਗਹੇ ਸਾਪਹੇਰਾ ਤਾਹਿ ਮੰਤ੍ਰਨ ਕੀ ਕਾਨਿ ਕੈ ।
੪. ਤੈਸੇ ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਨ ਪ੍ਰਤਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਤ ਚੰਚਲ ਚਿਤ, ਨਿਹਚਲ ਹੋਤ ਮਤਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨ ਕੈ ॥

1. As a bird flying all across the open sky can be curbed by putting it in a cage,
2. As a wild elephant wandering in the forest can be tamed with the stroke of a Mahouts's instrument

3. As a poisonous snake hiding in a deep hole underground, can be caught with the snake charmers' magic spell,
4. So can the forever flirtatious, flippant human mind, be stilled through Satguru's enlightenment.

– *Kabit* 231, p. 161

Similarly, good human conduct is the touchstone of human life. No amount of jugglery of words can be a substitute for determining the qualitative supremacy of life. Goodness of actual human conduct is far more superior to glib talk about one's goodness.

੧. ਖਾਂਡ ਖਾਂਡ ਕਹੈ ਜਿਹਬਾ ਨ ਸ੍ਵਾਦੁ ਮੀਠੋ ਆਵੈ, ਅਗਨਿ ਅਗਨਿ ਕਹੈ ਸੀਤ ਨ ਬਿਨਾਸ ਹੈ ॥
੨. ਬੈਦ ਬੈਦ ਕਹੈ ਰੋਗ ਮਿਟਤ ਨ ਕਾਹੂ ਕੇ, ਦਰਬ ਦਰਬ ਕਹੈ ਕੋਊ ਦਰਬਹਿ ਨ ਬਿਲਾਸ ਹੈ ॥
੩. ਚੰਦਨ ਚੰਦਨ ਕਹਤ ਪ੍ਰਗਟੈ ਨ ਸੁਬਾਸੁ ਬਾਸੁ, ਚੰਦ੍ਰ ਚੰਦ੍ਰ ਕਹੈ ਉਜੀਆਰੇ ਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸ ਹੈ ॥
੪. ਤੈਸੇ ਗਿਆਨ ਗੋਸਟਿ ਕਹਤ ਨ ਰਹਤ ਪਾਵੈ, ਕਰਨੀ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਭਾਨ ਉਦਤਿ ਅਕਾਸ ਹੈ ॥

1. Neither can mere repetition of word 'Sugar' provide taste of sweetness, Nor can mere repetition of word 'fire' lessen feeling of coldness.
2. Neither can mere repetition of the word doctor/apothecary cure illness, Nor can mere repetition of word 'wealth' provide happiness.
3. Neither can mere repetition of word 'Sandalwood' provide any fragrance, Nor can mere repetition of word 'moon' provide any illumination.
4. Neither mere glib talk during debates and discussion provides virtuous living, Nor can spiritual enlightenment be attained without doing good deeds.

– *Kabit* 437

Several other issues, subjects and persons drawn from ancient mythology highlighting the beliefs and values systems related to Sikh religion such as charity, truth, service, will of God, Gursikh regimen, liberation, proper use and misuse of offerings, pangs of separation, explanation of *Mool-Mantar*, inevitability of death, temper of the times (*Juggardi*) ungratefulness, *vidya*/knowledge – its learning and contemplation, humility have also been highlighted in these verses. Besides these core issues, Bhai Gurdas narrates

Gursikh/ Gurmat point of view about the contribution of Sikh Gurus namely Guru Nanak, Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind and their devout Sikhs as well as Bhai Gurdas' views of several Indian saints namely Ahalia-Gautam, Ambrik, Sudama, Sain, Harichand- Tararani, Kabir, Ramanand, Janak, Jaidev, Dhanna Bhagat, Dhru Bhagat, Namdev Tarlochan, Prehlad, Balmik, Beni and Ravidas. These saints and Bhagats have been Sikh Guru's predecessors who have contributed and enriched the Indian spiritual stream. The Sikh Gurus have further enriched and rejuvenated it.

To conclude, this body of *Kabit Swaiyya* verses of Bhai Gurdas not only projects and propagates Bhai Gurdas' brilliant assimilation and narration of basic tenets and peripheral concerns of Sikh theology but also demonstrates the versatile and creative quality of his poetic genius. Incredible and uncountable number of illustrations drawn from diverse fields of mythology, contemporary sciences, Indian fauna and flora and landscape to project his *Gurmat* postulates and to reject anti-Gurmat beliefs and opinions not only demonstrate his profound scholarship but also demonstrate his highly skillful craftsmanship. His mastery over the *Kabit* prosody maintaining a delicate balance between a surfeit of similes, metaphors, images and objects and continuity of racy, recitative rhythm in each and every line of a *Kabit* verse surpasses all parameters of literary evaluation. It is a rare blend of scholarship assimilation, creativity and craftsmanship indeed.

To conclude, Bhai Gurdas's Vars and Kabirs, together, occupy the leading place in the Sikh canonical literature and codify and explain the major tenets of Sikh theology. These compositions constitute one of the major ingredients of the foundational material / basis of Sikh religion. Their study is indispensable for the proper understanding of Sikhism. It is for this expositional quality/ content of these compositions

that Bhai Gurdas has been termed as Ved Vyass of Sikh religion and his verses as the key to Gurbani.

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## JANAMSAKHI LITERATURE – AN ANALYSIS

*Janamsakhis* are a body of literature written in Gurmukhi script of Punjabi language comprising description of incidents, anecdotal tales, allegorical fables, legends associated with Guru Nanak's life. Some of the verses are believed to have been spontaneously composed and recited by Guru Nanak himself in response to his encounters with men and matters. This body of literature covers the major span of Guru Nanak's life from his birth to death. As Guru Nanak grew in years and as his spiritual aura expanded and spread following his departure from his native place to his sister-in-law's abode at Sultanpur Lodhi and thence to various contemporary places of Hindus and Islamic pilgrimage across the length and breadth of India and to some islands in the south of India and to a few Islamic countries in the middle East to the North west of India, his encounters and verbal engagements through his favourite mode of dialogue and discussion with the prominent leading lights and members of clergy of contemporary religious seats, monastic orders and even some political figures and people belonging to diverse other fields continued. These engagements kept on being recorded in the form of anecdotal accounts and tales and circulated among his followers. Initially, these accounts were communicated orally among his followers at miniscule congregations at places which had been visited upon by him. Gradually, these accounts came to be recorded in written form by some devout literate persons among his followers or through the services of their voluntary or chartered professional scribes. Guru Nanak is believed to have recorded his verses in the form of a codex which he carried on his person and which he finally bestowed on his successor,

Guru Angad Dev.<sup>1</sup> As this body of literature kept on increasing in size, more than half a dozen of *Janamsakhis* in Punjabi prose and verse were written and have been made available to us till date, based on various records in manuscript form or copies of manuscripts, some of which are no longer available.<sup>2</sup> The latest research puts this number of *Janamsakhis* written in prose at around five.<sup>3</sup> The number of *Sakhis* / tales as well as their sequence, and the name of the narrator of these tales varies in each version. It will be quite profitable to learn about some basic facts about these versions such as their time of composition, contents, possible motive behind each composition and portrayal of Guru Nanak's person and his spiritual vision and several other historical, contextual and incidental circumstantial details provided in each version and then formulate an opinion about the authenticity or otherwise of each version. An attempt will also be made to assess the position of *Janamsakhi* literature as a whole in the category of Sikh canonical, scriptural and classic texts of Sikh religion and assess the relevance of *Janamsakhi* literature in the overall ambit of Sikh studies. Although quite a few other representative studies on *Janamsakhi* literature have also been consulted while making this analysis, it subscribes primarily to the latest well-researched and well-documented study on this subject by S.S. Padam in 2014.

As per the latest information, there are several versions of *Janamsakhis* in Punjabi prose and poetic compositions in the *Janamsakhi* tradition. *Janamsakhis* as a body of literature is one of the important constituents of the earliest Sikh tradition in the written form which took its origin during the life time of Guru Nanak himself and then kept on increasing in both size and numbers. As per the latest information provided by Prof S.S. Padam, there are five valid versions of *Janamsakhis* in Punjabi prose.<sup>4</sup> These are:

1. *Sakhi Mahal Pahile ki* - written between 1570-74 by Seehan

Uppal.

2. *Janam Patri Babe ji ki* - written between 1597-1600 by Bhai Boola
3. *Pothi Sach Khand* bearing a more popular name *Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji* written in 1619 by Meharvan.
4. *Janam Patri Nanak Vedi ki* or *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala* written between 1657-59 by Gorakh Das
5. *Sakhi Babe Nanak ji ki* – Its other names are *Sakhi Adi Anki*, *Puratan Janamsakhi*, *Valayat Wali Janamsakhi*, *Colebrook Wali Janamsakhi* or *Macauliffe Wali Janamsakhi* written between 1657-58 by Saido Jatt.

In addition to these five versions there are a few other versions such as *Pothi Harji* written by Kesodas during 1650-1651,<sup>5</sup> and *Pothi Chhattarbhuji* written by Kesodas in 1651<sup>6</sup> which are, infact, extensions of *Janamsakhi* by Meharvan. Another version is *Janamsakhi* Bhai Mani Singh also known as *Gian Ratanavali* written around 1737. As Piar Singh has pointed out this version contains 225 episodes of the three earlier available versions of *Janamsakhis*. *Adi Sakhian* written by Bhai Boola and *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala* written by Gorakh Dass and *Puratan Janamsakhi* written by Saido Jatt. The latest research has revealed that this version is the creation of one of Bhai Mani Singh's disciples, Bhai Surat Singh, a resident of Chiniot.<sup>7</sup> The abridged text of this version is available in Kirpal Singh edited *Janamsakhi Prampara* (1969).<sup>8</sup>

Before analyzing the major five prose versions of *Janamsakhis*, it is necessary to refer to the first *Var* of Bhai Gurdas which according to some scholars has provided the seminal or foundational basis for the writing of *Janamsakhis*. This fact has been revealed in brief comment found written in the *Janamsakhi* Bhai Mani Singh.<sup>9</sup> It states that this verse was composed by Bhai Gurdas at the bidding of Guru Arjan Dev at the pressing request of Sikh followers of the Guru. They had expressed an apprehension that the dissenters or the splinter

Sikh sects *Meenas*, (*Pirthias* or members of *Chota Mel*) had made several interpolations in the earlier existing *Janamsakhi* versions and these interpolations needed to be scrutinized and separated from the original versions. It was then that Guru Arjan Dev had instructed Bhai Gurdas to compose a *Var* which must narrate the truth about the real Sikh tradition which the future generations may read and follow.

Bhai Gurdas' first *Var* (Ballad) consisting of *Pauris* 23-45 narrates the various incidents and anecdotes associated with the life of Guru Nanak. The eleventh, thirteenth and fourteenth *pauris* narrate Guru Nanak's grasp of Vedas and other ancient Hindu scriptures and his views about these texts. These *pauris* also highlight Guru Nanak's own spiritual response about human life. Another eight *pauris* (14-22) narrate Guru Nanak's sojourn in the Punjab and his encounters with the contemporary Nath Jogis (Monastic ascetic orders). The 23<sup>rd</sup> *pauri* describes Guru Nanak as a messenger of God who has taken birth in order to bring about the emancipation of the people in the age of *Kalyuga* (the Dark Age) and whose gospel endeavoured to eliminate differences of caste and creed and promote equality of human beings. *Pauri* 24 narrates the unique spectacle of Guru Nanak's spiritual enlightenment and his receipt of Divine blessing through his intuitive, mystical communion with the Divine and his selection of the mode of spreading his mission through his adoption of life of austere living and travels. *Pauris* 25 and 26 provide almost a chronological account of Guru Nanak's visits to Indian places of pilgrimage where he found people performing frivolous rituals and indulging in several esoteric practices without any spiritual and moral improvement. *Pauri* 27 makes a declaration about Guru Nanak's emergence as the dispeller of ignorance, obscurantism and an emancipator of whole mankind across continents. He is, thus, the one who has ushered a dawn of enlightenment and religious reformation. *Pauris*, 28 to *pauri* 31 narrate his travel to Himalyan Mount



Kailash (Sumer Parbat) and his encounter with the Nath Jogis, Sidhas (practioners of ascetic orders) and reminding them about their escapist way of life and the futility of their esoteric practices without any contribution to mankind and society which was ridden with evils of widespread corruption in political governance and religious guidance. *Pauris* 32-37 narrate Guru Nanak's visit to Mecca, Medina and Baghdad, centres of Islamic pilgrimage and his encounter with Muslim clergy and his driving home to them the omnipresence of the Divine throughout His creation. *Pauri* 36 also describes his transcendental visit to the Divine abode along with the son of the leading light of Muslim clergy of Baghdad to reveal his spiritual enlightenment. *Pauris* 37 to 45 narrate Guru Nanak's return to Punjab, his settlement at Kartarpur, his systematic start of his pontification as the first Sikh Guru and appointment of Lehna named Angad Dev as his spiritual heir and successor preceded by another encounter with the Sidh Yogis at Batala and Multan. Bhai Gurdas had gathered this information from his daily conversations with Baba Buddha *ji* who was his close and intimate associate as well as a person who had not only a personal glimpse of Guru Nanak but was also well-informed about Guru Nanak's social and spiritual accomplishment and deeds. Bhai Gurdas has mentioned Baba Buddha's place among the eminent personalities in the house of Nanak in his eleventh Var, *Pauri* 14.<sup>9</sup> Thus Bhai Gurdas's 1<sup>st</sup> Var occupies a landmark position in the *Janamsakhi* tradition. While Piar Singh and Kirpal Singh regard the first Var of Bhai Gurdas as the seminal and foundational work in the *Janamsakhi* tradition, S.S. Padam<sup>10</sup> regards it as complementary work in continuation of the first and original *Janamsakhi* version written by Seehan Uppal because the episodes narrated in the first *Var* of Bhai Gurdas succeed the incidents narrated in Seehan Uppal's *Janamsakhi* and maintain a continuity of episodes associated with Guru Nanak's life. Seen in this perspective, S.S. Padam's observation

seems to be more plausible. But, irrespective of these two varying observations, Bhai Gurdas' first *Var* and its *Pauris* 23-45 is a significant landmark in *Janamsakhi* tradition.

Seehan Uppal's version of *Janamsakhi* titled "*Janamsakhi Mahal Pehile ki* (1570-1574)"<sup>11</sup> seems to be the first and the earliest version of *Janamsakhi* literature. Its existence in the manuscript form was first noticed and hinted by W.H. McLeod<sup>12</sup> and subsequently by Piar Singh<sup>13</sup> and Pritam Singh.<sup>14</sup> The latest edited version of this *Janamsakhi* version has been prepared and edited by S.S. Padam, It is based on the intensive, analytical study and comparison of four manuscripts of this version. These Manuscripts are Prof Pritam Singh MS 320, MS-B-40, MS 2000, DAV College, Chandigarh and MS 194, Bhasha Vibhag Patiala. This version contains 28 episodes associated with Guru Nanak's life. Its author Seehan Uppal<sup>16</sup> was either a devout disciple of Guru Nanak in his own time or a contemporary of Guru Nanak and closely associated with the places visited or lived by Guru Nanak. The most authentic and reliable reference to Seehan Uppal occurs in Bhai Gurdas' *Var* 11, *Pauri* 14 in the second line.<sup>17</sup> His name alongwith the name of Gajjan Uppal being mentioned as the close and intimate disciples in the *Var* makes him a precursor of other veteran followers of Guru Nanak such as Baba Buddha *ji* and Ajita Randhawa. This duo of Uppal Khatri were the first among Guru Nanak's disciples who remained in Guru's service even during the Guru's Angad Dev's time. This is by far the most authentic documentary evidence about the existence of Seehan Uppal. Another Pothi in the possession of the Sodhi family of Guru Harsahai (Ferozepur) also mentions his name. Bhai Vir Singh in his *Sri Asbat Guru Chamatkar* has referred to Seehan Uppal's visit to Khadoor Sahib to pay his obeisance to Guru Angad Dev.<sup>18</sup> Seehan Uppal had married his daughter Matho with Prema, a resident of village Khai who had been cured of a serious illness with the blessings of Guru Amar Das. He was renamed Murari

after marriage. This Matho-Murari couple was assigned *Manji* by Guru Amar das for missionary work.<sup>19</sup> Sultanpur, being a cluster of Uppals, Seehan Uppal was, in all probability a resident of this place and might have come into contact with Guru Nanak here. *Manohar Das Meharwan Janamsakhi*<sup>20</sup> mentions Guru Nanak's brother in-law Bhai Jai Ram at Sultanpur as belonging to Uppal caste. The use of very tough Persian phraseology in Seehan Uppal's *Janamsakhi* suggests that Seehan Uppal might have been a junior colleague of Guru Nanak in the store-keeping department of Lodhi administration. Persons literate in Persian were the first choice of the employers in those days. A few other factors such as mention of Guru Nanak's return to Sultanpur after his (first) itinerary and its detailed description of places enroute endorse Seehan Uppal's existence at Sultanpur. Seehan Uppal, because of his devotion and proximity to first three Sikh Gurus and having a firsthand knowledge about the movements and incidents related to Guru Nanak had equipped him with sufficient material to ignite his creative faculties to pen down these details which ultimately materialized into this *Janamsakhi* version now made known as *Sakhi Mahal Pehle ki*. In S.S. Padam's opinion, this version of *Janamsakhi* is his daring attempt which had laid the foundations of this excellent literary *Janamsakhi* tradition.<sup>21</sup> Later on, Saido Jatt the author of another comparatively reliable version of *Janamsakhi* known as *Puratan Janamsakhi* (157-58)<sup>22</sup> completed his version on the basis of Seehan Uppals' somewhat incomplete and the earliest version and succeeded in rebutting the interpolations and invention of spurious characters like Paira Mokha made by the Handalias in the nearly contemporary Bhai Bala version of *Janamsakhi* (1657-1658).<sup>23</sup>

Seehan Uppal's version of *Janamsakhi* was written during Guru Amar Das' Gurship, more particularly during the last four years of his Guruship (1570-74).<sup>24</sup> This fact gets endorsed

by the mention of Goindwal Tehsil Khadoor Police Station Varowal, Distt. Amritsar. This place was made habitable and developed by a Khatri Goind Marwaha at the inspiration of Guru Amar Das. The use of the verses of Guru Angad Dev and Guru Amar Das and absence of Guru Ram Das' verses in this version also endorse the timing of the composition of this version during Guru Amar Das's Guruship. Babur's four invasions of north India beginning with Punjab during the years 1521-1540,<sup>25</sup> and the destruction of Saidpur referred to in the several verses of Guru Nanak cumulatively known as *Babarvani* finds its detailed mention in one of the episodes of this version where its original name Saidpur Sloei has been written. The concluding episode about Karoria"<sup>26</sup> the person who had reconstructed the town of Saidpur in 1582 A.D. and named it as Emnabad after his own name Mohammad Amin Kroria proves that this version had not been written later than 1582 A.D. The word "Kroria" came into use as a term for an official in the administrative setup during this period. So from these direct and not-so-direct inferences, the period of composition of this version comes out to be between 1570-74 which makes it the first version of *Janamsakhi* and the foundational and seminal work in the whole *Janamsakhi* tradition.

Thus *Sakhi Mahal Pabli Ki* is a highly reliable account of episodes associated with Guru Nanak. It has been written by one of the most devout, faithful, trustworthy, and blessed followers of Guru Nanak three decades after Guru Nanak's demise. It contains 28 episodes covering a period from Guru Nanak's birth to his final settlement at Kartarpur. The episodes are selective highlighting Guru Nanak's spiritual voyage and enlightenment reflected through the verbal encounters with several people belonging to different social, religious and philosophical spheres as well as the expression of his spiritual insights in his verses. What makes this version unique and

distinct from the later versions is its brief, crisp, Punjabi prose at once impressive, forthright and appealing. Its colloquial, conversational diction appeals, directly to the reader's heart and bears a stamp of its author's originality and versatility of expression. It is an excellent specimen of the earliest Punjabi prose in that early period of Punjabi language and literature. Otherwise, it is an incomplete work as it neither narrates all the episodes associated with Guru Nanak found in the later version nor maintains a chronological continuity of events. But its diction, its narrative flavour and style and its proper projection of Guru Nanak's personality has left a lasting impression on the later versions in this *Janamsakhi* tradition. Its contribution to this literary genre is indeed immense.

Seen in the chronological sequence of the *Janamsakhi* literature, the next *Janamsakhi* version in this literary tradition (*prampra*) is the work called *Adi Sakhian* or *Janam Patri Babe ji ki* in 1597-1600".<sup>27</sup> It has been written by a learned, talented erudite Brahmin Bhai Boola (Boola Pandha), a resident of Dalla, a village in the vicinity of Sultanpur. He was a devout disciple of Guru Amar Das. This is confirmed by a reference to his name in Bhai Gurdas' *Var* 11, *Pauri* 16. It consists of 30 episodes with factual contents of earlier 13 episodes having been borrowed by its author from the earliest version of Seehan Uppal and the later episodes having been written on the basis of his own information. What distinguishes it from its predecessor's version is its author's clear division of his version into episodes and numbering these episodes and assigning titles to these episodes, whereas Seehan Uppal's version is made up of a long continuous narrative tale. The whole sequence of episodes in this version suggests a continuity of incidents with his predecessor's version and filling up of the gaps left in the earlier version. Thus, it records the later incidents which occurred during the physical and spiritual voyage of Guru Nanak in the chronological order and this enhances the advance

in the *Janamsakhi* literature. For instance, episodes narrating Guru Nanak's meeting with Lehna (later Guru Angad Dev), vesting of his pontification (Guruship) on Lehna, discussions with Sidhas at Achal Vatala, encounter with Karoria and Guru Nanak's last moments are his own creations based upon his own information. This version also provides a correct date and timing of Guru Nanak's demise in its episode named "*Sakhi Orak di*" (The Episode about the last moment). It records it as Assu Sudi 10 (the tenth night of the Waxing moon in the Month of Assu/September) in the year 1595 B.S. (Bikrami Samvat). It also provides the original name of Kartarpur which was known as *Jammanwali* before Guru Nanak's naming it as Kartarpur. The quantity and quality of its contents as well as the diction and the excellence of linguistic expression of its Punjabi prose leave no doubt that its author was well-versed in the geographical landmarks and the contemporary inter-religious and cultural disputes and issues. Bhai Gurdas' reference to him as Gurbani singer and writer endorses his scholarly credentials. Undoubtedly, Piar Singh regards him as a seasoned scholar of the earliest Sikh letters.<sup>28</sup>

The next version in the *Janamsakhi* tradition is known by the name *Janamsakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji* written by Meharvan. Its author Manohar Das Meharban (1581-1640) was the son of Prithi Chand and grandson of Guru Ram Das.<sup>29</sup> Prithi Chand was the elder brother of Guru Arjan Dev. Meharban got his education from Guru Arjan Dev and soon became a well-known author and an accomplished Gurbani singer (*kirtania*). Being a member of the Guru's household, he was quite conversant and well-versed with the traditions of the house of Nanak and episodes associated with Guru Nanak. He was, in all probability, not only conversant with the earlier two versions of *Janamsakhi* written by Seehan Uppal (1570-74) and Bhai Boola (1597-1600), but had these two versions with him in manuscript form. It becomes evident from the apparently

visible influence of these two versions on his own version. In fact, these two earlier versions provided the seminal or the foundational basis for his version.<sup>30</sup> Thus, his version maintains continuity with the existing versions. He expanded the *Janamsakhi* literature both quantitatively and qualitatively by constructing multiple episodes from the existing two versions as well as provided a greater philosophical and spiritual thrust to these episodes in tandem with Guru Nanak's gospel and message.

Meharban created a larger body of *Janamaskhi* covering a longer span of Guru Nanak's life. It is a body of three anthologies/collections containing presently available 288 episodes, though the original collection is believed to be containing 575 episodes contained in six volumes. These three anthologies, though collectively named as *Pothi Sach Khand* were prepared consecutively by Meharban and his two sons Harji and Chatterbhuj. While the first version "Pothi Sach Khand" was composed by Meharban himself in 1619. The successive two collections known as Pothi Harji and Pothi Chatterbhuj were prepared by his sons in 1650 and 1651, respectively.<sup>31</sup> As Piar Singh and some other scholars have rightly surmised that *Janamsakhis* were quite probably begun to be created in Guru Nanak's own lifetime and continued to be created late up to the middle of seventeenth century. From the oral beginning, these gradually came to be written and added gradually. Meharban's first collection and the two earlier *Janamaskhi* versions must have been written prior to the composition of Bhai Gurdas's first *Var* as indicated by Bhai Mani Singh's *Ratanawali*.<sup>32</sup> Although these three collections were scribed by Kesodas, the uniformity and consistency of expression, diction and point of view make Meharban the undisputed author of this whole collection.

The episodes in this *Janamsakhi* version are in the form of conversational discussions (Goshties) Guru Nanak held

with persons belonging to different religious denominations and socio-political background. It is through this conversational medium that Guru Nanak put across his intuitive, spiritual and mystical vision about the Divine identity as well as human conduct. Thus the format adopted in this *Janamsakhi* version and its presentation of Guru Nanak's spiritual vision through this format lays a foundation for the tradition of the Sikh exegesis (*Parmarth*) and exposition of the major verses of Guru Nanak such as *Japuji*, *Patti*, *Onkar* and *Baramanba*. Another distinct feature of this version is its story-telling element which integrates the *Janamsakhi* literature with the centuries old rich Indian tradition of telling tales. Its each episode begins and ends with the remark indicative of invocation of God's name "*Bolo Waheguru, Bolo Bhai Waheguru*". The imagery and symbolism used in this version are loaded with deep allegorical meanings. As a work of literature, it is more detailed, more communicative and more educative and instructive. It portrays Guru Nanak as spiritual savant and an enlightened person quoting his own revelatory verses and his divine gospel than associating incredible mythological miracles with his personality. It also mentions the specific events, the dates and timing on which Guru Nanak started his mission of delivering his gospel and message soon after his emergence from the Bein river at Sultanpur. It is narrated in episode 28, as: *Parameshar ke naam ka Pargas...* Samvat 1564, Bhadon Sudi 15, *Puranim Hai din Bhalke* (revelation of God's name, B.S. 1564, Bhadon Sudi, Next Day is night of the full moon). This evidence makes this version highly reliable and authentic.<sup>33</sup>

This version, despite having been written by a member of the "Meena" splinter sect, clearly provides a clear distinction to the real Sikh *Janamsakhi* tradition in contradistinction to the spurious versions being written by anti-Sikh/ anti-Guru lobbies. One episode in the second part of Meharban *Janamsakhi* reveals how Bhai Lehna (Guru Angad Dev) selected a few sections



from Guru Nanak's verses and arranged these in a sequence and edited those verses into a single unit and got it approved by Guru Nanak. He added his own verse (*saloka*) at the end of this unit, after he was approved as his successor by Guru Nanak. This verse came to be known as Japji.<sup>34</sup> Finally, this version also provides a detailed information about Guru Nanak's verses composed by him during his final stay at Kartarpur. Thus, Meharban *Janamsakhi* further consolidates the genuine *Janamsakhi* tradition initially started by Seehan Uppal and supplemented by Bhai Boola.

The next *Janamsakhi* version in the *Janamsakhi* tradition is *Janamsakhi* Bhai Bala. There is a lot of controversy about the authorship and authenticity of this version. There are three shades of opinions about it. The first point of view consisting of earlier authors like Ishar Singh Nara (1970), Giani Udham Singh (1972) and some even among the present day authors like Gurcharan Singh Aulakh regard this version as a genuine version written under the direct supervision of Guru Angad Dev by Paira Mokha as narrated by Bala Sandhu, a life-long companion of Guru Nanak. Another view point consisting of earlier authors like Surat Singh (*Gian Ratanawali*) Kavi Bhai Santokh Singh, Rattan Singh Bhangu, Giani Gian Singh, Shamsher Singh Ashok and a few among the present day scholars believe that Guru Angad dev had undoubtedly got a *Janamsakhi* version prepared but it has been lost or deliberately destroyed for unknown reasons. The presently available Bhai Bala *Janamsakhi* is not a true copy of that version. It has been tempered with and several interpolations have been made in this copy by some anti-Sikh elements. Still another set of authors including Ernest Trump, H.W. McLeod, Karam Singh, Piar Singh, Kirpal Singh, Sahib Singh, Gurbachan Kaur, S.S. Hans and S.S. Padam regard this version as prepared by the followers of Handalias, a splinter Sikh sect. Out of these three points of view, the opinion of the third school of thought

with their intensive study of the text of this version as well as well-researched and well-documented studies of this school is nearer the truth. This version (1657-1659) is the creation of a descendent of Handals, a splinter Sikh sect of dissenters variously known as Handalias, Jandialias, Niranjanias and Bidhi Chandias. Its founder a Handal Jat (1573-1648) of Jandiala Guru, Dist Amritsar was a devout follower of Guru Amar Das who was appointed as incharge of a Sikh diocese (Manji) authorised to collect offerings on behalf of the Guru from Sikhs from over twenty villages. Gradually, he deviated from the Guru's path and started claiming himself to be a guru. Since, he meditated upon the word "Niranjan", his sect came to be known as Niranjanias.<sup>35</sup> His second son Bidhi Chand became his successor after his death and got his *Janamsakhi* version written by a chartered scribe Gorakh Das. Bidhi Chand, being an opportunist and a degraded debauch, started showing his allegiance to the Lahore Darbar after taking significant pecuniary benefit from the Mughal authorities and projected his sects' founder Handal and his sect as anti-Sikh, anti-Gurmat and a paralled religious stream.<sup>36</sup> He got a document prepared which is named as "Parchi Baba Handal" (1655)<sup>37</sup> partly to restore his own falling stock among his followers due to his acts of debauchery and partly to project his predecessor Baba Handal as a superior personage to Guru Nanak in spiritual and moral status. This document describes both Guru Nanak and Baba Handal as fellow religious disciples (Gur Bhaees) of Jind Peer/ Khawaja Khizar but shows Baba Handal as greater in spiritual status than Guru Nanak. In the *Treta Yug* both of them were disciples of Raja Janak and were his caretakers, in both *Treta* and *Duapar Yugas*. Both were equal in status, but in *Kalyug* Baba Handal was greater in spiritual status than Guru Nanak, although he was younger in age to Guru Nanak. Although Bhagat Kabir was the greatest among the great, but Baba Handal was even greater than the greatest Bhagat Kabir.

As a result of their spiritual legacy, Handalias were sovereign, independent heirs of Jinda Peer and needed no (*manji*) diocese of the House of Nanak. Although, there is no mention of the author of this document, but it is evident that it was prepared by Bidhi Chand himself. It is this same Handalia Bidhi Chand who, later on, got the Bhai Bala *Janamsakhi* version written by a chartered scribe Gorakh Das. The comparative study and analysis of contents, expression, stance, motive and syntax of both these documents *Parchi Baba Handal* and *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala* leaves no doubt that both of these have been written or got written by the same author with a similar motive of projecting Baba Handal and denigrating Guru Nanak.

The text of *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi* existing in three successive stages in manuscriptural format as Bala –I with 72 episodes, Bala –II with 113 episodes, Bala 3 with still more episodes is the creation of Handalia Bidhi Chand and his successors between 1657-1659. It is also known by the name, *Janam Patri Nanak Vedi ki*.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Handalias claim this *Janamsakhi* version to be based on the narration of events in the presence of Guru Angad Dev by Bhai Bala, described as a life-long companion of Guru Nanak and an eye-witness to these events and scribed by one Paira Mokha of Sultanpur, its real author is Gorakh Das who was a contemporary, seasoned, scholarly and creative writer chartered by Bidhi Chand Handalia. Both Bhai Bala and Paira Mokha are completely fictitious characters created by Gorakh Das in order to put a stamp of credibility and authenticity on this version. There is neither any documentary nor any historical evidence to prove the existence of these two characters, where as there is a solid basis for Bhai Mardana's life-long association with Guru Nanak. Its author Gorakh Das, being well-read and imaginative, had read copies of all the earlier three genuine versions of *Janamsakhi* written by Seehan Uppal (1570-74) by Bhai Boola (1597-1600) and Meharvan

(1619-1651). So he concocted an altogether fictitious characters of Bhai Bala and Paira Mokha to put this version at a pedestal at par with these genuine and earlier versions. Handalias, due to their stronger political clout with the ruling Mughal authorities and having adequate financial resources and due to the almost absence of Sikh Gurus in the Amritsar belt due to contemporary political and security reasons, promoted this version on a massive scale. They also got almost every page of this version heavily illustrated with very expensive paintings and spectacles of Guru Nanak's life and Bhai Bala's continuous companionship. Handalias continued to prepare copies of this version on a large scale for a long-time and ensured that a copy of this version was made available at every centre of Sikh activity and Sikh following. As a result of its mass circulation, this version continued to be read by a vast majority of readership. Its contents, inspite of some of its concocted and spurious characters such as Bhai Bala and Piara Mohka and several spurious episodes denigrating Guru Nanak's spiritual status, succeeded in influencing even the authors of some important Sikh classics in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Bhai Santokh Singh of *Suraj Pratap Granth* and Giani Gian Singh *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*. Even, some of the eminent modern scholars who have written extensively of *Janamsakhi* literature seem to have either overlooked its distortions or acquiesced in its half truths. The latest study by S.S. Padam of this literature and his edited version of "*Sakhi Mahal Pehle k?*" by Seehan Uppal has exposed the counterfeit nature of this version.<sup>39</sup> Piar Singh also stated that the latest research has established that this version is the creation of Handalias and the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century *Janamsakhi* of Baba Handal (Parchi Handal) and Bhai Bala *Janamsakhi* are creations of one and the same author (Gorakh Das).<sup>40</sup> Gurbachan Kaur's doctoral dissertation written under the expert guidance and supervision of Prof Pritam Singh, from Guru Nanak Dev University (1978) had

earlier brought out all the biased and distorted facts put forth by the Handalias in this version. Still earlier, Karam Singh Historian had presented its critique in 1912.<sup>41</sup>

The only available version of this *Janamsakhi* at present is based on Manuscript Bala 2, a copy of which is lying with descendents of Piare Lal Kapur, of Hauz Khas New Delhi. Its copies are also available in Punjabi University Patiala and Guru Nanak University, Amritsar. This manuscript's pages are full of deletions, additions, over writings and revisions in different hand writings. Its date of composition first given as 1582 has been variously changed to 1585, 1589 and 1600 through these later interventions. However, the date of composition in this manuscript given by its own author Gorakh Das as 1715 (B.S), Magh Sudi 6 (January 14, 1659) seems to be correct. Scholars like Macauliffe, H.W. McLeod, Karam Singh and Rattan Singh Jaggi have all estimated its timing of composition around the first half of seventeenth century or 1640.<sup>42</sup> Gurbachan Kaur who prepared its first edited version has fixed its year of composition between 1651-1658. S.S. Padam, on the basis of his study of the manuscript of Bala 2, has fixed its time of composition a little later around 1659.<sup>43</sup> In any case, Bhai Bala *Janamsakhi* was written during later half of 17<sup>th</sup> century and definitely after the compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Dr Gurcharan Kaur's doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Prof Pritam Singh based on the study of Bhai Bala *Janamsakhi* is the first reliable study. It had been subsequently published by Bhasha Vibhag Patiala, entitled: *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala the Path, Parmanikaran ate Alochanatmak Sampadan* in 1987.

Bhai Bala *Janamsakhi*, being a product of the collaborative efforts of 17<sup>th</sup> century Handalias, contains several derogatory references to Guru Nanak. It denigrates Guru Nanak and his family and friends. As pointed out by Prof S.S. Hans, "The first clue to grasping the true character of the *Bala Janamsakhi*

is the fact that the persons related most closely to Guru Nanak are presented in uncomplimentary light. His father, Kalu, for instance, is a cruel man; he is greedy and ill spoken; he blames Mardana for spoiling his son; and Guru Nanak is rather chary of meeting him. Guru Nanak's wife regrets marrying him, she is hot-tempered and full of anger. His mother-in-law is quarrelsome and hardhearted. His father-in-law curses his fate to have a son-in-law like Guru Nanak. The Guru's constant companion, Mardana, is pleased with counterfeit coins and cast off clothes; he is all the time hungry." ([http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bhai\\_Bala\\_Janamsakhi](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Bhai_Bala_Janamsakhi)) Its author added his own inferior verses under the name of "Nanak" which are near parodies of Guru Nanak's verses. Some of these verses are tagged on to Guru Nanak's verses as for instance in episode 60 pertaining to Babur's invasion of Saidpur.<sup>44</sup> In episodes 11,12, he describes Guru Nanak as mentally challenged who is shown sitting in a graveyard under the spell of evil spirits for whom Guru Nanak's father-in-law brings in a sorcerer to exorcise these spirits and rid Guru Nanak of this evil influence. It is a deliberate attempt to misinterpret Guru Nanak's own verse<sup>45</sup> related to a moment of his most momentous spiritual enlightenment soon after his emergence from rivulet Bein and his decision to adopt a life of detachment and his resolve to undertake long travels (Udasis) across the continent. This version, thus, indulges in Guru Nanak's character assassination in several other episodes. As Principal Sahib Singh has also pointed out, Gorakh Das added his own episodes like *Jugawali*, *Pran Sangli*, *Rattan Mala*, *Seeharfi* and *Harjasnama* under the name of Nanak.<sup>46</sup> In another Episode about Guru Nanak's stay at Sultanur, its author narrates a somewhat heated conversation involving Sulakhani, Guru Nanak's wife, his mother-in-law Chandorani and his sister Bebe Nanki about Guru Nanak's temperamental detachment and his wife's genuine pangs of separation, but, twists the whole

narration in such a way that it gives it a colouring suggestive of Guru Nanak's lack of masculinity and his wife's frustration due to marital incompatibility. In his concluding episode, named "Sahaj kusahaj", Bhai Bala has been presented not only as a rival of the Guru with greater spiritual and mystical revelatory powers than those of Guru Nanak, but also a sort of all-knowing omniscient *Brahmgyani* who knew about the future successor of Guru Nanak as well. Thus, this version has neither any sense of uniformity and continuity among its disparate episodes which could project a consistent image of Guru Nanak's distinct spiritual and philosophical vision nor any spontaneous and creative thrust of expression born out of an inspired, devout follower of Guru Nanak. Despite its abundance of details about incidents, persons, places miraculous deeds associated with Guru Nanak's life due to its multiplicity of episodes (74-75), it is written in a comparatively polished and more modern expression incompatible with the contemporary Punjabi idiom and usage found in earlier *Janamsakhi* versions. Instead, it is replete with half-truths, anti-Gurmat assertions and an imaginary stuff aimed at denigrating Guru Nanak's spiritual grandeur and his gospel. In an other episode, Guru Nanak has been made to acknowledge Baba Handal's spiritual grandeur greater than his own, as narrated by Bhai Bala to Guru Nanak. Baba Handal is predicted to be born one hundred years after Guru Nanak, though he was actually 60 years younger to Guru Nanak.<sup>47</sup>

This version of *Janamsakhi* denigrates Guru Angad Dev in the same vein. For instance in episode related to Guru Nanak's discussion with Sidhas, narrated by Bhai Bala, Guru Angad has been described as illiterate, unlettered, given to fits of epilepsy, going into weeklong bouts of fainting and unconsciousness (*bideh*) instead of his well-known moments of spiritual ecstasy, remaining unclean and unhygienic, unwashed, tongue-tied, and without food for a week and upon

coming into consciousness acknowledging Bhai Bala as truly blessed by Guru Nanak.<sup>48</sup> Further, it shows all these half-truths and completely concocted tales as being approved by Guru Angad who had himself remained associated with Guru Nanak for a considerable period and had imbibed and embodied Guru Nanak's spiritual vision through his faithful service and devotion to Guru Nanak and his spiritual teachings and who was considered to be a worthy successor of his spiritual legacy. How could Guru Angad — who had received the complete collection of Guru Nanak's verses because he had been found to be competent to sift grain from the chaff as it were and was authorised to select Guru Nanak's verses and put these in a proper sequence and made this selection what came to be named as "Japuji" and was allowed to add his own concluding sloka to this verse — approve such a version written with a malicious and vested intent? Even the irrefutable date of Guru Nanak's birth on Vaisakh Sudi 3 of the Indian month has been changed to Kattak Puranamasi and made to be popularly accepted. Since then, this concocted date has entered every significant Sikh classic in the Sikh religious and literary canon although Karam Singh Historian produced in 1912 clinching evidence to prove this date wrong. A tenth generation descendent of Guru Nanak's family living at Dera Baba Nanak had written a treatise known as "Nanak Bans Prakas" in 1872 B.S. (1815 A.D.) where he had written Guru Nanak's birth on Vaisakh Sudi 3 and that of his son Baba Sri Chand on *Kattak Puranmashi*. He had also communicated the same date of birth of Guru Nanak to one Muslim scribe Mufti Ali-ud-Din who had come to Dera Baba Nanak. Later, this Muslim scribe wrote his *Ibarat Nama* on the basis of this information.<sup>49</sup> All these facts and inferences drawn from its text and the contemplated intentions of its author and its patron point to the counterfeit and spurious nature of this version. The politico-historical circumstances prevailing at the time of its inception and



composition supportive of its anti-Sikh motives, frequent references to this version in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Sikh classics like Kavi Santokh Singh's *Suraj Partap Granth* and the subsequent promotion and propagation of this version by its commercial producers for more than three centuries have perpetuated its status as that of a valid and genuine *Janamsakhi* version. It was only after the publication of Gurbachan Kaur's research dissertation in 1978 that scholars and researchers have drawn the serious readers' attention towards its dubious credentials. Its real identity has still not percolated to the consciousness of the Sikh masses. Sadly, Gurbachan Kaur's well-researched book first published by GNDU in 1978 and subsequently by Bhasha Vibhag Punjab in 1987 has been banned and now its Bhasha Vibhag's remaining stock has been burnt publicly on May 27, 2015.<sup>50</sup> For some time, the book was being sold after tearing four or five pages containing the episode having derogatory and objectionable contents against Guru Nanak. But despite a governmental ban and burning of its existing stock, the Bala Janamsakhi's myth has been exploded and its Handalia identity accepted and established by well-researched and well-documented publications on this version like that of S.S. Padam's 2014 publication *Adi Sakhi Mahal Pehli Ki*. Gurbachan Kaur had already established, on the basis of her study of several internal sources and evidence in the Bhai Bala version text, that there existed no historical characters such as Bhai Bala and Paira Mokha and that they are purely a fictitious creation of Handalias, created only to put a stamp of credibility on their version. Bhasha Vibhag's burning of this book's stock is an acknowledgment that this version contains several objectionable and offensive remarks against Guru Nanak which neither stand the scrutiny of historical research nor tally with Guru Nanak's image as it emerges from his verses or earlier versions of Janamsakhis. It needs a serious reflection whether banning a book or burning of its copies can conceal a reality.

Certainly not.

The next version in the *Janamsakhi* tradition is *Sakhi Adi Ant ki* or *Puratan Janamsakhi*. It is also known by several other names such as *Sakhi Babe Nanak Ji Ki*, *Vilayat Wali Janam Sakhi*, *Hafizabad wali Sakhi*, *Colebrook Wali Sakhi* or *Dehradun Wali Sakhi* and *Macauliffe wali Sakhi*. Earnest Trump<sup>51</sup> considered this version as the oldest which led Bhai Vir Singh to label it as *Puratan Janamsakhi* in 1926. In fact, this is the latest version in the *Janamsakhi* tradition while Seehan Uppal's *Sakhi Mahal Pehli Ki* is the earliest and the first version in this tradition in the chronological order. *Purtan Janamsakhi*, in the present available form, is the contribution of Bhai Vir Singh who reconstructed its final version on the basis of London Manuscript and other available manuscripts. Now, this version has come to be accepted as a highly reliable, genuine and classic version of *Janamsakhi*. It is called *Valayat Wali Janamsakhi* or *Colebrook Sakhi*<sup>52</sup> because Henry Thomas Colebrook had taken its manuscript to England in 1815. He was a Sanskrit scholar and member of the East India company's Council. He gave this manuscript to East India Company's Library, London, which was later transferred to India Office library after 1857 where it is still available. Dr Earnest Trump<sup>53</sup> had examined it in 1872 and drew other scholars' attention to it. Charles Aitchieson, the then governor of Punjab, brought some copies of this manuscript to Punjab. So it was known as *Vilayatwali Sakhi* before Bhai Vir Singh named it as *Puratan Janamsakhi*. Since a similar manuscript of this *Janamsakhi* version was traced by Bhai Gurumukh Singh from Hafizabad (Dist Gujranwala, Pakistan), so this version was also known as Hafizabad wali Sakhi. Since this version was also published in lithograph format by M.A Mcauliffe, it a also known as *Mcauliffe Wali Sakhi*. The author of this *Janamsakhi* version was Saido Jatt of Gheho sub-caste. As stated in Bhai Gurdas's Var 11, Pauri twenty fifth, Saido Jatt was a resident of Mujanga (Lahore)

and devout disciple of Guru Arjan Dev and worked as a Sikh missionary in the tradition of missionary work initiated by Baba Gurdita Ji. Being a devout Sikh steeped in Gurmat and genuine Sikh tradition, he reacted instinctively and spontaneously after going through the malicious contents of *Parchi Handal* (1655) and *Bhai Bala Jamansakhi* (1657-1659) both written by Gorakh Dass at the behest of Bidhi Chand Handal and Lala Pannu of Lahore. Feeling apprehensive about anti-Sikh and anti-Gurmat contentions made in this document and the likely damage and distortions that it might cause to the image of Sikh Gurus and the genuine Sikh tradition, he felt compelled to write a correct version of *Janamsakhi*. So Saido Jatt wrote the *Puratan Janamsakhi* version as a forceful rebuttal and repudiation to the dissenting Handalias' *Parchi Handal* and *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi* (1657-59). Taking into account the contemporary strained Mughal-Sikh relations due to Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom, Guru Hargobind's confrontation with the Mughals and his departure from Amritsar to Kiratpur Sahib and the patronizing attitude of the Mughal Darbar towards the Handalia, Saido Jatt sought to portray Guru Nanak as the really genuine distinct recipient of divine revelation and messenger of God and divest his persona from the mythological clap trap of being a devotee of Raja Janak in *Treta* and *Duapar* ages and later on, a devotee of Jindpeer/ Khawaja Khizar as portrayed in the Handalia version and as one who had blessed Babar. So drawing heavily upon the first *Janamsakhi* version of Seehan uppal, he succeeded in redrawing the genuinely spiritual and distinctly independent portrayal of Guru Nanak and restored the *Janamsakhi* tradition to its original path laid down in the first three versions of *Janamsakhi* and thereby negating and neutralizing the deviational and diversionary by-lane laid down-by the Handalias. So he wrote his version in 1657 to 58 almost parallel to the Bhai Bala version and named it as *Sakhi Babe Nanak Ji Ki Adi Ant-Ki*. Its timing of composition as well as the contents

of some of its episodes clearly point towards the genuine Sikh spirit of its author and his resolve to falsify the Handalia vilification of Guru Nanak and his tradition and Gospel.

Consisting of fifty seven episodes, the author's selection of episodes (*Sakbis*) has been determined on the basis of a single most criterion which projects the distinct and unique identity of Guru Nanak and the distinctive spiritual and philosophical and ideational angle of Guru Nanak's gospel and teachings. With all the episodes maintaining a broad chronological order of incidents related to Guru Nanak's life, it keeps on building and adding to the corpus of Guru Nanak's teachings about his perceptions about Guru Nanak's conception of the Divine reality, his views about the rituals of several prevalent contemporary religions and their hollowness and his repeated stress on meditating upon God's name (*sabad*) in repudiation of the belief in the Puranic mythological figures. Consisting of 14 dialogic discussions (goshtis) with four Sidhas (episodes nos 18-40-50-52), seven Muslim saints (episodes 11,14,16,28,32,36,45) three Brahminical Pandits (episode 2,11,49) this version reiterates Guru Nanak's rejection of the outward observance of all religious rituals and his emphasis on imbibing the intrinsic spirit and essence behind their observance. What strikes the reader most is the brilliance and wisdom of its author with which he has deconstructed the Bala myth of Guru Nanak's subordination to Baba Handal and his spiritual Guru Jindpir/Khawaja Peer. In episode 42 related to second *udassi* of Guru Nanak, both Jindpeer / Khawaja Khizar (god of water) and Varun (god of air) have been shown emerging from the sea and proceeding to pay obeisance to Guru Nanak and making an offering of a fish and telling Guru Nanak's two companions Seehan Uppal and Saido, who they came across on their way, about Guru Nanak's supremacy over all other gods. This episode not only negates the presence and existence of Bala as Guru Nanak's companion

by making Seehan and Saido as eye-witnesses to this spectacle, but also negates the Jind Peer myth. The whole episode written in simple, straightforward brief expression and conversational diction certainly restores Guru Nanak's true spiritual status and grandeur. It endeavors to clear the consistently flowing stream of genuine Sikh stream muddled by the half truths and malicious contents of Bhai Bala version. Soon after, Guru Nanak's revealing to Mardana the real identity of Jindpeer making his offering of fish and paying obeisance to him (Guru Nanak) further negates the Jindpeer supremacy. Addition of three more characters Jharu Kalal in the episode related to first *udassi* and Seehan Chheemba and Hassu Luhar in episode 49 related to third *udassi* of Guru Nanak as eyewitnesses to various incidents and as companions of Guru Nanak during his *udassis* further deflates and punctures the Handalia bluff of making Bhai Bala as Guru Nanak's life-long companion. Whereas names of Seehan Uppal and Mardana are listed among the close disciples of Guru Nanak in Bhai Gurdas's *Var* 11, there is no mention of Bhai Bala's name in any classic document including all the *Janamsakhi* versions except in the *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi*. On the other hand, both Seehan Uppal and Saido are mentioned as Guru Nanak's companions during his second *udassi* to the South and visit to the island of Singhladeep mentioned in the episode of Shivnabh Pran Sangli. These two companions baptized the king Shivnabh and citizens of this Island and blessed Shivnabh with a *Manji* (Diocese). Guru Nanak's handing over the corpus of his verses called *Pothi* to his duly appointed successor Guru Angad Dev (episode 57), companion ship of Seehan and Saido (episode 59), description of five *Udassis* of Guru Nanak and sequencing all the episodes in the logical order highlighting Guru Nanak's physical, geographical and spiritual voyage - all projecting Guru Nanak's gospel and teachings in the proper perspective, fill the contents of this *Janamsakhi* version. Seen from historical

point of view also, several places visited by Guru Nanak mentioned in this version include Assa (Assam and meeting with Raja Samundar of this region (episode 28), Dhanasari, the Eastern part of Assam (episode 26,27), meeting with Mian Mitha of Pasrur in Sialkot (Pakistan) (episode 36) Makhdoom Bahawadi, a descendent to Bahaudin Zakaria of Multan Episode (45,55) visit to Gorakh Hatri in Peshawar (episode 52), Vanjarian Da Tanda Dist Rampur near Moradabad in the Trai region in the present state of Uttaranchal (episode 19) and Kirian Pathana in Gurdaspur (34) provide a reliable documentary evidence about Guru Nanak's five *udassis* and their movement details.<sup>54</sup> This version also provides a glimpse into the contemporary socio-cultural scenario and the prevalent religious streams subscribing to Vedantic, yogic and Sufi ideologies as well as Guru Nanak's own original, revelatory, spiritual and philosophical viewpoint. On the whole, this version of *Janamsakhi* is an earnest attempt to set right the distortions, intentionally and deliberately incorporated myths derogatory to Guru Nanak's spiritual grandeur fictitiously put forth by the Handalias in the Bhai Bala version and restore the real *Janamsakhi* tradition to its avowed objective of projecting and propagating Guru Nanak's gospel and its unique Sikh religious identity. Judicious selection of episodes highlighting Guru Nanak's dynamic persona bordering on the miraculous, and almost hypnotizing, mesmerizing impact of his utterances and verses, the simple, forthright, easily readable diction, rare brevity of expression and episodes narrated in Western dialect flavour and dialogic (*goshtis*) style, make it a landmark composition in the *Janamsakhi* literature. Still greater effort is required to sift the grain from the chaff and analyze the *Janamsakhi* literature in the perspective of real Sikh tradition.

To conclude, the clear stream of *Janamsakhi* literature flows through the four versions written by Seehan uppal (1570-74), Bhai Boola (Pandha) (1597-1600), Meharvan and his two

sons (1619-1651) and Saido Jatt (1657-58). It was temporarily muddled by the Handalias who commissioned Gorakh Das to wrote the Bhai Bala version (1657-59) but was finally restored to its real tradition by the writing of *Puratan Janamsakhi*. Barring the Handalia version, the mainstream *Janamsakhi* literature consisting of Seehan uppal's version, Bhai Gurdas Eleventh *Var*, Bhai Boola's, Meharwan's and Saido Jatt's and later on Bhai Mani Singh's versions are the real repository of the earliest Sikh tradition founded by Guru Nanak. Although it is neither a scriptural writing nor a work of history, but it is definitely a literary chronicle of Guru Nanak's biographical, spiritual and philosophical voyage and his distinct ideological gospel which became an important component of the foundational material of Sikh religion on which the whole superstructure of Sikh religion and its metaphysics, theology, philosophy and history has been built. The majority of the episodes in the *Janamsakhi* tradition also provide a contextual background to some of the verses of Guru Nanak and facilitate in the proper interpretation of his Gospel.

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## SRI GUR SOBHA

A literary text acquires its existence after a complex synthesis of its author's main sources of inspiration, his sensitivity towards his inner stimulation, his psychological introspection, experience and its resultant hypothesis as well as its intended semantics communicated through a medium best suited to his creative genius. In other words, a literary composition can be studied, analysed and evaluated on the basis of its theme, craftsmanship, linguistic expression, diction, aesthetic nuances, imagery, symbolism and structural organization of its composition in the light of existing parameters in that genre. Looked at from this perspective, Sainapati's *Sri Gursobha* is a composition written in the Gurmukhi script in Punjabi in the popular *Gurbilas* tradition. It is also considered as one of the primary sources of Sikh history. Composed in the early decades of eighteenth century, it is also included among the prominent writings of medieval age in Hindi and Punjabi literature. A sizable section of this contemporary literature belonging to India consists of Court poetry replete with the excessive adoration of its royal patrons primarily motivated by extraneous considerations and an acquirement of a venerable status for its creator in the royal Court. Very often, its main occupation and concern boils down to a hyper-adulation of the royal master even at the cost of neglecting the contemporary historical realities and prevailing public concerns. But Sainapati, despite being one among the prominent court poets of Guru Gobind Singh and his composition despite being titled "*Sri Gur Sobha*" (In Praise of the Guru) and despite his glorious portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh's persona, is also a highly perceptive treatise on Sikh religion, Sikh theology, continuity of Sikh Guruship from its

beginning to its final culmination in the eternal Guruship of its sacred Sikh scripture and its bodily manifestation in the Khalsa commonwealth. So *Sri Gursobha*, inspite of its focus on character portrayal of the tenth Guru in line with the contemporary literary tradition, is a creative poetry in the Sikh tradition of Sikh history and Sikh religious spirit. Consisting of twenty chapters and 935 couplets (*Chhands*), it revolves round Guru Gobind Singh as much for his personal charm as for his spiritual vision and divinely-ordained mandate and mission, ideology and its implementation. In Dr. Jai Bhagwan Goel's opinion, "The aim of the poet (Sainapati) in this composition is not to make a pedantic display of his skill of using literary embellishments as has often been done in the traditional Court poetry. That is why we do not find excessive show of ornate imagery of miraculous nature in this composition. The *Gursobha* is essentially a medieval poetic composition suffused with the spirit of faith and belief."<sup>1</sup>

### **SAINAPATI – THE MAN AND THE POET**

There is hardly any biographical detail available about the name, birth and living place of Sainapati from the direct sources. However, from some indirect references and inferences, it is possible to get some information about his biography. Besides writing "*Gursobha*", Sainapati has translated two other books into Braj Bhasha. These books are *Chankeya Neeti Shastra* and *Sukhsain Rama Binod*. In the beginning and end of the translated version of the second book *Sukhsain Rama Binod*", he has given a lot of information about his name and living place:

“Of Jagat Rai the Brahmin Vaidya,  
Was Chander Sain a loving friend.  
While living in the City of Wazirabad,  
He had completed a wonderful scripture || 5 ||  
Now here is the genealogy of the Poet:

“Among all the Jat Castes is known  
A well-known Jat genealogical tree.  
Being manifested as the Mann sub-caste,  
It is well-known in the whole world || 6 ||  
Bal Chand who belonged to this sub-caste  
He was a writer par-excellence indeed.  
Being a native of the city of Lahore,  
He was quite fond of reading and writing || 8 ||  
Chander Sain being his offspring,  
He had a little bit of humble poetic disposition.  
Still in the Court of Guru Gobind Singh,  
He found an honorable place indeed || 9 ||  
Luckily, he found a literary guide,  
In the person of Chandan Devidas,  
Who made him as good as himself in letters,  
After chiseling his mental faculties || 10 ||  
Jagat Rai being a Brahman Vaidya,  
He was a resident of city of Wazirabad.  
He having been a friend of Sainapati,  
They established a harmonious relationship || 11 ||  
Thus did Jagat Rai accost Sainapati,  
One day addressing him in this vein.  
Make a translated version of a book,  
Known by the name of “Rama Binod” || 12 ||  
After some time Sainapati the poet,  
Hastened to leave that place (Lahore)  
Arriving at the city of Wazirabad,  
He settled at that place for good || 13 ||  
Padam Rang being a sage of Jainism,  
He was a great scholar of medicine (Vaidya)  
Ram Chander having learnt medicine from him,  
Perpared a book on medicine “Rama Binod” || 14 ||  
After a thorough study of this ancient book,  
Which contained a list of choicest medicines,  
Sainapati prepared a fine translated version,  
Of this book called “Rama Binod” || 15 ||  
Having prepared this excellent version,

Sainapati felt highly elated at heart.  
After having translated this ancient book,  
He titled the new version as “Sukhsain” || 16 ||  
As one lamp lights another lamp,  
The second lamp is the replica of the first.  
So was another version of Rama Binod  
Prepared and titled “Sukhsain” || 17 ||  
After having studied every aspect of it,  
I have extracted complete essence of it  
“Sukhsain” have I titled this book  
As I (Sainapati) have translated it.” || 1106 ||<sup>2</sup>

This is the end of “Sukhsain” Granth prepared by Sainapati, courtesy Misr Jagat Rai B.S. 1875. This book, according to Dr Ganda Singh, is safely preserved under Manuscript No 274, in the catalogue on page 422-424 in the library of Language Department, Punjab, Patiala.

It becomes quite clear from this detailed reference that Sainapati’s real name was Chander Sain. He belonged to a Mann caste of Jats. Although his ancestors belonged to Lahore, he himself had shifted to Wazirabad and became a resident of this town with his friend Misar Jagat Rai. It is also mentioned there that his father Bal Chand Mann himself was very fond of reading and writing. He received a lot of instruction and guidance in his literary writings from Devi Das Chandan who enabled him to become a poet and secure a place among the Court poets of Sri Guru Gobind Singh. From this account, it becomes quite evident that all these names such as Chander Sain Mann, Sainapati, Sukh Sain and Sain Sukh belong to one and the same person whom we call Sainapati. In *Gursobha*, he begins the first chapter with such a heading as “*Khalsa Baatch*” which indicates that this composition belongs to a person who uses “Khalsa” as his surname. It is quite possible that he might have partaken the Khalsa initiation (*Amrit*) and become a Singh. It is because of this that Baba Sumer Singh, Mahant of Sri Patna Sahib, has called Sainapati as Saina Singh in his book

*Sri Guru Pad Prem Parkash* (1882, p. 713).<sup>3</sup> In his *Gur Ratanakar Mahankosh*, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha has also stated that Sainapati was the writer of *Gursobha*, who was one among the Court poets of Guru Gobind Singh who had also translated the book *Chanakya Neeti*. Saniapati's name is mentioned in the concluding lines of Chapter Sixteen of this book:

*‘There in the Court of Guru Gobind Singh,  
Was a writer highly accomplished.  
One who translated Chanakya Neeti,  
He was Sainapati Mann the Poet.’*<sup>4</sup>

In *Gurmat Martand*, Vol I, p. 79, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha has again referred to Sainapati in the same manner. Similarly, Pandit Tara Singh Narotam, the writer of *Sri Guru Tirath Sangrah*, (Vol 1, p. 120) has mentioned Sainapati as the writer of *Sri Gursobha*. Thus, all these references combined together point to the fact that Sainapati is the writer of *Sri Gursobha* and the various names mentioned above have been given to him at different stages.

### **GURSOBHA'S COMPOSITION**

There is a bit of controversy regarding the time of composition of *Gursobha*, although Sainapati has clearly mentioned the year of its composition in the sixth couplet of first chapter. He has stated that he wrote this book in the month of Bhadron (September 6, 1701) of the year 1758 of Bikrami Samvat Calendar. It means the book was written in the year 1701 A.D. In the first published version of *Sri Gursobha*, Akali Koer Singh had mentioned its year of composition as 1758 B.S. which does not conform to the events presented in the book. This date of composition precedes some of the major events relating to Guru Gobind Singh's life such as his departure towards South India and his demise at Nanded in 1765 B.S. or 1708 A.D., which have been narrated in the text of *Sri Gursobha*. Akali Koer Singh also suggested that it could also be read as 1798. But this also becomes unacceptable in the light of later

improved versions of this book where the year of composition is mentioned as 1768. There are two other sources which support 1768 B.S. as the year of its composition. In his book *Gurmat Sudhakar*, 1922, third edition, page 485, Bhai Kahan Singh mentioned 1768 B.S. as the year of composition of *Gursobha*. Baba Sumer Singh, former Mahant, Patna Sahib in his *Sri Gur Pad Prem Parkash* 1882, page 713 has also stated 1768 B.S. as the year of *Gursobha's* composition. He states:

Thus did Saina Singh narrate  
A paean in praise of the Guru  
It was in the year seventeen hundred sixty eight  
That he completed this paean.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, on the basis of various chronological events covered in the text as well as the two above-mentioned sources, it is better to take the 1768 B.S. or 1711 A.D. as the year of its composition till a more authentic source about its year of composition is available. Otherwise also synthesising the two dates as well as the various dates of several incidents mentioned in the text, it can be premised that Sainapati might have begun writing his composition in 1701 and completed it by 1711. This conflict over the date of its composition and its resolution has been brilliantly summed up by Dr Mcleod:

“There has been much controversy concerning the date of *Sri Gur Sobha*, but opinion seems once again to be hardening in favour of 1711. The exact date of the text has been difficult to fix and three dates have been advanced. These are 1701, 1711 and 1741. The first of these can be easily eliminated as *Gur Sobha* includes events that belong to the last years of Guru Gobind Singh's life which ended in 1708. The 1741 date proved, however, to be a little more difficult to dislodge. Akali Kaur Singh had argued in 1927 that *athavan* (fifty-eight) should really be read as *athanav* (ninety-eight), which would make the date of the text B.S. 1798 or 1741 CE. Dr Ganda Singh responded by pointing out that none of the important

events of the years separating 1711 and 1741 received even the hint of a mention in the text of *Sri Gursobha* and that 1741 could therefore be definitively eliminated. This left 1711 as the only acceptable year. For some years his reasoning was accepted, but recently the controversy has been reopened on the grounds that no definite text exists. This, however, did not disprove Ganda Singh's argument concerning the silence of *Sri Gursobha* on events between 1711 and 1741 and once again opinion has swung back to 1711 (Oberio 1994, 60n). There seems to be little reason for maintaining 1741 as the approved date. The claims of 1711 are much stronger."<sup>6</sup>

However, Professor Gurinder Singh Mann, University of California Santa Barbara, disagrees with the composition year of 1711 because he believes, "The appearance of the date 1701 within the invocation of *Sri Gursobha* needs to be taken into serious consideration. Its presence at the opening of the text could imply that the poet began writing in 1701 and continued to work on the text until late in 1708."<sup>7</sup> Based on his study of the extant manuscripts of this composition and the evidence lying therein as well as the complete absence of any post-1708 developments such as the rise of Banda Singh Bahadur in the *Sri Gursobha* text, Mann believes that the year 1711 is rather late for this composition. Thus, he is in favour of taking 1708 as the possible date of composition of this text. Ami Praful Shah of the same University also endorses Prof Mann's formulation when she writes: "However, when the *Sri Gursobha* is examined in light of manuscript evidence, the invocation date itself provides, and the substance of its narrative, it becomes evident that Sainapati was writing within the contemporary presence of the Guru and the living institution of his court."<sup>8</sup> Keeping in view this latest finding based on Prof Mann's argument about manuscript evidence and *Sri Gursobha's* textual silence about any post 1708 (the year of Sri Guru Gobind Singh's demise) development, it is



sensible to place the year of this composition around 1708, the time gap between 1708 and 1711 being too small. Another plausible reason for taking the year of composition as 1711 is the tone, tenor and stance of the poet in composing the last two chapters of *Sri Gursobha*. After reading these two chapters, it appears as if the poet may have composed these two chapters after the demise of Sri Guru Gobind Singh, and completed it around 1711. Anne Murphy also experiences this difference in the text of these two concluding chapters. She feels that the chronological narrative reaches its culmination in Chapter 18 with the demise of Guru Gobind Singh that event signals the end of the reportage of the text. She further states: "These two chapters are of a different order from chapters 2-4 and 8-17 and do not constitute the same kind of historical narrative."<sup>9</sup> So the placing of 1711 as the year of composition of *Sri Gursobha* is not altogether without basis and should be accepted as the most appropriate.

### **DIVINE MANDATE AND GURU'S MISSION – SAINAPATI'S PERCEPTION AND NARRATION**

The poet Sainapati in his poetic epic *Sri Gursobha* pays a rich tribute to Guru Gobind Singh for his charismatic personality, his physical and moral courage, his divine dispensation, his mission of eliminating evil doers, oppressors, exploiters and tyrants, his steadfast vision of laying the foundations of a just social order based on righteousness, justice and equality, his creation of the Khalsa, his upholding of human rights and defence of the defenseless and his complete commitment and sacrifice to bring about a just political and social order. Making a selective use of the incidents and anecdotes from the very short span of Guru Gobind Singh's life, Sainapati portrays Guru Gobind Singh as a divine messenger who succeeded in his assigned task of creating a new class of men who would not only take a vow to dismantle

the existing caste-ridden bigoted, intolerant and exploitative politico-social structure but also as one who emerged as a paragon of virtue, sacrifice and selfless service. Being the last living human successor to the nine Sikh Gurus, whose credo has been establishment of a just social order based on love, truth and equality, Guru Gobind Singh fired the imagination of the slavish, suppressed and disadvantaged people of Punjab and India to take upon their oppressors and exploiters. With his charismatic personality and soul endowed with the Divine mandate to punish the evil doers and uphold the human rights of the downtrodden and the exploited, he founded an ideological order consisting of a mass of people who were ever ready to lay down their lives for a just and honourable cause and wage a relentless war against the bigoted tyrannical Mughals and their collaborators, the local feudal chiefs. As a result of this crusade, not only the infrastructure of tyranny and exploitation started crumbling and developing cracks within a short span of less than half a century, but a completely new order of men based on a distinct religious ideology, code of conduct and dress with a new nomenclature of Khalsa emerged on the northern horizon of India. Based on principles of castelessness, equal human rights, dignity, moral uprightness and sacrifice, it was able to take up cudgels against the mightiest and the most formidable oppressors. Being fearless, imbued with the spirit of sacrifice and inspired by the sacrifices of their mentor and his whole family, the Khalsa could face the most formidable challenges, and developed an instinct for survival even under the most hostile conditions and inhuman atrocities. It is this kind of indomitable spirit and profile of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa which Sainapati applauds and glorifies in *Sri Gursobha*. Endorsing this sort of mission of Guru Gobind Singh and his creation of the Khalsa in the *Sri Gursobha*, Dr. J. S. Grewal writes:

“Amidst frank admiration of all that was said or done by

Guru Gobind Singh, Sainapati's preference for the creation of the Khalsa as the epitome of Sikhism and the *raison d'être* of Guru Gobind Singh's life comes into high relief. He accepts the account of the Guru's mission given in the *Bachittar Natak*. Though in line with the true Guru of the pure Panth, Guru Gobind Singh was sent by God to fulfil a specific divine purpose: to enable mankind to worship the true Lord, and to remove all obstacles from the path of this pursuit. To defend the claims of conscience against external interference, the purified Sikh followers of Guru Gobind Singh – the Khalsa – were to side with Good against evil. As the vanguard of righteousness, they were secure in their eternal foundation in the image of the Guru himself, they were not to remain concealed or to suffer decrease, they were to be ever on the increase. This was how, according to Sainapati, the mission was conceived by Guru Gobind Singh.”<sup>10</sup>

Making discrete and selective choice of events from the life of Guru Gobind Singh, Sainapati succeeds in building up the profile of a personage whose image will remain perpetually etched in the collective consciousness of a community, an ideological order of men “The Khalsa” which he had founded. The final image that emerges in the minds of the readers is one of a prophet divinely inspired and initiated, an ideologue and an immortal icon.

This venerated image of Guru Gobind Singh gets illustrated and qualified from the causes and consequences of each battle that the Guru had to fight against the local hill chiefs or the Mughals or their combined forces. Sainapati lays down contours of the mandate and mission of Guru Gobind's life and career in the very first chapter of *Gursobha* in the 17<sup>th</sup> Couplet:

As destroyer of the evil doers and defender of the saintly,  
He emerged as the emancipator of the whole humanity,  
As all the gods hailed him as saviour profusely,

They came to seek his benevolent protection.<sup>11</sup>

It was with this mandate and mission that Guru Gobind Singh had taken a human birth and founded an order of the Khalsa which would accomplish this mission. It will neither remain inconspicuous nor could be decimated or wished away. It would multiply and declare an open war against the wrong doers. The manifesto for founding such an order is further supplemented and presented in the couplets 33 to 35 of this chapter:

Brave Singh warriors jumped into the battle,  
And they accomplished the assigned task,  
A permanent foundation did they laydown  
Which could not be dismantled at any cost. || 33 ||

Let this fact be known to everyone,  
Let this truth be embedded in every heart  
Such a unique faith (religion) has been created,  
As has been ordained by Divine Lord himself. || 34 ||

Neither could it be eclipsed at all,  
Nor could it be diminished at any cost.  
Forever would it increase and multiply,  
Let it be taken as its declaration. || 35 ||<sup>12</sup>

During the pre and post Khalsa creation period, Guru Gobind Singh had fought as many as 20 battles against the Mughals and hill chiefs. Irrespective of the victory or defeat in each battle, the image of Guru Gobind Singh that emerges is one of a principled warrior and commander of men, a fearless fighter with nerves of steel, a committed upholder of moral values and inalienable human rights, capable of making extreme sacrifices, a magnanimous forgiver of friends and foes alike, a man of stoic patience in the face of extreme adversity, loss and defeat and a person resigned to the divine will of God. Choosing a fair sample of representative battles, Sainapati has taken a lot of pains to build up such a profile and portrait

of Guru Gobind Singh and written an inspiring paean highlighting these qualities. He builds this profile step by step. In the very first battle of Bhangani, (1688) (Chapter II) which had been thrust upon the Guru by the narrow-minded, jealous hill chiefs, Guru Gobind Singh's bravery, warriorship and steely determination comes out clearly. Despite being scantily equipped, Guru's warriors, inspired by the indomitable spirit of their leader, routed the professional and combined army of the several hill chiefs. It was a fight between motiveless, unprincipled, unorganized and uncoordinated feudal groups on the one hand and a highly motivated class of men steeped in supreme moral scruples and selfless sacrificing led by their ideal commander from the front. This battle of Bhangani and Guru's victory in it was a precursor of things to come. Not only were several hill chiefs killed in this battle, but a lot of war booty fell into the hands of Guru's warriors. Sainapati pays a glorious tribute to Guru Gobind Singh for being victorious in this battle:

As there were great invincible warriors among the rivals,  
All of them were defeated with Divine Guru's grace.  
As the sound of victory echoed through the three worlds and  
fourteen continents,  
Guru Gobind Singh returned after winning the battle (of  
Bhangani).<sup>13</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh's inherited ideology, which he had inherited from his father, of neither frightening anyone nor getting frightened by anybody was upheld and vindicated by Guru's victory in this battle. Guru's warriors who consisted of people from all the castes had vanquished the army consisting of so-called martial races. It was the inspiring leadership of Guru Gobind Singh which had motivated these people to fight a battle with a spirit of sacrifice to the cause of truth and uprightness.

The battle of Nadaun fought on March 20, 1691 at

Nadaun (Chapter III) further brings out the catholicity of vision of Guru Gobind Singh and his opposition against tyranny, oppression, and exploitation by the Mughals even when it was directed against Guru's own enemies. Aurangzeb, the then Mughal ruler had demanded tributes from the hill chiefs and instructed the governor of Lahore to accomplish this task. He, in turn, deputed Mian Khan to comply with the emperor's royal mandate who, in turn, deputed his deputy Alif Khan to accomplish this task.

Acceding to Bhim Chand's request Guru Gobind Singh fought against the Mughals with his dedicated band of devout warriors and won the battle of Nadaun. Thus, Sainapati brings out Guru Gobind Singh's valour and commitment to resist oppression and exploitation even if it is directed against his own adversaries, the wily hilly chiefs. Great men are magnanimous even towards those who have wronged them at some stage. Personages such as Guru Gobind Singh are made of stuff of which legends are made. The next battle with Khanzada and Hussaini (Hussain Khan) (Chapter IV) fought on March 20, 1695, Fagan 23, 1752 B.S. further brings out the greater glory and reputation of Guru Gobind Singh as a valiant warrior. A very brief description of this battle has been given by Sainapati. Dilawar Khan, an army commander of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb had sent his son Rustam Khan (Khanzada) with a force of five thousand soldiers against Guru Gobind Singh. With a plan to launch an attack at Anandpur Sahib, Khanzada positioned his troops on this side of the rivulet Sirsa. But Guru Gobind Singh's warriors, being informed by a devout Sikh about the Mughal troops deployment, started beating war drums immediately even before the Mughal Army could launch an attack. This beating of drums unnerved the enemy so much that they retreated hastily without launching any attack at night. After Khanzada's retreat, another subordinate of Dilawar Khan named Hussaini (Hussain Khan) advanced to lead an attack

with a lot of fanfare. But he was killed on the plains of Guler before reaching Anandpur Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh's devout warrior Sangati Singh along with seven other warriors were martyred in this battle. But victory belonged to the Guru.

This battle further demonstrates the excellence of Guru Gobind Singh's warriorship and the sense of fear and terror that he had struck in the hearts and minds of professional Mughal warriors. The voluntary information rendered by a devout Sikh about the Mughal troop deployment speaks volumes for the appeal of Guru Gobind Singh among the masses.

After winning these initial battles and raising a band of dedicated warriors, Guru Gobind Singh now launched on the most important phase of his career. It is in this phase that the image of Guru Gobind Singh as a visionary, an ideologue and a creator of a new ideological order with far-reaching historical consequences emerges. It was the phase when Guru Gobind Singh dispensed with the institution of the Masands, initiated and created the Khalsa and laid down a code of conduct for the new order. Creation of the Khalsa was the greatest contribution of Guru Gobind Singh which changed the course of history of India by dismantling the mighty Mughal empire in India. It was the Khalsa and the sacrifices of its mighty warriors which not only shook the foundations of the well-entrenched mighty Mughal empire but also put a stop forever to the invasions by the foreign Afghan invaders to India from the north. It was this inculcation of the spirit of defiance, fight and sacrifice against all kinds of oppression, tyranny and exploitation which Guru Gobind Singh had enthused in those who volunteered to join the Khalsa order. The word "Khalsa" besides connoting the pure and the pious also means the one which belongs directly to the Guru. In the contemporary land ownership terminology and contemporary revenue records, the land which belonged directly to the king and proceeds from

which were deposited directly into the State treasury without the mediation of any sort of revenue collectors was called the Khalsa land. By the same analogy, the order of men which owed their allegiance only and directly to the Guru and followed his instructions in letter and spirit and volunteered to make the supreme sacrifice of their lives for upholding the faith of their Guru was known as the Khalsa. It was such a dedicated order of men which became crusaders of the Sikh faith or the Khalsa. It was created by Guru Gobind Singh on the historical day of Baisakhi day on March 1699 at Anandpur Sahib.

It goes to the credit of Sainapati that he dwells more on the fundamental principles and ethics of the newly-established order of the Khalsa than on the ceremonial and dramatic act of creating the Khalsa on the Baisakhi Day of 1699. In the fifth chapter "*Bachan Pargas*", couplet 31 to 36, 38 Sainapati lays down the basic postulates of the Khalsa:

Kabit: "Thereupon, the Divine Guru made a declaration,  
(The Divine Guru) being the cause of all causation.  
All congregations of all the Sikh followers,  
Would forever be belonging to Guru's Khalsa.  
Whoever followed Guru's commandment,  
Truely would he be a Sikh of the Guru.  
Whosoever violated Guru's commandment,  
Surely would he be a desperate wretch.  
Renouncing the company of the wretched five,  
Who loved the company of the virtuous,  
Imbibing the virtues of compassion and righteousness,  
Who renounced all kinds of wordly cravings,  
Abstaining from smoking hubble-bubble,  
Who did not shave his head and beard off,  
He alone would be the Divine Guru's Khalsa,  
Truely would he be the Divine Guru's Khalsa." || 31 || 147 ||



Pauri: (The Divine Guru) being creator and doer,  
He issued an edict and commandment  
Doing away with institution of Masands,  
He appropriated all the Sikhs into himself.  
Those who accepted the Divine Guru's command  
Truely rewarding would their living become  
From the bondage of death would they be freed,  
Nectar of God's sacred Name would they partake.  
That alone comes to pass which Divine Guru Wills,  
That alone happens what his Will causes to prevail. | 32 | 148 |

Dohra: (The Guru) administered (Khandey ki Pahul) initiation  
He being the Divine cause of all causation.  
He created the Khalsa all over the country,  
None else being a competitor to his plan. | 33 | 149 |

Pauri: Administering Khandey-ki-Pahul (initiation)  
He strengthened and empowered his followers.  
Empowering the Sikhs by making them Singhs,  
He made the Divine Will prevail indeed.  
Those being destined to join this fraternity,  
They alone joined and practised its ethos.  
Other being ignorant lost in superstition,  
They could not comprehend its mystique.  
Surely, those ignorant could gain nothing,  
Deprived as they had been by Divine Will. | 34 | 150 |

Dohra: Renouncing the company of the wicked,  
His grace cleans all the traces of vice,  
His will being eternally prevailing,  
Its acquiescence saves human soul from hellfire. | 35 | 151 |

Pauri: Never should a Singh attend ceremonies,  
Of birth and death involving shaving of heads,  
Never should a Singh have bond of love,  
With those who indulge in five vices,  
Those who shun indulgence in five vices,

They alone succeed in cleansing their souls,  
Those who come under the influence of the virtuous,  
They never fall into the flames of hell fires.  
Eternally true as the will of the Divine Lord is,  
Truely His grace provides all round happiness. | | 36 | | 152 | |

Pauni: The Divine Guru issued a commandment,  
Never must a singh put razor to his hair.  
Must he dwell upon the Divine Guru with devotion,  
Must he practise what the Divine Guru preaches.  
Never must he tonsure his sacred hair,  
Even when his parents shed their mortal frame.  
Countless do not abide by the Divine Will,  
In meaningless fuss do they keep indulging.  
Truely eternal and true is the Will of the Divine,  
Truely, shall it prevail being forever true. | | 38. | | 154 | |<sup>14</sup>

Among the main postulates of the newly created order of the Khalsa described in Chapter 5 verses 31 to 36, 38 are initiation into Khalsa Panth after partaking of *Khande-ki-Pahul* (consecrated sweetened water prepared by stirring the solution with a double edged dagger in the midst of recitation of Gurbani hymns, instead of the old tradition of *charan-pahul* (partaking of water touched by the thumb of Guru's foot), selection of five initiated Sikhs known as *Panj Pyaras* from within congregation and authorising them for carrying out on the further initiation of Sikhs, abolition of the institution of the Masands, abandoning of all distinctions of caste after getting initiated into the Khalsa, growing and maintaining of unshorn hair as sacred and sacrosanct, tying of turban as a symbol of dignity and self-respect, wearing of five Khalsa (*Kakaars*) symbols as integral parts of dress, abstinence from smoking tobacco and use of other intoxicants, and discontinuance of the existing practice of shaving off one's head after the death of one's father. It was the creation of this distinct order of men which brought about a revolutionary change of heart and

mind among the masses. Abandoning all distinctions of caste and social stratification after joining the brotherhood of the Khalsa, it had an electrifying effect on the psyche of those who had been downtrodden and disadvantaged for centuries. With one stroke of his sword, the Guru reinvigorated the centuries old slavish mentality of the Indian masses and made them bold and brave to confront those who had been oppressing and exploiting them. It was this spirit of defiance, freedom from fear, prejudice and discrimination which was enthused by the Guru through his act of creating the Khalsa. Khalsa stood for dignity, self-respect and defiance against tyranny, struggle and sacrifice for upholding freedom, human rights and freedom to profess and practice the faith of one's own choice. It was the rebirth of a nation committed to the ideals of independence, equality and basic human dignity. Khalsa would never submit to tyranny, religious persecution, slavery and suppression of fundamental human rights. It would be ready to make supreme sacrifices to uphold its faith and live by its code of conduct and ideology. This, indeed was the mandate and mission of Guru Gobind Singh when he took birth as a human being. It was for upholding the rights of the virtuous and punishing the evil doers that he had lived for and died. It was for the fulfilment of this express will of God that he created the Khalsa for carrying on his sacred mission. No wonder, the Khalsa emerged as a mass of men highly motivated and dedicated to its ideals and enthused with the spirit of struggle and sacrifice. It showed its mettle in the subsequent battles in which it took on the high and the mighty and won decisive victories setting new records of warriorship and self-sacrifice. Soon after its initiation at Anandpur Sahib, it had to confront the combined forces of the hill chiefs (Chapter VIII). Refusing to vacate the legally purchased territory of Makhwal (Anandpur Sahib) the Khalsa force, though less in number and ill-equipped in warfare hardware, it defeated the combined army

of hill chiefs of Kahloor and Handoor. After four days of fierce battle, the Khalsa vanquished the enemy on the battlefield. It was in this first battle of Anandpur Sahib that Guru Gobind Singh's eldest son, Sahibzada Ajit Singh displayed exemplary courage and verve. Yet, when the vanquished hill chiefs pleaded with the customary cow in chains for a temporary reprieve for their honour and false prestige, the Guru vacated Anandpur Sahib temporarily. It was his magnanimity that even after winning the battle he agreed to the appeal of the wily hill chiefs. Thus, with the creation of the Khalsa, the dye was cast and the mettle of the newly amalgamated alloy called the Khalsa was tested in the first battle of Anandpur. Thus, was their order patented with its distinct identity, ideology, code of conduct and its distinct church and symbols. None was more privileged than the other in this order, none lagged behind the other in waging a war and making a sacrifice. Every one including the Guru's four sons were ever ready to make the highest sacrifice. In the subsequent skirmishes following Guru's vacation of Anandpur Sahib and the hill Chiefs' going back on their promises and occupying the vacated territory, the battle of Nirmohgarh (Chapter IX) ensued. Once again the Khalsa Army stood victorious after a heavy bloodbath. Even in the next battle (Chapter X) which took place soon after the Mughal reinforcements assisting the hill chiefs, the Khalsa could not be beaten. It defeated the combined hordes of hill chiefs and the Mughals and occupied Anandpur Sahib once again.

Sainapati's highly embellished poetry replete with various epic metaphors, similes and parallelism, describing the battle of Nirmohgarh is a befitting tribute both to the glory of Guru Gobind Singh and the strength of the Khalsa army. Once again during the Guru's stay at Baisali, Guru's valiant warriors gave a crushing defeat to the hostile warriors of Kalmot and the lumpens who dared to enter into a skirmish with Guru's

warriors during a hunting spree. (Chapter X) Thus, the Guru's newly initiated order of the Khalsa went from victory to victory in these battles. Even after these smaller skirmishes when the going got more tough, these toughmen got even tougher and more steadfast in their struggle. With the departure from Anandpur Sahib (Chapter XI) under the most trying circumstances when the month-long blockade of all kinds of provisions was imposed by the enemy forces, the Guru and his small band of dedicated men cut through the enemy lines. It was on the bank of the flooded Sirsa rivulet that the most bloody encounter took place in which the Guru, with his two elder sons and a handful of Sikh warriors, got separated from Guru's mother and the younger Sahibzadas. It was here that a great Singh warrior Bhai Udai Singh made the supreme sacrifice of his life while fighting the enemy. But despite the coincidental conspiracy of nature's elements in the form of rain and torrent and the enormity of the enemy forces, none of the Guru's dedicated warriors either fled from the field or surrendered to the enemy. They fought like the furies and when the moment of truth arrived, they went down fighting, killing and getting killed. So firm was their spirit of dedication and commitment to the cause that each one of them competed with the other to make a sacrifice. Unlike the mercenaries on the other side, they were the crusaders and men of faith who were fired with ideals of fighting tyranny and bringing about a new dispensation based on morality, truth and justice. There was not a trace of motives such as personal aggrandizement of any selfish desire for dominance over others. They wished to be sovereigns of their own land where they could profess and practise their own faith. The battle at Chamkaur (Chapter XII) and the blood bath that followed was a climax of this saga of sacrifice. Surrounded by enemy hordes and holed up in a mud fort, the Guru, two Sahibzadas and a handful of Singh warriors dared to confront and resist the combined army

of Mughals, Pathans, Ranghars and hill Chiefs. Coming out in batches of few men, they kept fighting and resisting till the last man fell dead. The two adolescent Sahibzadas Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh in their teens did not lag behind. They, too, became martyrs in this mother of all battles. It is this unique sacrifice of the two Sahibzadas which makes Guru Gobind Singh a unique commander and a father in the annals of world history. The strongest of men falter and flinch when it comes to make a sacrifice of their own progeny. But the Guru accepted the Will of God and sent the two Sahibzadas into the battle voluntarily as he sent his other devout warriors. No sacrifice was too great to fulfil the mandate and mission with which he had been sent to this world. Never for a moment did he falter or waver from his mission howsoever grave be the adversity and howsoever formidable the enemy. The Guru himself had opted to cross the rubicon but as he had himself partaken *pahul* (*Amrit*) from the *Panj Piaras* it was the collective Will of the Khalsa that prevented his jumping into the fray but commanded him to escape and reorganize the Khalsa in the near future. Thus, once again the basic principles of the Khalsa brotherhood had come into play. It was the Guru Panth rather than the Guru which was to be the arbiter of things at crucial moments of history. So it was at the command couched in the phraseology of advice and appeal of the Khalsa which prevailed.

Leaving Chamkaur, the Guru proceeded towards Machhiwara and thence to the jungles of Malwa (Chapter XIII). Once again the Sikhs started rallying round the Guru and making offering of provisions and their own lives. It was here that the Guru wrote a letter of protest, rather an epistle of moral victory known as *Zafarnama* to the bigoted Aurangzeb reminding him of several instances of breach of trust on his part and reiterating his resolve to fight tyranny and oppression despite a colossal loss of lives at the personal and fraternal

level. Khalsa was alive and around to rise and fight against the atrocities. Loss of two sons at Chamkaur and two younger sons and mother at Sirhind did not deter the Guru from his ideological goal of raising the Khalsa and realising its cherished goal of sovereignty. Once again at the battle of Muktsar, the reorganised Khalsa proved its mettle. Making a supreme sacrifice of their lives, the forty Singhs, who had severed their allegiance with the Guru in a moment of weakness, redeemed themselves in the battle of Muktsar. They were eternally immortalised as “*Muktas*” (the redeemed ones) by the Guru and their names would get entrenched permanently as icons in the collective consciousness of the Khalsa through their remembrance and reference in the daily Sikh prayer. It was Guru’s ideology and the moral strength of Guru’s mission which had brought back these errant followers to their fraternity. It was the prick of their conscience which forced them to return to the Khalsa fold even at the cost of their lives. Thus, time and again, it was the divine mandate and Guru’s mission which saved the Khalsa from extinction and enabled it to accomplish the task of punishing the evil doers and upholding the virtues of truth, piety and human dignity. Though the Khalsa did not achieve any tangible victory against the forces of oppression and tyranny in Guru’s own life time, yet it succeeded in almost dismantling the infrastructure of religious persecution and human right violations. The final showdown was yet to come when even the mentor, guiding spirit and the Guru would not be physically alive among the Khalsa. The dye had been cast, the seed had been sown, it had taken deep roots. It would hibernate for sometime after its Guru’s demise and then rise as if out of its own ashes to wreak vengeance on those who had perpetrated incredible atrocities on the Khalsa. Before breathing his last, the Guru had visualised its complete future course. The ideological order raised by him as a part of his divine mandate and mission had reached adulthood and became

capable of taking its own decisions collectively. Instead of seeking guidance from a personal Guru, it would instead seek guidance from the fundamental ethical and spiritual values enshrined in the written word of its sacred scripture Guru Granth and the collective will of the Khalsa.

Thus, if creation of the Khalsa was the seminal stage of Guru Gobind Singh's mandate and mission, declaration and establishment of Guru Granth Sahib the eternal Guru was the climax of its completion. In future, it would be the twin ideals of Guru Granth and Guru Panth which would guide and determine the future course of the Khalsa Panth. While it will seek spiritual and moral guidance and inspiration from the Guru Granth, it will take its derivative temporal, political, social and cultural decisions from the collective body of the Guru Panth. It was as if a nation had come of an age and was capable of making its own destiny. Hurriedly nominating Baba Banda Singh Bahadur to take up the command of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh breathed his last after accomplishing his mission. It is this mandate and mission which Sainapati undertakes to highlight and vindicate in his poetic eulogy *Sri Gursobha*. Throughout this poetic work, he has laid more stress on the fundamental postulates of Guru Gobind Singh's vision than on the day to day events. Avoiding to give a detailed narrative account of each battle, skirmish or even the creation of the Khalsa, he has chosen to focus more on the essential ethos and postulates of Guru's mission. Making a selective use of major battles and events than giving a chronological account of each event, he has chosen to trace the contours of Guru's visionary and ideological postulates. The spirit and philosophical principle behind each major event is more important for him than the actual event, be it the creation of the Khalsa, abolition of the institution of Masands and establishment of Guru Granth as the eternal Guru. It is for this kind of expostulation of Guru's mission that Sainapat's



poetic work should be read rather than as a historical work, written by a contemporary historian of Guru Gobind Singh. It is the work of a person and a creative writer who had seen the working of the mind of the Guru and understood its profound vision. It is because of this insight into the long-term vision and the new ideological dispensation to be set up by the Guru that Sainapati almost deifies and apotheosizes Guru Gobind Singh to the level of a divine prophet and believes that the Guru would once again be amongst his beloved Khalsa soon as Divine prophets are believed to have been coming to this world time and again to eradicate sin and vice and restore *Dharma* and sanity in the world. Thus, it is from the point of view of the vision based on the mandate and mission of Guru Gobind Singh that *Sri Gursobha* should be read rather than either as a biographical account or as a historical document chronicling the life and work of Guru Gobind Singh. Sainapati visualizes the Guru more as a prophet, a visionary and an ideologue or creator of a communities of saint-warriors than as a historical warrior whose life is a sum-total of military victories and daring acts of bravery. It needs to be read as the profile of a person who has been mandated by the divine Lord to take a human birth to fulfill a divinely ordained mission of punishing the evil doers, defending the virtuous and ushering in an order of men which could set in a new set of values based on justice, equality and sovereignty of human rights. Keeping this visionary aspect of Guru Gobind Singh's life, Sainapati has succeeded in delineating the basic contours and an outline of his vision rather than giving a chronological account of his life. It is for this deep insight into the vision of Guru Gobind Singh that his poetic work is of unique significance. It is because of the epochal nature and magnitude of his vision that Sainapati has composed a paean to the glorious saga of Guru Gobind Singh's life. It should be read more as a tribute, an ode and an eulogy of a contemporary

poet rather than a work of a historian chronicling the sequence of his acts and deeds chronologically. It is precisely for this reason that we do not find some major events of Guru Gobind Singh's life described in full detail except for their significance from an ideological point of view. Take for example, the various battles fought by the Guru during the pre and post Khalsa creation. Guru Gobind Singh fought around twenty battles during his whole life span, nine in the pre-Khalsa creation period and eleven in the post Khalsa creation period. But Sainapati, instead of mentioning every battle, its time and place, has clubbed some of these minor skirmishes together. Except for giving account of the battle of Bhangani, Nadaun and Hussaini, he has either partially omitted or mentioned briefly or clubbed some of the battles of Anandpur together. Instead, he has stressed upon traits of Guru Gobind Singh's vision and personality which came to the fore during these battles. Similarly, in the post Khalsa creation period, he has clubbed the first and second battle of Anandpur, the battles of Nirmohi, Baisali and Kalmot and combined the four battles of Anandpur in 1702, 1703, 1703 and 1704, before describing the battle of Mukatsar. But through out his poetical epic, he has focused more on the emerging profile of Guru Gobind Singh and its major character traits such as his physical and moral courage, his magnanimity towards his enemies, his steadfast suffering and struggle, his stoic acceptance of the tragic death of his sons and mother and determination to carry on and fulfil his assigned mission. Sainapati is more concerned with projecting this mission than with the detailed and minute account of its qualifying events. It is for this reason that certain historians find his work deficient as history though they assign it a prominent place among the primary sources of Sikh history. Same pattern is discernible in some other events. Sainapati gives no details of the creation of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib but devotes three chapters to the

significance of its creation and the fundamental ideological and religious postulates of its underlying philosophy. He extensively dwells upon its code of conduct, its moral, spiritual and religious basis and the consequences of its creation. Similarly, before the creation of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh abolished the well-entrenched but decadent institution of the Masands. In that case also, no details have been provided, but Guru's decisions to abandon the Masands has been mentioned. But no omission regarding the Guru's mandate and mission has been made by Sainapati except that of not mentioning the initiation and induction of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and mandating him to carry on the divine mission. This omission is, perhaps, due to Guru Gobind Singh's passing on the Guruship to Guru Granth Sahib and its external visibility in the Khalsa Panth. Banda Singh Bahadur, being part of that Khalsa Commonwealth and though first among equals, may not be so important for Sainapati as an individual than as an integral part of that Khalsa commonwealth and fraternity which was ordained to carry on with this mission. So it does not seem to be an inadvertent omission. Undoubtedly, there are one or two omissions and distortions regarding Sahibzadas. As Dr Ganda Singh has pointed out, Sainapati has confused the names of Sahibzadas. For example, Sainapati has written Jeet Singh at some places and Ranjit Singh at some other places for Sahibzada Ajit Singh in couplets 18.314, 31.327, 36.332 chapter VIII.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Sainapati has created some confusion about Sahibzada Jujhar Singh too. First, he mentions that both Sahibzadas Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh got martyred at Chamkaur Sahib in the field of battle in Couplet 73/541 Chapter XII.<sup>16</sup>

Swaiyya: The enemy forces which remained on the battlefield,  
Unitedly did they launch an attack on Chamkaur fortress.  
There taking the two (younger) Sahibzadas into captivity,

Together did they bring the Sahibzadas to Sirhind,  
As Sahibzada Jujhar Singh had put up a mighty fight,  
Death's messengers approached after his martyrdom,  
Such being the divine dispensation of the Divine Lord,  
That both the Sahibzadas too departed for heavens. || 73 || 541 ||

But in the concluding part in couplet 75/543 he combines Sahibzada Jujhar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh who sacrificed their lives at Sirhind in the tradition of their grandfather Guru Tegh Bahadur as mentioned in couplet 74-75/542/543 Chapter XII.<sup>17</sup>

A similar mistake has been made regarding Sahibzada Zorawar Singh by Sainapat. He narrates that Sahibzada Zorawar Singh had crossed through the battlefield while fighting fiercely in couplet 65/533 Chapter XII.<sup>18</sup>

But the person who had escaped and actually survived during this battle was not Sahibzada Zorawar Singh but another youth named Zorawar Singh who, being the son of Guru Gobind Singh's domestic help, was brought up in the Gurus' household. This mistake in identity of two similar names has been passed on to the later writers like Bhai Sukha Singh and Kavi Santokh Singh who have repeated this mistake in their works *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* (1751) and *Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth* (1843) respectively. Sainapati has also skipped over the sacrifice of the two younger Sahibzadas as well at Sirhind mentioning their martyrdom only in two concluding lines including his substitution of Jujhar Singh in place of Zorawar Singh. Dr Ganda Singh has pointed out these mistakes in his well-researched book *Sri Gursobha*.<sup>19</sup> But all these distortions and omissions seem to be peripheral and insignificant when we see Sainapat's main objective in this poetical tribute to Guru Gobind Singh. As the very title of this work *Sri Gursobha* suggests, his primary objective is to highlight and admire the vision of Guru Gobind Singh based upon a divine mandate given to him and his relentless struggle to fulfil that mandate.

Sainapati is neither a historian, nor a chronicler but a poet who has understood the Guru's vision and the realisation mainly in its ideological and doctrinal terms and partially in concrete and tangible terms and narrated it in a poetic manner. Dr S S Hans has summed up Sainapat's perception and narration of this vision most precisely. He observes: "The author of the *Sri Gursobha* is the first Sikh writer to enunciate the doctrine of Guru-Khalsa or Guru Panth, after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Though the doctrine is theologically implicit in the making of Guru Angad by Guru Nanak yet it was the course of history that explicated the idea. The author states the doctrine of the indistinguishability of the Guru from the Sangat which later developed into the Khalsa."<sup>20</sup> The concept of Guru Panth reaches its climax in the following words of Sainapati as he narrates the last moments of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded in Chapter XVIII:

Dr W.H. Mcleod also endorses and corroborates Sainapati's version. He writes, "*Gursobha*, as we have already noted, was a paean of praise for the Khalsa, and again it must be emphasised that its key message placed it firmly within the area of *Rahitnamas*. As they existed to list the distinctrective qualities of the Khalsa Panth so too did *Gursobha*.... The doctrine laid down by *Gursobha* was that of Guru Panth and by the Guru Panth the author specifically meant the Khalsa. It was not the Sikh community which constituted the Guru Panth but rather the Khalsa which occupied the position."<sup>21</sup> Mcleod has also given an elaborate list of the essential features of the Sikh code of conduct (*Rahit*) as narrated in *Gursobha*.<sup>22</sup>

Dr J S Grewal is even more emphatic in endorsing Sainapati's emphasis on the doctrinal aspect of Guru Gobind Singh's amalgamation of Guru Granth and Guru Panth. He writes, "Sainapati makes it rather explicit that the true Guru and the *sangat* are one and the same. With the vague identification of the Guru with God on the one hand, and a

clear identification of the *sangat* with the Guru on other, Sainapati attributes almost a divine character to the collective body of the Khalsa which becomes sacrosanct and authoritative for the individual member. This idea gets linked with the statement of Guru Gobind Singh only a day before his death that the Khalsa represented his visible form (Roop). The office of Guruship was vested in the Khalsa. At the same time, Guruship was vested in the Shabad-Bani or the scripture.”<sup>23</sup>

Ammi Praful Shah substantiates this theme more succinctly. She observes, “As one of the earliest, if not the earliest, articulations of the doctrine of *guru panth* and *guru granth*, in Sainapati’s account the Guru secures his legacy by elevating the entire community as the Khalsa. The importance of the Guru’s verses (*gurbani*, *shabad*) in the succession of authority was established by Guru Nanak and continued by Guru Gobind Singh upon his death.”<sup>24</sup>

Moreover despite being a literary composition Sainapati’s *Sri Gursobha* is a marvellous and reliable contemporary source about the last twenty years of Guru Gobind Singh’s life. It is perhaps the first source of information about tenth Sikh Guru’s life from the battle of Bhangani (1688) to his demise in 1708. The poet has also narrated the other events prior to the creation of the Khalsa on the basis of narration in the *Bachittar Natak*. His narrative information about Guru Gobind Singh’s departure to the south after the events of 1699 is also quite authentic. According to Dr Ganda Singh, Sainapati’s information about Aurangzeb’s royal proclamation about sending a court messenger (Guraj Bardar) towards Guru Gobind Singh after the receipt of Guru’s epistle *Zafarnama*, Guru’s meeting with Bahadur Shah and his presentation of robes of honour to the Guru and the emperor’s departure towards Rajputana and other events in the south, tallies with the records in the Persian sources such as *Abkam-a-Alamgiri*, *Akhbarat-a-Darbare-Maula*,

*Twarikh Muazamshah* and *Twarikh Bahadurshahi*. Sainapati has composed his poetic narrative on the lines of his Guru patron's own composition *Bachittar Natak*. It is the first biographical narrative written by a non-Muslim personage of India after the similar narratives of by Muslim personalities. Thus, Sainapati's *Sri Gursobha*, having been written by a person who had the good fortune of having a glimpse of Guru Gobind Singh's person and having witnessed his deeds, listened to his sermons and having gathered information from some of his contemporaries who were close to the Guru and privy to his thoughts and views, is the first reliable source of Guru Gobind Singh's life and history.

### **SRI GURSOBHA AS LITERATURE**

Since the spirit behind "*Sri Gursobha*" is the poets' faith in Guru Gobind Singh as a divinely-ordained prophet and founder of a new religious order, his primary focus is on the portrayal of Guru's character on a lofty, grand scale much like the portrayals of great Hindu mythological heroes of Lord Rama in 'Tulsi Dass' *Ramayana*, Ved Vyas's portrayal of Krishna in *Mahabharata* and Guru Gobind Singh's own portrayal of Durga / Chandi in three of his own composition. In Dr Jai Bhagwan's opinion *Sri Gursobha* bears great affinity to some of the compositions such as *Apni Katha (Bachittar Natak)* of *Dasam Granth* so far as its mode of composition, narrative style, character portrayal, religious beliefs, heroic spirit are concerned, the only difference being that while the former composition is the autobiography of a Guru – poet, the latter one is the biography of a Guru by a Guru's devout devotee... "*Bachittar Natak*" as a model poetic composition was available to Sainapat..... In both these scriptural compositions, religious devotion and heroic chivalry based on religious faith are the dominant concerns.... both compositions have similar divisions into chapters '*Apni Katha* having fourteen chapters and

Gursobha having twenty chapters without any other division of sections.”<sup>25</sup> He further states, “Much in the style of religion based poetic compositions such as *Ramchritmanas*, *Sri Gursobha* begins with an invocation to the Divine, the naming of the Contemplated composition, the central leitmotif, the time and year of composition, admiration of Sikhism, introduction of poet’s own person, the lineage of the Guru and poets’ veneration of Guru, the tradition of Gurship in Sikh religion, reasons for Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom, the divine will and commandment behind Guru’s birth as a divine prophet, the self-centredness of some earlier prophets, the birth of the Khalsa, the hollow rituals of certain other religious orders, divine invocation, the exposition of fundamentals of Sikh religion and the divine blessings, directions regarding the composition’s title and mode of composition and its ending in the manner of scriptural composition.”<sup>26</sup>

He further observes, “Portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh’s vision personality and character remains Sainapat’s primary concern. Guru Gobind Singh is a ‘religious prophet, a heroic warrior who has taken birth as a divinely-ordained prophet-personage to protect the saintly and punish the evil doors in order to rid the mother earth of sin and evil. His determination, steadfast courage, battle expertise, manifestation of valour, chivalry and magnanimity have also been extremely well described. Sainapati has presented his heroic Guru as struggling and fighting fearlessly throughout his life against tyranny and injustice, in defence of truth, justice, religion and country. Thus Sainapat’s portrayal of the Guru is in the Classic tradition of Indian epics of heroism. Out of its total twenty chapters, six to seven chapters consisting 360 couplets have been devoted to the description of various battles and another six to seven chapter consisting of 340 couplets to the religion oriented concepts. Observing these features, Sainapati seems to have succeeded in projecting Guru Gobind Singh’s image



as a defender of the faith and a protector of the saintly and a destroyer of the evildoers. Guru Gobind Singh is both a brave warrior as well as a religious crusader. There is hardly any other protagonist / hero in heroic epic literature in Hindi who is both a religious ideologue as well as a brave warrior. Seen from this view point, there is scarcely any other heroic epic as unique as *Gursobha* which is suffused with spirit of warriorship born of religious fervour.”<sup>27</sup>

This is what the protagonist of a heroic epic is believed to be in the literary canon of India and western classical literature. Dr Jai Bhagwan rightly observes, “So far as the literary qualities of a heroic epic are concerned, *Gursobha* has the narrative, poetic and lyrical diction which uses appropriate imagery, symbolism and other literary embellishments suitable for acts such as wearing armour, their high-spirited morale, marching of armies, display of rare feats of bravery, battle skills, pride, bravado, act of offence and defence, the horrible battle scenarios, blowing of trumpets, bugles and war drums, thus creating a proper ambience of ancient warfare and clashing of armies.”<sup>28</sup> Sainapati has composed his narrative poem in a hybrid mix of Braj Bhasha, Hindi and Punjabi in *Gursobha* mainly on the pattern of Guru Gobind Singh’s creative skill used in *Bachittar Natak*. He has successfully used and crafted majority of prevalent contemporary literary poetic metrical compositions used in *Bachittar Natak – Apni Katha* and other contemporaneous poetic compositions in the form of couplets, quatrains and octaves. In the total 935 couplets of “*Sri Gursobha*”, Sainapati has used 19 types of couplets namely *Antuka*, *Rasawal*, *Ardil*, *Swaiyya*, *Sortha*, *Kabit*, *Chhaupai Chband*, *Chopai*, *Chotan Chband*, *Jhoolna Swaiyya*, *Tribhangi Chband*, *Totak Chband*, *Dobra*, *Narj Chband*, *Pauri*, *Bhujang Paryat Chband*, *Modhubhar Chband*, *Rasawal*, *Ruamal* and *Lotan Chband*. Each of these literary, linguistic and meterical devices have a distinct rhym scheme with a fixed number of syllables, weight, rhythm,

lyrical melody and sound track to capture and communicate the particular moment, mood, temper and intensity of human feelings and emotions involved at that moment. Sainapat's skillful use of these highly technical meterical compositions according to varying events and moods speaks volumes for his poetic talent and craftsmanship. He has also avoided the tendency to embellish and overload his heroic epic with undue use of classical similes, metaphors and parallelisms as some other medieval and contemporary poets often did. Lack of these embellishments and classical references is likely to create an impression in certain minds about Sainapati's lack of erudition, scholarship and lesser poetic imagination and create an impression of his being a traditional court poet rather than an eminent literary figure, and his composition a run-of-the-mill panegyric. But such a flawed reading would be belittling all other creative, poetic, narrative and linguistic and even historical qualities of this work as well as the overriding vision, and craftsmanship of Sainapati and his work. Thus, taking a balanced view of Sainapati's *Sri Gursobha*, it would be appropriate to regard Sainapati as a highly sensitive and perceptive person and a poet and his work a remarkable tribute, an extended ode, a paean, an eulogy and an apotheosis of a great prophet whose life and mission the poet had an opportunity to see, observe understand, evaluate and describe.

On the basis of the above discussion, we can safely state that the author of *Sri Gursobha* was a person of enlightened sensitivity and deep sense of history who had a profound knowledge of Sikh theology, Sikh philosophy, and its complete spiritual and temporal attributes. Sainapati's narration of the divine attributes of Guru Gobind Singh's personality, his creation of the Khalsa Commonwealth and laying down its distinct code of conduct, elimination of the institution of Masands and his battles against unjust social order reveal that the poet had grasped the essence of Sikh religion in its totality

in which Sikh theology and Sikh temporal body (the Khalsa) and its major concerns were the two faces of the same coin cast in the classical mint of Sikh spiritualism and its evolving ethos. As for as its stylistics, it mainly follows the diction, idiom and meterical devices used in *Bachittar Natak* and some other compositions of *Dasam Granth*. By virtue of being a close contemporary and observer of Guru Gobind Singh's conceptual and practical demonstrative deeds and their narration, this work has the genuine credentials of being one of the primary sources of a significant slice of Sikh history and a literary work of considerable merit.

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## THE 'GURBILAS' LITERATURE

### I

The tradition of '*charit*' poetry in Hindi and Braj languages is very old: it has been in vogue in India since ancient times although it was written under several different nomenclatures including 'Vilas'. As it is, the followers of different religions have always felt interested and inspired to write glorified life-stories of the founders and other spiritual preceptors of their respective faiths. Each author has his own understanding of the mission of the concerned preceptor/personage and many a time his story is narrated in an effusive and loquacious style, sometimes bringing in miraculous element also. That is why it becomes quite difficult to sift fact from fiction, history from mythology in such narratives. Although the 'Bilas' *genre* in Sikh literature is also taken as *charit kavya* but it differs from the Hindi/Braj *chrit kavya* in regard to its subject-matter as well as objective. In Sikh history, this tradition of 'Bilas' literature tries to find its roots in Guru Gobind Singh's *Bachitra Natak* and thereafter in Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha*. That is perhaps the reason the first such works deal with the life-stories of the Gurus and each such work is also titled *Gurbilas*. However, the *Bachitra Natak* being an autobiographical in nature is an incomplete life-story of the Tenth Master and *Sri Gur Sobha* is episodic in nature and there are wide gaps in-between different episodes which have been narrated without referring to their causes and effects. In this category, the earliest three titles are - *Gurbilas Patshahi Chbevin* (life-account of Guru Hargobind) and *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* and *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* (life-accounts of Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh).

In the ancient Indian religious tradition, we have the

examples of several life-accounts of Rama (son of Emperor Dasrath) written by different authors. Of these, the accounts by Tulsidas and Balmiki are more popular, though there are numerous other versions also. These accounts significantly differ from each other at several points. Similarly, the life-accounts of Krishna have also been attempted by many. Interestingly, up to medieval times all such works were taken as original works and not as translations or adaptations. In the *Dasam Granth* we find Puranic accounts of several Hindu *avatars* or incarnations including Rama and Krishna retold in Punjabi, and these are also taken as original works. The story of Chandi, a goddess in the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses who is variously known as Durga, Bhavani, Kali, etc., as retold and reinterpreted in the *Dasam Granth* in three different versions has been taken from the *Markandeya Puran*, but all these three versions are treated as original works. However, all these stories (of the *avatars*, *Chandi* and others) in the *Dasam Granth* cannot be taken as part of *charit* or Vilas poetry because the objective is not to relate their complete life-stories but to reinterpret their lives emphasizing on any one or the other aspect of their personality. For example, the story of Chandi has been retold by the Guru to highlight the point that anybody can emulate Chandi and play a role like her to annihilate evil from contemporary life.

The practice of writing life-stories of the Gurus began soon after the passing away of the founder of the faith, Guru Nanak. “*Janamsakhi*” (*janam* ordinarily means birth but in theological context it implies life; *sakhi* in Sanskrit means evidence or testimony but in Punjabi it stands for a story or anecdote) has been the term used to designate the traditional narratives relating in anecdotal prose the life and teachings of Guru Nanak. Gradually several *Janamsakhi* traditions evolved, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, supplementing the earlier nucleus with additional anecdotes

and interpretative discourses.<sup>1</sup> It is generally believed that the *Puratan* version has been the oldest followed by various other versions. Bhai Gurdas' first *Varis* is also a kind of brief *janamsakhi*. After the *Janamsakhis*, another important literary genre employed to write the life-accounts of the Gurus has been the '*Gurbilas*'. No doubt, the lives of the Gurus have been described in the (Panth) *Prakash* literature also, but the latter is more comprehensive in nature and deals with the history of the Sikh faith beginning with the founder of the faith and concluding with the times of the author. Whereas the '*janamsakhi*' genre has been used for the life-accounts of Guru Nanak only, the *Gurbilas* is the genre wherein eulogies of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh have been sung while narrating their life-stories. Of course, there are some other works which can be included in the *Gurbilas* category though they have not been so titled.

As we hinted earlier, in the Sikh literature after the *Bachitra Natak*, Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* is generally taken to be the first book which studies events relating to the life of Guru Gobind Singh in historical perspective. The book itself does not provide any authentic information about the author and he does not use either his name or pen-name in the entire work: in fact, there have been other instances also where the authors out of their humility do not give their names to what they write. Whatever little information we have about him is culled from his two other works, *Chanakya Niti* and *Sri Sain Sukh*. The original name of Sainapati was Chandra Sain and he was the son of Bal Chand of Lahore. Some scholars also aver that he belonged to Delhi, but this averment has no legs to stand on. Since the poet begins this work with the words '*khalsa bach*' instead of the usual '*kavioach*', we can infer that he might have received the Khalsa initiation and become Saina Singh before starting work on this chronicle: Bawa Sumer Singh of Patna, in his book *Sri Gur-pad Prem Prakash*, also holds this

view.

Similarly, there is some controversy about the date of the writing of the *Sri Gur Sobha*. The only internal reference to this effect is in the first chapter itself where the poet says:

*sammat satrah sai bhae barakh athavan bit*  
*bhadav sudi pandram bhai rachi katha kari prit*  
The year was seventeen hundred and fifty-eight;  
And the day was Bhadon sudi fifteen when  
he set out to lovingly narrate the story.

However, Samvat 1758 (AD 1701) cannot be accepted as the year of its completion since the work describes the Guru's life post-1701 and goes up to the passing away of the Guru in 1708. Akali Kaur Singh who rediscovered this work after it had remained unknown until he published it in 1925 reads the word '*athavan*' (or fifty-eight) as '*athanav*' (or ninety-eight) and says that the work might be of 1798 Bikrami/AD 1741 but this amounts to misreading the text. Also, even if we take it true, we cannot justify the absence of the very important events which took place between 1708 (the year with which closes the book) and 1741. Since the above referred verses appear in the beginning of the book, the year could possibly be the beginning of the writing because he cannot give the year of completion of the work in the very beginning. We can thus assume that Sainapati started working on it in AD 1701. Dr Ganda Singh has given 1768 Bikrami/ AD 1711 as the year by the reference of some other manuscript but has not given any clue of that manuscript. Bawa Sumer Singh also says:

Thus did *Saina Singh* narrate  
A paean in praise of the Guru;  
It was in the year seventeen hundred sixty eight  
That he completed this paean.<sup>2</sup>

Bhai Kahn Singh also agrees with this date, as do most of the other modern-day scholars.

Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* is a poetical work part eulogy



and part history. It has Guru Gobind Singh as its protagonist and is a contemporary account of various events including the creation of the Khalsa Panth. Apart from its historical significance and poetic excellence, it clearly elucidates the Sikh terms *misl* and *khalsa* – the former as a military sub-unit and the latter as a community in direct relationship with the Guru. It is almost silent about the early life of the Guru and it begins, broadly speaking, where the Guru's autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* comes to an end. It has twenty cantos of which six, including the opening invocatory passages as well as various other passages in other cantos, are devoted directly to the eulogy of the Guru and the Khalsa. Events of the pre-Khalsa days are narrated rather briefly and the work is quite episodic as it deals with only a select few episodes from the Guru's life instead of taking up comprehensively the Guru's entire life. The events which have been dealt with much poetic flourish include battles fought by the Sikhs under Guru Gobind Singh, the battle of succession fought among the sons of Aurangzib, the Guru's meeting with Bahadur Shah, the attempt at the Guru's life and his passing away at Nanded. It seems the poet was an eye-witness to the creation of the Khalsa Panth on the Baisakhi day of AD 1699 yet, strangely enough, he does not give any details of the proceedings of the day.

## II

Apart from Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* (AD 1711), the Gurbilas literature comprises, as we said earlier, three other works - one on the life of Guru Hargobind and two on the life of Guru Gobind Singh - all of which belong to the eighteenth century. Sikhism begins with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and it was the time when the Mughals, who first came as traders in the south but then as invaders from the north-west, were establishing themselves as rulers of India. During the earlier

phase especially during the regime of Akbar (1542-1605), the Sikh-Mughal relationship remained cordial but the successors of Akbar followed a policy of religious intolerance and exclusivism whereas the Sikh Gurus preached the ideas of religious tolerance and pluralism. The result was strained relationship between the two resulting first in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan in 1606 under the orders of Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627) and later on the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 under orders of Emperor Aurangzib (1618-1707). Guru Hargobind had to take up sword to resist the excesses of the contemporary Mughal satraps and then Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed everything in the *dharma yudh* fought for upholding human dignity and freedom of conscience.

The post-Guru eighteenth century was a highly turbulent period for the Sikhs when they were being hounded out of their homes and prices were fixed on their heads. They had to leave their home and hearth for the safety of their life. Banda Singh Bahadur who had, with the blessings of Guru Gobind Singh, waged a war against the Mughal oppression and suppression, was executed in 1716. However, the Mughal government in Delhi had become weak after the death of Aurangzib and was completely shaken in the Punjab region by its successive defeats at the hands of Banda Singh Bahadur. This encouraged the likes of Nadir Shah and then Ahmad Shah Durrani (1722-72) to invade India from the north-west with the objective to loot and molest it. The Sikhs in the Punjab got sandwiched between the unjust and cruel Mughal government and even more cruel invaders because these invaders had to pass through here to reach further inside India. The Sikhs were hard hit but they fought back: it was, to say so, through persecution and suffering that they attained political power and became masters of the land. Not much literary activity especially among the Sikhs is possible during such chaotic days. Interestingly, all these three *Gurbilases*, which are

the subject of our study, are the product of this period. Their importance lies in the fact that anyone who desires to construct history of the Sikhs including the lives of the Gurus, their message and its impact on the Sikh society has to depend on these works: he has no other option available to him.

*Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* is the earliest work to narrate a complete life-story of the sixth Guru of the Sikh faith, Guru Hargobind. Three different published versions of it are available as edited by Indar Singh Gill; Gurbachan Singh Vedanti and Amarjit Singh; and Gurmukh Singh. Scholars differ as regards the authorship of this work: this confusion arises, according to Fauja Singh, from the author's 'humility' which made him 'reluctant' to mention his name as author of the work.<sup>3</sup> The poet says that Bhai Mani Singh, a highly revered name in Sikh tradition and the person who fought in several battles alongside Guru Gobind Singh and also served as amanuensis with the Guru when he prepared the revised version of the Adi Granth at Talwandi Sabo, was once requested by one Bhagat Singh to narrate the life-story of Guru Hargobind: Mani Singh was then on a visit to Nanakana Sahib and was giving a discourse on Guru Hargobind with reference to Bhai Gurdas' *Var* on the subject. He agreed to narrate what he had heard from Bhai Daya Singh who in turn had heard from Guru Gobind Singh himself. Bhai Dharam Singh, whom the poet regards his teacher, also happened to be present in the congregation there: Bhai Dharam Singh narrated to the poet what he listened to from the mouth of Bhai Mani Singh and the latter rendered it in verse.<sup>4</sup> According to a view, Dharam Singh might be one of the court-poets of Guru Gobind Singh, and Bhagat Singh might also be a renowned Sikh because the poet says that Bhai Mani Singh got up to receive him and that he also seems well known to the entire congregation.

Some scholars including Shamsheer Singh Ashok, Taran Singh and Haribans Singh (Niranaikar) are of the view that

Sohan is the author of this work though it has been very clearly stated by the poet that he does not want to give his name. The argument in favour of 'Sohan' is based primarily on a verse in the work which reads as under:

*partakkb hot gur dev ke sevak sohin nam*

It does not seem proper to read the word 'sohin' as 'sohan'; in fact, 'sohan' is not one word but two – 'sohi' and 'n', and taken together these words will mean 'unbecoming' or 'does not look proper'. In this sense, the verse would mean that 'it does not look proper for a disciple to give his name when his teacher is present'. This is just the author's way of expressing his respect for the teacher and his own humility. At other places, the author also uses for himself the words 'das' or slave, 'bal' or child, etc. but he might have used these out of humility and these can in no way be called his pen-names. Bhai Kahn Singh disagrees with the name of the *Gurbilas's* author being Sohan, and he says that the poet has kept his name 'a secret' and that 'actually the authors are Bhai Gurmukh Singh and Bhai Darbara Singh'.<sup>5</sup> Macauliffe also agrees with him.<sup>6</sup> As Karam Singh Historian has said, 'a priest of Akal Bunga was a relation of the family at Gurusar (with whom was preserved the original copy of the *Gurbilas* as says Bhai Vir Singh in his introduction to the *Sri Gur Suraj Prakash Granth*). He made a copy of the *Gurbilas*, made some additions and alterations and popularized this corrupted version.' Maybe this 'priest from the Akal Bunga' is the same Gurmukh Singh to whom, along with Darbara Singh, is attributed the authorship by Bhai Kahn Singh. Bhai Joginder Singh Vedanti and Amarjit Singh hold that the authorship of the work is anonymous while Gurmukh Singh argues that Bhagat Singh, whose name finds mention several times in the work, is the author of this work. The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism also calls it an anonymous work.

Although we do not have any biographical information about the author because the author out of his humility wants

to remain unknown yet we learn that he was a disciple of Bhai Dharam Singh who, it seems, was a good poet and well versed in prosody. It was he who asks the poet to versify the Guru's life-story - *ais kari chband rachi lijai/chband band gur gatha kijai* (Ch. XXI.695). Following the advice of his teacher, the poet started writing: he would compose a part, show it to his teacher who accepted and approved some and asked him to revise the remaining, and the poet would re-write accordingly – *avval suno chband puni kari haun/jai guru age puni dhari haun/jo manman rakh gur soi/puni haun karon bhakh gur joi* (Ch. 21.697-98). As the colophon mentions, the poet spent fifteen months working on this and completed it in 1775 Bikrami/AD 1718. But there are in it some anachronistic references to the post-1718 events such as the nine-storey building of Baba Atal at Amritsar, demolition of the *serai* of Nur-ud-Din by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, *subahs* of Jalandhar and Peshawar, etc. which make the date in the colophon suspect. The author also emphasizes that *Ragmala* should be included in the complete recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib which implies that the work belongs to the period when the controversy over *Ragamala* was hot. Consequently, Bhai Kahn Singh in his *Gurmat Martand* gives AD 1833-34 the year of the composition of the work. However, there are also scholars who hold on to the year 1718 and they include Ganda Singh and Fauja Singh also. The scholars of this school assume that these anachronistic references are later interpolations by various scribes.<sup>7</sup> Among these scribes could be some belonging to one or the other schismatic groups working against the Sikh tradition otherwise several historical and doctrinal flaws could not have crept in. A scholar also holds that the scribe might have supplemented the data given by the author in order to provide continuity to the events mentioned by him (the author) and it is in this connection that the scribe mentioned the name of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his *firman* or the order of demolition of Sarai Nur.<sup>8</sup> However, these differences will

remain since original manuscript of this work has not been available. Bhai Vir Singh<sup>9</sup> refers to the existence of a manuscript in the Nanaksar Gurdwara until the Akali Movement but it is not available now.

The author being a devout Sikh of the Guru has presented the Guru's life in a Puranic vein, but it also happens to be a very important source of information on the historical persona of the Guru. The *Gurbilas* has been divided into twenty-one cantos or chapters. The opening chapter begins with an invocation to Bhagauti and eulogy of the ten Gurus to seek their blessings for the venture and goes on to describe the circumstances leading to his composition of the *Gurbilas*. According to the poet, the Guru was born on 21 Har 1652 Bikrami (19 June 1595), a date which has been accepted by historians in general. The second chapter narrates the Guru's childhood in great detail, especially the conspiracies hatched by Prithi Chand to kill him. Here is also a reference to worship of Durga when child Hargobind falls ill which is obviously incorrect: this may be a later interpolation. The next chapter begins with a dialogue between Mahadev and Prithi Chand wherein the former advises the latter to desist from conspiring against Guru Arjan: Prithi Chand meets Emperor Jahangir through the good offices of Sulahi Khan but gets nothing from the emperor except the grant of a village in the Malwa region of Punjab. The poet then describes the arrangements for the spiritual and secular education of child Hargobind. The fourth chapter opens with Guru Arjan taking up the compilation of the Adi Granth: the poet narrates the story of the Guru going to Baba Mohan to get the *pothis* which had reached him from Guru Amar Das. About the Bhagat-Bani, he says that all the Bhagats came to the Guru in their subtle bodies and dictated their hymns. Similarly, the Bhatts are also called manifestations of gods like Brahma. The next chapters deal with the installation of the Adi Granth in the Harimandar, (Guru)

Hargobind's marriage (5); Prithi Chand's conspiracies against Guru Arjan continue and they lead to the latter's martyrdom for which the poet holds Prithi Chand, Chandu and others primarily responsible (6-7).

At the time of the formal anointment of Hargobind as the sixth Guru, he puts on two swords representing *miri* (temporal sovereignty) and *piri* (spiritual sovereignty); the author also refers to the *bukamnamas* the Guru sent to *sangats* all over to bring horses and weapons also in their offerings, though no such information is found in the two available collections of *bukamnamas*. Soon after his taking over the pontificate, Guru Hargobind decided to construct the Akal Takht. The poet says that the entire work which at that time comprised only a raised platform was done by Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas only (5 Har 1763 Bikrami/AD 1606) and that the job of looking after it was assigned to Bhai Gurdas. In fact, he discusses in detail the nature, form and the concept of Akal Takht (8). The Guru's visit to Darauli and Kashmir and the birth of (Guru) Tegh Bahadur is also mentioned here. The poet also takes up the issue of whether or not to eat meat (9).

No doubt, the Guru's relationship with the Emperor had become cordial after the former's release from Gwalior fort and it is said that the Emperor was highly impressed by the Guru's spirituality, but the poet at places makes some overstatements in describing this new relationship. However, this relationship again deteriorated when Shah Jahan succeeded Jahangir on the Delhi throne. Apart from the Naqashbandi order, there were more than one forces which saw danger to their position with the strengthening of Sikh ideology and they all worked together to incite the Emperor. It resulted in four battles – at Ruhela (Hargobindpur), Amritsar, Mahiraj and Kartarpur: the poet excels in the description of the battle scenes though he obviously exaggerates the numerical strength of the Mughal forces in each battle and the dates given are also not

correct. The Sikh tradition also believes that (Guru) Tegh Bahadur took part in the Kartarpur battle: he showed such valorous feats in the battle that Guru Hargobind changed his name from earlier 'Tegh Mall' to 'Tegh Bahadur'. These battles took place at Amritsar (10), Sri Hargobindpur (14), Mahiraj (19) and Kartarpur (2). The poet also refers to the death of Bibi Kaulan including the legend of her previous birth (12), demise of Baba Buddha (16), Bhai Gurdas (18) and Mata Damodari ((19). The *Gurbilas* concludes with the chapter dealing with the passing away of the Guru and anointment of Guru Har Rai as his successor (21).

Although Guru Hargobind spent most of his time in Amritsar and Kiratpur, he took out several long odysseys to spread the divine Word. The book under discussion has given a good amount of information about these travels, but the poet is not very particular about their chronology. On way to Gwalior, the Guru visited Majnu ka Tilla (Delhi) and after release from there, he visited Lahore where he took care of the *baoli* which had earlier been got dug by Guru Ram Das and also identified the place where Guru Arjan was martyred. He also went on to Nanak Mata, a place earlier sanctified by Guru Nanak and which was then taken over by the yogis: the Guru ousted these yogis and entrusted Baba Almast with the responsibility of looking after the place (9). The Guru also visited various places in Kashmir though the poet does not mention any specific places: according to the poet, the Guru had gone there because of his love for Mata Bhag Bhari (9). The Malwa region in the Punjab had remained neglected until then but Guru Hargobind spent time there spreading his message: he also laid the foundation of the village of Bhai Rupa, so named after Bhai Roop Chand (19). The Guru also founded another town called Hargobindpur. The Guru spent the last about ten years of his life at Kiratpur he founded in the Sivalik foothills. The poet gives Chet *sudi* Panchmi 1695



Bikrami/AD 1638 the date of the Guru's passing away which is not correct. He is also incorrect in his statement that Guru Hargobind got the *dhunis* added at the head of nine of the *Vars* included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Notwithstanding some lapses as regards dates or chronology of events, the book is a very significant source on the life of Guru Hargobind: in fact, it provides very useful information about some of the more important Sikhs of the Guru's time such as Baba Buddha, Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Bidhi Chand and others. Each episode included herein is complete in itself and also fits in well as a part of the main plot. Each episode serves to highlight the spiritual persona of Guru Hargobind who happens to be the main protagonist of the book. It is the first source to invent the story of Baba Mohan *Pothis* serving as the main source for the compilation of the Adi Granth. It also says that Guru Arjan himself composed the *Ragmala* and that Bhai Banno was given the first codex to get it bound from Lahore. To the poet, the Guru is the very image of Akalpurakh who has come into this world for the amelioration of humankind. He uses for the Guru epithets like *sukhsagar* (ocean of happiness), *antarjami* (omniscient), *dayasindh* (ocean of compassion), *karuna nidhan* (treasure of pity), *garib niwaz* (savior of the poor), *kirpasindh* (ocean of grace), *dina nath* (lord of the hapless) and, to him, there is a divine purpose behind every deed of the Guru. The poet has used the device of prophesying, references to previous existences of various characters and introduction in the story of various gods/goddesses and other Puranic characters to highlight the spiritual, divine persona of the Guru.

Composed mostly in Chaupai and Dohira, the *Gurbilas* uses more than thirty meters in all. The language used is Punjabi with a mixture of Braj, though some words of Sanskrit and Persian are also found scattered here and there. Though there are references to some Puranic myths, the primary objective

of the author was to write with complete devotion a eulogistic account of the life of Guru Hargobind. Notwithstanding some lapses, the work provides a good amount of information on contemporary social life and is thus of great historical and sociological importance.

### III

The other two early sources of information in this *genre* are Kuir Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* and Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* (1797). Chronologically, Kuir Singh's *Gurbilas* is the first though there have been differences among scholars in regard to the exact date of its composition. It is the first work which attempts to have a comprehensive look at the personality of Guru Gobind Singh: it takes all the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith as spiritually one though different in body and touches upon almost all events from the Guru's life and also tries to highlight the mission and objective of his life. The account is in verse "of various forms including *aril, salok, savaiya, sirkhandi, soratha, kabit, chaupai, jbulana, tribhangi, dohira, bhujang, rasaval, gia* and *naraj*. Out of a total of 2938 *chhands*, 2901 are written in Braj and the remaining 37 in Punjabi."<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the work has also a few specimens of prose interspersed in the text which are linguistically very significant. Unlike the earlier two works – the Guru's autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* and Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* – the *Gurbilas* under review portrays for the first time the entire life of the Guru.

We do not have much biographical information available about the author: neither this book nor any other source is of much help in this regard. The poet makes a brief reference in the colophon of the book about his background and says:

*Kuir singh kalal ati joi*  
*Rahai kamboan angan soi*  
*Nam matri singh ho bhai*

*Purab kbande pabul na lai.*

*Jab naukari te bhae bairagi*

*Sunat sakbian man anuragi*

*Mani singh e bachan alae*

*Suno kbalsa ji chit lae.*

Kuir Singh Kalal is the author;

In the colony of Kambos he lives.

He is a Sikh only in name, my Brother:

Khalsa initiation he received not earlier.

When from his job he retired,

Listening to the stories of Gurus,

his mind to the Gurus got attached.

The contents were by (Bhai) Mani Singh related;

O Khalsaji! With heart and soul listen to these words.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, we can infer from the above reference that the author, Kuir Singh, was a Kalal by sub-caste and lived in Mohalla Kamboan, but the poet remains silent about the city or town he lived in. Some scholars presume that the city could possibly be Lahore because he was for a while in the employ of the Subedar of Lahore. He was born in a Sikh family but he was Sikh only by name because he had not by then received the Khalsa initiation: we can also imply from this admission by the poet that he was otherwise deeply attached to the Guru. After he retired from his job, he spent most of his life in the company of Bhai Mani Singh from whom he listened to the *sakhis* or stories concerning the Guru's life. It can also be presumed that he might have received Khalsa initiation some time after coming in contact with Bhai Mani Singh. The poet admits at several places that his narrative is based on what he listened from Bhai Mani Singh, and the name of Bhai Mani Singh and references to him occur at several places in the work. This made some scholars, including Ratan Singh Bhangoo and Bawa Sumer Singh of Patna, attribute the authorship of the *Gurbilas* to Bhai Mani Singh. As for the use of 'Sri Kant Hari'

(Chapter III, p. 30), ‘Bisan Hari’<sup>13</sup> and ‘Visan Hari’<sup>14</sup> as pen-names by the poet, it is possible that Bisan/Visan Singh might be the poet’s name before he got it changed to Kuir Singh after receiving Khalsa initiation: it was a popular practice among the Sikhs to change the name after receiving the Khalsa initiation. It is also possible that his earlier name might be Kuir Singh and he might have changed his name to Bisan/Visan Singh after receiving Khalsa initiation: the poet might have used ‘sri kant hari’, ‘bisan hari’, ‘visan hari’ etc. as his pseudonyms in this work. It was quite common among medieval Hindi poets to use the words synonymous with their names as their pen-names.

As for the date of its compilation, although the author has mentioned the date in the colophon but still scholars differ as regards the interpretation of the words of the colophon. In the light of this colophon, it is difficult to agree with scholars, like Surjit Hans, who put it posterior to Sukha Singh’s *Gurbilas* but this thesis has been convincingly rejected.<sup>15</sup> Shamsheer Singh Ashok and Fauja Singh tend to accept 1808 Bikrami/AD 1751 as the date of starting work on the *Gurbilas* and 1811 Bikrami/AD 1754 the date of its completion.<sup>16</sup> Bhai Vir Singh calculates the date as 1819 Bikrami/AD 1762. However, Madanjit Kaur takes the middle path as she says that we can “safely place the work between AD 1751 and AD 1762”.<sup>17</sup> The year AD 1751 as the day of its composition has been generally accepted by scholars. Although the author makes explicit statements at more than one place saying that his work represents only what he heard from the discourses delivered by Bhai Mani Singh, but he obviously studied, analyzed and made use of various volumes relating to the Guru’s life and other tertiary literature to make his work authentic and comprehensive.<sup>18</sup>

Divided into twenty-one cantos or chapters, the *Gurbilas* begins with an invocation to the Real One who is the creator of the entire manifest phenomena and then briefly refers to

Guru Tegh Bahadur leaving on a preaching odyssey in the eastern parts of India (Ch. 1). As Guru Tegh Bahadur accompanied Raja Ram Singh on his Assam campaign leaving his family at Patna, Mata Gujari gave birth to a son (1723 Bikrami/AD 1666), then named Gobind Rai. The poet refers to various incidents relating to his childhood there including the deep love for him of the local congregation (Ch. 2). After receiving a message from Guru Tegh Bahadur, the family leaves for Anandpur and travelled through towns like Kashi (Varanasi), Ayodhya, Nanak Mata, Haridwar and Lakhnaur (Ch. 3). The family receives warm welcome on arrival in Anandpur. Soon thereafter a group of Kashmiri Pandits calls on Guru Tegh Bahadur to share their woes: these Pandits were being forcibly converted en masse to Islam by the Mughal satrap in Kashmir. The Guru takes upon himself the responsibility of meeting the emperor in this behalf and gets arrested: the poet describes the martyrdom of the Guru as having happened in 1733 Bikrami/AD 1676 (Ch. 4).<sup>19</sup>

The poet then refers to the succession of Guru Gobind Singh and also mentions that the Sodhis of Kartarpur tried to create some hurdles. Raja Bhim Chand of Kahiloor calls on the Guru but feels humiliated when the Guru declines to lend him the Airawat elephant which a devotee had given in offering to the Guru. The Guru leaves Anandpur to avoid any clash and founds a new habitation, called Paonta Sahib, on the bank of Yamuna outside the Kahiloor principality (5). The town of Anandpur was situated in the hill state of Kahiloor and Bhim Chand was throughout apprehensive of the growing strength and popularity of the Guru. The Guru's ideology of ethnic equality of all was not to the liking of all the caste-conscious Rajput hill chiefs. They apprehended it as a threat to their social and political status. They made several alliances to either subdue or evict the Guru from amidst them and were ever on the look-out of an excuse to attack him. Of the several

skirmishes forced on the Guru, the first important battle was against the combined forces of these hill chiefs which took place at Bhangani: Kuir Singh holds Bhim Chand primarily responsible for causing this conflict though chiefs of several hill states took part in it. The poet portrays a very realistic picture of the battle scenes as if he were an eye-witness to the event. Describing one such scene, the poet says that Kirpal Udasi hit Hayat Khan on the head with a heavy club and broke his skull; as soon as the club hit his head, marrow came out of his head just as butter came out when Krishna broke the butter-filled pitcher.<sup>20</sup> The Sikhs came out victorious and they felt so highly inspired that started talking of “looting Srinagar and Jammu,” says the poet. The author gives no date of the battle which actually took place on 18 September 1688 (6).

After the battle of Bhangani, Guru Gobind Singh returned to Anandpur. Soon thereafter as the Mughal forces, under the command of Alif Khan, reached the doors of hill chiefs for the collection of tribute money they had fallen in arrears, the hill chiefs came begging for the Guru's help: according to Kuir Singh, Bhim Chand sought forgiveness of the Guru who put aside all the wrongs the hill chiefs had earlier done to him and agreed to help them in the ensuing battle which took place at Nadaun. This has been “an obvious and living evidence of the Guru's generous heart with animosity towards none”, as says Ganda Singh.<sup>21</sup> Kuir Singh gives no date of the battle which actually took place on 20 March 1691, and errs in describing the role of Bhim Chand Katoch of Kangra.<sup>22</sup> Although the Mughal forces were routed in this battle as Alif Khan fled from the field in the darkness of the night and his brother was killed, but the Rajput chiefs entered into an agreement with the Mughals soon thereafter. Thus, the Guru lost all trust in the hill chiefs and returned to Anandpur. It is also said that the Sikh forces looted Alsun village on their way back: the reason for this perhaps was the existence of a Mughal camp here (7).

The following chapter is primarily addressed to the goddess worship and punishment meted out to the corrupt Masands (8).

Another skirmish popularly known as the Husaini battle took place on 20 February 1696 but Kuir Singh does not give any date of this battle but wrongly calls it a post-Khalsa creation event (12). The Mughal forces came under the command of Dilawar Khan's son, Rustom Khan, but he had to return without any success. Dilawar Khan then sent Husain Khan to collect the tribute and also subdue the Guru. Husain Khan's army caused much havoc in the Doon valley. Kuir Singh uses a beautiful metaphor (Ch. 12) to convey how Husain Khan failed to reach even close to Anandpur:

Badar charayo gur ke upar  
Barasayo giri rajan ke khopar  
Uha mirat bhayo sab bhai  
Gur anand so rah uhai  
*The cloud had come up on the Guru*  
*It burst on heads of the hill (Guler) chief*  
*He got killed there, my brother*  
*And the Guru lived blissfully in Anandpur.*<sup>23</sup>

Husain Khan was killed in a fight against the chief of Guler. Anandpur remained safe as the enemy could not reach even close to it.

With the appointment in 1694 of Prince Mu'azzam (later Emperor Bahadur Shah) as viceroy of the north-western region including the Punjab, pressure from the Mughal government receded a bit because the Prince was of somewhat liberal leanings. According to Kuir Singh, when Prince Mu'azzam arrived in Sirhand, it caused immense fear among the hill chiefs who, he says, 'hid themselves in the mountains'. But the Prince was advised by some of his confidants not to be in conflict with the Guru rather he must keep cordial relations with him, says Kuir Singh (13). The reason given for this is that, one, he

may not be able to vanquish the Guru and, two, the invincible Guru could be of great help to him in case a war for succession takes place in future. Following this advice, the Prince sent some gifts to the Guru and himself went on to Lahore. When the Emperor learnt of the Prince's failure to act against either the Guru or the hill chiefs, he sent four of his officials among whom Mirza Beg was the prominent name. Mirza Beg caused a lot of death and destruction, decimated many homes and humiliated common masses in a variety of ways. Since this did not affect the Guru or the Sikhs directly and that only those who had left the Guru fearing the arrival of the Prince got killed, the entire incident is referred to rather briefly. The poet has not given any date, place or other details of any skirmish.

Kuir Singh is wrong in discussing the battles of Nadaun, Husaini battle and the campaign of Prince Mu'azzam as having taken place after the creation of Khalsa: he also errs in regard to the date on which the Guru inaugurated the Khalsa: he says it was 1746 Bikrami/AD 1689 whereas it was the Baisakhi of AD 1699. However, Kuir Singh's is the first historical document that provides many details of the proceedings of that day though some of his information does not stand the scrutiny of history (Ch. 9). He says that the Guru invoked goddess Durga on the bank of 'the Ganga' soon after the battle of Nadaun and that the goddess appeared prior to the creation of the Khalsa. One, goddess worship is not in keeping with the ideology of the Gurus who preached belief in and meditation on only the Real One. Two, none of the contemporary or near-contemporary writers make even an oblique reference to *devi* worship by the Guru before (or at any other time for that matter) the creation of the Khalsa. The issue appeared for the first time in the *Mahima Prakash*, in prose (AD 1741): the author of this work<sup>24</sup> only says that the Guru invited Brahmins from Kashi, got a *hom* performed by them and then created the Khalsa. Kuir Singh seems to have taken



the clue from this reference to invent the story. Thereafter several other chronicles of the tradition reiterated the story with varying differences with regard to the place, duration of worship, the appearance of the goddess and the reaction of the Guru and the Sikhs, the gift sought from or given by the goddess, etc.

Kuir Singh also tries to rationalize in a dramatic manner the Guru's repeated calls for the 'head of a Sikh' by inventing the story of slaying of five he-goats. He says that the Guru had "got four additional tents erected and then asked for he-goats to be brought each one of which he tied in these tents at night without the knowledge of anyone."<sup>25</sup> In the morning when a huge assembly of Sikhs from far and near had assembled, the Guru came on the stage and asked the assembled devotees if "there was a perfect Sikh among them who could offer his head to the Guru." He repeated the call three times to the assembly when a Sikh came forward. The Guru took him to a tent, slaughtered the he-goat tied there and came back alone to the stage with blood-dripping sword in hand. He repeated the same call four more times. Each time, a Sikh would come forward and the Guru would take him into a tent, slaughter a he-goat and come back. The entire assembly was in shock unable to comprehend the ways of the Guru. Then, the Guru brought to the stage the five Sikhs thus selected. These five are known in the Sikh tradition as the five Beloved Ones. The poet has given quite useful information about the background of each of these five Sikhs. However, the poet presents them as incarnations of ancient Indian holy men.

To prepare *amrit*, the Guru then sent for pure water of the river and put it in an iron cauldron. According to Kuir Singh, as the Guru began to recite the hymns, Pandit Kirpa Ram ran to the Mataji and narrated to her everything that he had seen. The poet merely calls her Mataji but does not identify her by name, but the tradition believes it was Mata Jitoji, the

wife of Guru Gobind Singh, who came out and put some puffed sugar candies into the *amrit* being prepared by the Guru who was also reciting certain hymns. He does not specify the hymns but says that the gesture of Mata Jitoji was important because it added motherly love and affection to the *amrit* being prepared which was otherwise aimed at infusing fearlessness and valour in the Sikhs. The *amrit* thus prepared was given to the Five Beloved Ones who became the nucleus of the Khalsa Panth. The poet also refers to some do's and don'ts the Guru prescribed to these Sikhs. They were asked to maintain unshorn hair, wear long drawers and sword and keep a comb to keep the hair tidy. Interestingly, steel bracelet or *kara* which is today mandatory for every initiated Khalsa does not figure among these. Most of the earlier sources ask the Khalsa to wear five weapons along with *kes*, *kangha* and *kachchh*. Although these five weapons are nowhere named yet it seems with the passage of time only two, i.e. sword and steel bracelet came to be accepted as mandatory for each member of the Khalsa Brotherhood. *Kara*, like shield, might also have been taken as a weapon, a defensive weapon. Besides, the Guru also exhorts them to listen to the divine Word in congregation and ever remember the Name Divine. They are also advised to shun moral evils like 'gambling, infidelity, attachment and avarice'. They must also shun the company of the five – those with shaven hair, who indulge in female infanticide, Minas, Masands and the Turks.<sup>26</sup>

Referring to the social and political implications of this event, the poet says that through Khalsa creation the Guru put an end to the earlier prevalent caste hierarchy and gathered together the four *varnas* and made them partake of food together at one place. According to the poet, the Rajput hill chiefs did not receive the initiation because 'they were proud of their caste and they could not convince themselves to sit and eat with the so-called lower caste people'.<sup>27</sup> To the arrogant

Rajput chiefs the Guru's proclamation that he has bestowed sovereignty on the Khalsa seemed rather strange: how could sparrows overpower a hawk and how could goats subdue a lion, they averred. The poet, in a *swaiyya*, sums up the feelings of these chiefs in these words: "Being Rajput, if we share food with the Jats and sit together with the barbers, it will be shameful for us in this world and we shall not find a place in the next world". In response to their belief that all were 'sparrows' before Aurangzib, the Guru, as says the poet, told them that he was 'pleased with these 'sparrows' and that he would make sure that they kill the 'hawk' and attain 'sovereignty'.

The objective for which the Khalsa - an organized and strong entity with a distinct identity and way of life - was created is made clear by the Guru in his *Bachitra Natak*.<sup>28</sup> He reiterates the objective of his life in this world as 'spread of righteousness and annihilation of the wicked', 'to help the saintly and wipe out the knave'. Sikhism being a revelatory religion, Guru Nanak initiated the Sikh movement under the divine command to spread the divine message. The birth of Guru Gobind Singh in this mundane world is also part of the divine mission. The Absolute One had earlier also sent several preceptors into this world with a specific job of uniting people to Lord God assigned to them, but instead they attracted people unto themselves.<sup>29</sup> It was also in this context that the brotherhood the Guru created was named Khalsa or the ones who worshipped none but God alone and who were related direct with Guru and God. Obviously, the vision was no doubt inherent in the Sikh movement as initiated by Guru Nanak and nurtured by his successors, and this movement reached its culmination and this vision became concretized in the creation of the Khalsa. Total identification with the suffering humanity was the ideal of the Gurus, and they put this ideal into practice as well. To fight against injustice and oppression became a sort of myth in the Sikh psyche. The following Sikh struggle including the

battles the Guru had to face stand testimony to the realization of this objective.

Kuir Singh mixes up chronological order of the skirmishes and battles which took place post-Khalsa creation. He does refer to the Anandpur battle but makes no reference to the Nirmohgarh, Basali and Kalmot skirmishes. The successive victories of the Guru became a cause of deep concern for these hill chiefs who went to the Mughal emperor explaining their 'helplessness' against the Guru and sought his help. The emperor accedes to their request and sends a '10-lakh-strong army' to help them against the Guru. The combined forces of all hill chiefs supported by the Mughal forces from Lahore and Sirhand besieged Anandpur. The fight between Bhai Bachittar Singh and the intoxicated elephant sent by the besieging forces to break open the door of the fort where the Guru was camping is described (11): reference here to Masand Duni Chand who tries to run away to save his life but dies of snake bite is indicative of the corruption that had set in among the Masands. The poet talks of some correspondence between the Guru and Mughals and hill chiefs and also refers to safe passage promised by the besieging forces which finally leads to the evacuation of Anandpur (14-15).

Kuir Singh does not give any details of the Guru's travel from Anandpur to Chamkaur except that a skirmish took place on the way at Shahi Tibbi where a small group of Sikhs countered the chasing enemy forces (16). In the battle of Chamkaur two elder sons of the Guru and all the prominent Sikh leaders receive martyrdom. The number of enemy forces here is said to be ten lakh whereas there were only forty Sikhs with the Guru. Finding the circumstances highly unfavourable, five surviving Sikhs together ask the Guru to slip through the cordon of enemy forces in the darkness of night. No date of the battle is given though it is described in a very vivid manner. The poet is rather brief describing the Guru's journey from

Chamkaur to Muktsar. He refers to the Guru's brief stay at Kotkapura where the local chief, Kapura, is said to have earned the Guru's displeasure when he being afraid of the Mughals declined to help the Guru. Learning of the approaching Mughal forces the Guru moved on to Khidrana (Muktsar) where another battle took place. The poet does not give any information about the forty Sikhs who had 'disowned' the Guru at Anandpur but, realizing their mistake, had reached Muktsar in time to take part in this battle: the Guru forgave them and these forty are known in the Sikh tradition as Chali Mukte or the forty Liberated Ones. It was also during his journey through the Malwa region that the Guru sent a letter, known in Sikh tradition as *Zafarnamah*, to emperor Aurangzeb (Ch. 16): here the poet errs in saying that the emperor received the letter, his red face turned pale as he read it, realization of sins overtook him and he breathed his last. The poet also refers to Zaib ul-Nisa, the emperor's daughter, having met the Guru's messenger but this is also incorrect because she had died in AD 1703 (Ch. 17).

During his journey from Muktsar to Talwandi Sabo, the Guru visited various villages and towns including Bathinda preaching the divine Word and consolidating the Sikh power. During his stay at Talwandi also the Guru continued with his preaching visiting various places in the neighbourhood. The poet makes no mention of the Guru getting a new revised version of the Adi Granth written though he refers to the Guru blessing the place as 'Guru ki Kashi' (Canto 18). On way to the South, as the Guru passes through the Rajasthan region Bhai Daya Singh meets the Guru returning after meeting Aurangzib. The poet also refers to a marriage of the Guru with a local girl, but this is historically incorrect (18). The Guru receives the news of Aurangzeb's death while at Baghaur: Kuir Singh also refers to a skirmish with the local chief which took place here and lasted two days. It seems the Guru's travel

to the South was with the objective of meeting Aurangzib and now since the emperor had died, there was no need to go towards South. The Guru now turns towards Delhi to meet and talk to the new emperor. Prince Mu'azzam (later Bahadur Shah) sought the Guru's help in the battle of succession in which Mu'azzam became the new king (18). Emperor Bahadur Shah and the Guru had a meeting at Agra.

Since the Emperor had to rush to the South to quell the rebellion raised by his younger brother, the Guru also decided to travel the same direction. From Agra, the Guru traveled to Jaipur passing through Bharatpur and Dausa. Kuir Singh also refers to the Guru's brief visit to Patna via Varanasi, but it seems only the poet's imagination. The poet gives names of various places through which the Guru passed and also briefly describes a few skirmishes which took place on the way, but he does not give the period of halt at any place, the strength of the Guru's camp and other problems they might have faced on the way. The Pathan who stabbed the Guru at Nanded is said to be a descendent of Paine Khan. He also refers to the Emperor sending a British surgeon to stitch the Guru's wound. Before passing away, the Guru passes on the pontifical office to the *granth* and the *panth*: the ceremonies surrounding anointment of the Granth are described in detail (21).

The *Gurbilas* is important as the first source which portrays the complete life-story of Guru Gobind Singh. It provides very useful information about the Guru's early life, the proceedings of the day when the Khalsa was created and passing over the office of Guru to the *granth* or Guru Granth Sahib. Another notable feature of the work is the poet's reference to the martyrdom in 1734 of Bhai Mani Singh along with several other Sikhs: as the poet names some of these Sikhs, it can be presumed that he might have been an eye witness to the entire episode. Of course, the work has certain flaws some which we have discussed in the preceding pages.

## IV

The *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* by Bhai Sukha Singh, another early life-account of Guru Gobind Singh, is also a versified and detailed account of the Guru's life giving rare insights into the prevailing socio-political conditions as well as into the moral issues involved in the armed resistance of the Guru. We do not have any detailed authentic information about the biography of the poet: some internal evidences suggest that he lost his parents when he was a small child and his elder brother brought him up. As both the brothers went to pay obeisance at the Sikh shrines in the eastern region of India, his elder brother also passed away when they were visiting Nanak Mata. Following the advice of the elder brother to dedicate himself to the Guru, he came to Patna where he spent about eleven months. Thereafter he returned to Anandpur where he composed this *Gurbilas*. According to Bhai Kahn Singh, *Mahan Kosh*, Bhai Sukha Singh was born at Anandpur in 1825 Bikrami/AD 1768 and passed away in 1895 Bikrami/AD 1838. He is also said to have been a *giani* at Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur. However, Kahn Singh does not reveal the source of this information. There is no information available on this issue even in the birth and death registers of the Anandpur Municipal Committee.<sup>30</sup> Some scholars<sup>31</sup> suggest that he was under the influence of Udasi tradition but it does not seem correct because the poet makes no references either to Udasi *akharas* or Udasi doctrines rather he exhorts the Khalsa to die fighting for the sake of its rights.<sup>32</sup> About the time of composition of this work, the *Gurbilas* was completed in 1854 Bikrami/AD 1797 as an internal reference gives the following information:

*sammt sabas puran kabat sab*  
*aradh sabas phun char ganat sab*  
*kuar vadi pancham ravivara*  
*gurbilas kiono avtara*

This date has been unanimously accepted though some scholars deem it the year of beginning of the writing of this work but their argument is not convincing.

The poet worked on the *Gurbilas* when the memory of the cruel death given to Banda Singh Bahadur was still sharp in the minds of the elder generation. The Sikhs had struggled against three different forces – Mughals, Pathans and the Marathas. They had been decreed outlaw and were ordered to be killed wherever found. They had fought for their survival and sought to gain some sort of political authority so that they could save their identity and live with dignity. Banda Singh had tried to establish a Sikh sovereign state but his success was short-lived. Now Sukha Singh was working on this book when the Sikhs were in political ascendancy: the entire Punjab and the surrounding areas were divided into Mislis ruled by various Sikh chiefs. Ranjit Singh had the vision and power to consolidate the Sikh strength divided into small principalities and he was on way to uniting entire Punjab into a single political unit. The poet is not as interested in describing political conditions as he is in highlighting the merits of the Sikh rule. According to the poet, in the Sikh rule the weak and the hapless had no fear of the powerful and in fact the Sikh rule aimed at strengthening the weak. He makes scattered references to various religious practices of the Hindus and the Sikhs. The latter were true to the *rahit* prescribed by the Gurus; celebrated the days connected with the Gurus by singing *bani*; Khalsa initiation was given much importance as was the Akal Takht; *langar* was one of the central institutions and simple fare was served there; and protection to the saintly and annihilation of the demonic was included among the primary obligations of the Khalsa.

Sukha Singh has divided his *Gurbilas* into thirty-one chapters and begins with Guru Harkrishan's visit to Dehi and Guru Tegh Bahadur's anointment as Guru and the founding



of the town of Anandpur (Chapter I). Leaving his mother behind at Anandpur, Guru Tegh Bahadur goes on a preaching odyssey visiting Kurukshetra, Haridwar, Nanak Mata, Prayag, Kashi. After reaching Patna, the Guru left his family there and went, on a request of 'Raja Maan Singh'<sup>33</sup> to Assam whereto he was deputed by Emperor Aurangzib on a military campaign (Ch 2). According to the poet, (Guru) Gobind Singh was born in 1723 Bikrami (3/45) and the congratulatory message was received by Guru Tegh Bahadur when he was at Dhaka in Bengal (3/55-56). The Guru received training in horse-riding and use of weapons quite early in age. On receiving a message from Guru Tegh Bahadur, the family left Patna for Punjab. They travelled via Kashi, Ayudhya, Nanak Mata, Haridwar, Lakhnaur and Kiratpur to reach Makhawal (Anandpur): the poet sings of the beauty of the place and also refers to the large number of devotees thronging to the place on hearing the news of the Guru's arrival (4).

The next chapter (5) deals primarily with the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and succession passing on to Guru Gobind Singh. According to the poet, a group of Kashmiri Pandit came to the Guru and related their the tale of woe how the Mughal satrap there would daily take off *janeus* equal to the weight of one-and-a-quarter maund (equaling a little more than forty kilograms) of the Hindus and convert them into Islam (5/10-11). The child Gobind comes to the Guru, finds him in a reflective mood and learning of the cause innocently asks his father-Guru 'there can be none worthier than you to 'lighten the burden of the earth' (5/14-16). The poet makes a factual error here in saying that the Guru was arrested in Delhi and that the Guru let a Sikh behead him (5/110) although the Guru was executed under imperial orders of the Emperor. The date of Guru Gobind Singh's anointment (Bikrami 1733/AD 1676) to the office of Guru is also wrong (5/236-37). He also refers to the Guru's training in different martial arts and to the

preparation of the Sikhs for the struggle ahead. He refers to the objective of the Guru's birth in this world as 'amelioration of the world' (3/46) and 'unburdening of the earth from the burden of sins' (5/289).

The major reason behind the battle of Bhangani is, according to the poet, the hill chiefs' jealousy at the rising popularity of Guru Gobind Singh though the Guru's refusal to lend to Raja Bhim Chand of Kahiloor the elephant, called Prasadi Hathi which the Guru had received as an offering from Assam (5/333-34), had also offended the Raja. The Guru had perceived the Raja's ploy to own that elephant and offered him any other elephant instead (5/337) but the Raja found in it an excuse to conspire with other hill chiefs to attack the Guru to either subdue or oust him from Anandpur. The chief of Nahan, another hill state, invited the Guru to his state and the Guru, to avoid any clash with Bhim Chand and his cohorts, departed from Anandpur and founded the new habitation of Paonta. The battle of Bhangani, which is about 11 kilometre from Paonta, took place on 16 September 1688 but the poet gives 1746 Bikrami/AD 1689 as the year. Several hill chiefs fought against the Guru but were defeated in the end: the valour of Mahant Kirpal Das Udasi finds a special mention. Details of the battle are not much different from Kuir Singh's *Gurbilas*. The details of the battle of Nadaun and the reason for the Guru's support to the hill chiefs are the same as given by Kuir Singh.

Sukha Singh describes worship of goddess in great detail (see chapters 8-10): in the tenth chapter the goddess, Kali, is said to appear and gift a sword to the Guru. The Guru, says the poet, invokes goddess Durga for annihilation of the Malechhas (Muslims) - *tumi mund mali/dipai jot jawali/karo pur iccbchha/hano ju malechha* (9/12): this is obviously against the Sikh ideological stance according to which worship of gods and goddesses is declared of no spiritual benefit. Before the

creation of Khalsa, the Guru receives several complaints of corruption and haughtiness against several *masands* and punishes them accordingly (Ch. 11). As for the proceedings of the day of Khalsa creation, Sukha Singh follows Kuir Singh not only on fact but almost in words also. He also refers to the *sis-bhet* episode in the same vein. The *rahit* he refers to is in keeping with the belief of the mainstream Sikhs. The Guru transformed the four *varnas* into one brotherhood (12/131) and made them all sit and dine together (12/133). The Khalsa is exhorted to shun the Minas, Masands, Dhirmalias, Ram Raias and who commit four deadly deviations as well as the Turks (12/106). The Khalsa must submit to the Real One, recite and reflect on the Word as included in the Guru Granth Sahib, fight against the wicked and give comfort to the saintly. Participation in the holy congregation, maintenance of the 5 k's, etc. are also given as part of the Khalsa discipline.

The poet follows Kuir Singh in the description of the Anandpur battle (Ch. 14-15). The governor of Lahore attacks the Guru under instructions of Emperor Aurangzib whom the hill chiefs were complaining against the Guru. The Mughal forces which were supported by the hill chiefs were finally routed. The Emperor now sends Prince Mu'azzam (later Bahadur Shah) to chastise the Guru but he avoids this clash. (Ch 16). The poet also refers to the Guru's love for literature: he himself wrote several works and also patronized many scholars and poets who worked in his *darbar* (Ch 17). Here the poet also refers to some committed Sikhs: for example, a person in charge of Guru's treasure once helps a poor father with five hundred rupees to marry off his daughter (17/57-61); the story of Joga Singh's devotion and commitment is given 17/87-109); and so on. The final battle of Anandpur and the Guru's evacuation of the town are also on the lines of Kuir Singh (Ch 20). However, he says that the Guru agreed to leave Anandpur for Delhi to meet Aurangzib who had been insisting on the

Guru to come and meet him (20/259).

As the Guru and his entourage left Anandpur, the enemy forces attacked them from behind near Kiratpur where a group of Sikhs under the leadership of Bhai Udai Singh blocked their way to enable the Guru and a few others to reach Chamkaur where they took shelter in a local chieftain's *haveli* and turned it into a fortress (21/71). The details of the Chamkaur battle including the martyrdom of elder Sahibzadas, Gangu who had escorted Mata Gujri and the younger Sahibzadas gets them arrested (21/236-58), the Sahibzadas are executed under orders of Wazir Khan of Sirhand (21/260-72) and Mata Gujri breathes her last in captivity (21/276) almost the same as in Kuir Singh's *Gurbilas*. The poet gives the month of Magh in 1761 Bikrami/AD 1704 the date of the battle of Chamkaur (21/14), but modern scholars disagree and hold that it took place on 8 Poh 1762 Bikrami/6 December 1705. The next chapter (22) comprises only 256 couplets but covers many incidents from the Guru's life. Departing from Chamkaur, the Guru passes through Machhiwara where two Masands, Gulaba and Panjaba, meet the Guru but deserted the Guru fearing backlash from the Mughal forces; on reaching Kangar, the Guru dispatches Bhai Daya Singh with the '*Zafarnamah*' to deliver it to Emperor Aurangzeb (22/151-57) in Ahmednagar; it seems the Guru had composed it before reaching Kangar because the poet discusses its contents in the account preceding the Guru's arrival in Kangar (21/115 onwards); the Guru reaches Kotkapura (22/202) and Kapura, the local chief, is too afraid of the Mughals that he does not help the Guru (22/205); and a battle takes place at Khidrana (now Muktsar) with the chasing Mughal forces in which the latter are routed and sent back. Reaching Talwandi Sabo via Bathinda, the Guru halts there for a little more than nine months (23/167); various literary activities of the Guru including blessing the place as 'Guru ki Kashi' and training of Sikhs in various martial activities to

protect themselves are also mentioned.

The details of the Guru's journey from Talwandi Sabo also coincide with Kuir Singh's including the Guru's marriage in Rajputana, meeting with Bhai Daya Singh who was returning after meeting Aurangzeb, battle with the Baghaur chief, etc. (Ch. 24). Similarly, the account of the war of succession (Ch 25); the Guru's meeting with Emperor Bahadur Shah and departure with the emperor on the latter's request (Ch 26); the Guru rendering help to the emperor in subduing various chiefs of Rajasthan; the Guru stays at Burhanpur for a few months; arrival in Nanded from where the emperor returns to Punjab but he himself stays there (Ch. 27-28); the Guru gets injured by two Pathans who came to him as devotees, the emperor sends a surgeon, the wound heals somewhat but burst open as the Guru stretches a strong bow (29); the Guru passes away on 1765 Bikrami/ AD 1708 (30/47) but before that he directs the Sikhs to deem the Granth and Panth as the Guru and also reiterates the *rahit* (30/23-25); some of the Sikhs accompany Banda Singh Bahadur to Punjab (30/80). The last chapter (31) relates to Bala Rai and Rustam Rai who were imprisoned by Marathas and who got their release when they meditated on the Guru as inspired by a Sikh guard.

Sukha Singh relied on the *Bachitra Natak*, *Sri Gur Sobha*, *Mahima Prakash* and Kuir Singh's *Gurbilas* in the preparation of his *Gurbilas*, but he adds to all this information his own insight into the prevailing socio-political conditions and the moral issues involved in the Guru's struggle against oppressive rule of the state. He narrates in an effusive style the grandeur of the Guru's court which the hill chiefs especially Raja Bhim Chand envy. Machinations of the hill chiefs are also described with great insight. The details of the last days of the Guru at Nanded as given here are not found in any earlier work. All the details of goddess worship he provides in his narrative prior to the creation of Khalsa and which seem to be the

product of Brahminical influence have taken this from Kuir Singh. The details of the *sis bhet* episode, pouring of puffed sugar bubbles and antecedents of the Five Beloved Ones are almost akin to Kuir Singh's narrative.

## V

All three above-discussed classical works are important for the students of history who want to study the life and times of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. Notwithstanding some minor flaws relating to the chronology of the events and their dates, they provide highly useful information on the Gurus' lives. Anybody who wants to know details of the Gurus' lives or any scholar who wants to do further work in the field must refer to these works: there is no other option before him.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. S.S. Padam, in his book *Sakhi Mahal Pable Ki*, gives five valid versions: *Sakhi Mahal Pable Ki* 1570-74 by Sihan Uppal; *Janamsakhi Babe Ji Ki* 1597-1600 by Bhai Boola; *Pothi Sach Khand* by Miharban; *Janam Patri Nanak Vedi Ji Ki* or *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala* 1657-59 by Gorakh Das; *Sakhi Babe Nanak Ji Ki* (also known as *Sakhi Adi Aniki*, *Puratan Janamsakhi*, *Vilayatvali Janamsakhi*, *Colebrook Wali Janamsakhi* / *Macauliffe Wali Janamsakhi* 1657-58 by Saido Jatt. In addition to these, there are several other versions also.
2. As quoted in Kulwant Singh, Tr., *Sri Gur Sobha*. Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies, 2014, p.xvii
3. "The Date of Writing of the Gurbilas Patshahi VI" in the *Punjab History Conference Proceedings*. Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972, pp. 62-66
4. Kuir Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (Ed. Shamsher Singh Ashok).

- Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968; rpt. 1999, p. 491
5. *Gurmat Sudhakar*. Patiala: Languages Department, 1970; rpt. 1988, p. 216
  6. *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*, Vol. IV. Oxford, 1909, p. 1]
  7. *Gurbilas*, *op. cit.*, p. 410
  8. Gurbachan Singh Nayyar, “Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin” in *Proceedings of Punjab History Conference*. Patiala: Punjabi University,
  9. Bhai Vir Singh, ed., *Sri Gurpratap Suraj Granth*, Vol I, p. 13
  10. *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. II, p.
  11. Kuir Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok, p. 117
  12. *Ibid.*, p. 276
  13. *Ibid.*, (Chapter V, p. 5)
  14. *Ibid.*, (Chapter VI, page 80)
  15. See Madanjit Kaur, “Koer Singh’s *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*: An Eighteenth Century Sikh Literature” in Jasbir Singh Mann and Kharak Singh, eds., *Recent Researches in Sikhism* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972),
  16. (Ashok, Intro, x)
  17. “Koer Singh’s *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*: An Eighteenth Century Sikh Literature” in Jasbir Singh Mann and Kharak Singh, eds., *Recent Researches in Sikhism* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972), 163
  18. (Ashok, Intro, x)
  19. The exact date of the Guru’s martyrdom is 11 November 1675 (4).
  20. *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, p. 74
  21. Sri Gur Sobha, 16
  22. The poet is incorrect because Katoch had, in fact, accepted the suzerainty of the Mughal government and even sent his younger brother, Kirpal Chand, to help the Mughal commander.
  23. *Gurbilas*, p.154
  24. None of the manuscript copies of the *Mahima Prakash Vartak* bear any name of the author, but it is commonly attributed to Bawa Kirpal (Das) Singh Bhalla. It is dated 1798 Bikrami/AD 1741.
  25. *Gurbilas*, 108

26. For details on the *rabit* as prescribed by the Guru, see the *Gurbilas*, pp. 110-11
27. *Gurbilas*, 118
28. As per the *Bachitra Natak* (VI: 30) the Lord-God sent the Guru into this world with the avowed purpose of spreading *dharmā* and preventing people from doing evil deeds. The Guru accepted the divine command but sought the divine assistance to fulfill his mission as an apostle.
29. The *Bachitra Natak* (VI: 28) contains a long list of earlier apostles who came with the same mission but got lured into attracting people unto themselves instead of uniting them with the Lord.
30. Sukha Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasmi* (Ed. Manvinder Singh). Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2016, pp. 4-6
31. See Surjit Hans, Historical Analysis of Sikh Literature, Ph.D. thesis, Guru Nanak Dev University, p. 411; Gurbachan Singh Nayyar, *Maukhik Itihas*, p. 182]
32. Manvinder Singh, pp.8-9
33. The poet errs in regard to the name: it was not Maan Singh but Raja Ram Singh.





## BANSAVALINAMA DASAN PATSHAHIAN KA

### I

The term '*bansavalinama*' literally means genealogy; another word used to convey this meaning is '*kursinama*' which is of Persian background. As a poetic genre, Kesar Singh Chhibbar uses it for the first time in Sikh literature. Other authors had by that time used *Janamsakhi* and *Gurbilas* genres to write about the lives of the Gurus. The origins of the *Bansavalinama* as literary genre could be traced to the writings in Rajasthani literature written under different nomenclatures such as *Vigat*, *Khayat*, *Bansavalinama*, *Piri*, and so on. These works generally dealt with the life and genealogy of a chief or a king and highlighted the great deeds done by him and his ancestors, and provided information about the concerned chief's birth, parentage, marriage, offspring or his special attainments. These writers generally related their protagonists to the earliest Sun or Moon dynasty with the objective of justifying their right to rule; almost all of them began their works with an invocation followed by references to the creation of the world, and the four eras (*yugas*), etc.

However, Kesar Singh Chhibbar has brought about a major change in the subject-matter. Instead of making some chief or king the main protagonist of his work, he has written the *Bansavalinama* of the Sikh Gurus of the Sikh faith he believed in. It is not about one Guru, rather it deals with all the ten Gurus apart from some of the important Sikhs. He wrote this at a time when the Khalsa Panth had almost completely blocked the Afghan invasions from the north-west and replaced the Mughal authority by occupying a considerable chunk of territory in the Punjab region. Of course, the poet is not happy with these Sikh leaders who were also fighting

amongst themselves and he felt that they had become '*raule de Sikk*' (the Sikhs causing anarchy) instead of being Sikhs of the Guru. That may be one of the reasons why Chhibbar did not take, as has been done in the earlier Rajasthani tradition, any Sikh chief as the protagonist of his work. Following the Sikh belief in the spiritual oneness of all the ten Gurus and following the Tenth Master's *Bachitra Natak*, he has traced the dynasties of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh to a single source, i.e. the two sons of Ramchandra, the son of King Dasarath. In this way, he relates all the Gurus to the Sun dynasty (Suryavanshi), and thereby provides justification for the Sikh rule.

The author of the *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshabian Ka*, which we intend to discuss in the following pages, is Kesar Singh Chhibbar, who throws many hints about his elders being loyal and committed Sikhs. He is from the Brahmin background and we find this obvious bias in favour of the Brahmins expressed quite unabashedly throughout the work. He traces his dynasty to one Gautam Chhibbar and counts Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Sati Das, who courted martyrdom in Delhi along with Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675, among his ancestors. His grandfather, Dharam Chand, was in charge of the treasury of Guru Gobind Singh, and his great-grandfather, Dargah Mall, also served as *diman* to Guru Hargobind and his two successors. He was considered such a reliable disciple that Guru Har Rai is said to have sent him along with Baba Ram Rai to represent him before the Emperor and it was he who wrote to the Guru about the distortion of the scriptural verse made by Ram Rai in the emperor's court. Kesar Singh's father, Gurbakhsh Singh, also served under Guru Gobind Singh. We do not have any information about the exact date of Kesar Singh's birth or death except that he worked for a long period of seventy years on this work (Ch. XIV.264). Some verses in the *Bansavalinama* say that Kesar Singh resided in Jammu when he started work

on it<sup>1</sup> though it seems to have been written at different intervals of time. There are several other works also which are attributed to his authorship, but opinion differs on the issue.

Three manuscript copies of the *Bansavalinama* were available – in the Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar (which got destroyed during the Operation Bluestar in 1984), Khalsa College, Amritsar, and in the personal collection of Professor Pritam Singh which is now available at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. The first printed version of it became available in 1972 when Ratan Singh Jaggi edited and published it in the special number of *Parakh*, a research journal of Panjab University, Chandigarh. Thereafter Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, published another version, edited by Raijasbir Singh containing a very detailed and useful introduction. There is no unanimity about the exact date of the writing of the work. According to the colophon in the work, it was completed in Bikrami 1826/1769 AD. Since the date, Savan *sudi* 14, 1826 Bikrami has been given in the very beginning (I.10), this has led many scholars to believe that it was the date on which Chhibbar started working on the *Bansavalinama*. Raijasbir Singh holds that it might have been completed around 1769-1779 AD prior to the Ranjit Singh period.<sup>2</sup> There are some anachronistic references such as the burning of the city of Jammu in which the scroll containing the accounts of the Tenth Master's treasury got burnt.<sup>3</sup> It is just possible that such anachronisms might be the result of some additions and alternations which, it seems, continued to be made in it till 1784 AD: in any case, the time of its composition cannot be later than the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Chhibbar's *Bansavalinama* is one of the important sources of early Sikh history. By the end of the eighteenth century, we had *Janamsakhi* literature on the life of Guru Nanak and the Gurbilas literature narrating the life of Guru Hargobind and

of Guru Gobind Singh. There was no work prior to it which narrated in one volume the life-stories or especially important events from the lives of all the Gurus, part played by Banda Singh Bahadur and his martyrdom, the persecution that followed and the Sikhs' rise to political ascendancy and formation of *misl*s. Chhibbar's work is the first to fulfill this need. He also provides very useful information about the ladies from the Gurus' families, other close relatives and offspring of the Gurus, Ajit Singh Palit, and others apart from shedding light on the contemporary political, social and religious situation in the Punjab. In fact, it is a rich source of information about the contemporary life. The poet seems to be very familiar with the contents of the Guru Granth Sahib and the *Dasam Granth* and we find quotes from both of these at several places wherever relevant. However, like Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahima Prakash*, it is neither plain history nor is it free from inaccuracies of facts.

## II

Chhibbar divides his *Bansavalinama*, composed in Dohira and Chaupai meters, in fourteen *charans* or sections. The opening section begins with an invocation to the true Guru and all gods and goddesses and goes on to describe various events from the life of Guru Nanak. He describes Guru Nanak's ancestry and the information about Guru Nanak includes his birth, betrothal, marriage, birth of the Guru's sons (Baba Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das), and his demise etc. The dates of the Guru's birth and death are incorrect as is his reference to Bala Sandhu joining the Guru on his preaching odysseys. Chhibbar follows *Bala Janamsakhi* in regard to various details of the Guru's life. As we all know, this *Janamsakhi* has come from the heretical Handalia tradition, and the details given therein cannot be trusted. Chhibbar is also wrong in saying that the Guru received enlightenment from Jind Pir during his disappearance

in the Bein rivulet. However, he makes a very significant statement about the spiritual oneness of all the Gurus as he traces the ancestry of all the Gurus to the Sun dynasty (*Suryavansh*) thereby providing genuine Indian character to the Sikh rule in the late eighteenth century.

The following nine *charans* or chapters are devoted to one each of the following Gurus. The poet believes in the doctrine of incarnation and regards all the Gurus as incarnations of various Hindu deities although the chronology of the Gurus does not match with that of the Hindu deities: Sikhism rejects the idea of divine incarnation but the poet seems unable to altogether give up his Brahmanic Hindu beliefs. Bhai Lahina/Lehna (later Guru Angad) is said to have met Guru Nanak for the first time in Bikrami 1594 and served the Guru for two years, though various other sources such as *Adi Sakbian* say that he spent three years in the service of Guru Nanak. The poet credits Guru Angad for getting the *Bala Janamsakhi* written but this has since been proved wrong by the latest research because, as we said earlier, the work belongs to the Hindalia tradition and is a much later creation. The reference to Baba Sri Chand cursing Guru Angad and then taking the curse back is obviously against the Sikh doctrine. The story of *siropa* given by Guru Nanak to Guru Angad becoming too heavy for Baba Sri Chand and others to pick it up and only Guru Angad could pick it up and wear it needs to be read as symbolic. The heaviness of the *siropa* implies the spiritual and moral burden of the responsibility of Guruship that the future Guru would have to bear. The poet shows Guru Amar Das also as given to idol worship and believer in the Sastras. Since Chhibbar himself is a Brahmin, he attempts to present all the Gurus as following the Hindu rituals and ceremonies. He holds only Chandu and Prithi Chand responsible for Guru Arjan's martyrdom and makes no mention either of Jahangir's fanatic religious policy which made him antagonistic to the Sikh movement in general

and to Guru Arjan in particular as the emperor himself says in his *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* or of the role played by the fanatical Islamic Naqashbandi organization headed by Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi. Similarly, the visit of Baba Ram Rai to Delhi was in response to the Emperor's summons but Chhibbar adds another motive - of complaining against Guru Harkrishan. This date of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom also does not match with the one accepted in the tradition. The poet also makes a wrong statement when he says that only Mati Das and Sati Das, whom he claims as his ancestors, courted martyrdom along with Guru Tegh Bahadur in Delhi, and conveniently omits the name of Bhai Dial Das. He is perhaps the first person to present Guru Gobind Singh as a worshipper of the goddess: the later day writers seem to follow his story. About the creation of the Khalsa, the date of initiation given as well as the proceedings of day are not in keeping with the accepted tradition. The poet says that the Guru asked Bhai Dharam Chand to bring the sugar-bubbles, Chaupa Singh was the first person to receive the Khalsa initiation and 5-7 more persons received the initiation after him. Thus, he completely glosses over the institution of Panj Piaras.<sup>5</sup> The year of the creation of the Khalsa is also given as Bikrami 1754/AD 1697 whereas the tradition accepts it to be AD 1699. The details of the battles the Guru had to fight against the hill chiefs and the Mughal forces also do not tally either with the dates given in *Sri Gur Sobha* or in either of the two *Gurbilases*. He also states that during the Anandpur battle the Turks snatched away the wife of Sahibzada Ajit Singh, but neither this incident nor even the marriage of Ajit Singh finds mention in any other work. The Guru's meeting with Banda Singh Bahadur has been described in detail.

The last four *charans* or sections (XI-XIV) deal with the events of the post-Guru period. The section XI begins with Banda Singh Bahadur whose earlier name he gives as Ram

Das though he writes him as Lachhman Dev as well. He says that Banda Singh burnt down Sadhaura, dug up the graves and cremated the dead bodies (XI:13). Then Banda Singh captured Sirhand where he is said to have meted out harsh punishment to many. His command to the Sikhs has been communicated (XI:30-32) in the following words:

Banda uttered these words to the Sikhs:

....                                      ....                                      ....  
Abandon sins and establish rule of righteousness;  
Take revenge on Guru's behalf, kill the *malechhs*  
and pull down the tombs.

....                                      ....                                      ....  
Only he is the Guru's true Sikh  
who imbibes not love with the *malechh*;  
He should forever wish Panth's prosperity and  
follow the path of righteousness.  
He should avoid sinfulness and live truthfulness, and  
he must never eat a non-vegetarian fare.<sup>6</sup>

Referring to the siege of the Gurdas Nangal fortress, the poet says that the Mughal forces sent by Emperor Farukhsiyar and the local hill people stopped all provisions and the Sikhs inside the fort were left with nothing to eat. He says that Banda Singh had such supernatural powers as he could disappear if he so wished but he willingly surrendered along with other Sikhs:

None could capture him, and  
and he could disappear at will;  
But he got himself arrested  
of his own free will.<sup>7</sup>

"Many Sikhs were taken captive and taken to Delhi: the cavalcade included seven hundred carts full of the heads of the Sikhs. So many Sikhs were killed by the Turks that one could see mounds of the Sikhs' heads on the way from Lahore to Delhi." (XI. 57) All the captured Sikhs were put in jail in

Delhi and five of them were martyred daily in the Chandni Chowk. The poet is of the view that the Sikhs attained political power through persecution. He says that the “Sikhs who gave away their heads but remained firm in their religious commitment have now attained sovereignty and are enjoying political authority”. (XI. 58) Banda Singh remained firm in his faith and refusing to show any miracle he preferred to lay down his life. The poet does not give any details of the way Banda Singh was tortured to death but refers to his resurrection. Bandais also believe that Banda Singh had only feigned death through *pranayama* and he finally settled down in Jammu where he breathed his last in AD 1732.

The following *charan* (Chapter XII) refers to the misconception among some ignorant Sikhs who had started calling Banda Singh as the eleventh Guru. The poet, however, does not believe this. He says that Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devan reached Delhi, along with adopted son Ajit Singh, in Bikrami 1764/AD 1707. He refers to Ajit Singh becoming disobedient to his mother but the poet explains it with a long narrative of how *karmas* done during the past existences affected his present life. He also narrates how Ajit Singh gets a faquir killed, is arrested and dies of fear. It is not clear why he conceals the fact that Ajit Singh was given very severe punishment and was trampled under the feet of an elephant. The Mughal forces also searched Mataji's residence as well while searching for Ajit Singh. The poet also makes another wrong statement in saying that Mata Gujri died at Fatehgarh when she took poison after learning of the martyrdom of younger Sahibzadas. Then the poet briefly refers to the demise of Mata Sundari, Mata Sahib Devan and the Guru's maternal uncle Kirpal. The concluding *charan* (Ch. XIV) describes various battles between the Sikhs and the Mughals and the poet brings in supernatural elements at a couple of places. Here, as at some other places also, he makes statements saying that a true



Sikh is one who takes revenge from the Mughals and does not have any loving relationship with them. The milieu is the Misl period when the Sikhs were on way to acquiring political sovereignty. The reference to the burning of Jammu city is also perhaps indicative of Mahan Singh Sukarchakkia's invasion of Jammu when he had put the city on fire.

The colophon at the end says that the poet completed the writing of the *Bansavalinama* in Bikrami 1826/AD 1769. After this colophon (XIV: 626-646), he gives some personal information about himself. He is a Brahmin by caste and a *nati* or grandson of Bhai Dharam Singh who worked as treasurer with Guru Gobind Singh. Just out of humility, he calls himself without having any merit: 'he appears a great *tiagi* (i.e. completely detached to worldly allurements) to look at but within him burns the fire of avarice', he says. Here he repeats what he had said in the beginning: he took up the writing of the book on a simple question from his son but now he very humbly says that his son 'simply asked him the meaning of a verse and he has written this huge volume'. At the end, he advises the reader to remember the Guru's Word, live the prescribed way of life, practice truthfulness and participate in the holy congregation.

### III

As it is, the *Bansavalinama* is accepted as one of the important sources of Sikh history though several of the dates and the events relating to the Gurus he records herein are different from the ones we find in other sources. His perspective of the contemporary events is also entirely different from other writers of the period. As we said, the poet refers to a simple question from his son and his explanation of a verse from Guru Nanak's *Japu(ji)* as the primary reason behind his writing of this book but towards the end he wonders why he wrote such a big volume to answer a simple question. Obviously, this

could not be the real motive for writing the *Bansavalinama*. To create a context for preparing a work was a common practice those days with many of the writers and poets. The authors of *Gurbilas Patshahi VI*, *Prachin Panth Prakash* and *Sikhan di Bhagatmal* have also created such contexts to say why they took up the work. There is in his *Bansavalinama* some personal information which seems to have been included by the poet simply to highlight his and his ancestors' loyalty and commitment to the Gurus' House. According to the poet, after the demise of Guru Harkrishan in Delhi, it was Bhai Dargah Mall, one of his ancestors (and not Makkhan Shah Lubana as believed in the Sikh tradition), who proclaimed Guru Tegh Bahadur [*Guru ladho re, Guru ladho re*] to the *sangat* which had then felt baffled finding twenty-two claimants to the holy office having set up their seats. Among the Sikhs who were executed along with Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675, he counts only two – Sati Das and Mati Das – who belonged to his family and omits the name of Bhai Dyal Das who also courted martyrdom along with the Guru. Harijas Rai who taught Punjabi to Guru Gobind Singh was also the poet's relation and so were Sahib Chand and Dharam Chand who served the Guru as *diwan* and treasurer, respectively. He also names Chaupa Singh as the first person who received initiation at the time of the creation of Khalsa and Chaupa Singh has also been said to have acted as attendant to the Guru during his childhood days. There are several other references wherein we find the poet referring to the important role played by his ancestors and close relatives in the history of Sikh faith. He has even created certain events and highlighted the role played by his family only to bring fame to the name of his family. What could be the poet's motive in distorting the facts in this way? According to one source, it was the poet's desire to get a *jagir* or some other reward from one or the other Sikh chiefs by highlighting the role his family had played in the Sikh tradition.<sup>8</sup>

Chhibbar worked on this *Bansavalinama* at a time when the Khalsa Panth was leading the Sikh organization towards the establishment of Sikh rule: they had waged a long-drawn struggle against the government of the day which they found highly unjust and oppressive, religiously intolerant and exploitative. After Banda Singh's brief moment of glory, the Khalsa had faced very fierce persecution but now the Panth had already taken strides towards establishing their political sovereignty: in fact, *misl*s had already come into existence and Ranjit Singh was coming up as the most powerful leader to unite the Sikh power into a single entity. The objective of the poet for writing this *Bansavalinama* could also be to provide validity to the Khalsa rule and that is perhaps why he traces the ancestry of the Gurus to the Sun dynasty. It was customary during those days for any ruler to be related to Sun (*Suryavansh*) or Moon (*Chandervansh*) dynasty to provide genuine character to his regime. Chhibbar is of the view that only the Khalsa is worthy of ruling and he tries to provide justification to their rule by tracing the Gurus' ancestry to the Sun dynasty. That could also be one of the reasons why he has not written a *Bansavalinama* of any of the Sikh chiefs but preferred to write one of the Gurus.

Chhibbar has tried to find out a cause for almost every important event he has described, though sometimes these causes seem purely imaginary and misleading. He invents a dialogue between Guru Ram Das and his elder son Prithi Chand in which the latter asks his father-Guru that he being the eldest son deserves to be appointed as successor: Guru Ram Das is said to have replied:

Guru Ram Das just before his demise uttered these words:

He who obeys the elders is real victor;  
Arjan is the youngest I know,  
You are highly intelligent and wise.  
I have not bestowed guruship on him,

His maternal grandfather blessed him so.  
I could not undo what he had done,  
So have I anointed him (the Guru).<sup>9</sup>

Implicit meaning of this could be that Guru Ram Das had otherwise no objection to appointing Prithi Chand his successor. Wittingly or unwittingly, the poet is trying to give the Mina sect some sort of legitimacy in the Sikh society. He traces the antagonism of Baba Prithi Chand towards Guru Arjan to an event in one of their earlier existences: Guru Arjan as one of the Pandava brothers (Arjun) had killed a hare which was now reborn as Prithi Chand and wanted to avenge that killing. He has also invented a similar story of an earlier birth to say that the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur was also the result of a *karma* done during an earlier existence. The poet seems to be unaware of the significance of the martyrdom of the Gurus and thus relates these events to the theory of *karma*. Similarly, the antagonism between Baba Ram Rai against Guru Harikrishan is also explained as a consequence of something that had happened in one of their previous existences.

As for Chhibbar's understanding of history, he takes it as a continuum of the feelings of revenge at the individual level and repaying for the consequences of the good or bad deeds done by one during one's earlier existence(s). That is perhaps why he finds a cause in some earlier existence to every event taking place in the present life. He tries to relate it to the doctrine of *karma* or the result of some miracle or supernatural happening. Most of the time, it is the avenging by the person, who was a victim in the earlier existence, of the wrong done to him. In fact, the poet invents a story, assigns it to some earlier existence and shows it as the cause of present happening in the Gurus' life. We have already referred to the causes the poet assigns to martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur. It seems he lacks understanding of the significance

of certain events especially the martyrdom of the Gurus. But at the same time he explains some other events in a symbolic manner rather beautifully. We have already referred to two such instances, i.e. the *siropa* given by Guru Nanak to Guru Angad being too heavy to be lifted by Baba Sri Chand and others and that it was only Guru Angad who could lift it. Then, the *siropas* dispatched to the congregation of Kabul by Guru Arjan proved to be heavier than the ones sent by Prithi Chand. Also, the poet says that the seizing of the Guru's hawk by the Guru's opponents was the cause behind the Kartarpur battle Guru Hargobind had to fight. No doubt, the hawk is a symbol of sovereignty and the seizing of the hawk implied a challenge to the Guru's temporal authority but the real reason behind the antagonism of the Mughal government of the day towards the Sikhs was much more ideological than mere power politics. This sort of inventing of causes for the present day events in the past gives a Brahminical tilt to this otherwise Sikh oriented text.

The poet is also not very happy at the Sikh state of affairs. He explicitly states that the contemporary Sikh leaders have become materialists after becoming forgetful of the teachings of the Gurus. He expresses his unhappiness as he finds the Sikh leaders striving for the establishment of personal fiefdoms instead of working for the one Khalsa organization. He is also conscious of the change in the attitude of the Khalsa towards the Muslim populace. Since the Muslims were a majority community in many of the areas under the Sikh rule, The Sikh chiefs thought it politically expedient to maintain amicable relationship with them. But Chhibbar is averse to this change and he says at many places in his *Bansavalinama* that a true Sikh of the Guru must not have any relationship with the Muslims. In fact, he makes no distinction between the Mughal government and the common Muslim. Whatever atrocities were committed against the Sikhs were the handiwork

of the government resulting from its exclusivistic religious policy supported by a particular faction among the Muslim clergy. We learn of various Muslims including some religious leaders like Pir Buddhu Shah, Sain Mian Mir and others who had nothing against the Sikhs or Sikh faith. Rather some of them sided with the Sikhs and even fought on their side against the Mughal government of the day. This attitude of the poet could possibly be the result of his inability to forget the cruelties and atrocities perpetrated by the Moghals against the Sikhs. There might have been many more Sikhs who might still have memories of the persecution they or their elders had suffered not long ago.

Chhibbar is the first person to introduce *devi*-worship by Guru Gobind Singh prior to the creation of the Khalsa. In the case of preceding Gurus also, he shows them performing various Brahmanical rituals and ceremonies. He shows the Tenth Master even wearing a *janen*, the sacred Hindu thread. At various places in his *Bansavalinama*, he talks of his belief in the oneness of God but he has also failed to completely give up faith in the Hindu doctrine of divine incarnation and takes the Gurus also as incarnations of various Hindu deities. This is already the influence of the Hindu Brahmin background to which Chhibbar belonged. His bias in favour of the Brahmins is rather obvious and he makes some very explicit statements to this effect at various places in his *Bansavalinama*. About the objective behind the creation of Khalsa, he attributes it to the Guru receiving a boon from the goddess who became manifest during the course of *hom yajna* the Guru had some Brahmins perform on his behalf. Guru Gobind Singh's verses in praise of the Khalsa are also attributed by the poet to have been composed by the Guru in praise of the Brahmin, Devi Ditta (X.190). He also says that the Guru himself could not destroy the evil, and now he created the Khalsa to realize this objective. Maybe the poet was to justify the achievements of the Khalsa

(e.g. subduing the Afghans and pushing them forever beyond the north-west frontier, conquering a certain territory and establishing their political sway there) by calling them as agents of the divinely ordained Guru's wish.

Regarding the creation of the Khalsa, the poet is either completely unaware of the importance of this great event or he is overwhelmed by his desire to put his family ahead of everything else. Apart from inventing the imaginary story of goddess worship, her becoming manifest and blessing the Guru with a boon, he also gives an incorrect date of the creation of the Khalsa. According to him the event took place in Bikrami 1754/AD 1697. As for the reason behind the creation of Khalsa, the Guru is advised "to give a distinct identity to the Gurus' followers as had been done by Muhammad, Gorakh, Ramanand and others and thus create a third *panth*". About Prophet Muhammad, he says that "he turned the Atharav Veda upside down, put it in Arabic from the original Sahaskriti and named it as the Quran:

He put the fourth Veda upside down –

This was named the Atharv Veda;

He initiated the script written from opposite direction

And derived the teachings from the Atharv Veda;

Deriving knowledge from there, he composed the Quran,

Abandoning Sahaskriti, he composed it in Arabic.<sup>10</sup>

Referring to Prophet Muhammad, the poet goes on to say that "he thought ill of cow and snatched Mecca from the Hindus" (Ch. X:314). His narrative of the proceedings of the day is also entirely off the track. He says that "one day the Guru summoned Chaupa Singh to his *darbar* and asked him to bring a bowl of pure, clean water. When he fetched the water, the Guru gave him the *karad* or double-edged sword to stir the water in a bowl and recited the *Japu(ji)* and the *Jap*. Diwan Sahib Chand who stood close by suggested that the product will be tasty if sugar-puffs are added. The Guru asked Dharam

Chand to bring sugar-puffs and put them in the water being stirred in the bowl. He gave it the name of *pabul*.” (X: 319-21) Chhibbar makes no mention of the selection of the five Beloved Ones (*Panj Piaras*) as the tradition believes and, according to him, the Guru initiated Chaupa Singh first of all. (X:322) Thereafter the five or seven Sikhs present there also received the initiation. Thus, Kesar Singh Chhibber not only differs on the date and details of the proceedings of the creation of Khalsa, he makes no mention of the Panj Piaras. May be once again the desire to present members of his family as the most loyal to the Guru dominated the poet’s sense of history because all the persons mentioned present and involved in the ceremony belong to his family.

It appears that the poet’s understanding of contemporary times especially of the problems facing the Khalsa is better than his understanding of the Guru-period. He takes in his *Bansavalinama* the events up to the death of Nawab Kapur Singh in AD 1754. The *Bansavalinama* version of the details of the victories of Banda Singh Bahadur over Sirhand and other territories including the dates of these battles has generally been accepted and followed by later writers on Sikh history. However, his statements about Banda Singh killing Emperor Bahadur Shah and about Banda’s resurrection do not stand the scrutiny of history and logic. There is also a reference to the split in the Khalsa Panth into Bandai Khalsa and Tat Khalsa. He makes no reference to the attempts made at resolving their mutual dispute though he does say that the number of Bandais had dwindled and that the Tat Khalsa dominated at that time. The information about Ajit Singh (the *palit* Sahibzada) including his dispute with Mata Sundari on the issue of his claiming himself to be the next Guru, his haughty temper, the killing of a faquir and his arrest are historically correct, but he says that Ajit Singh died of fear whereas there is empirical evidence which suggests that he



was killed after being trampled under the feet of an elephant. The poet also refers to the Amritsar battle (AD 1736) to which he claims to be an eye-witness: 'the Turks set up a police post in the town and let loose oppression on the Sikhs which included their arrest, hanging, cutting limbs one by one; many *sangats* were robbed, eyes of many were pulled out, women were dishonoured and the *sanctum sanctorum* was also defiled', says the poet. Reference has also been made to the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh and Haqiqat Rai.

A study of the *Bansavalinama* also reveals a good amount of information about the contemporary religious situation, especially the religious policy of the Mughal government of the day. The government followed a policy of religious exclusivism and deemed non-Muslims as inferior citizens. The Hindus were not free to visit their places of pilgrimage: *jaz'ia* was imposed on such pilgrims. The religious opponents were given the options to either show some miracle to prove their higher spiritual status or embrace Islam, and failing to accept either of these two options, they were severely punished: they were stoned to death or thrown into a river tied to a heavy stone or just beheaded. In many such cases, children of such a person were also put to death. Everything was considered fair in the battles fought on communal lines: towns and cities were burnt down; women from the enemy camp were captured and dishonored; and rats were put inside their trousers (XI:13-15). Even the kith and kin of the enemy were not spared: they were captured and tortured if they could be arrested and their houses were demolished (XI: 24-25).

Chhibbar is of the view that it is the primary responsibility of the ruler to mete out justice to his subjects. He is quite critical of the Mughal rulers for their intolerant and oppressive attitude towards the non-Muslims who were not treated as equals by the Muslims. No doubt, Ravan, the legendary king of Sri Lanka, is taken in this part of the world as a symbol of

evil and his effigies are burnt every year to mark his death (symbolically, victory of righteousness over evil) with great religious fervour. The poet here makes a reference to him to highlight that even such an evil ruler had a great sense of justice: implicitly, he proclaims Ravan better than the contemporary Mughal kings. He brings out this message of a king's obligation to provide justice with the help of an imaginary story he invents about the marriage of King Dasrath with Kaushalya. He does not seem much pleased with the Sikh chiefs who, he finds, were engaged in mutual fighting with the objective of establishing their personal fiefdoms. He refers to them as '*maiki sikh raule de*' (the materialist Sikhs causing anarchy). The Mughals lost their political power because of their sinful deeds and the Khalsa attained political sovereignty as a result of the '*didari mukatian de tap*' (the meditation of the perfect Sikhs) (XIV:118) and wants the contemporary Sikh political leadership to learn a lesson from their past if they wanted their sovereignty to last.

The poet envisions an ideal state wherein there will be no thefts or robberies, no natural calamities like droughts or fires, and no discrimination or oppression against women. He expresses his dismay at the prevailing social situation because he finds that 'the Khalsa has forgotten the true Guru after having attained political authority'; 'they do not serve the saintly; they love neither the masses nor the (Guru) Granth Sahib'; 'they deem the sovereignty and their youth as their own and forget the Guru and God who have bestowed these gifts on them' (XIV:120-21). He quotes from the Guru Granth Sahib verses to the effect that a king must be just to all and the poet calls him a 'butcher' if he fails to do justice. Although the poet makes this reference in the context of Sikh rulers exhorting them to follow what has been said in the Guru Granth Sahib (XIV: 350), he also makes it applicable to all the rulers – past and present.

The *Bansavalinama* also documents the contemporary socio-religious life with its numerous customs and traditions and beliefs. Since the work is about the Gurus and since the author is a Sikh with a Brahmin background, most of the information available is about the Sikhs and Brahmins: references to the social and religious beliefs and customs of Muslims are also there because they belonged to the contemporary ruling class and were always in conflict with the Sikhs. In fact, the author relates many Brahminical beliefs and customs to the Gurus as well. The tradition of preparing a *janam patri* at the time of a child's birth and that of wearing *janetu* when he came of a certain age are part of Brahmin's life: the author relates these to the life of Gurus as well. The Sikh Gurus had rejected the caste system, and established of the institutions of *sangat*, *pangat* and Khalsa with a view to put the principle of equality of entire humankind into practice. It seems that the Sikhs in those days had not been able to fully absolve themselves of this evil. We have not, in fact, been able to free ourselves from this evil even till date. It is just possible that the high caste Hindus who converted to Sikhism might not have still shed the notion of caste superiority. Coming from the Hindu Brahmin background, Chhibbar is also caste conscious and he tries to justify the validity of caste especially in the matters of matrimonial alliance and partaking of food. He wants the members of the Khalsa Brotherhood to keep *sikhi da nata* (relationship of faith) and *varan da nata* (relationship of *varna* or caste) distinct from each other. He invents a story wherein a Sikh coming from the so-called lower caste is punished – his hair are shorn, he is made to sit on a donkey and taken around the town and hanged - for having food in the company of a 'so-called high caste' Sikh (XIX: 14-15). As per the *Manusmriti*, a Sudra, i.e. the low-caste person in the Hindu society, has no right to listen to or study religious scriptures. But Ravidas who received spiritual enlightenment and was

given a place of honour in the Guru Granth Sahib by the Gurus was also born in a *chamar* or low-caste family. Chhibbar tries to explain this away with the help of an imaginary story from his earlier birth when he had taken food in alms from the house of a trader who had married a *chubari*, i.e., a low-caste woman. Thus, it seems the high caste Hindus especially the Brahmins who had converted to Sikhism might still have faith in the caste system. We can also surmise that it was perhaps the poet's intention to perpetuate these Brahminical rituals/beliefs as part of the Sikh belief system.

We can also learn about the position of woman in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century society from a study of the *Bansavalinama*. One important fact that comes out from this work is that the position of woman depended on the status of the family she belonged to. Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devan happened to be leaders of the Panth at a particular time. It was Mata Sahib Devan under whose instruction the Panthic headquarters were shifted from Delhi to Amritsar, and she had also appointed persons to look after the organization in Amritsar. The poet does not mention any incident of female infanticide: maybe this evil practice was not prevalent in the Punjab at that time. Generally monogamy was in vogue but a girl had no say in the choice of a groom. The job of finding a prospective match for a girl was that of a Purohit or a barber who used to search and select the groom and the girl would accept him ungrudgingly though incompatibility between the two often resulted in tension and clash. The rich would give a lot in dowry to the daughter in her marriage: in some affluent families, even a maid was also gifted along with other dowry items. Such a maid remained unmarried throughout her life though in some cases she became mother to the child by the husband of her mistress. But the children born of such an alliance did not have any rights to property of the father. Birth of a son was highly prized, and if a wife failed to give birth to a male child, the

husband married another wife and in some cases even the first wife encouraged him to get another wife. A wife will generally remain faithful to her husband though prostitution was also prevalent in society: 'if a saintly person given to God indulged in prostitution, it meant all his spiritual merits will be destroyed but the woman he indulged with would be saved by having had relations with such a saintly person,' says the poet. The women were the worst sufferers during the war-time: they were made to eat at the hands of a *chubra* or an untouchable and then handed over to such untouchables.

Apart from the Brahmins whom he places at a higher pedestal in the social order, another caste-group he writes a lot about, is the Jats. He makes almost no or just passing references to other caste-groups. If the Brahmins are worthy of everybody's respect and killing of a Brahmin, even if unwittingly, a grievous sin which carries punishment in its wake, Chhibbar does not speak highly of the Jats and the low-caste people. He does not like the then leaders, almost all of whom were Jats by caste, fighting amongst themselves to establish their own principalities and says that 'they are Sikhs in appearance and they will kill each other; they will cause suffering to masses, and they will demolish many a town.' He goes on to say:

Who are the '*maiki* Sikhs' -

Those who have become forgetful of the true Guru.

Having attained political sovereignty

They have forgotten the true Guru.

They render not service to the saintly,

Neither have they love for beings nor for the Granth.

They take pride in their sovereignty and youth

But have become forgetful of the Giver.

So deem the scriptural saying as true:

He is a *manmukh* who deems gifts better than the Giver.<sup>11</sup>

These '*maiki sikh raule de*' (the materialistic Sikhs given

to anarchy) who, according to the poet, had become so engrossed in materialistic pursuits that they had distanced themselves from the message of the Guru. Either he was pained at the fratricide among the members of the Khalsa Brotherhood or he was disappointed with the leaders because none of them had extended patronage to him or bestowed any *jagir* on him.

#### IV

Notwithstanding the author's bias in favour of Brahmins and other factual inaccuracies, there is no doubt that the author is a devotee of the Gurus. He writes about various Sikh prescriptions at different places in the work: for example, he wants the Sikhs to 'hold on to Guru Nanak so that they get acquitted hereafter'; and 'no one can attain liberation without the guidance and grace of the Guru' (Ch. XIV:620). 'The Panth of the Guru shall remain armed and the Sikhs will follow the Granth (Guru Granth Sahib); he who abides by the Will of God shall find a place in the Divine Presence. (X: 494). He is well aware of the inner *rahit* as well as the outer appearance of a member of the Khalsa Brotherhood and emphasizes it.

In sum, the *Bansavalinama* is a valid account, in rather incipient Punjabi verse, of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith, of Banda Singh Bahadur and of some other important Sikhs. Alongside this, the poet gives some quite useful information about the families of the Gurus including their wives, children, brothers and other relatives. Description of historical events and mythological elements overlap at many places in the work. A prominent characteristic of the work is the chronological pattern of the events relating to the lives of the Gurus and their families. The Brahminical bias, invention of some stories and presenting them as the causes of some events in the present life, inaccuracy of dates and his inability to come to terms with the contemporary Sikh situation wherein Sikhs were

fighting against the enemy as well as amongst themselves, are some of the weaknesses of this work. But in spite of these and such other flaws, the work remains one of the major sources on the early Sikh history.

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## REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES

1. *Bansavalinama Dasan Patsbaian Ka*, Ch. 1:10  
ਸੰਬਤ ਅਠਾਰਾਂ ਸੌ ਛਬੀਸ ਮੈਂ ਸਾਵਨ ਸੁਦਿ ਦਸ ਚਾਰ।  
ਜੰਮੂ ਨਗਰੀ ਕੇ ਸਿਖੈ ਬੈਠੇ ਬੇ ਧਰਮਸਾਲ।  
It was Samvat eighteen hundred and date was Savan *sudi* four,  
We were then abiding in Jammu in a *dharamsal*.
2. Raijasbir singh, Ed., *Bansavalinama Dasan Parsbaian Ka*. Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University, 2001, p. 21.
3. *Bansavalinama*, Ch. XIV: 190  
ਸੋ ਵਹੀ ਬਸੰਤੁ ਦੇਵਤਾ ਭਖ ਲਈ।  
ਜੰਮੂ ਨਗਰੀਐ ਅਗੁ ਲਾਗਤ ਭਈ।  
That scroll was devoured by fire,  
(when) fire broke out in Jammu town.
4. Raijasbir Singh, op.cit. p. 21.
5. *Bansavalinama*, V: 319-24.
6. *Ibid.*, XI: 30-32.
7. *Ibid.*, XI:56  
ਤਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਕਉਣ ਪਕੜ ਸਕੇ ਚਾਹੇ ਤਾਂ ਉਠ ਜਾਇ।  
ਤਿਨ ਜਾਣ ਕੇ ਅਪਨਾ ਆਪ ਦਿਤਾ ਪਕੜਾਇ।
8. Raijasbir Singh, p.24.
9. *Bansavalinama*, Ch: IV:29-30.  
ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮ ਦਾਸ ਸਮੇਂ ਚਲਾਣੇ ਦੇ ਬਚਨ ਇਹ ਕੀਤਾ।  
ਜੋ ਬਚਨ ਵਡਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਮੰਨੇ ਤਿਨੇ ਹੀ ਜੀਤਾ।  
ਅਰਜਨ ਹੈ ਨਿਕੜਾ ਮੈਂ ਭੀ ਜਾਣਾ। ਤੂੰ ਹੈ ਵਡਾ ਬੁਧੀਮਾਨ ਸਿਆਣਾ।੨੯।  
ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਮੈਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਦਿਤੀ ਗੁਰਿਆਈ। ਇਹ ਥਾਪੀ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਨਾਨੇ ਹੈ ਲਾਈ।  
ਮੈਂ ਉਸ ਦਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਮੇਟ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਕਿਆ। ਇਸ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਮੈਂ ਹੈ ਟਿਕਿਆ।੩੦।
10. *Ibid.*, Ch: X: 312  
ਅਖਰ ਇਸਨੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਉਲਟੇ ਚਲਾਏ।  
ਅਥਰਬਣ ਬੇਦ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਮਤਿ ਲੈਂਦਾ ਜਾਇ।  
ਤਿਸ ਦਾ ਮਤਿ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਇਸ ਕੁਰਾਨ ਬਣਾਇਆ।

ਬੋਲੀ ਸਹਸਕ੍ਰਿਤੀ ਤਜ ਕੇ ਅਰਬੀ ਵਿਚ ਪਾਇਆ।

11. *Ibid.*, Ch XIV: 120-21

ਸੇ ਮਾਇਕੀ ਕੋਣ ਹੈਨਿ ਜਿਨਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਦਾ ਗੁਣ ਹੈ ਗਵਾਇਆ।

ਰਾਜ ਭਾਗ ਪਾਇ ਕੈ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਹੈ ਭੁਲਾਇਆ।੧੨੦।

ਨਾ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਤ ਸਿਖ ਦੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਨ ਖਲਕ ਮੁਹ'ਬਤ ਨ ਗੁੰਥ ਨਾਲ ਪਿਆਰ।

ਕਹੇ ਮੇਰਾ ਹੈ ਰਾਜ ਜੋਬਨ ਵਿਸਾਰਿਆ ਦੇਵਨਹਾਰ।

ਸੇ ਗੁੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਬਚਨ ਸਤਿ ਕਰ ਜਾਣੀਐ।

‘ਦੋਦੇ ਨਾਲੇ ਦਿਤਾ ਚੰਗਾ’ ਮਨਮੁਖ ਐਸਾ ਜਾਣੀਐ।੧੨੧।



## MAHIMA PRAKASH BY SARUP DAS BHALLA

### I

There are two different books under the title *Mahima Prakash*: one is in prose and the other is in verse. The former is an anonymous manuscript written, according to Dr Kirpal Singh, by Kirpal (Das) Singh Bhalla in 1798 Bikrami/AD1741. It is written in prose and comprises 164 *sakhis* or anecdotes about the Gurus and is one of the earliest works dealing with lives of all the ten Gurus. The former latter is written by Sarup Das Bhalla and is, unlike its counterpart, a versified account. Several of the *sakhis* are common between both but some *sakhis* in the prose version are different from the versified version. Also, the prose version is quite brief whereas the other has *sakhis* written in good detail. In the following pages, we discuss only Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahima Prakash* (two volumes) which, as published by the Languages Department, Punjab, Patiala, comprises both *Guru Nanak Mahima* and *Mahima Prakash*.

The *Mahima Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla is a detailed versified, with brief prose sections at the end, anecdotal account of the lives of the Gurus, with numerous references to the teachings of the Gurus and the Sikh way of life scattered here and there. There have been more than one manuscripts of the work available, for example at the Languages Department, Punjab, Patiala; Punjab State Archives, Patiala; Sahit Academy, Ludhiana; Khalsa College, Amritsar; and in some personal collections. A manuscript copy was also available in the Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar, until it got destroyed during the Operation Bluestar in 1984. The work has since been published, first in 1970 and reprinted in 1999, by the Languages Department in two volumes: the first volume, edited by Gobind Singh Lamba and Shamsher Singh Ashok and

containing sixty-five *sakhis* from the life of Guru Nanak. was published under the title *Guru Nanak Mahima* whereas the second volume, *Mahima Prakash*, edited by Gobind Singh Lamba and Khazan Singh, narrates *sakhis* from the lives of all the succeeding Gurus. The *sakhis* in the second volume are 172 in number, and of them sixteen are about Guru Angad Dev, thirty-two about Guru Amar Das, eight about Guru Ram Das, twenty-two each about Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind, twenty-one about Guru Har Rai, eight about Guru Harkrishan, nineteen about Guru Tegh Bahadur and twenty-seven about Guru Gobind Singh. At the end is one brief *sakhi* about Banda Singh Bahadur: this *sakhi* as well as the last *sakhi* of Guru Gobind Singh's life is in prose.

As was customary among the writers of those days, the author of *Mahima Prakash*, Sarup Das Bhalla, also keeps a low profile and does not give much information about his life. Neither this work nor any other helps us in constructing even a semblance of a biography of the author. The only information the author gives is his name which he writes as Sarup Das – also as Sarup Chand at a few places – who is the son of Baba Bahar Mall in the dynasty of Guru Amar Das. Guru Amar Das had two sons, Baba Mohari and Baba Mohan, and Sarup Das was a descendent, in the eighth generation, of Baba Mohari through his son Baba Arjani. According to Sarup Das, Baba Mohari was the elder of the two whereas some other sources including the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas call Baba Mohan the elder son of the Guru. In the *Mahima Prakash*, Sarup Das refers to only two persons from the family of Baba Mohan (Baba Mohan and his son Baba Sahans Ram), but he refers to several persons from amongst the descendents of Baba Mohari such as his sons Baba Anand and Baba Arth Mall, his grandson Baba Duaraka Das and so on. He was born around 1800 Bikrami/AD 1744 at Goindwal. Although we do not have empirical evidence of his education and training, but a study of *Mahima*

*Prakash* reveals that Sarup Das Bhalla had made a deep study of ancient and Puranic literature apart from the Sikh scriptural text. He had a thorough knowledge of Indian mythology, history, tradition and culture as well as of Hinduism and Islam. He appears a deep devotee of the Sikh faith but the orthodox Hindu *rahini* (way of life) always dominated his mind. Sarup Das is proud of his ancestry and throughout his work speaks very highly of his ancestors. According to him, they enjoyed a place of great importance in the Sikh tradition and even the Gurus took many important decisions only in consultation with them. Of course, many times he distorts historical facts to give credit to one of his ancestors for something which never happened or which he never did.

Writing about the sources he consulted during the writing of *Mahima Prakash*, Sarup Das says that he depended on the *Janamsakhi*, the *Adi Sakhi*, and information he received from various members from the Gurus' families and other Guru-oriented Sikhs:

*Janam sakhi te adi jo sakhi*  
*Gurmukhi sikhian jo much bhakhi*  
*Gur kul purkhan jo mukh kahi*  
*Ta mo ratan chuni birade gahi*

Translated into English, it would read:

The *Janamsakhi* and the *Adi Sakhi*,  
And statements of Guru-oriented Sikhs  
And utterances of Gurus' descendents  
All this precious information I imbibed in my heart.<sup>1</sup>

The *Janamsakhi* he consulted might primarily be the *Purtan Janamsakhi* because he seems to have taken some *sakhis* from it, but he seems to have used the *Bala* and the *Miharban* versions as well because some of the *sakhis* in the *Guru Nanak Mahima* are not available in the *Puratan* version. Some *sakhis* have obviously been taken from the *Bala Janamsakhi* and his soft and favourably-inclined attitude towards Prithi Chand and other

Mina leaders implies that he might have also consulted the Miharban version of the *Janamsakhi*. The members of the Gurus' family from whom the poet got help in the preparation of this work include especially members of the Bhalla dynasty, but he seems to have got help from the Bedis, Sodhis (especially the descendents of Prithi Chand and Ram Rai) as well.

If we study other Sikh literature of that time such as *Gurbilases*, *Bansavalinama*, etc., we find that the authors have always been humble enough not to mention even their names or other biographical information and also always refer to a cause which prompted them to take up work on that project: most of the authors of *Rahitnamas* also attribute their works either to the command of the Guru or an answer by the Guru to their queries. In this respect, Sarup Das Bhalla is different insofar as he not only mentions his name as author but is also proud of his ancestry. Although Guru Amar Das bypassed his biological sons and anointed Guru Ram Das his successor, but the poet portrays the succeeding Gurus as being highly respectful to all biological descendents of Guru Amar Das. Sarup Das also does not feel the need to invent any genuine or imaginary cause to attribute his work to: he simply says that he one day felt inspired to attempt this kind of work:

*Divas ek man bhaia umaha*

*Gur mahima likh lijai laba*

*Satigur mahim patit udharan*

*Mahan bhai sagar par utaran*

Translated into English, it would read as:

One day in my mind I felt inspired

to write the Gurus' eulogistic account;

Savior of sinners is the Gurus' eulogy,

across the fearsome world-ocean it takes.<sup>2</sup>

Although the *Mahima Prakash*, which according to inner evidence was completed in 1833 Bikrami/AD 1776, is primarily in verse but there are specimens of prose also. The

poet has made use of several meters such as *Dohira*, *Chaupai*, *Naraj*, *Soratha*, *Arill*, *Madhubhar*, *Akra*, *Makra*, *Tomar*, *Tribhangi*, *Baint*, *Rasaval*, *Chbant*, *Totak* and *Sloka*. No doubt, the poet has tried to give in his expression priority to his deeply eulogistic feelings towards the Gurus and to the explanation of the essential meaning of these *sakhis*, but at places he has also made use of similes and metaphors to add to the aesthetic beauty of his verses. He has quoted examples from the Puranas in support of his views. He is a devout Sikh of the Gurus and has at several places proclaimed Guru Nanak supreme amongst all other religious preceptors and prophets. Reiterating the Gurus' teachings and inspiring the Sikhs to tread the path of truth and lead a spiritually and morally pious life seems the poet's main objective.

## II

The first volume, titled *Guru Nanak Mahima*, comprises *sakhis* about the life of Guru Nanak alone whereas the second volume, titled *Mahima Prakash*, is divided into ten sections, giving one section to each of the succeeding Gurus and the last brief section to Banda Singh Bahadur. He has throughout retained his focus on the personality of the Guru concerned, various episodes connected with his life and tried to highlight the essentials of the Gurus' teachings with the help of these episodes. The poet believes the Gurus to be the very image of the supreme Lord, spiritual oneness of all the ten Gurus, bestowal of guruship on the *granth* (or Word as enshrined in what we today revere as the Guru Granth Sahib), and highlights these and such other points. In the process he also gives a lot of information about the rites and ceremonies and beliefs then prevalent among different sections of society. We can also learn from a study of it about the system of education, economic conditions including the occupations of people, and fall of the Mughal empire and ascendancy of the Sikhs. At the end

of each section he gives the dates of birth and death of the Guru, his total life span, the total period of his pontificate and names of his offspring. Sarup Das Bhalla begins his work with an invocation to the supreme Lord and the true Gurus (*namo namo paramatma satigur kripa nidhan*, i.e. I bow to the supreme Soul or God and to the true Gurus who have been the treasure of compassion and grace)<sup>3</sup>.

The poet begins narrating some select *sakhis* from the life of Guru Nanak referring to the Guru's birth; here he seems to follow the *Puratan Janamsakhi* and says that the Guru was born on Baisakh *sudi* 3, but he errs in giving 1525 Bikrami instead of 1526 Bikrami as the year of his birth. When the Guru was seven years old, the family arranged a religious ceremony to ceremonially put *janau* on the young Guru: Pandit Hardayal was invited for the ceremonies and all Vedic rituals were performed (*bed riti sabh kari*). The poet here quotes the Guru's famous hymn now found included in the Guru Granth Sahib wherein the Guru advises to 'wear the *janau*' of spiritual values like compassion, contentment, truthfulness, chastity, etc. <sup>4</sup> The poet refers to the *sakhi* because it has always been popularly enshrined in the Sikh psyche and it brings out the Guru's views on the wearing of *janau*: Sikhism is of the view that any outward symbols need to be taken as a means to a higher end and must not be taken as an end in themselves. In other words, the wearer of any outward symbol must have imbibed in his heart the values that symbol stands for. However, the poet's own views on the issue are eclectic because he does not seem to have fully come out of the influence of Hindu beliefs and customs as they prevailed in the contemporary society. This episode is important insofar as it shows that the tradition of putting on *janau* on a boy of a high-caste Hindu family those days was quite important and it was performed when the boy was of or around seven years of age.

Following the established custom of sending boys to the

*pathshalas* attached to temples or mosques, Guru Nanak was also sent to the village Pandha to learn alphabets and acquire worldly education but, according to the poet, Guru Nanak surprised the Pandha by uttering his now famous acrostic composition titled *Patti* now available in the Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>5</sup> The *Mahima Prakash* also says that the Hindus those went to the Brahmin in the temple's *pathshala* to study. However, when the Pandha felt himself ill-equipped to teach Nanak, he was sent to the village Maulvi to study but the Guru began teaching him about the essential values a true Muslim must imbibe. The Guru's going to the village Pandha and Maulvi to study shows that this was the normal means of studying and no formal education system existed. Sarup Das also hints that people those days sent the child to *pathshala* only on an auspicious day they fixed beforehand *vidhiani ke paran ke shubh din kari bichar*.<sup>6</sup>

In the milieu depicted by Sarup Das Bhalla, there were three kinds of avocations for a person from a middle class family to follow – agriculture, trade or employment with a government official. The Guru's father Baba Kalu also wanted his son to take to one of these professions. When Guru Nanak was too young to take up agriculture, he was sent to take the family cattle for grazing but instead of taking care of the animals so that they do not wander into someone's crop, he remained absorbed in deep meditation and one day his cattle mauled a farmer's crop. But as they say God ever preserves the honour of his devotees, the crop was found to be entirely fine when checked in response to the farmer's complaint. It is the agriculture which the Guru takes up when he finally settles down at Kartarpur during the last years of his life. Finding the Guru uninterested in agriculture, Baba Kalu one day gave Guru Nanak a sum of twenty rupees to start some trade. As the Guru was on way to the town to buy some wares with the money, he finds some hungry mendicants and spends the entire

money in feeding them. It was a disaster worldly-wise for Baba Kalu, but in the Sikh tradition the money thus spent has been proclaimed 'the true bargain'. Ever since his childhood days, Guru Nanak sought company of the holy persons from any of the traditions and there are reports of his having dialogue with them though he himself did not observe rites and rituals of any of the traditions. The former of these episodes highlights the Sikh belief that God is ever on the side of His devotees. The latter episode is precursor to the Sikh institutions of *langar* and *dasvandh*.

The family found Guru Nanak indifferent to his studies and inattentive to any worldly duties and was feeling quite anxious for a long time. They found him a brilliant child were felt concerned about his laxity and indifference. At one stage they felt as if the Guru was emotionally and physically ill. A physician, Hardas by name, was called in to check the Guru and cure him but the poor physician did not know that the Guru did not suffer from any physical ailment rather it was his longing for the Divine which made him look so. Presuming that this might make Guru Nanak more involved in worldly affairs, the family decided to get him married. Since it was the duty of the family purohit to find a suitable match for the son of his patron, Baba Kalu also called in the purohit and asked him to find a match so that Nanak was engaged to her:

*Babe Kalu purohit ko kaha*

*'tum jab kutamb kannia ho jahan.*

*Nanak ji ki hoi sakai*

*Tab karon biah kabon sabh bhai.*

An English rendering of these lines would read as:

Addressing the family priest

Baba Kalu asked him to find a suitable match

So that Nanak could be betrothed

To be married in consultation with all relatives.<sup>7</sup>

The *purohit* recommended the daughter of Bhai Mool



Chand Chona of Batala and the betrothal ceremony took place soon. The poet describes in detail various ceremonies connected with betrothal, marriage party and so on. He also says that the bride's family sent her to the groom's place with good dowry.

The family being rather keen to see Nanak engaged in a worldly vocation, the advice coming from his brother-in-law, Jai Ram, was accepted and it was decided to send Guru Nanak to Sultanpur Lodhi: it was here that the Guru Nanak's elder sister, Bibi Nanaki, lived with her husband who served with the local Muslim chief, Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi. Jai Ram was able to secure for the Guru employment as keeper in the *modikbana* or government stores of the Nawab. If Rai Bular, the chief of Talwandi Rai Bhoi ki, the birth place of Guru Nanak, and Bibi Nanaki, the Guru's sister were the first two persons to acknowledge Guru Nanak as a great divine, Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi also soon realized that Guru Nanak was not a common mortal: instead of various complaints against the Guru that he distributed rations free to the needy and holy persons, the Nawab found that accounts were always found perfectly in order. In fact, the Nawab attributed his prosperity to the Guru's presence in his town. During his stay at Sultanpur, Guru Nanak gathered a small group of disciples and together they worshipped one God and meditated on Name Divine. He also invited his childhood friend and companion, Bhai Mardana, to Sultanpur to give him company. The Guru earned admiration of all for his honesty and diligence at work and his message of common weal, simplicity and righteousness in life that he lived and preached to others.

It was a routine with the Guru while at Sultanpur to go every morning to the nearby Bein rivulet to have his bath there. But one day he failed to come back and report for work after having gone there for his daily ablutions. According to the poet,<sup>8</sup> everybody was apprehensive that he might have drowned

and the Nawab sent divers and used nets in the flowing water, but to no avail. The Guru came out on the third day. The Sikh tradition believes, as is also said by the poet, that the Guru remained in deep concentration and meditation on God which brought him in direct communion with Him. It is also believed that during this while the Guru received a divine call to go out into the world to preach the message he had received from God. The poet broadly agrees with the account given in the *Puratan Janamsakhi* and in the first *Var* of Bhai Gurdas. The first words the Guru uttered on coming out were: *na hindu na musalman*<sup>9</sup> which implied that God is one and that He is beyond religious division of Hinduism and Islam as created by human beings. It can also be interpreted to mean that the entire humankind is, in essence, one and that divisions of humankind into Hindus and Muslims are immaterial.

Guru Nanak was about thirty years of age at this time and he was already married. However, after having thus received revelation direct from God, Guru Nanak was ready to go out on *udasis* as his preaching odysseys are known in Sikh tradition. According to the poet, the Nawab who was convinced of Guru Nanak's divine status, has a small dialogue with the Guru wherein he says that the 'Guru has now become (mystically) one with God; he has now become Jind Pir and that he has caused cessation to the cycle of his birth-death-rebirth':

*Nibhi khañ yah khep tumari*  
*Maula son bhai tumari yari;*  
*Tun to jind pir ab bhaia*  
*Maran jivan ka dookh mit gaia.*

Translated in English, it means:

You (Guru Nanak) have succeeded in your mission,  
You have united with the Divine Lord;  
You have become a living spiritual guide  
You have redeemed (yourself as well as me) from

Birth and death cycle.<sup>10</sup>

According to the poet, the Guru took out five *udasis* in different directions: the poet begins his narration of the first *udasi* with the Guru's dialogue with cranes. The poet perhaps wanted to convey that the Guru wanted to ameliorate not only the human beings but birds and animals as well. Then he narrates the *sakhi* of Sajjan (128-31) who wore the mask of a religious and philanthropic person but was actually a great cheat and rogue. The following *sakhis* with a Vaisnavite, an Avadhut and Shaikh Ibrahim are aimed at highlighting the Guru's point of view vis-à-vis the ones held by the traditions represented by these persons. The second *udasi* of the Guru takes him towards the south of India: during this sojourn, Guru Nanak is said to be accompanied by Bhai Saido and Bhai Siha also besides Bhai Mardana who accompanied the Guru in all of his odysseys. According to the poet, the Guru met a Jain *srevaru* or ascetic (162-65) who, according to the poet, was 'filthy' (*kust*, *kuchil*) and was given to hard penance: the message conveyed is that one cannot realize God by remaining filthy or through hard penance. The *sakhi* about Nanu Pandit (166-70) deals with the question of whether to eat meat or not, whether or not it has anything to do with one's spiritual pursuits. On the way to Bidar, the Guru is said to have met Shah Sharaf and Bharathri Nath. The Guru crossed the sea and reached Sri Lanka where he tested the local king who later turned a Sikh of the Guru. According to the poet, the Guru also composed the text *Pran Sangli* during his stay in Sri Lanka: it has, however, been proved that *Pran Sangli* is an apocryphal writing. On way back to India, the Guru visited a Siva temple where he had a dialogue with some holy men: the Guru is also said to have composed his *Oankar* here. He came back to the Punjab via the eastern regions including Assam. The Guru met the Siddhas and had long dialogue with them which the Guru has put down in the form of *Siddha Gosti* now included in the Guru Granth

Sahib. Assam was then known for its witchcraft: the poet refers to Mardana being changed into a ram through the witchcraft of a woman-witch but her magic could not have any effect on the Guru who saved Mardana from her clutches. The third *udasi* takes the Guru deep into the Himalayas where the Guru had another encounter with the Siddhas at the Sumer mountain. The Guru also visited what is now known as Nanak Mata and defeated the yogis here in a discussion. Another *sakhi* relates to the saving of a god who, as a result of a curse, had been made to live the life of a demon: the mere glimpse of the Guru effaced the effect of that curse and once again became a god. The fourth *udasi* is towards the west which takes Guru Nanak to Mecca and Medina. The Mecca *sakhi* is obviously aimed at saying that God is *rabul-almin*, i.e. He is all-pervasive: there is no place in the world where God does not reside. The poet records Guru Nanak's meeting with Emperor Karun which is historically incorrect as Karun was not the Guru's contemporary. Other *sakhis* here include the one with Duni Chand in which the futility of offering food to the dead ancestors (*sbradb*) is exposed.

The Guru lays foundation of Kartarpur where he takes up agriculture to meet expenses of his and his family's needs. The devotees would visit him here and divine eulogies were sung both morning and evening. Bhai Balwand is said to be one of those who perform *kirtan*: it is not historically correct as Balwand and Satta are said to be contemporaries of Guru Arjan and they are also said to have composed their *var* during the pontificate of Guru Arjan. The poet narrates in detail how Guru Nanak tests the commitment and conviction of Bhai Lahina and finally blesses him to be his spiritual successor. Guru Angad Dev is also said to have got a *Janamsakhi* of Guru Nanak prepared it: the reference obviously is to *Bala Janamsakhi*. The poet concludes *Guru Nanak Mahima* with the couplet:

*Bedi kul Kalu pita mata Tiparo tas*

*Gur Nanak Ghummi patai sut Sri Chand Lakhmi Das.*

Bedi dynasty, father Kalu and mother Tiparo;

Guru Nanak married Ghummi and had sons -

Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das.

This couplet is followed the information about the date of Guru Nanak's passing away: it reads as follows: Samvat 1596 Assu *sudi dasmi* (AD 1539, tenth day of the bright moon).

### III

The second volume of *Mahima Prakash* comprises *sakhis* about the following nine Gurus and Banda Singh Bahadur. We find that at many places in his narrative the poet distorts facts to provide a place of prominence and respect to one or the other of his ancestors. The implication of what he tries to say is that that no Guru could earn general acceptance until and unless the Bhallas approved of the anointment and these Bhallas played an important role in the selection of the successor in more than one instance. By saying so he goes by implication against the Sikh doctrine of the successor being selected on merit and it always happened to be the concerned Guru's own choice. At places he shows some Gurus or members of the Guru's family paying obeisance to one of his elders.

After the passing away of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad Dev shifts to Khadur Sahib where he, according to the poet, remains in deep meditation for about six months confined to a room and comes out only after some devotees - Balwand, Baba Buddha and Baba Lalu (the elder brother of Guru Nanak's father Baba Kalu) and Bhai Bala - go to pay him obeisance and request him so. The Guru sets up some wrestling arenas to improve the devotees' physical health alongside their spiritual uplift (16). Guru Angad Dev removes ego from the mind of Balwand by showing his displeasure at his (Balwand's) refusal to recite a hymn on the request of Baba Buddha (30-31): according to the poet, Balwand realizes his mistake and

composes the first four stanzas of the *Var*, popularly known as Satte-Balwand di Var, in eulogy of the Guru. As his end approaches, Guru Angad Dev appoints his successor in Guru Amar Das, **he** tells his sons, Dasu and Datu, to cremate his body, remember God and persevere in the will of God, and not to perform any other rituals (89). The poet deems Guru all-powerful and shows him bestowing various *siddhis* on Savan Mall who happened to be the Guru's nephew and whom the Guru was sending to a hill state named Haripur to get some timber but at the same time advises him against their use because they create ego which, as says a scriptural verse, stands in antagonism to Name Divine: both cannot co-exist (110-12). The *sakhi* referring to Emperor Akbar summoning the Guru who deposes Bhai Jetha (later Guru Ram Das) to the royal court where the Emperor had arranged a gathering of people from various religious traditions and where Bhai Jetha overcomes them all is aimed at reflecting the supremacy of Sikh teachings. According to the poet, the Emperor was convinced of the Guru's divinity and held him in so deep regard that he sends a messenger to seek the Guru's blessings when he was unable to conquer the fort of Chittor (174-76). Narrating the *sakhi* of the Guru's visit to Kurukshetra and then towards north-east on the bank of Yamuna to the Ganga, the poet also reflects on the mythological origin of the Ganga (146-52). The poet adds such details perhaps to make his work epical in nature. On return to Goindwal, the Guru digs the *baoli* and, as says the poet, makes the water of the Ganga flow into it. Referring to the birth of sons (Arth Mall, Anand Mall and Arjani) to Baba Mohri and Sahansar Ram to Baba Mohan, the poet calls them incarnates of some earlier *bhaktas* and also says that Guru Amar Das composed his *Anandu* as included in the Guru Granth Sahib by way his expression of joy at the time of Anand's birth, the second son of Mohri. Bibi Bhani earns the boon (253-55) so that *guruship* remains within the Sodhi family

of her husband. When Guru Amar Das had had the intuition that Bhai Jetha had almost lived his life, he (Guru Amar Das) called him (Bhai Jetha) to him, gave the remaining six years of his life to him (263), anointed him his successor and breathed his last on Bhadon *sudi* Puranmshi 1631 Bikrami/AD 1574 (271).

The poet gives a mythological colour to the *sarovar* Guru Ram Das got dug in the centre of which now stands the Sikh *sanctum sanctorum*, the Harimandar Sahib: as the sarovar got ready, ‘the Guru bathed in it and the place got acknowledged as a *tirth* in the *Kaliyuga*; he who has a glimpse of it is truly blessed and he himself attains liberation and also liberates his entire lineage’, says the poet (294). The Guru advised the Sikhs ‘not to weep or wail but to recite Divine eulogies after he passes away’ (303-04). Intriguingly, Bhai Jetha is not said to be present at that moment. Unlike in the case of preceding Gurus, the poet says that Guru Ram Das did not formally anoint anybody his successor though he had made an informal proclamation in this regard. It was Baba Mohari (son of Guru Amar Das) who thought of deciding the issue of succession. He invited all the siblings (Baba Prithi Chand, Baba Mahadev and Guru Arjan) and initiated the issue of succession. Prithi Chand and Mahadev, according to the poet, agreed that ‘only he who deserves should occupy the office of Guru’ (*baithe so jo laik asan*). Then Mohari referred to Guru Amar Das’ earlier remark about (Guru) Arjan being ‘*dohita bani ka bobatha*’ (grandson is the store-house of *gurbani*), and formally anointed Guru Arjan as Guru Ram Das’ successor. After the ceremony, the poet also says that Prithi Chand felt unhappy as his mind got polluted seeing the grandeur (*pun prithichand ros an kina/ dekhi bibhuti man bhaia malina*) connected with the Guru’s office. One day Satta Dum whom the poet calls Balwand’s son (312), came to the Guru’s *darbar* and composed the remaining stanzas to give the *Var* its present shape: the poet seems to have

narrated both the sakhis relating to Balwand to to give his view of how the *Var* came to be composed. There are *sakhis* about the construction of the Harimandar, composition of *Sukhmani*, digging the existing pond to turn it into a sacred *sarovar* of Tarn Taran (the poet here refers to two instances (a crow bathes in its waters and comes out a swan and a leper takes ablutions and becomes healthy (347-48), Bhai Gurdas coming to pay his obeisance, and Bhai Paira Mokha visiting Sri Lanka to get a copy of *Pran Sangli* from Raja Shivnabh. According to the poet, Emperor Jahangir did not like the Guru's grandeur and glory (397) but attributes the Guru's martyrdom primarily to Chandu's machinations. Here also the poet shows Guru Arjan inviting Arth Mall (Baba Mohari's son) to discuss with him his impending martyrdom.

As has today been convincingly proved, Guru Nanak handed over the codex containing his own hymns as well as those of some other holy men which he had collected during his preaching odysseys to his successor at the time of succession. In this way, these codices kept changing hands with each successive Guru and reached the hands of Guru Arjan. However, the poet gives a different version of this in the *sakhi* of compilation of the scripture. According to him, when Guru Arjan one day thought of compiling the *granth* he asked Bhai Gurdas to take up the job of writing down the entire text in one volume after sifting the genuine from the counterfeit. At this moment, Bhai Gurdas asks the Guru to get from Sahans Ram the *pothi* of earlier Gurus' hymns he had with him: unlike some other sources, the *pothi* is said to be with Sahans Ram and not with his father Baba Mohan rather the poet presents Baba Mohan in a positive light who helps in persuading Sahans Ram to part with the *pothi*. It is this *pothi* which, according to the poet, becomes the primary source for the material to be compiled in the scripture. Bhai Paira Mokha is sent to Sangla Deep (modern-day Sri Lanka) to bring the



*Pran Sangli* from there. As for the inclusion of Bhagat-Bani in the scripture, the poet says that all these Bhagats came to Guru Arjan in person requesting for the inclusion of their *bani* and the Guru causes Bhai Gurdas meet them (360-71): there is also a *sakhi* of the poets whose *bani* the Guru rejected. This view of the poet has since been rejected by the modern research in the field.

According to Sarup Das Bhalla, the relations of Guru Hargobind with Emperor Jahangir were quite eclectic and the chronology he gives of the battles the Guru had to fight also does not match the modern findings. The Guru took out preaching tours especially in the Malwa region of Punjab and finally shifted his headquarters to Kiratpur. There are also several *sakhis* of Guru Har Rai visiting different places preaching the divine Word and providing succor to numerous beings. According to the poet, when Prince Dara Shukoh sought the Guru's help, he helped the Prince by deploying his '*topkhana*' (troops) at the ferry and thus delaying Aurangzib's forces for two *pahar* (598): Dara had earlier been defeated by Aurangzib whose forces were now pursuing him. This incident is taken as a major reason behind the grudge Aurangzib nurtured against the Gurus. The *sakhi* of Ram Rai being debarred by the Guru from his presence for committing the blasphemy of showing a miracle and mis-reading a verse from the *Adi Granth* (616) is aimed at stressing the sanctity of correct reading/pronunciation of *gurbani*. The poet invents quite an unconvincing story of the Guru putting leeches on his body and thus giving away his life (627) but before that he anoints Harkrishan as his successor and instructs the gathered congregation to 'acknowledge him (Guru Harkrishan) his own form and deem no difference between him and me' (626). The episodes about Guru Hargobind and Guru Har Rai highlight the Sikh tradition of defiance against the unjust rulers and upholding the Sikh human rights of sovereignty, freedom of

life and expression. Earlier Guru Arjan Dev's supreme sacrifice had strengthened the Sikh tradition by preparing the ground for Sikh defiance by Guru Hargobind. *Mahima Prakash* vindicates this continuity of Sikh tradition of facing the challenges arising out of emerging situations.

Guru Harkrishan did not formally anoint anyone his successor but just hinted that his successor will be found at Bakala. The Guru's mother who had accompanied the Guru to Delhi preferred 'to follow the family tradition' (*ab so bidh karo jo kul biuhara*) and sent a letter, through Bhai Garhia, to Dwarka Das (a descendent of Guru Amar Das) at Goindwal, asking him to reach Bakala forthwith. Contrary to the accepted tradition, it is Dwarka Das who proclaims that Tegh Bahadur is the real Guru to which Guru Harkrishan had hinted. He is also shown as formally anointing him the Guru. Not only this, the poet also makes Mata Nanaki bow at the feet of Dwarka Das (*prithme mata het kar gur ans ki puja kin*). He also gives the story of Makkhan Shah (Lubana) visiting the Guru after the ship carrying his wares safely reaches the shore but it is shown as happening after Dwarka Das had made the formal anointment: however, even at this time the poet shows the devotees divided between Guru Tegh Bahadur and Dhir Mall (661-63). Sikhism is against the performance of miracles by a spiritual preceptor because this amounts to interference in the Divine Will: the poet highlights this with the help of a sakhi from the life of Guru Tegh Bahadur wherein the Guru, when asked by Emperor Aurangzib to perform a miracle, says 'we should willingly accept whatever the Creator of this world does' (*jin khalak kari khaalak vahi kare su vah parvan*) because 'performing miracle is being co-equal with God' (*kare jo karamat musarak kahave*) and it does not behove a faquir to perform a miracle (*na laik fakar ke karamat karna*) (674).

Guru Gobind Singh spent first 'more than twelve years (of his life) at Patna' (*bahut kal satgur rahe patane dhar antar/*

*baras duadas so adhik karat bilas bibar*, 753). The Guru and the family departed from Patna for Anandpur whereto *sangats* thronged to have a glimpse and pay obeisance. Bhai Nand Lal's visit to Anandpur including his early life as an employee of Prince Bahadur Shah and his acceptance of the Guru's discipleship is also narrated. Even during his stay at Patna, the Guru is shown as aware of the corrupt practices indulged in by the Masands: in order to highlight that one must be strictly honest with the offerings made in the name of the Guru and the poet relates some *sakhs* from the Guru's life. On a Baisakhi day in Anandpur, the poet says, the Guru confronted the Masands who had gathered there in thousands (*basoe ka mela jab bhaia/sabh masand sangat sang laia/babut masand bajar bajar/sangat ant na paravar*, 797): Masands Bulaki Das and Chet were particularly chided for their dishonesty. The Guru proclaimed punishment for Chet and others and also instructed the gathered *sangat* to shun the Masands (805). Having thus put an end to the institution of Masands, the Guru declared the *sangat* as Khalsa (*sangat sagal khalsa bhaia/pure satigur kini daia*, 806). *Mahima Prakash Vartak* (1741) is perhaps the first chronicle which refers to the Guru inviting some Brahmins from Banaras and getting a *hom* performed by them before he created the Khalsa: he makes no reference to the invocation or worship of the goddess. Sarup Das Bhalla, however, invents, from that single sentence in the *Mahima Prakash Vartak*, the story of invocation of the goddess. Sarup Das Bhalla refers to the worship of the goddess, appearance of the goddess and her gift of *khanda* or double-edged sword to the Guru (823). The *hom* is performed by the Pandits for this purpose on the top of a mountain near a temple which could perhaps be the Naina Devi temple (821). He says that the Guru uses this *khanda* to prepare the *amrit*, partakes of it himself first of all and then gives to the five Sikhs. This is against the established Sikh tradition and does not find support in any other contemporary

or near-contemporary work. As it is, Bhalla seems to try and add a mythological tinge to the event though it was entirely devoid of any such element. Post the creation of Khalsa, the Guru prescribes *rahit* to the members of the Khalsa Brotherhood. He says that an initiated member of the Khalsa Brotherhood must use the surname Singh and maintain untrimmed hair but the poet also includes the wearing of *janenu* in the Sikh *rahit*. Sikhism has an unimpeachable tradition that Guru Nanak refused to wear *janenu* when called upon to do so as per the family tradition: therefore, the narration of goddess worship and wearing of *janenu* is at variance with the Sikh tradition.

The Guru's life after the evacuation of Anandpur Sahib is related in brief and in prose. These are the *sakhis* about the martyrdom of the Guru's sons (at Chamkaur Sahib and Sirhand); the Guru's journey to Talwandi Sabo; meeting with Banda Singh Bahadur; Bhai Daya Singh sent to Emperor Aurangzib with a letter reading which the Emperor breathes his last; and the Guru's demise. There are several inaccuracies of fact here. According to the poet, all the four sons of the Guru died during the latter's lifetime because of a curse of Mata Nanaki (the Guru's grandmother) whereas the fact is that she had passed away in AD 1678; the Sahibzadas who were martyred at Sirhand were Fateh Singh and Zorawar Singh whereas the poet names them Fateh Singh and Ranjit Singh; and Mata Sahib Devan fell down from the Burj and gave away his life whereas other sources mention that she outlived the Guru. At the end is a *sakhi* about Banda Singh Bahadur.

#### IV

The *Mahima Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla is an important work because it happens to be written by a person who belongs to the dynasty of Guru Amar Das and this also happens to be one of the earliest works giving a connected though only episodic account of the lives of all the Gurus of the Sikh

faith. Notwithstanding the fact that it is not plain history and it is also not free from inaccuracies of fact, the work is also important because it highlights some of the fundamental Sikh precepts apart from portraying some of the important aspects of the Gurus' lives and describing the contemporary religious, social, political and economic situation. The author is a devout Sikh and he has described Sikh *rahit* Sikh precepts in references scattered at different places. He emphasizes that a Sikh must get up early in the morning and remembering Name Divine<sup>11</sup> and follow the Guru's teachings<sup>12</sup> and he who remembers the Name in the company of the Guru attains the supreme spiritual state.<sup>13</sup> The Guru and the Guru-oriented persons are alike and there is absolutely no difference between the two.<sup>14</sup> However, the divine Word gets enshrined in one's mind only when God bestows His grace and thereby effaces all traces of duality.<sup>15</sup>

Talking of various moral and ethical values, Sarup Das Bhalla emphasizes the value of service to humankind because 'meditation (on God) is not possible without rendering service (unto the Guru and fellow beings) and no one can attain liberation without meditation on God' - *seva bina bhagat nahi ho/bina bhagat mukt nahi koi*, 254. Service rendered unto the Guru is the supreme treasure of happiness (*guru seva such param nidhan*, 175) and he who renders service with love effaces all traces of ego, accomplishes everything and reaches across the world-ocean - *prem jugat seva kare nah upajai ahankar/sarab padarath pai ke bhavnidh utare par*, 254. The poet advises us to imbibe the values of contentment and truthfulness and give up the evils of ego which the poet compares with a butcher that slays the 'animals' in the world (*jagat pashu ahankar kasai*, 69) but ego, according to him, is effaced as one gets immersed in the Name Divine - *name rate haumai jai*, 90. A Sikh of the Guru must give up avarice because it makes one forgetful of the Gurus' teachings (*lobh laga gurmati bhai han*, 135), slandering which is like a *chandali* or witch (*par nindia chandali sang*, 29);

lust and wrath which are called poisonous and a heavy weight – *kam krodh bikh bajra bhar*, 58.

The author accepts the central Sikh doctrine of the oneness of God and also wants the readers to follow the Gurus' teachings. However, he does not reject worship of gods and goddess and some other Hindu beliefs and practices. For example, he makes Guru Gobind Singh invoke the goddess and accepts from her a *kebanda* with which he prepares the *amrit* for initiation into the Khala Brotherhood. Sikhism does not believe in the idea of Divine incarnation but the poet believes the Gurus as incarnations. Guru Nanak rejects the *janai* as of no spiritual significance but the poet continues to emphasize on it. The poet believes in the spiritual oneness of all the Gurus and states this at several places in his work. However, he errs in articulating the objective of the life of Guru Nanak: while Bhai Gurdas says that the Guru took birth to ameliorate humankind but Sarup Dass says that the Guru's objective was 'to spread the message of Atharva Veda because no one can attain liberation without following these teachings in the present Kaliyuga'. He refers to the Gurus' instructions that 'performance of miracles does not become men of God', but still the poet attributes some miracles to the Gurus – perhaps in his desire to put them on a pedestal higher than the preceptors of other religious traditions.

No doubt, Sarup Das belonged to a highly respected family in the Sikh tradition: he was a direct descendent of Baba Mohari, one of the two sons of Guru Amar Das. However, in his desire to glorify the role of Guru Amar Das' dynasty, he has at several places distorted historical facts. For example, before appointing Bhai Jetha (later Guru Ram Das) his successor, Guru Amar Das sends for Baba Mohari and bows at his feet; Guru Arjan is anointed to the pontifical office after consultations with Prithi Chand and Mahadev held by Baba Mohari; Guru Arjan calls in Arth Mall (son of Baba Mohari)

just before passing away; when Dwarka Das (grandson of Baba Mohari) goes to Bakala to formally anoint Guru Tegh Bahadur, the latter gets up to receive him and Mataji worships him he being of Guru Amar Das' dynasty; and so on. Apart from the Bhallas, the poet also has a word of praise for Minas (Prithi Chand and his followers), Dhir Mall and his followers, and others who otherwise formed heretical sects and worked against the Gurus in a variety of ways.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the *Mahima Prakash* remains an important source on the lives of the Gurus and the contemporary milieu. It preserves in its pages the persona of each of the Gurus, incidents related to their lives, various beliefs and practices popular among the masses, the main occupations of the times, system of education, marriage and death rites, and so on. The poet is quite familiar with the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib and he quotes with ease a hymn wherever it fits in his narrative. He is a poet of great merit and uses different meters to suit the narrative. He has used various similes and metaphors to adorn his poetic work but never lets them be a burden on his narrative.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash* (Vol. I). Patiala: Languages Department, Punjab, 1970 (rpt. 1999), p. 66
2. Ibid., p. 66
3. Ibid., p. 65
4. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 471
5. Ibid., pp. 432-34
6. *Mahima Prakash*, p. 5
7. Ibid., p. 9
8. Ibid., pp. 106-115
9. Ibid., pp. 109-110

10. Ibid., p. 119
11. Ibid., 244 [A Sikh must get up early in the morning, bathe, sit in meditation and read/reflect on the *gurbani* - *pabar ratra pichhali jab rahai/ kar ishnan ikant hoi bahai/gur sarup hirdai mo dhare/ gurbani man mahi bichare*]
12. Ibid., p. 355 [He who follows the Guru's teaching is a true Sikh - *sikh soi gurbachanan seve*]
13. Ibid., 182 [One attains the supreme bliss only by being in the company of the true Guru - *jo sat gur ki sangat avai/daras paras paramarth pava*]
14. Ibid., 181 [The Guru and the Guru-oriented Sikh are one and there is absolutely no difference between the two - *gurmukh sikh rup mam jano/ya mo ranchak bbed na ano*]
15. Ibid., 96 [*nadari kare shabad ghat mahi vasai vichahu bharamu gavae*]



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## SRI GUR PANTH PARKASH

Rattan Singh Bhangoo's *magnum opus*, *Gur Panth Prakash* (1841), written in the great literary Western and Eastern tradition of poetical epics like Homer's *Illiad*, *Odyssey*, *Ulysses*, Virgil's *Aenid*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Tulsi's *Ramayana* and Ved Vyas' *Mahabhabarta*, is one of the oldest historical chronicles about the origin and evolution of the Sikh/Khalsa Panth. Epic writing is universally acknowledged as a valid genre of writing legends, both in the Western and Eastern literary canons. All these epics, in both the literary canons, have the history of their respective historical personages during the specific periods of the predominant races of those regions as their primary content and subject matter. But epic mode of presentation has a poetical rather than the cold prosaic mode of pure historical works. To that extent, we find these epics dotted with diverse kinds of digressions and deviations from the focal point of history, because the authors of all these epics being poets, rather celebrated bards of their times, have a professional commitment to make their compositions acquire epic dimensions capable of capturing the imagination of their people. For this purpose, they employed well-known literary devices such as epic similes and other literary embellishments in order to perpetuate and immortalize their national heroes. All epics primarily aim at glorification and edification of their epic heroes to make them embodiments of their national, racial, and religious ethos and ideological doctrines. Rattan Singh Bhangoo's poetical epic is no exception to this rule. But despite this poetical flab of cosmetic embellishments, there runs a deep, perennial undercurrent of contemporary history in all these poetical works. Moreover, there is another dimension to these epical

compositions that these epics were meant to be recited and sung, very often, to the accompaniment of music, to the vast audiences to capture their imagination. It is this poetical appeal, which has made these epics immortal since their reading and recitation before vast audiences, through the several generations of their people, have permanently etched the memory and moral stature of their heroes in the collective unconscious of their nations. It is this poetical dimension, which has kept the history of the nations and races alive and vibrant rather than the cold factual, scholarly records of the historians. Thus, these epics inform, instruct and entertain at the same time. A discerning reader can easily sift through the creamy topping of the poetical flab and dip into the steady undercurrent of history and arrive at conclusions closely similar to those recorded in typical histories, minor distortions notwithstanding. Thus Bhangoo's monumental work, like all other world classics, is a great work of art as well as Sikh history, especially of the blood-soaked Sikh history of over one hundred years covering the whole of 18<sup>th</sup> century (1675-1795).

Rattan Singh Bhangoo's *Gur Panth Prakash* came to be written under special circumstances with the British collusion with the predominantly Sikh-dominated Phulkian state rulers of the major principalities Southwest of the Sutlej to checkmate the advance of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Khalsa forces. With the capture of Delhi, the British had established their rule on major part of Northern India. The British were now on the verge of having an encounter with the Sikhs whose writ was running from the river Attock in the north to the river Yamuna in the Northeast. A little earlier in 1783, a massive Sikh force of forty thousand troops had occupied Delhi during Shah Alam II's rule under the command of S. Baghel Singh, the head of the Kroresinghia Misl, who had vacated Delhi only after demarcating and constructing the

major historical Sikh shrines in Delhi and after collecting a huge ransom and a significant percentage of octroi as regular payment as a condition for keeping the Sikh forces out of Delhi. The British, being shrewd and steadfast visionaries, had started gathering intelligence and compiling information about the Sikhs two decades before their occupation of Delhi. After their capture of Delhi, they speeded up their efforts to have an authentic version of history of the Sikhs, and Colonel David Ochterloney stationed at Delhi had got one version of Sikh history prepared by Khushwaqat Rai, *Tarikh-e-Ahwal-e-Sikhism* which was more or less a Mughal version of Sikh history with all its biases and prejudices. Thereafter, he asked his junior British resident at Ludhiana, Captain David Murray to get another version recorded from another source to check the veracity of the earlier version. Captain Murray summoned the services of one of his court officials and a Muslim scribe, Ghulam Mohi-ud-din alias Boote Shah Maulvi (daftar), to dictate to him the history of the Sikhs. This Muslim scribe, being as much prejudiced and biased against the Sikhs as the earlier chronicler, also recorded an extremely distorted and biased version of the Sikhs and their evolution. It was at this juncture, as if by coincidence, that Captain Murray also came into contact with Rattan Singh Bhangoo, a resident of Village Bhari near Samrala, in his Court at Ludhiana. During the course of their random meetings, Captain Murray shared his mission of getting the history of the Sikhs recorded, and revealed that he had already got one version recorded by his court official Boote Shah Maulavi. Captain Murray also entreated Rattan Singh Bhangoo to acquaint him with the Sikh history, since the latter came from an illustrious Sikh family. He also sought the latter's opinion on the contents of Boote Shah's version. Acceding to Captain Murray's request, Rattan Singh Bhangoo went through Boote Shah's version and found it not only inadequate, but extremely biased and completely bereft of

truth and objectivity. Being a direct descendent of the great Sikh martyrs and having a comprehensive knowledge of the origin and evolution of the history of the Sikhs acquired through the then prevalent oral narration of events from generation to generation as well as his study of the earlier Sikh texts like *Janamsakhis* (1588), Sri Guru Granth Sahib (1604), Bhai Gurdas' *vaars* (1630), Sainapati's *Sri Gursobha* (1711) Sukha Singh *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasmi* (1797) and earlier Persian records, he felt an urgent need to set the record straight and narrate a valid, unbiased and objective history of the origin and evolution of the Khalsa Panth from its beginning upto his own times. He told his patron candidly about the inadequacies and glaring distortions in Boote Shah's version because of his in-built racial hostility and religious bias against the Sikhs. He also offered to narrate an objective and true account of the origin and evolution of the Khalsa Panth, to Captain Murray. The latter accepted this offer and entrusted him to record the history of the Khalsa Panth since this British Officer as well as his senior at Delhi had been instructed to get an authentic version of the Sikh history recorded so that its proper version could be preserved in the British Museum at London. It would also serve the purpose of chalking out the British policy towards the Sikhs in the near future. This recording of major episodes of Sikh history by the author of the *Gur Panth Parkash* to his British patron continued for a significant period. Later on, the author converted these statements into a single volume of a poetical epic and completed its last version at Amritsar while sitting in the Bunga of his ancestors in the holy precincts of Harmandir Sahib. For recording these prominent historical events of Sikh history, he travelled extensively to collect information, took notice of the prevalent traditions of oral history, heard the accounts from his veteran Sikh ancestors and went through the available religious Sikh records. Being a good scholar of Persian, and Sikh and ancient Hindu scriptures

and belonging to a Sikh family of illustrious Sikh martyrs as well as being an immediate descendant of those Sikh veterans who had participated in some of the most violent and bloody military campaigns against the Mughals, he was fully qualified to record a reliable version of the Sikh history.

Before going into the subject matter of this great epic, its sources of information and mode of its presentation, it would be appropriate to look into the brief biographical profile of its author in order to evaluate the relevance and authenticity of its historicity. The author was the grandson of the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century Sikh warrior Sardar Mehtab Singh of Mirankot from the paternal side and Sardar Sham Singh of Kroresinghia Misl from the maternal side. S. Mehtab Singh along with S. Sukha Singh had, in a rare act of dare-devilry, beheaded the Mughal feudal lord dubiously known as Massa Ranghar in the open court in 1740 CE for the latter's act of desecrating the holy Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar. After the martyrdom of his grandfather, his father S. Rai Singh, too, had participated in many Khalsa campaigns against the Mughals. He was married to the daughter of S. Sham Singh, head of the Kroresinghia Misl and was given the territorial custody over a few villages near Mirankot in Amritsar and Sirhind, kept in their custody under the "Rakhi" system of their Misls. Rattan Singh Bhangoo, the author of this epic, was the third son of S. Rai Singh. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh established his political dominance over the north-western parts of the Punjab to the North of the Sutlej, the author's family migrated from Mirankot and settled at village Bhari in their custodial territory of Sirhind as per Lepel Griffin's<sup>1</sup> account. It was during his stay here that he got wind of the history of the Sikhs being written by Boote Shah Maulvi under the patronage of David Murray. Being well-versed in Sikh history, both because of his illustrious Sikh lineage and heritage as well as his scholarship in Sikh history, he apprehended the production of a distorted version of Sikh

history by a bigoted Muslim. With the object of both guarding against the projection of such a biased view about his religion and history being passed on to the British and the world and presenting an authentic, objective version of the Sikh history, he established links with Captain Murray and struck a good rapport with him. It was out of this two-fold objective of protecting the rich Sikh heritage and history and projecting an almost eye-witness account of the saga of Sikh struggle and evolution that he undertook to communicate his perspective on Sikh history to his British patron. It took him a lot of time and labour to complete and preserve the rich legacy of Sikh struggle for the coming generations in a poetic epic. As Dr G S Mann of Global Institute for Sikh studies New York 2016 points out “The text under discussion thus is the creation of a substantial figure with a considerable family and cultural capital, who had acquired the best that the late eighteenth-century education in the Punjab had to offer, and who felt obligated to inform the East India Company officials of an accurate account of the history of the Panth. As a self-appointed spokesperson of the Panth, he discussed these issues with Captain Murray and then committed them to writing (*jibi bidhi kahi Angrezani sangi, rakhon uthanaka soi prasang*, s. 1:3) for the use of fellow Sikhs. The title Sri Guru Panth, the divisions of the narrative into the sakhis, the medium of poetry with the use of *dobras* and *chaupis* – all are firmly rooted in the Sikh religious and literary ethos. Its public recitation started in his lifetime (*path krote niti taban rabe nihal nihal*, s. 163:13) and continues until today.”<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the year of composition of this text, the year 1841 projected by Bhai Vir Singh has been broadly accepted by the subsequent editors of this text, though doubts have been raised by recent scholars like Dr G S Mann about the veracity of this year of composition. Dr Mann believes that Bhai Vir Singh’s fixation of 1841 as the year of its composition

does not interpret the textual reference given in the concluding episode correctly. He is of the opinion that we should abandon this “century old wisdom” and arrive at more convincing date and year of composition after a correct examination of all the available manuscripts. It will be interesting to know how Bhai Vir Singh arrived at this year 1841 after reading the textual reference to its composition in episode 169, p 784, Vol II, It reads: **ਬਿਕ੍ਰਮ ਬਸੁ ਗ੍ਰਹਿ ਅਹਿ ਸਸੀ ਬੀਤਤ ਭਏ ਸੁ ਸਾਲ । ਪਾਠ ਕਰੋ ਤੈ ਨਿਤ ਤਗਾ ਰਹੈ ਨਿਹਾਲ ਨਿਹਾਲ ਨਿਹਾਲ।**<sup>3</sup> Bhai Vir Singh interprets it as eight-gods (*basu*) nine planets (*grahi*), eight precious stones (*ahi*) and one moon (*sasi*). He then reversed the sequence of 8981 to generate 1898 Bikrami Samvat (the Indian Lunar year) which corresponds to 1841 as the year of the completion of this text. Such a pattern of dating text does also appear in some other eighteenth century texts. However, Dr Gurinder Singh Mann interprets this entire line as “1898 good years have passed” and by implication the year 1899 BS is underway and we have been kept enlightened by reciting it every day. He feels that Rattan Singh Bhangoo created this work after Bute Shah’s “*Twarikhe Punjab*” (1809) and it came to closure before Col David Ochertoney’s departure from Punjab in late 1814. He further states that this period between 1809-1814 also endorses the reference to the incursion of the Khalsa army under Ranjit Singh into Cis-Sutlej area in 1807 as well as a complete absence of any mention of his (Ranjit Singh’s) activities afterwards as stated in the text.<sup>4</sup> With this new observation by Dr G. S. Mann, there is need to examine the various manuscripts and more textual references to arrive at a correct conclusion about the correct timing of its composition. Further research is required on this aspect of the text.

Bhangoo used both the sources of oral history as well as the written resources for his writing of this epic. As far as the use of oral history, he acknowledges its contribution in the opening lines of his epic:

Now I undertake to write the account of the Sikhs,  
As it was narrated by our ancestors and forefathers.  
And as heard from still earlier and ancient elders,  
Who had heard it from their own talented peers.<sup>5</sup>

This oral tradition of narration of major historical events and historical personages has been prevalent almost in every society, especially during the earlier phases of civilization. This tradition, in the form of grandmother's tales, discourses (*katha*) from the pulpit in the daily religious congregations at religious places and even stage and theatre versions, has been so strong and pervasive among the majority of all the Indian religious groups that the major contours of the character traits of the great historical personages and their legendary achievements, together with their religious and moral ethos, have been permanently etched into the memory and collective unconscious of their races. With their repetitive recitation over the generations, each religious community has come to acquire their distinct religious and moral traits. This stream of oral history has a wider mass appeal than the recorded history based on scholarship, which caters to the interests of a miniscule minority of those who study it for their scholarly and academic pursuits. This oral stream of history, though undoubtedly laced with a bit of sentimentalism and racial and religious bias, is nevertheless as pervasive and valid as the academic stream of history. The legends of Rama, Krishna, Kauravas and Pandavas, and various Hindu legendary saints and soldiers have become an integral part of the Indian/Hindu psyche primarily through this folklorist tradition of epics of Indian/Hindu History. Similarly, major attributes of Sikh valour, charity, sacrifice and service of humanity and Sikh fundamental ethos of *Naam Simran*, meditation, earning one's livelihood through just and earnest means as well as sharing one's earnings with others, have entered the Sikh psyche and become an indispensable part of Sikh way of life mainly through this



perennial stream of oral history in the form of verbal narration of the legends such as those works written by Sikh bard Santokh Singh's *Suraj Parkash Granth* and other folklorist genres (*vars*) through the generations about the lives of Sikh Gurus and great Sikh Martyrs and saints. Rattan Singh Bhangu, like the authors of several celebrated Indian epic writers, has borrowed heavily from some of these oral sources while composing his epic about Sikh history together with the facts from the written sources available to him. Some of his forefathers, with whom he interacted, had given him an eyewitness account of some of the major events during the 18<sup>th</sup> century period of great turmoil in Sikh history. His own grandfather's legendary beheading of an arrogant and spiteful Mughal stooge Massa Ranghar and his father's active participation in the major Sikh military campaigns against the Mughals, were events which were not so distant from his own times. Several instances of exceptional bravery by the veteran Sikh warriors from his own Majhail stock of Jat Sikhs and the verbal anecdotes about their valorous acts right from the initiation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh through the several Khalsa campaigns including the Guru's tortuous departure from Anandpur Sahib, the bloodiest encounter and battle at Chamkaur Sahib and the sacrifice of two elder Sahibzadas; the execution of younger Sahibzadas at Sirhind; sacrifice of forty Muktas (mainly Majhail Singhs); the ransacking of major Mughal centres of power together with the destruction of Sirhind and the revengeful slaughter of Wazir Khan under the command of the most illustrious Sikh warrior and general, Banda Singh Bahadur, and the latter's most tragic execution along with his more than seven hundred devout Sikh soldiers and the subsequent two genocides (*ghallugharas*) of the Sikhs — to mention a few sagas of Mughal oppression and the Sikh retaliation and sacrifice, were too fresh in the collective Sikh psyche of his own generation.

The epic writer, being a very sensitive and conscious inheritor of this painful historical legacy, was also a gifted poet in his own vernacular language. The chance encounter with the British Political resident David Murray at Ludhiana in around 1808-09, and his assigning the author with the narration of the history of his ancestors and their religion's evolution, provided him with the most appropriate opportunity to display his knowledge of events and the talent to narrate those events. Thus, it was an ideal matching of "the man and the moment" to produce a rare work of art and historical importance, as all the monumental works and events have materialised whenever the right personage arrived at the right moment. It seems his oral narration of events in the daily dialogues with the inquisitive British officers spurred his poetic imagination to put it in verse in the peaceful environs of his home at night what he had narrated in one-to-one conversations to his patron in the latter's court or home during the day. The author's use of the contemporary literary poetic forms such as those of *Dobra*, *Chaupai*, *Kabit*, *Sortha*, *Kundliya*, *Chhand*, *Swaiyas*, together with the appropriate quotations from the verses of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, shows his poetic craftsmanship as well as his being well-versed in the religious literature of his own times and the ancient Indian/Hindu epics. By compiling the major events and sagas of Sikh valour and sacrifice into a poetical epic, the author has given expression to all those beliefs, religio-racial traits, ethos and a value-system together with the streak of hero worship that was embedded in the innermost recesses of the Sikh psyche of his times. Despite all the changes in the environment in the modern age, the Sikhs, all-over the world, still cherish and believe in all those fundamental tenets of Sikhism which Bhangoo's epic narrates and eulogises. It is for this rendering of basic Sikh ethos that he deserves to be counted among the great Sikh bards like Bhai Gurdas, Kavi Santokh Singh and Bhai Vir Singh. His epic, besides being a

great poetico-historical document of Sikh history, primarily of the most bloody eighteenth century period of Sikh history, is, perhaps, the finest specimen of expression of the pent-up Sikh emotions and aspirations of his own times. It is a recorded expression, in a suitable and widely used linguistic medium, of all those emotions, aspirations and regrets, which were on the lips and in the terribly bruised Sikh hearts and minds. The credit for creating a unique work of art, out of a verbal dialogue and the social discourse of his times, goes to the author of this epic, the minor deviations and distortions of basic historical facts notwithstanding. Together with the assimilation and exploitation of this oral stream of history, the author has also depended on available written resources such as *Gurbilas* to which the author repeatedly refers during his compilation of various resources. Most of his references of the existing resources of Sikh history are meant to authenticate what he has narrated from his knowledge and use of oral history. He urges his readers, time and again, to go through the works of his predecessors in order to verify and acquire a more detailed account of events, which he has narrated briefly in order to restrict the volume of his epic to its manageable size. His travels and visits to certain places and persons related to the major events reveals his painstaking efforts to put a stamp of authenticity on his narrative creation.

There are two handwritten manuscripts of this text available, one MS 797 at Panjab University Chandigarh and other Manuscript MS 276 at Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar, Another copy of the Manuscript was believed to be in possession of S Gian Singh Rarewala family which was one among the author's descendants. This copy was reported to have been taken away by Bibi Nirlep Kaur and landed at Baba Virsa Singh's headquarters/ Dera at Gadaipur near Delhi. It is now untraceable. Another copy of the manuscript used to be available at Public Library Lahore, and still another copy in

the personal possession of S Gian Singh Rarewala which was taken away from him by Giani Gurdit Singh, according to Dr Kirpal Singh, Ex Professor and Head of Department of History, Punjabi University, Patiala.

The first edited and published text of *Sri Gur Panth Parkash* was prepared by Bhai Vir Singh in 1914 on the basis of the different copies of manuscripts in his possession. A revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of it was published by him in 1939 on the basis of another copy of the manuscript traced by him. Subsequently he published the third and fourth editions of this text in 1952 and 1962 which are more or less copies of the second edition. At present, the eighth edition of this published text is available. Dr Harinder Singh Chopra, in his doctoral research dissertation, "Editing of *Panth Parkash* of Rattan Singh Bhangoo by Vir Singh", GNDU 1990 analysed Bhai Vir Singh's method of publication of this text where he traces the socio-cultural crosscurrents in the Punjab around 1900, and highlights Bhai Vir Singh's contribution to Sikh studies and gives a detailed description of the editing process adopted by him while preparing the first and second editions of publishing this text. He also refers to Bhai Vir Singh's deletion of certain passages related to Hindu gods and goddesses and sanitization of the methodological associations with the Sikh Gurus. He also refers to the replacement of the term/ word "Hindu" with "Sikh" which were otherwise synonymous terms in Rattan Singh Bhangoo's time. Despite these observations, Bhai Vir Singh's published text makes a popular reading among Sikh readers. The next published and edited text edited by Dr Jeet Singh Seetal, published by Sikh History Research Board, Amritsar in 1984 is another revised and improved version of this text which facilitates its reading through the addition of explanatory footnotes about the various references to Indian/ Hindu mythology. It also goes to the credit of these editors for giving this text its real and correct title as per the name of this text

found in almost all the manuscripts. The sobriquet Sri has been added as a mark of respect in this beginning as it has been a convention while naming earlier Sikh classics as well. The third published edition of this text has been prepared by Jathedar Santa Singh of Nihang Singh organization Buddha Dal published by Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh in 2008. The unique feature of this edition is that it facilitates the understanding of the true import of certain colloquial phrases, slangs and terminology used in the text by its author while narrating the life, culture and deeds of 18<sup>th</sup> century Nihang Singhs / Sikh Warriors. The latest edited and published edition of this text prepared by Dr Balwant Singh Dhillon, has been published by Singh Brothers Amritsar in 2004. This edition is based on the comparative study of Ms No 276 (GNDU), MS. No 797 (PU Chandigarh) and Bhai Vir Singh's latest edition available before its own publication. However, we have translated the text edited by Dr Jeet Singh Seetal in deference to the Institute of Sikh Studies' policy guidelines about the translation of Sikh classics.

The central subject and main thesis of Bhangoo's *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (the very name is suggestive) is the origin and evolution of, perhaps, the youngest religion of the world, the Khalsa Panth or the Sikh religion, despite its not very meticulous adherence to the chronological order of events of the Sikh history. The need to trace the origin of the Khalsa Panth and narrate its evolution arose from a purely circumstantial need to refute the calculated Muslim attempt by the discredited Mughal rulers and the Muslim scribes to feed a completely distorted version about the Sikhs and their history to the newly arrived British rulers of India after the near extinction of the once mighty Mughal empire. The author, feeling a sense of outrage at the total travesty of truth contained in the Muslim versions, felt it as his moral duty to set the record straight and took upon himself to present it as a rejoinder to the Muslim versions that the Sikhs, far from being followers

and inheritors of a divinely revealed and painstakingly organised religion, were a section of the Indian populace which as “subjects” had become defiant and anarchic rebels against the Mughal rule because of the repeated invasions of the Afghans from the north and the consequent anarchic conditions that prevailed in the Northern region in which the Sikhs were in a dominant majority. The two Muslim versions, one that was got prepared by the first British political resident at Delhi, Colonel David Ochterlony and the subsequent version submitted by Boote Shah Maulvi to Captain David Murray had painted Sikhs as an irresponsible unruly section of society and rabble-rousers, devoid of any ideology and Divinely revealed religion or any legitimate authority to rule and govern after toppling an established monarchic order or having a public mandate or hierarchical sanction to take over the reigns of political power. The Sikhs in the north had been emboldened to defy the Mughal authority partly because of the Mughal rulers’ preoccupation with wars in the south and partly because of the Sikh tactics of hit and run and looting and plundering of the Afghan raiders from the north on their way back home after their repeated invasions of India through the Punjab/ Sikh territory. Otherwise, the Sikhs had neither routed any big military power on the field of battle, nor have accomplished any other deed of any exceptional bravery nor have even received any sanction to rule from any Divine or temporal authority.

The whole epic, through its narration of more than one hundred and sixty legends of Sikh valour and sacrifice, together with its narration of Guru Nanak’s birth and his laying the foundation of Sikh religion and its final codification as a full-fledged, organised religion by the Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, through the initiation of Khalsa Panth, is the author’s answer to this specific singular enquiry of his British patron: who conferred the sovereignty on the Sikhs? Which

authority, Divine or temporal, had sanctioned or anointed them to be sovereigns? Whom had the Sikhs routed in the war and how had the mere Sikh subjects, timid like sparrows and lambs, had torn out the mighty Mughals as brave and ferocious as lions and the falcons?

In a series of extremely poetic dialogical stanzas of exceptional brevity and brilliance, the author provides a point by point explanation to the questions of his brilliant patron:

Dohra :Then addressing me Captain Murray asked me the question,  
That I should disclose him this much of a mystery.  
“How did the Sikhs acquire political power and statehood,  
And who bestowed sovereignty on the Sikhs? (33)

Chaupai: Then, I answered Captain Murray in these words,  
“The true Lord Divine had conferred sovereignty on the Sikhs.”  
Captain Murray asked me who was their true Lord?  
I replied, “Guru Nanak is their true Lord.” (34)

Murray remarked that Nanak was a mere mendicant,  
What did he know about political power and sovereignty?  
I remarked that Guru Nanak was the Lord of Lords,  
He was a Divine prophet and lord of the whole world. (35)

His reprimands turned many kings into paupers,  
And his blessings turned many paupers into kings.  
By keeping himself detached from politics and power,  
He came to acquire the status of a Lord of Lords.(36)

Whosoever sought his Divine grace and blessings,  
They were imbued with power and sovereignty.  
His blessings made the timid sparrows pounce upon the hawks,  
And he empowered the meek lambs tear apart the lions.<sup>6</sup>

Rest of the whole epic — through its narration of various legends of laying the ideological foundations of a new Sikh

religion following a Divine inspiration received by Guru Nanak during his two days disappearance in the river Kali Bein and passing on his ideological message to the successive nine Sikh Gurus and its final codification by the tenth Sikh Guru and conferring the right of sovereignty on the Khalsa Panth and the subsequent sagas of Sikh resistance and sacrifices by the Sikh Gurus and his followers — provides a detailed explanation of the brief, almost monosyllabic answers made in the introductory question-answer dialogue in the second episode of the epic. By the time, the reader reaches the middle of this epic, its author has convincingly explained both to his patron as well as to his readers that Sikh religion, like the earlier major religions of the east and the west, is a revealed religion; that its founder was a divinely inspired prophet who made his divine mandate clear both through precept and example to rid the society of ignorance, corruption, religious bigotry and senseless religious rituals and to lead a human life based on truth and earnest living. He had also warned both the oppressive Lodhis and the succeeding Mughal rulers that they would rule and govern so long as they ruled justly and fairly, and would lose their sovereignty the moment they turned oppressors and tyrants. His subsequent narration of the supreme sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur to uphold the fundamental right of following one's religion and resist political coercion to propagate the ruler's religion and impose its ideology on others; the armed resistance put up by Guru Gobind Singh against the tyrannical rule of the despotic and bigoted Mughals at the cost of his own and his four sons' lives; the subsequent armed uprising of the entire Khalsa Panth under the command of the bravest and the most charismatic Sikh warrior Banda Singh Bahadur that shook the foundations of the oppressive crumbling Mughal empire and the final establishment of a sovereign Sikh empire in the north-west of India; and the narration of innumerable legends of individual bravery and



sacrifice — provide a detailed and convincing explanation for the legitimate claim of the Sikhs to be sovereigns and independent. Besides the narration of this central thesis about the genesis and evolution of the Khalsa Panth with its distinct Sikh scripture and eternal Guru, Guru Granth Sahib, its church (Gurdwara), its national flag, distinct identity, dress code, value system and way of life, and their final setting up of a sovereign Sikh state with its own army, currency and civil administration over a vast territory in the north west of India, the author of this great epic of Sikh history gives a graphic narration of innumerable sagas of Sikh valour and sacrifice. Among the prominent episodes in this epic are those of the battles of Anandpur Sahib, Chamkaur Sahib, Muktsar, Baba Banda Bahadur's invasion and destruction of Sirhind and other Mughal centres of power in the north including those of Sadhaura, Banur, Samana and the slaughter of the bravest Mughal Pathan warriors including the slaughterer of tenth Guru's younger Sahibzadas, Wazir Khan, the Nawab of Sirhind; subjugation of the wily, intriguing, traitorous Hill chiefs of *Baidhar* states and annexation of their territories; the two worst genocides of the Sikhs known as *Ghallugharas* and the supreme sacrifices of individual Sikh martyrs primarily those of Baba Banda Bahadur and his more than seven hundred faithful brave Sikh followers; Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Sukha Singh, Mehtab Singh and several others. It presents a glorious saga of terrible confrontations of the Sikhs with the tyrannical and autocratic Muslim rulers of Delhi, Sirhind, Lahore, Jalandhar, Kasur, Multan, and foreign Afghan invaders like Nadir Shah Durrani and Ahmed Shah Abdali and the final emergence of the Khalsa, as if out of its own ashes like the proverbial Phoenix, as a sovereign nation and a state after a century of countless sacrifices.

Having been written by a contemporary scholar, whose father and fore-fathers had directly participated in the major

Khalsa crusades against the oppressors and having heard about the not-so-distant historical events from his elders in the best available oral tradition as well as his perusal of available recorded accounts, he was the most qualified person to record the Sikh history for his British patron. In addition to the narration of the above mentioned episodes vindicating the origin and evolution of the Khalsa Panth, the author has recorded various other events closely related to the course of history of the Sikhs which either emerged out of various distortions and fault lines that erupted out of the uneven flow of Sikh history or had a strong bearing on the growth and expansion of the Khalsa Panth. The author faithfully records the eruption of several splinter groups which set up their own shops to preach and propagate their own brand of religion after deviating from the basic tenets of Sikhism as laid down and propagated by the Sikh Gurus. Notable among these splinter movements and vested organised sects, which caused a considerable damage to the Sikh Panth and are still causing it even today and which find a detailed mention of their activities in the epic are, for instance, Banda Singh Bahadur's religious order of Bandai Singhs with their own slogan of "Fateh Darshan" in place of Khalsa Panth's fundamental greeting of "Waheguru ji ki Fateh" and donning of red robes after discarding the Khalsa ordained blue robes after their split from the mainstream Khalsa Panth during the fag end of Banda Singh's life and his tragic execution. Similarly, the author records the activities of several other splinter groups such as those of Sultanis, Hindalias, Gangushahias, Ram Raiyas, Masands, Gulab Raias, Chandalias and Jandalias, which after splitting from the Khalsa Panth, did a considerable damage to the cause of the Sikh Panth and abused the patronage accorded to the founders of their respective sects by the Sikh Gurus, for their own extraneous and mercenary advantages. The epic, thus, includes, all these places, personages and their pontifactory

activities, which got embedded into the Khalsa Panth during its checkered and tortuous evolution since its origin and well beyond the eighteenth century. Thus, its well-laid out canvas is dotted with the graphic spectacles of Sikh Panth's origin, evolution, consolidation, under the Guru period; its violent, valiant, sacrificial confrontation with the oppressive tyrannical Mughal rulers, its temporary eclipse, its mythical Phoenix-like resurgence from its near extinction and its final flowering and fruition into an independent sovereign Sikh State. To put it briefly, the narration of this divine-spiritual-politico-temporal voyage of the Khalsa Panth constitutes the Subject matter of this unique Sikh/Punjabi epic.

Among its diverse other characteristics is the portrayal of a galaxy of eminent Sikh warriors and chivalrous Sikh knights who occupy a pivotal position in the glorious history of the Sikh Panth and without whose grit, and steadfast commitment to Sikh ideals and sacrifices, the Khalsa Panth could not have evolved and preserved its religious and distinct national identity among the comity of nations and world religions. Beginning from the portrayal of the ninth Sikh Guru, the four Sahibzadas and Forty Muktas, there are more than a dozen other fully indoctrinated, highly motivated and committed chivalrous Sikh Warriors, whose legendary acts of valour and supreme sacrifice find a graphic description in the pages of this epic. While the author adopts a broadly objective approach conforming to the historical evidence in majority of the cases about their legendary contribution, in one or two cases he deviates from the historical facts and enters into an excessive glorification and edification of their charismatic personalities, due to his poetic disposition and flights of fancy. In his excessive zeal to glorify their dynamic, charismatic and almost magnetic qualities of leadership and exceptional valour, he catapults them from the human plane to superhuman level and projects them more as divine incarnations and demi-gods

than exceptional visionaries, steadfast leaders of men, and real flesh and blood figures as they really were. Such a projection of one individual Sikh warrior and leader of men not only violates the wide spectrum of historical evidence available regarding the eminent role played by this unique Sikh warrior but also goes against the grain of fundamental tenets and principles of Sikh religion and its ideology. This dichotomy between principle and the deed pertains to Rattan Singh Bhangoo's portrayal of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. Like some other epic writers of both the east and the west, the poet's act of hero glorification assumes the dimensions of a hero-worship where the glorious deeds of bravery, chivalry and the most strategic battle victories and demolition of the most powerful citadels of the mighty Mughal empire are narrated to be accomplished more by the exercise of occult/supernatural acts demonstrated by an accomplished necromancer than by a thoroughly indoctrinated, master strategist, highly motivated, committed, and the most valiant Sikh warrior and Guru-anointed leader of men that Banda Singh, as per all historical evidence available, really was. This edification begins from the word 'go' as Banda Singh enters the territory north of Delhi after his appointment as the supreme leader of the Khalsa Panth by the Tenth Sikh Guru at distant Nanded, and continues till his final execution at Delhi on June 9, in 1716.

In about forty-five episodes devoted to this great Sikh crusader and warrior in this epic, there runs an endless chain of miracles, unbelievable blessings, curses and magical feats which get materialised by his mere sleight of a hand and batting of an eyelid. Moreover, all these feats of supernatural acts are attributed to his pre-initiation and orientation period in the Sikhfold during which he had been a devout follower of a Tantric Yogi Aloonia Sidh and from whom he is reported to have received a book of Tantric Mantras over which he attained a complete mastery and command. A full episode records a

long list of these esoteric formulas, which Saint Jait Ram of Dadu Duar narrates to Guru Gobind Singh during the Guru's stay with the Saint during his journey to the South. Later on, this epic hero is shown practising most of these feats on his foes and sometimes on his friends as well. It will be appropriate to give a sample of some of these esoteric skills of Banda Singh to highlight the author's extent of hero-worship and excessive religious fervour in gross violation of the established principles of Sikh philosophy and faith. Banda Singh's domination over the gang of bandits and dacoits during his first encounter with them in Bangar area of present-day Haryana more through a magic spell than a real fight; his prediction about the approach of horse-riders of the Kaithal *faujdar* by his stamping of his feet on the top of a wall and later on his overpowering the invading troops through magical jamming of their horses' movement and the weapons of their riders; his miraculous disarming of Aali Singh and Maali Singh's handcuffs put by the Sirhind police and later on his astrological identification of these two Sikh warriors and their innermost thoughts and feelings and a similar spotting of Sirhind custodian's spies at Samana; his burning of a body of a dead Muslim Pir at Sadhaura and his open declaration about his possession of Tantric powers learnt from his tantric Guru and possession of a book of Tantric Mantras; his reputation of his walking with his feet without touching the ground; his body casting no shadow; his non-batting of eye-lids; his planting of Khalsa's saffron standards (flags) without any support and security at Panipat and their mysterious immunity from being uprooted or damaged by any human being and a Muslim's instant burning in fire at his touch of these flags; his sitting aloof on a hilltop and non-participation in fighting during the decisive battle for the capture of Sirhind and his sudden raising of a dust storm by shooting an arrow in the final phase of battle; his possession of countless miracles, Sidhis and feats

of necromancy — are all very vividly described:

He is portrayed as nursing a strong vendetta against the mainstream Khalsa force “The Tat Khalsa” threatening to slaughter them in the same manner the Guru’s Singhs’ had slaughtered his goats at his monastery near Nanded and offer the Singhs’ heads as sacrifices to propitiate and invoke the blessings of goddess, Kali. He is also portrayed as a treacherous, indulgent sex-maniac, who declined and deteriorated in moral character due to his various lapses of moral turpitude. Bhangoo records ten reasons for his decline in military and spiritual prowess as well as his powers of necromancy such as his alleged disobedience of Mata Sundri’s express will; his decline in moral character; his loss of occult powers and the loss of book of necromancy his estrangement with the mainstream Khalsa; his founding of a new religion, the act of female infanticide, and his gratuitous achievement of first acquiring occult powers and then their later loss.

Such a portrayal, though poetically appealing and highly glorifying initially and extremely depressing later on, not only runs counter to the basic tenets of Sikh ideology and ethos, but also contradicts the bulk of historical evidence available about Banda Singh Bahadur’s steadfast commitment to Sikh ideals and his implementation of Guru’s mandate to wreck the tyrannical Mughal empire. His charismatic personality, imbued with Guru’s blessings and specific mandate, became a rallying point for the Sikh masses to avenge the merciless execution of the two younger Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh and other atrocities committed by the Mughals. He not only fulfilled the mandate of the Guru but also made the supreme sacrifice of his life along with more than seven hundred devout Sikh warriors with a steadfast, unflinching faith despite all kinds of temptations and incredible atrocities and indignities inflicted on him and his followers. The eminent Sikh historians including Dr Ganda Singh, Dr Kirpal Singh, Dr M.S.

Ahluwalia and others have contradicted in unequivocal terms the highly exaggerated portrayal of Banda Singh's powers of necromancy and his disobedience of Mata Sundri's dictat. Majority of the historians are unanimous in their opinion that Banda Singh Bahadur is one of the bravest of the brave Sikh warriors who was a military genius, a military strategist par excellence, a charismatic leader of men with an electrifying personality, a leader of men who always fought from the front and made the supreme sacrifice, despite all provocations and tortures including the slaughter of his son in his lap and forcing the slaughtered child's throbbing heart into his mouth. This is an act of sacrifice, which is as profound and supreme as the sacrifice of the two Sikh Gurus, Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, besides other legendary Singhs like Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh and many other devout Sikhs. The historical records of Banda Singh's and his contingent's execution and the manner of their execution as well as their acceptance of this retribution for their act of defiance negates Bhangoo's charges of moral degeneration of Banda Singh. Banda Singh's steadfast commitment to Sikh ideals and doctrines is manifest from his short sovereign rule over Punjab when he struck a coin, currency and seal in the name of Sikh Gurus rather than in his own name and abolished the feudal *zamindari* system and gave proprietary and occupancy rights to the tillers of the land.

The fact remains that Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, after his initiation and indoctrination by Guru Gobind Singh, fulfilled the Guru's mandate with complete commitment and honesty of purpose. In one of the episodes, Rattan Singh Bhangoo compares Banda Singh to a poisonous, parasitical creeper, which sucks the sap of a green healthy plant and destroys it forever. This plant is called "Bando" in the vernacular language as stated by Bhangoo. The Guru, terming Banda Singh as the Guru's "Bando", enjoins upon Banda Singh to stick to the wicked

Mughal rulers and their tyrannical, oppressive rule like the viscous, sticking and sucking creeper and keep sticking to it till it is sucked, wrecked and mutilated beyond repair:

Dohra :There is a parasitical creeper that ruins a tree from the top,  
This creeper is known by the name of “Bando” in the world.  
Banda Singh should become a similar poisonous creeper of the Guru,  
And squeeze, sap and destroy the oppressive Mughal empire.<sup>10</sup>

Baba Banda Singh Bahadur fulfills the Guru's fond wish and completes his mission with his utmost devotion and commitment in the best tradition and of Khalsa code of conduct except for initiating a slogan of “Fateh Darshan” temporarily which dies its own death after finding no acceptance among the main body of the Sikhs. Rattan Singh Bhangoo, being a poet, an epic writer and a zealous inheritor of Sikh heritage of the dignified struggle and defiance against tyranny, has been carried away by the charisma and valour of his epic hero. It is this excessive zeal and poetic disposition of the author which makes him enter into acts of hero-worship and imaginative glorification of Banda Singh and investing him with superhuman and supernatural powers. Otherwise, all the military campaigns and victories of Banda Singh narrated by the author conform to the historically recorded achievements of Banda Singh. Thus, Rattan Singh Bhangoo's version of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur's contribution, despite his deification and glorification of Banda Singh's character is not altogether fictitious though it certainly hurts and shocks the sensibilities of enlightened Sikh readers well-versed in principles of Sikh ideology. Rattan Singh Bhangoo's excessive mythologisation of Banda Singh's personality also blunts the authenticity of this great historical document to some extent and makes it a work of imagination based on poet's fancy and hearsay. This mythologisation of his epic hero also dilutes the significance of oral history which otherwise is a valid source of historical information. Like the great English 17<sup>th</sup> century epic poet John



Milton's unconscious eulogisation of Satan for his rebellious opposition to God after the poets' own rebellion against the protestant church in his famous epic *Paradise lost* and like the several other instances of glorification and deification of Indian figures of Rama and Krishna by the Indian epic writers, Rattan Singh Bhangoo, being a descendant of the mighty Sikh warriors, too, had deified Baba Banda Singh Bahadur to make him qualify for being an epic hero of the Sikhs. But his deification neither violates the chronological sequence of Banda Singh's heroic exploits nor contradicts the historical contribution of this great Sikh warrior except the myth of his resurrection after his death.

Besides the origin, evolution of the Khalsa Panth through charismatic personality, heroic deeds and achievements of Banda Bahadur and his martyrdom, Rattan Singh Bhangoo describes the relentless struggle, sacrifices and martyrdom of legendary 18<sup>th</sup> century Sikh warriors and martyrs notably Tara Singh, Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Bhai Mani Singh, Mehtab Singh Mirankot, Sukha Singh, Shubeg Singh, Taru Singh, Hathoo Singh Majhail, Nihang Gurbaksh Singh, Charat Singh, Baghel Singh and Bota Singh in the later episodes together with the major historical events of Wada Ghallughara, Chotta Ghallughara, invasions of Nadar Shah, Ahmad Shah Abadli, Organization of two veteran Dal Khalsa Sikh militaristic continents namely Budha Dal, Taruna Dal. Slaughter of Nawab of Sirhind Zain Khan and destruction of Sirhind for the second time as well as an account of a Cis-Sutlej Phulkian Sikh States and splinter Sikh schismatic sects such as Chandialas, Jandialas, and Dile rammians.

Thus, this epic, besides chronicling the sagas of supreme sacrifices by the Sikh Gurus and the Sikhs for upholding the values of their faith and religion, also acquires the status of a seminal work for the preservation as well as presentation of the most basic Sikh tenets of sovereignty of *Guru Granth*, *Guru Panth*, and the Sikh tradition of *Gurmatta* and Sikh martyrdom.

The epic writer's whole-hearted effort appears to be both on conceptualizing these tenets as well as demonstrating the technique and tradition of materializing these concepts as living role models so that the coming generations may learn to preserve and uphold this rich heritage and legacy of their faith.

By accomplishing these two objectives, this epic has come to hold a unique position among the few available resources of contemporary Sikh history. It is perhaps for this reason that a twentieth century Sikh historian Karam Singh remarked that had Rattan Singh Bhangoo not composed his *Panth Prakash*, we would have known very little Sikh history. Hari Ram Gupta regarded *Guru Panth Parkash*, an 'extremely valuable' and a 'first-rate authority' on Sikh history. Various other historians like Dr Ganda Singh, G. C. Narang and Indu Bhushan Banerjee have acknowledged its relevance and borrowed heavily from it while writing their books on Banda Singh Bahadur and the post Guru Period of Sikh history. Sardar Kapoor Singh has referred to this work time and again while writing his philosophical treatise on Sikhism. Despite these super-human deeds of sacrifices and acts of martyrdom both by the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh warriors to uphold and espouse the basic tenets of Sikh sovereignty and its acknowledgement by an overwhelming number of eminent scholars of Sikh history, there still persists a belief in certain quarters which feels shy of according this poetic work the status of an epic while admitting it to be a "social chronicle" and a "masterpiece" in the same breath. Let us analyze some of the definitions of an epic as given by certain literary theoreticians in order to see what makes a poetic work an epic and see whether Rattan Singh Bhangoo's work belongs to this genre. Epic, according to Oxford Dictionary "is a long narrative poem of heroic deeds." Another literary theoretician M.H. Abrams says, "In its standard sense, the term epic or heroic poem is applied to a work that meets at least the following criteria: it is a long

narrative poem on a serious subject, told in a form and elevated style, and centred on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or (as in the instance of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*) the human race."<sup>11</sup> Among the other characteristics of an epic are "its hero as a figure of great national or cosmic importance", its setting which is "ample in scale or even larger", the action which 'involves superhuman deeds in battle' in which "God and other, supernatural beings take an interest or an active part; narrated in a ceremonial style which is deliberately distanced from ordinary speech and propositioned to the grandeur and formality of the heroic subject and epic architecture and begins in *medias res* that is in the middle of things."<sup>12</sup> Considering all these characteristics as parameters of an epic, Rattan Singh Bhangoo's *Gur Panth Prakash* fully qualifies for being an epic of a sublime order. It narrates the evolution of a nation and a religion, the Khalsa Panth, enumerating the superhuman deeds of human valour, endurance and sacrifice in a grand poetic style over a span of vast space and time. The Sikh heroes and martyrs, both among the divine Sikh Gurus and the human Sikh warriors can be counted among the world's greatest martyrs by any reckoning. Bhangoo's flashes of poetry touch the sublime while narrating some of these deeds of rare sacrifice. The contrary view which denies this poetic work the status of an epic, ignores all these attributes of this work because it thinks erroneously that Bhangoo's work lacks in the "homogeneity of personages and events which communicates wisdom as the correlative of truth". But it fails to realize that homogeneity in this poetic composition, as in all other epics, is one of vision and its steadfast projection of that vision rather than the homogeneity of personages and events. All the diverse personages and their sacrificial deeds of valour and sacrifice which form the *dramatis personae* of this Sikh epic right from the Sikh Gurus to the last Sikh warrior stand for and uphold

the same homogeneity of supreme principle throughout the span of this epic - the principle of sovereignty of the Khalsa Panth and its achievement and preservation even at the cost of their lives. How can the personages and events belonging to different periods of time and facing different circumstances be homogeneous? Thus, this epic, like all other epics, has heterogeneous personages and encounters to uphold a homogeneous vision of Khalsa Panth's evolution, preservation, promotion and ultimate sovereignty.

Its author, being well versed in Indian mythology, his epic is a veritable goldmine of grand epic similies and verisimilitudes, which makes for a delightful reading for a reader of vernacular Punjabi. The epic abounds in references from Indian mythology illustrative of Indian moral values, valour, sacrifice, keeping of promises and propagation of one's ideology through precept and example rather than through the Islamic way of coercion and duress. There are innumerable references to the Indian mythological heroes and events like Lord Rama, Krishna, Harish Chandra, Janak, Janmeja, Sarapmedh Yajna, Gugapir and prophet Mohammad to bring out the moral fibre and valour of Sikh Gurus and Sikh heroes, especially its epic hero Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. The author, being a son of the soil, uses a folklorist rustic imagery and diction and, at times, appears to painstakingly rhyme his verse a bit crudely and artificially into some kind of doggerel. But his judicious economy of words and a brilliant play upon the words (puns) is amazing. For this quality of being brief and witty, his poetry can be compared to the heroic couplets of the greatest 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet Alexander Pope whose poetic credo was — "brevity is the soul of wit". Bhangoo's definition of a true Khalsa in a single couplet illustrates his remarkable command over poetic diction:

Dohra :The Khalsa must be as autonomous and self-respecting,  
As embodiment of all the Divine attributes in plenty.

Never submitting to the sovereignty of anyone else,  
Except the sovereignty and autonomy of God alone.<sup>13</sup>

He has experimented with all the prevalent contemporary literary forms such as those of Dohra, Chaupai, Sortha, Kabit, Sawaya, Kundlia, Chhand and Tribhangi Chhand, Jhoolna, Pauri and Aril and used them quite successfully. The imagery is predominantly rustic taken from the day-to-day life of his agrarian fraternity.

Rattan Singh Bhangoo's major source 18<sup>th</sup> century Sikh history being oral and traditional from of listening of Sikh sagas from his elders there are a few other omissions and commissions regarding the exact dates, and time of certain major events and names of certain personages due to the author's excessive dependence on oral sources of his narration. For instance, he mentions the names of Sahibzadas Jujhar Singh and Zorawar Singh who sacrificed their lives at Chamkaur Sahib instead of Sahibzadas Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh. Similarly, he records the date of their supreme sacrifice as Bikrami Samvat 1762, which according to historical records is December 7, 1705 (C.E.) or Posh 8, 1762 B.S. Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah's demise has been recorded as 1784 (B.S.) which in terms of common era comes out to be 1727 C.E., which according to Dr B.S. Dhillon is not correct and is likely to be 1712 (C.E.). Banda Singh Bahadur's execution and death has been mentioned as 1778 Bikrami Samvat which means 1721 (C.E.). But he was executed on June 9, 1716.

Mughal emperor Farukhsiyar died as per Rattan Singh Bhangoo in 1781 Bikrami Samvat or 1724 (C.E.) but he also mentions it as 1133 (Hijri) which means 1721 (C.E.) at the same place. So, both these dates do not tally. Farukhsiyar was actually murdered by Sayyad brothers on February 28, 1719, after blinding him.

Similarly, he makes no mention of the younger Sahibzadas being bricked alive before their execution at Sirhind, in

(Episode 21) but later on describes the raising of a concrete platform at the place of their execution after its proper identification by the contemporary elders. He also mentions the year of Bhai Mani Singh's martyrdom as 1794 B.S. as he heard it from his father but the writer of *Shabeed Bilas* mentions it as 1791 B.S. or 1734 A.D. Mir Mannu's death is mentioned as 1823 B.S. or 1766 A.D. but, as per historical records, Mir Mannu died in November 1753. Similarly, the year of Ahmad Shah Abdali's death is recorded in Bhangoo's epic as 1823 B.S. or 1766 A.D., but historical records place it on October 23, 1772 A.D. Certain names such as those of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's father's name, Nawab Aslam Khan in place of Zakaria Khan and Abdul Samad Khan in place of Zakaria Khan in episodes 90 and 91 have been wrongly recorded. But for these variations in dates here and there, there is hardly any variation between his version and historical records in the sequence and chronology of major events. That speaks volumes for the credibility of this epic as a social chronicle of the times as well as Bhangoo as chronicler and epic writer.

By accomplishing these two objectives, this epic has come to hold a unique position among the few available resources of contemporary Sikh history. It is perhaps for this reason that a twentieth century Sikh historian S Karam Singh Historian remarked that had Rattan Singh Bhangoo not composed his *Panth Prakash*, we would have known very little Sikh history.<sup>14</sup> Hari Ram Gupta regarded *Guru Panth Parkash*, an 'extremely valuable' and a 'first-rate authority' on Sikh history.<sup>15</sup> Various other historians like Dr Ganda Singh<sup>16</sup>, G. C. Narang<sup>17</sup> and Indu Bhushan Banerjee<sup>18</sup> have acknowledged its relevance and borrowed heavily from it while writing their books on Banda Singh Bahadur and the Post Guru Period of Sikh history. Sirdar Kapoor Singh has referred to this work time and again while writing his philosophical treatise on Sikhism.<sup>19</sup>

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## GURPRATAP SURAJ GRANTH

*Gurpratap Suraj Granth* (1843), written in hybrid Punjabi and Braj Bhasha diction in Gurmukhi script, in highly embellished poetic verse is the most prominent historic-poetical text among a dozen of classical Sikh texts which form part of the primary sources of Sikhism. This anecdotal and episodic collection narrates the biographical, spiritual, religious, ideological, pontifical life and role of ten Sikh Gurus, Sahibzadas and Baba Banda Singh Bahadur's life and contribution to Sikhism. Because of the marked stance of its author's utmost faith in Sikh Gurus' spiritual enlightenment and grandeur, his avowed aim of the projecting, propagating, and promoting Sikh theology *Gurmat* among the Sikh masses, its richness of detail, historicity of its narrated events related to the Sikh Gurus and their mission and, above all, its unmatched poetic verse and appeal – this text has been authorized to be recited and explicated in the daily evening discourse in major Sikh historical Gurdwaras all over the world. It combines Sikh spiritualism and Sikh ethos with Sikh history and projects the Sikh Gurus' spiritual vision, philosophy and their concerted and consecutive efforts to establish and perpetuate Sikhism as a distinct religion. It aims at strengthening and cementing the faith of devout Sikh masses in their religion. Apart from its religious and historical contents, it is a rare work of literature in its epic dimensions. It is an indispensable text for a devout Sikh, a masterpiece for a literary scholar and a goldmine for a researcher of Sikh history and India's rich heritage.

Its author, Bhai Santokh Singh (1788-1844) was an erudite scholar, a master craftsman of poetry and an acute observer of men and matters and a committed champion and



crusader of distinct Sikh sensitivity and sensibility. He is among the most venerated, and the select eminent Sikh theologians namely Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Nand Lal. He has been bestowed upon with several honorifics such as *Kavi* (poet), *Mahan Kavi*, (author of a great epic), *Kaviraj* (poet laureate), *Kavi Churamani*, an honour conferred upon him by Bhai Vir Singh and *Bhai* an honour conferred by Sri Akal Takht on eminent Sikhs for their remarkable contribution to Sikhism. Born at Noor Di Sarai (now in Kapurthala District of Punjab), he soon moved to Buria Dyalgarh in Tehsil Jagadhri (Haryana) then to Patiala and finally to Kaithal in Haryana and compiled all his poetic works at these three places. Now a memorial known as Kila Santokh Singh at his birth place has been built along with a Gurdwara with the joint efforts of Bhai Vir Singh and S Ujjaar Singh and Giani Khazan Singh. Kavi Santokh, before writing and creating his poetic works, had studied all the existing and available writings and the Sikh canonical texts written in Gurmukhi script such as *Janamsakhis*, Sainapat's *Sri Gursobha*, *Sri Gur Ratanwali*, *Sau Sakhi*, *Parchain Sewadas*, *Gurbilas Patshahi VI*, *Gurbilas Patshahi X* by Koer Singh and Sukha Singh, *Mahima Prakash* both by Kirpal Dyal Singh and Sarup Das, and *Bansahvalinama Dasan Patshabian ka* by Kesar Singh Chhibber etc.

Being the son of a Sikh scholar Bhai Deva Singh and disciple of Nirmala Saint Karam Singh and having received his early education from Giani Sant Singh, the head priest of Sri Darbar Sahib, Santokh Singh was an accomplished scholar of Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Vedas, Hindi, Political Science, Martial Arts as well as astrology. Being a devout baptized Gursikh, he married out of his caste and his last remains were not immersed in the Ganges. He also married his daughters to baptized Sikhs. If Maharaja Ranit Singh had consolidated the Sikh power politically and saved it from getting splintered, Kavi Santokh Singh alongwith his guide and religious mentor Giani Sant Singh, enabled the Sikh masses to introspect and

explore and imbibe their rich spiritual, religious and cultural heritage. According to Bhai Vir Singh, Kavi Santokh Singh, compiled his magnum opus *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* on scientific lines on the basis of available Sikh history and Sikh historical traditions. He filtered the entire existing impurities from Sikh history and made the cleaned Sikh religious stream flow unpolluted and unhindered. He refers to the malicious attempts of those schismatic conglomerates who wished to contaminate the Sikh Gurus' pure stream of Sikh religion. He portrayed some of these elements in the most derogatory bestial imagery:

As male buffalos, animal spieces, asses and pigs together wished,  
To contaminate a water source with their excreta.  
So did the schismatic entities wished,  
To malign the pure Sikh stream rendering every  
Sikh effort to curb the contemnors blunted.<sup>1</sup>

(Rut 5, Chapter 52)

He regards Guru Nanak as "Param Parwar Nath", head of the Sikh religious family and also believes that without Guru Gobind Singh's birth, resistance and contribution, the whole Indian tradition and culture of Vedic and Puranic Hinduism would have been wiped out from the Indian sub-continent. He states:

(India's) religious diversity would have been wiped out,  
And a singularity of culture would have overtaken.  
There would have been (moral) corruption all over,  
And the Indian Classic texts Vedas/ Purana would have been  
tempered with.  
Sin would have prevailed all around,  
And all religions would have been degraded.  
Varnas would have been eliminated,  
And constitutional divisions/ allocations would have been effaced.  
Says the poet/ bard Santokh Singh,  
All the shrines of (Hindu) gods and goddess would have been  
destroyed.  
There would have been an end to the tradition,  
Of reciting and explicating Vedas and Puranas,

Had Guru Gobind Singh not been blessed by the Divine Lord,  
To be an icon of Divine Power against the aggressor.  
Praise be to the venerable Sri Guru Gobind Singh,  
For being the supreme Divine Warrior.<sup>2</sup>

(Rut 5, Ansu 52, couplet no 27)

In fact, Guru Gobind Singh is the ideal, hero and Sikh icon for Kavi Santokh Singh. The earlier verses of *Bachittar Natak* and of Guru Gobind Singh's Court-poets about the Guru's charismatic personality, character, role and contribution had left an indelible impression on the poet's mind and he has portrayed Guru Gobind Singh on the basis of those impressions. The end result is a monumental epic of rare historical, religious and literary merit. Besides his commitment to Sikh religion and Sikh ethos, he also accorded a respectful place/ position to some of the ancient Indian sages and a few deities from the pantheon of Indian gods, goddesses and their miraculous powers, so that the entire Indian nation could get benefitted from their rich heritage.

Before we analyze the structure, narrative technique, relevance and literary merit of this text, it is better to mention his total literary corpus. It consists of:

1. *Nammala kosh* (1821) – a Punjabi Braj Bhasha Poetic translation of a Sanskrit Work “Amarkosh”
2. *Balmiki Ramayana* (1821) – an excellent Gurmukhi translation of this text in the Braj Bhasha poetic diction in couplets.
3. *Sri Guru Nanak Parkash* (1822-23),
4. *Garb Ganjani Teeka* (1826) written in a Sanskritised diction – a scholarly commentary on the Jap (ji) text on the basis of Vedantic Philosophy.
5. *Atam Puran Teeka* – another excellent Gurmukhi translation of and commentary on an ancient Sanskrit text.
6. *Suraj Pratap Granth* (1843).

When Bhai Vir Singh edited and published the work, he made *Sri Guru Nanak Prakash* part of the *Sri Gur Suraj Parkash Granth*, and brought out the entire work in fourteen volumes.

In its present form, the *Guru Pratap Suraj Granth* consists of about 62000 couplets and over two and half lac lines. It took the poet ten years to complete this epic which beginning in 1834 was completed in 1843. If we include the period of preparation and finishing of *Guru Nanak Parkash* (1822-23) also, then it took the author a period of around 21 years to complete this monumental work.

After completing this text, Kavi Santokh Singh presented its first manuscript at Sri Akal Takht after a customary Sikh prayer (*ardas*) and handed it over to the authorities. This manuscript was handed over to Bhai Gurmukh Singh, son of Giani Sant Singh for safe keeping. It got misplaced during the large scale violence following the demise of Maharaja Sher Singh, but by that time, its several copies had already been made and its text was available with a few prominent persons. According to Gokul Chand Narang, its first edition was published at Caxton Press, Lahore, during the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of Maharana Padam Chander, the ruler of Jubal. Bhai Vir Singh edited the first edition of this text and published it in fourteen volumes, and now published by Bhasha Vibhag. While the first volume consists of a preface and an introduction, the remaining thirteen volumes contain its text with relevant word meanings and comments. Subsequent well-researched publications on Suraj Pratap Granth consist of Giani Khazan Singh's *Jeevan Katha Churamani Kavi Santokh Singh ji* (1966), and three publications by Dr Jai Bhagwan Goel namely his doctoral dissertation (1964) and later in a book form: *Nanak Parkash* or *Gur Pratap Kavya Tatvon ka Adhiyan; visheshta Chhand aur Alankar ki Drishti se* (1970), *Gurpratap Suraj Granth (Sankhipt)* (1972) and *Mahakavi Santokh Singh* (1992). Another research work is on *Nanak Parkash* by Sabinderjit Singh Sagar: *Historical Analysis of Nanak Parkash*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University in 1993. Three more books in this category are Dr Harneet Singh's *Bhai*

*Santokh Singh da Rachna Sansar* (1991), Dr Rupinder Kaur's concordance of all of Bhai Vir Singh's edited fourteen volumes and main events in this text published by Punjabi University Patiala, 1998, and Karamjit Singh edited *Mahan Kavi Santokh Singh: Jeewan te Rachna* (2014). SGPC has undertaken to prepare a Gurdwara version of this text by translating its contents into Punjabi prose edited by Dr Kirpal Singh and his team extricating lines and passages which it considers are excessively mythological and inconsistent with *Gurmat* philosophy and putting these extricated passages at the end of each volume. It has completed 18 volumes till date (Oct 2017) and plans to translate the entire text in 25-26 Volumes. There is an urgent need to translate this historical text into English to facilitate its reading by both the English reading Indian and diaspora readers.

The title *Gurpratap Suraj* or *Suraj Parkash* chosen for this work and its structure is also very imaginative using the brightest and the vast imagery of the Sun and its entire solar system. The creative poet has visualized the spiritual glory/effulgence of the ten Sikh Gurus as identical to the brilliance of the sun, and the movement of the earth around it in a span of twelve months. Like the sun Guru Nanak is the head of this Sikh family, "the Parwar Nath" and the other Nine Sikh Gurus are its satellites. The cosmic movement of the planets around the Sun and their symphony and cosmic dance is conceived in terms of *Ras* or *Ras Leela* (also connotative of Krishna and his consorts' dance around him) in a span of twelve months resulting in the change of six seasons over the two poles of the earth (North and South). The poet has divided his text into twelve sections, each section titled as *Ras*, and each section or *Ras* having several chapters called *Anshus* like many rays of the Sun. The whole work has been further divided into two main parts or *Aims*. To make it more clear, Guru Nanak's life and contribution has been narrated in *Sri Gur Nanak Parkash* and that of other nine Sikh Gurus from Guru Angad Dev to

Guru Gobind Singh in *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*. Each section (*Ras*) and its chapters (*Anshus*), besides describing the ten Sikh Gurus' lives and roles, also contain a beautiful description of Indian seasons, Indian fauna and flora and the infinite variety of Indian landscape.

*Guru Nanak Parkash* consists of two sections known as *Poorbardh* (1<sup>st</sup> half) and *Uttarardh* (2<sup>nd</sup> half) which have 130 chapters (73+57). It consists of around sixty episodes or *sakhis* related to Guru Nanak on the basis of many sources but especially *Bhai Bala wala Janamsakhi*. This, perhaps, is the only flaw in this text, as this version of *Janamsakhi* has been found to be less authentic with several inappropriate interpolations made in this version at the behest to its dubious and schismatic patrons, the Handalias:

It goes to the credit of Kavi Santokh Singh that he included only those episodes from the *Janamsakhi Bai Lala* which are eulogistic and bring out Guru Nanak's spiritual persona. He, thus, restored the purity of the spiritual and religious stream of Sikhism by excluding the derogatory episodes about Guru Nanak written and included in the *Janamsakhi Bhai Bala* at the behest of Handalias. However, he retained the *Kattak Puranmasi* (October or November) Guru Nanak's birthday as mentioned in *Bhai Bala* version of *Janamsakhi*.

*Guru Nanak Parkash* contains 130 chapters about the life, mission and gospel of Guru Nanak in the most devotional vein. The first part contains seventy three chapters consisting of Guru Nanak's birth, childhood, early education, cowherding, feeding of starving mendicants, Bibi Nanki's marriage, his state service at Sultanpur as store-keeper and accountant, betrothal, marriage, interaction with Rai Bular, dialogue and discussion with Sidhas and his mystical communion with the Divine during a protracted dip in the Bein rivulet. The second part consists of fifty seven chapters consisting of encounter with the monastic Rishis, mystical

odyssey into unknown planetary regions, demise of Guru Nanak's parents, visits to and intellectual and spiritual encounters with Brahminical priests at Kurukshetra, Brindaban, Haridwar on the banks of Ganges, Benares, Ajodhya, Jagannath in Orissa, historicity of Guru Nanak's odysseys, mystical encounter with Kalyuga and its values, visits to Kashmir, Kabul, Emnabad and settlement at Kartarpur, association with Bhai Lehna and final departure. It portrays Guru Nanak in the highest and most venerable diction. In his devotional zeal and staunch faith in Guru Nanak's divinity, the poet enters into deification of Guru Nanak in some episodes and he shows Guru Nanak mixing and mingling with the Hindu mythological gods. For instance, in chapter 8 of Uttarardh, Guru Nanak together with three main mythological gods is shown serving food to their common guest, the goddess Ganges. Similarly, in another episode, Guru Nanak takes on the persona of Lord Ram Chandra, Bhai Bala of Lachhman and Mardana of Seeta with Hanuman paying obeisance to Guru Nanak (Uttarardh, 18, 62-73). This kind of excessive zeal of faith and devotion and deification of Guru Nanak, though well-intentioned to place Guru Nanak at par with Hindu gods and accord him a divine status, is at variance with Gurmat philosophy which neither believes in gods and goddesses nor conceives God in any human form nor accepts Guru Nanak as a lesser God but a spiritual guide and a benevolent teacher. Despite this sort of deification and hero worship of Guru Nanak, *Guru Nanak Parkash* is the best portrayal of Guru Nanak's magnificent persona instilling and perpetuating religious faith among the Sikhs in the Sikh pathway of life as formed and propounded by Guru Nanak. A poet of Kavi Santokh Singh's scholarly and literary caliber alone could make a highly successful use of the images and symbols from the centuries old Hindu mythology embedded in the collective unconscious of all the Indians including the yet-to-be born

Sikhs. He alone was destined to give a new orientation to the preaching of the Sikh belief system with a view to perpetuate Guru Nanak's religion among his followers.

*Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* also has two parts, the first part has twelve *Ras* or sections divided into 775 chapters whereas the second part has six *Ruts* further divided into 313 chapters apart from two *Ains* which have 87 chapters. Thus, there are a total of 1175 (775+313+87) chapters, and if we add to this number 130 chapters of *Guru Nanak Parkash* also, the grand total of chapters comes to 1305. While the twelve cantos or *Rasas* consisting of 775 Chapters deal with Guru period from Guru Angad Dev to Guru Tegh Bahadur, the six cantos or six *Ruts*/ seasons consisting of 313 chapters, and the two *Ains* (North & South Poles) consisting of 87 chapters deal with life of Guru Gobind Singh's last battle at Muktsar, departure for south, stay and demise at Nanded and Banda Singh Bahadur's exploits in Punjab and his martyrdom. Moreover, all the sections and chapters vary in volume, size and length. The poet has written the highest number of chapters (313) attributed to the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, with sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind occupying second place and Guru Nanak with 130 chapters occupying the third position. Broadly, section one or *Ras* one *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* covers the period of Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das, It consists of invocation to Baba Buddhaji, genealogies of Baba Buddhaji, Bedi clan, ten Sikh Gurus, establishment of Khadoor Sahib by Guru Angad Dev and his teachings there, Hamanyu's visit, episode of Rai Bular and prominent Gursikh disciples and close associates of Guru Angad Dev and his contribution to the development of Gurmukhi alphabets and script. All these episodes are related to Guru Angad Dev. Episodes related to Guru Amar Das consist of Guru Amar Das' encounter and association with Guru Angad Dev and conferment of Guruship on Amar Das, establishment of Goindwal and digging of water reservoir



(Bauli), visit to Samana, sending of Jetha ji to Lahore to see Moghul emperor and resolve dispute with Brahmins, pilgrimage to holy places and setting up of twenty two Sikh dioceses (*Manjis*), description of close disciples of Guru Amar Das and conferment of Gurship on Bhai Jetha (Guru Ram Das).

Ras 2 consists of Guru Ram Das's setting up of Guru ka Chakk after receiving a of land grant and setting up of *Santokhsar* and later on starting of digging (*Tank*) of sacred pool on the eastern side of Santokhsar, later on called *amrit sar* (*sar* or *sarovar* or pool of *amrit* or nectar) and construction of Harmandar Sahib and colorization of Amritsar. It also describes Guru Ram Das' visit to Lahore and setting up of institution of authorized officials known as Masands, discovery of hidden epistles written by Guru Arjan Dev to Guru Ram Das from the custody of Prithi Chand, Guru Arjan's return from Lahore to Amritsar and information about Guru Ram Das's prominent disciples and intimate associates and further development of Amritsar.

Ras 3 and 4 consist of Mata Ganga's supplication to Baba Buddha ji for his blessings for the birth of a son, birth of Guru Hargobind, intrigues and conspiracies against the child Hargobind and his bodily infections, Prithi Chand's rivalry and conspiracies against Guru Arjan Dev, compilation of Guru Granth Sahib and its installation at the Harimandir, digging of sacred pool at Tarn Taran and information about Guru Arjan's Dev prominent disciples and associates. Canto four/ *Ras* four describes Guru Arjan Dev's refusal to accept the matrimonial alliance of Chandu's daughter with Guru Hargobind, his vengeance and conspiracy against Guru Arjan Dev, Jahangir's summoning of the Guru to Lahore, and pronouncement of death sentence through tortures, Sulhi Khan's contemplated attack on the Guru and his own demise, Amir Khusrô's visit to Guru Arjan Dev and his request for shelter and support, death of Prithi Chand, Chandu's daughter-in-law's faith and

devotion to Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind's Guruship and solemn pledge and establishment at Akal Bunga, Jahangir's invitation to Guru Hargobind and meeting at Majnu ka Tilla at Delhi, visit to Gwalior and release from Gwalior along with other princes.

Cantos or Ras 5,6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 deal with the lives and contribution of Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkrishan. Maximum space has been given in this part of the epic to the events related to the life of Guru Hargobind including custodial transfer of Chandu to Guru Hargobind, Guru's visit to Amritsar, Lahore, Srinagar, Kashmir, Nanak Mata, Darauli Bhai, Goindwal, Kartarpur, Kiratpur, Guru's second and third marriages, births of his sons Tegh Bahadur, Gurditta, Ani Rai, Atal Rai, Dhirmal, Har Rai and Guru's battles against Lalla Beg, Paimda Khan, Kaulan's protection under Guru's patronage and establishment of Gurdwara Kaulsar, Bhai Gurdas' and Bidhi Chand's association with the Guru and grant of Guruship to Har Rai, to mention a few. Events related to Guru Har Rai include Dara Shikoh's visit, excommunication of Ram Rai and a few other events related to Aurangzeb and his battles with his brother Shujah and Murad and Guru's development of Kiratpur and transfer of Guruship to Guru Harkrishan before his own demise. The section ends with Guru Harkrishan's visit to Delhi, stay at Delhi, teachings and services to the people of Delhi and his demise. These cantos are loaded with innumerable episodes about the sixth, seventh and eighth Sikh Gurus wherein each Sikh Guru has been projected as enhancing and advancing the Sikh spiritual tradition and the emerging profile of Sikh religion along with the description of the contemporary political and collateral rivalries.

Ras 11 and 12 narrate events and episodes related to Guru Tegh Bahadur and early life of Guru Gobind Singh. The episodes consist of discovery of true ninth Sikh Guru at Baba

Bakala by Makhan Shah Lubana, Guru's development of Anandpur Sahib, visits to Saraswati, Pehowa, Kaithal, Thanesar, Dhamtan, Prayag, Kashi, Sasaram, Patna, Gaya, Assam, Kamakhya Devi Temple, Dhaka, return to Anandpur Sahib through Patna, Agra, Delhi, Lakhnau, Kashmiri Pandit's appeal to the Guru for the protection of their religion, Guruship to Gobind Rai (Guru Gobind Singh), Guru's departure to Delhi, arrest, persecution and execution along with his three close disciples and picking up of Guru's corpse by Labana Sikhs.

Six Ruts (seasons) one to six consisting of 313 chapters narrate Guru Gobind Singh's taking up of Guruship, cremation of the sacred head of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur Sahib brought there from Delhi by Bhai Jaita, marriage with Mata Jeeto ji, and Mata Sundri ji, stay at Nahan, Paonta, birth of four Sahibzadas, Guru's main battles against hill chiefs and Moghuls, creation of the Khalsa and selection of Panj Piaras, third marriage with Mata Sahib Devan ji, death of four Sahibzadas and stay in Southern Punjab.

The concluding *Ains* (Poles) one and two consist of Guru Gobind Singh's stay at Muktsar, dispatch of Zafarnama, battle of Muktsar and, sacrifice of and reunion with once estranged Sikhs and Mai Bhago, departure towards South, meeting with Bahadur Shah, stay at Nanded, meeting with Banda Singh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh's demise, Banda's heroic victories in Punjab, demise of Wazir Khan and martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur.

This is a massive structure conceived imaginatively and executed meticulously. Since no other canonical Sikh text has such a wide canvas, it is the most voluminous historical poetical text covering the entire Sikh Guru-period and even going beyond.

The narrative technique of *Suraj Pratap Granth* follows the narration of historical events to the contemporary Sikhs in the manner of Sanjay narrating the whole *Mahabhabarta* to the

blind Dhritrashtra. The main source of *Suraj Pratap Granth* is the collection of episodes written by Bhai Ram Koer in his collection of *sakhis* titled: *Bhai Ram Koer Walian Sakhian*. Bhai Ram Koer was a descendant of Baba Buddha ji and became famous by the name of Bhai Gurbakhsh Singh after getting initiated into the Khalsa brotherhood. According to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Ram Koer gathered a lot of information about the first nine Sikh Gurus by asking several questions about them to Guru Gobind Singh and seeking their answers. He got the information thus gathered recorded in a book/ booklet (Poethi) from a scribe Sahib Singh. This collection became one of the prominent sources for the composition of Kavi Santokh Singh's *Suraj Parkash Granth*. Soon after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Ram Koer used to narrate the episodes/ Sakhis about the ten Sikh Gurus to aggrieved Sikh congregations from this collection. Although no copy of this collection is traceable now, it had been available till the time of Giani Gian Singh who has referred to his reading of this collection twice in his own work.

The main motif of Kavi Santokh Singh and the leitmotif of his main creation is to expound the *Gurmat* philosophy. While explaining the teachings of Sikh Gurus, he has highlighted their religious, social and cultural ideals and eulogized their spiritual glory and grandeur. So, propagation of *Gurmat* philosophy and portrayal of Sikh Gurus' idealistic persona, who were the living embodiments of this discipline, are the twin aims of the poet in this work. He has interpreted and explained the subtle nuances of *Gurmat* by using several episodes from Sikh Gurus' lives as well as the ancient Indian mythological figures from the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses. Implicit also in this exercise, there appears to be an attempt to reconstruct the rich ancient Indian spiritual and cultural heritage. It may be because of this consideration that there are some passages devoted to the invocation of several

mythological deities, their worship and blessings which are at variance with the *Gurmat* and Sikh religious beliefs. But majority of these mythological references have been used as literary devices to enhance the impact of the spiritual message of the Sikh Gurus. The poet's major allegiance and commitment remain to exposition of *Gurmat* philosophy, despite his use of these mythological references.

Some lay readers and a section among the Sikhs have accused Kavi Santokh Singh of being influenced by Vedantic, Brahmiacal thought and Hindu philosophy and excessive use of Hindu mythology in his compositions. This opinion has emerged out of a lack of proper understanding about the poet's use of mythology and its purpose. As has been rightly pointed out by Dr Dharam Singh<sup>3</sup>, mythology has been consistently used in the Gurbani text and other canonical Sikh texts as a medium of communication to illustrate and put across Sikh Gurus' and the post Sikh Guru theologians' message, as it was the only available frame work of reference at that time. Moreover, Hindu/ Puranic mythology is undoubtedly the common heritage of all Indians including the Sikhs. If we read this text keeping in view the poet's main motive of propagating his vision about *Gurmat* and its significance, the use of all mythological allusions employed by him fall in place and serve as illustrations and complementary parallelisms for enhancing the impact of poet's Sikh ideology. The author has used all the mythological references as similes, metaphors and as other poetic embellishments which are integral and indispensable for any poetic composition of great literary merit. Those who accuse the poet of making an excessive use of Hindu mythology and being a votary of Hindu gods and goddesses run the risk of missing the wood for the trees and fail to grasp the motive and mission of this unique champion of Sikh ethos. Here and there, one may come across a myth being used for its own sake where the poet might have been pressed upon by his patrons'

proclivity towards Hindu mythology or in a bid to escape the calumny of his literary rivals in his patrons' court. His main aim is to write a paean and a panegyric in the glory of Sikh Gurus and a vindication of *Gurmat* philosophy. Mythology and its ultimate motifs were the best available framework of reference and medium of communication for projecting the Sikh Gurus' spiritual vision by the poet at that point of time. According to Dr Jai Bhagwan Goel: "The poet's aim in *Gur Pratap Suraj* is to explicate the Gurmat philosophy in a detailed manner. He has highlighted the spiritual enlightenment of the Sikh Gurus and their teachings projecting their moral, religious, social and cultural efficacy which is essentially a part of India's great cultural heritage while portraying the lives and biographical profiles of Sikh Gurus. By composing a paean, panegyric of epic dimensions in their praise, he has, undoubtedly, propagated the Sikh Guru's Gurmat philosophy. He has been successful in conveying and communicating the subtle nuances of this Sikh religious pathway through his skillful use of a large number of scriptural verses and *sakhis* from the lives of Sikh Gurus in the tradition of an earlier Sikh classic *Mahima Prakash* (1833 Bikrami/ 1776 CE)

On the aesthetic and literary/ artistic side, *Gur Pratap Suraj* is a well-organized poetic epic. Its narrative, structural and thematic unity is based on relevance of episodes, balanced opinions, curiosity and interest of target audience and fluency of its expression... It is the first literary poetic epic which highlights the events spread over three hundred years in great detail, its earlier predecessor being *Mahima Prakash* which is written in episodic style. This distinction makes *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* a real chronicle of this epoch... it can be called an encyclopedia of Sikh history, Sikh philosophy and Sikh culture. It not only portrays Sikh Gurus' character sketches, temperamental virtues and their family lives, but also expresses the tone and tenor of the social and cultural moorings of the

contemporary age which makes it a landmark in the vast cultural history of India.”<sup>4</sup>

Besides being an exponent of fundamental Sikh ethos and Gurmat philosophy, this work is a remarkable chronicle of its times and a literary work of great merit. Its narrative reflects the political, social, cultural consciousness and awakening of the people of Punjab during the Sikh Guru period as well as their beliefs, superstitions and means of earning their livelihood. The family feuds, internecine wars and political rivalries among the Mughal rulers also find its reflection in this work. It is one of the finest specimens of aesthetic and poetic creation. We find all the finer nuances or *Rasas* of Indian literature such as *veer ras* (Bravery), *yudh kala* martial excellence, *karuna Ras*, compassion and pity, *vatsal* familial love (*shingar ras*), decoration and sense of *rahas* or wonder and horror. There is a surfeit of imagery, similes metaphors and other literary embellishments from diverse fields of Indian life and landscape. One comes across a panoramic view of changing Indian seasons and concomitant changes of hues, fragrances and temperatures. Being a talented scholar and an accomplished literary craftsman, he has successfully employed all the prevalent literary forms such as *Dohras*, *Chaupais*, *Kabits*, *Swaiyyas*, and *Chhands*. His vocabulary of words, and other lexicon items is unlimited and their usage most remarkable.

To conclude, it is a reliable chronicle of Sikh heritage, Sikh theology, and the beautiful landscape of Punjab and a literary work of great merit.

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## References

1. Kavi Santokh Singh, Gurpratap Suraj Granth, Rut 5, Chapter 52, translated into English by Prof Kulwant Singh.  
ਮਹਿਖ, ਕੋਲ, ਖਰ, ਸਵਾਨ ਮਿਲਿ, ਮਿਲ ਚਹੈ ਮਲਿਨ ਕਰ ਗੰਗ।  
ਤਿਮ ਬਾਦੀ ਗੁਰ ਕਥਾ ਕੇ ਚਲੇ ਨਾ ਬਸ ਕੁਛ ਸੰਗ।

2. Ibid., Rut 5, Ansu 52, couplet no 27  
ਛਾਇ ਜਾਤੀ ਏਕਤਾ ਅਨੇਕਤਾ ਬਿਲਾਇ ਜਾਤੀ,  
ਹੋਵਤੀ ਕੁਚੀਲਤਾ ਕਤੇਬਨ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਕੀ।  
ਪਾਪ ਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਪਕ ਜਾਤੇ ਧਰਮ ਧਸਕ ਜਾਤੇ,  
ਬਰਨ ਗਰਕ ਜਾਤੇ ਸਹਿਤ ਬਿਧਾਨ ਕੀ।  
ਦੇਵੀ ਦੇਵ ਦੇਹੁਰੇ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੂਰ ਹੋਤੇ  
ਰੀਤ ਮਿਟ ਜਾਤੀ ਕਥਾ ਬੇਦਨ ਪੁਰਾਨ ਕੀ।  
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਪਾਵਨ ਪਰਮ ਸੂਰ,  
ਮੂਰਤੀ ਨ ਹੋਤੀ ਜਉ ਪੈ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਨਿਧਾਨ ਕੀ।
3. Dr Dharam Singh in Er Karamjit Singh edited *Maha Kavi Santokh Singh – Jiwan ate Rachna*, Lokgeet Parkashan, Chandigarh, p. 10.
4. Translated from *Guru Pratap Suraj* (Sankhipt) Punjabi University, Patiala.



## SIKH MORAL TRADITION: RAHITNAMA LITERATURE

### I

A Sikh, especially one who has received initiation into the Khalsa Brotherhood is obliged to follow a distinct way of life (*rahit*) which must be in accordance with the Gurus' teachings. A distinct Sikh *rahit*/*rahini* started developing with the articulation of a new metaphysics and philosophy by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh faith. Guru Nanak received revelation and shared this revelation with humankind in general through his hymns as well as discourses. The succeeding Gurus reiterated and explicated Guru Nanak's ideology until it reached its fruition at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh. An interesting aspect of the Gurus' ideology is that they have made their spiritual thought *vis-a-tergo* of their social thought: the Sikh social thought including the Sikh moral tradition is not extraneously imposed nor is it the product of any social contingencies rather it develops from the Gurus' religious philosophy. In other words, we can say that the Gurus' hymns as included in the Guru Granth Sahib serve as the primary source of the Sikh *rahit*. The *Dasam Granth* can also be included in this category of literature though some scholars question the authenticity of authorship of some compositions included therein. The *bukamnamas* or epistles issued by different Gurus in the name of various individuals and congregations also bring out certain aspects of the Sikh way of life. The Gurus also delivered numerous discourses to their followers and also held dialogue with leaders of other religious traditions: these and such other sources highlight the Gurus' philosophy and way of life. This serves as the primary source

for articulating the Sikh *rahit*.

No doubt, the Sikh *rahit* can be extrapolated from these primary sources but the Guru Granth Sahib is an anthology of revelatory verses and not a formal treatise wherein one can come across separate sections on different subjects: we find references to the Sikh *rahit* or conduct and *rahini* or way of life scattered throughout it: people generally live their life in falsehood and hypocrisy whereas the conduct moulded in accordance with the *sabda* or Word (as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib) is the truest conduct, says Guru Nanak.<sup>1</sup> To understand the true import of the scriptural hymns on this subject, we have to depend on some secondary sources also wherein we find the scriptural message explained in simpler words. The first and foremost in this category of literature comes the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. These *vars*, commonly accepted as 'key to the understanding of scriptural hymns', explain various Sikh concepts and doctrines and also clearly define the Sikh *rahit*. However, in the post-Guru period in the eighteenth century a new *genre* of 'Rahitnama' came to be written by some intelligent Sikh scholars. Alongside this literature, there also appeared some traditional life-accounts of the Gurus such as *Janamsakhis*, *Gurbilases*, etc. which also discuss the Sikh *rahit*, but whatever these secondary sources say on *rahit* or any of its aspects must be in keeping with what is said in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh put an end to the institution of person-Gurus and bestowed this office for all time to come on the *granth* (Guru Granth Sahib or the Word as contained therein) and the *panth* (Khalsa Panth which lives strictly according to the tenets contained in the scripture). In the Sikh scripture, the words God (who is the source of revelation), Word (or *bani* as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib which comprises that revelatory message) and the ten Gurus (who served as medium to communicate that revelatory message received from

God to the entire humankind) have at several places been used synonymously. The Sikh tradition believes all the ten Gurus – Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh – to be one in spirit; these Gurus are believed to have become spirit-incarnate in the Word (or the Guru Granth Sahib which comprises the Word or *bani*) and their physical image has become present in the Panth or Khalsa Panth. On the basis of this, the Panth can also decide, through common consensus, certain rules of conduct and behavior for the Sikhs. Following this tradition, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the statutorily elected body of the Sikhs, has also prepared a *rahit*, titled *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, which is based on all the above-mentioned sources: this *Rahit Maryada* is universally followed by the Sikhs the world over.

The *rahit*, as we said earlier, takes in the Sikhs' life holistically: it deals with a Sikh's individual as well as social life, his inner values, outer symbols he maintains and his social behaviour. The SGPC's *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, available in both English and Punjabi versions, discusses the *rahit* under two heads – individual and Panthic: in the individual *rahit* is included remembrance of Name Divine, living in accordance with the teachings of the Gurus and rendering selfless service to humanity whereas under the head of Panthic *rahit* are included *amrit samskar* or initiation of the double-edged sword whereby the maintenance of five *k's* is made obligatory, penalty for infringement of any religious discipline and Gurmata or any resolution made by the Khalsa in the common interest of the community. Some of the *deras*, which apparently claim to be preaching Sikh teachings and which claim a special spiritual status for its leader, recommend a *rahit* which is not in accord either with the scriptural teachings or with the SGPC's *Rahit Maryada*. The Sikhs need to be wary of this.

In other words, we can say that the *rahit* as a whole relates to the Sikh view of man's right relationship towards the Creator-Lord, his right relation towards his own self or soul,

and his approvable attitude towards fellow human beings. First and foremost, a Sikh must have faith only in one God who is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the entire manifest material world: belief in the plurality of Godhead is strongly rejected. He must not bow to any other idol or deity except the Real One and the ten Gurus. He should keep his mind ever absorbed in the remembrance of Name Divine while performing his familial and societal obligations. Since God is not just creator of all beings but is also immanent in them, a Sikh should deem all beings spiritually one with Him and ethnically equal. He should always feel the Divine presence in every being and at all places, and this feeling should determine his attitude towards others. Each human soul is a particle of the Divine and a being has to realize this: body is the temple wherein resides the Lord-God in the form of soul. Therefore, we have to take care of the body also because it is through the means of this body that we can attain self-realization.

However, 'Rahitnama' as a different and distinct *genre* in Punjabi literature belongs to the post-Guru Gobind Singh period. 'Rahitnama' is a term used in Punjabi "in reference to a genre of writings specifying approved way of life for a Sikh":<sup>2</sup> the word '*rahitnama*' literally means a '*nama*' or '*namah*' (manual or written document) of '*rahi*' (stipulated conduct or specified way of life). This kind of literature was available in other religious traditions also: for example, in Hinduism it was available under the terms *vidhi* and *nikhedh*: the former comprises do's or worth doing tasks for a follower whereas the latter implies the don'ts or the things which a true follower of the faith must not do. The yogis have used the terms *yam* and *niyam* for this kind of prescriptive literature: the former includes the principles which a yogi must follow and the latter includes don'ts for a true yogi. In Sikhism, this kind of *genre* has come to be called *rahitnamas* or the *namas/namahs* (written

documents) comprising *rahit* (code of conduct; rules for the prescribed way of life). Bhai Gurdas who wrote his *vars* during the pre-Khalsa days and the *rahit* he articulates therein is obviously based on his study of the scriptural hymns. However, the literature written in the *rahitnama* genre proper is, with the sole exception of Bhai Nand Lal's *Rahitnama*, post-Khalsa creation or post-Guru Gobind Singh period. This literature seems to have been produced by persons who were witnessing or/and participating in the new life-style forged through the creation of Khalsa and thus felt the need to compile, for the benefit of common masses especially those who had recently received the Khalsa initiation, the rules of conduct for the life of a Khalsa.<sup>3</sup> This also shows the writers' overriding desire to project a Sikh ethos different and distinct from the Brahmanical ethos. Most of such literature was written after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh for the reason perhaps some enlightened Sikhs now felt with more intensity the need to put these rules together for the guidance of common Sikhs.

The authorship of many of these *rahitnamas* is doubtful: most of them ascribe the contents to have been pronounced by Guru Gobind Singh in response to the author's request/question and, in some cases, some of the averments ascribed to the Guru are not identical with either the Guru Granth Sahib or the *Dasam Granth*. They also differ in tone from the earlier and more authentic source on *rahit*, i.e. the *vars* of Bhai Gurdas. Most of these *rahitnamas* also claim to have been either approved or patronized by the Guru or were the Guru's response to the author's question(s) on some issues relating to *rahit*. Also, there were many outstanding literary luminaries in the Guru's court but these *rahitnamas* are attributed only to persons who were very close companions of the Guru. In the absence of any empirical evidence it is not possible to prove any of the contentions but it seems the names of such renowned and esteemed Sikhs were appended to these works by their

respective authors with perhaps the sole objective of lending credence and respectability to their works.

## II

It is very obvious that none of the Gurus wrote anything which could be called a *rahitnama* though *gurmat* or the Gurus' teachings are at the basis of all the *rahitnamas*. There are some *rahitnamas* which are directly or indirectly ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh, but the fact remains that had the Guru composed any such thing it should have surely formed part of the *Dasam Granth*. It seems the authors used this ploy only to lend credence and authority to their works. Pandit Tara Singh Narotam lists twenty-one *rahitnamas* which include among others *Sri Gur Sobha*, *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, *Gurbilas*, *Prem Sumarg* and *rahitnamas* by Bhai Nand Lal, Prahlad Singh, Desa Singh and Chaupa Singh.<sup>4</sup> Bhai Bhagwan Singh also compiled selections from thirty-seven such works to articulate the Sikh *rahit*: in these thirty-seven works he includes the *Guru Granth Sahib*, *Dasam Granth*, *Sarabloh Granth*, *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, and others.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, we shall discuss only a select few of these *rahitnamas* which are the earliest and the more important among them. The *rahitnamas* discussed in the following pages are listed below:

1. *Rahitnama* by Bhai Nand Lal  
(We have also discussed here the author's *Tankhabnama* and *Sakhi Rahit Ki*)
2. *Rahitnama* Bhai Prahlad Singh
3. *Rahitnama* Bhai Daya Singh
4. *Rahitnama* Bhai Chaupa Singh
5. *Prem Sumarg Granth* (an anonymous work)
6. *Rahitnama* Bhai Desa Singh

We have included in our list the *Prem Sumarg Granth* also because it has been generally discussed by various scholars as a *rahitnama* though it is much more than that and is also not

titled as such: it seems the author is a scholar of considerable merit though his name remains unknown. Authorship of most of the other *rahitnamas* discussed in the following pages is ascribed either to a close companion or to one who enjoyed the privilege of being in the Guru's court or company for a long time. Of course, they generally claim that the contents constitute the Guru's response to the author's request or questions at a particular time to elicit from the Guru information in regard to Sikh *rahit*. Though they claim to write these prescriptions as the Guru's pronouncements in response to their request but none of these has been directly ascribed to the Guru.

Chronologically, Bhai Nand Lal (1633-1713) is the first to write in this *genre*: he first wrote his *Rahitnama* and followed it by *Tankhahnama* and *Sakhi Rahit Ki*. The first two of these are in verse whereas the last named is in prose. Notwithstanding the doubts expressed by a few scholars about these compositions being the work of Bhai Nand Lal, they are generally accepted his genuine work. Written in Braj, which was the language generally used for Sikh literature those days, his *Rahitnama*, in verse, was written, as says its colophon, in the month of Magh of 1752 Bikrami/AD 1695 and comprises twenty-three verses only. It is written in the form of a dialogue between the Sikh (Bhai Nand Lal in this case) and the Guru (i.e. Guru Gobind Singh): here Bhai Nand Lal is presented as a seeker eliciting the Guru's response to his questions about the right doctrine and right conduct of a Sikh. A major part of it is attributed to what the Guru says. According to this *Rahitnama*, a Sikh must get up early in the morning, bathe and read/recite the divine Word. The idea is based on the message contained in the Guru Granth Sahib: Guru Ram Das in one of his hymns says that "he who wants to be called a Sikh of the true Guru should get up early in the morning and recite the Name Divine; he should get up early and bathe in the 'pond of nectar' (i.e. get

completely absorbed in the nectar-like Name Divine)”.<sup>6</sup> The poet names Guru Nanak’s *Japu(ji)* and Guru Gobind Singh’s *Jaap* to be read by the devotee in the morning and *Rahiras* in the evening. He should then participate in the holy congregation and listen to the Divine eulogies being sung there. There are several hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib also which stress the importance of participation in the congregation of the saintly: “the gathering where only the Name Divine is reflected upon is called holy congregation”,<sup>7</sup> and that “discoursing with the devotees for even a *ghari* or even half a *ghari* is beneficial to man”,<sup>8</sup> says the scripture. He who lives this *rabit* causes cessation to the cycle of his birth-death-rebirth, says the *Rahitnama*.

The *Rahitnama* says that the *granth* (Guru Granth Sahib) be deemed the very image of the Gurus. He who wants to have a *darsan* of the Guru should have a glimpse of the *granth* (Guru Granth Sahib) and he who wants to have a dialogue with the Guru should read and reflect on what is said in the Guru Granth Sahib. As we said elsewhere, the words God, Word and Guru have been used synonymously in the scripture because God is the source of revelation, Word is the revelatory message coming from God, and Guru is the medium through which the Divine revelation has to be shared with the humankind in general. Bhai Nand Lal also says that there is absolutely no distinction or difference between the Guru and the *granth* or Word. A true Sikh of the Guru must abandon all thoughts of “the other woman”, implying that he must not indulge in any adulterous relationship. He should give up all ego in his mind and serve fellow beings with love and humility.

Since this *Rahitnama* was written before the creation of Khalsa, understandably it does not refer either to the Khalsa initiation of the double-edged sword or to the *rabit* of five k’s - *kesb* (unshorn hair), *kangha* (comb to keep the hair tidy), *kara* (iron bracelet worn around the right wrist), *kirpan* (sword) and



*kachbahira* (long breeches) as prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh on that occasion.

His *Tankhabnama* is apparently a work written after the creation of Khalsa in 1699 though we cannot give any exact date to its composition. Herein we find some of the famous affirmations of Guru Gobind Singh such as the word ‘Khalsa’, combing the hair twice daily which implies maintenance of unshorn hair, transforming the four *varnas* into one brotherhood, mentioning the name of the Guru as ‘Gobind Singh’, flying the hawk, empowering the Sikhs enough that one is capable of fighting against a lakh-and-a-quarter, and the famous couplet that the ‘Khalsa will rule and none will be remain a defiant...’. Also, the word *tankhab* in the sense of penalty for religious infringement came into vogue in Sikh tradition quite late. There are also oblique references to the struggle between the Khalsa and the Mughals. Like his *Rahitnama*, *Tankhabnama* is also claimed to be the Guru’s own pronouncement but here are the pronouncements on penalties for infringement of religious discipline, each of these infringements earning a particular penalty. The objective of the poet obviously is to warn the reader against all such infringements. The poet has written it in Braj and used four meters - Dohira, Chaupai, Soratha and Swaiyya – in the entire composition.

The *Tankhabnama* begins with the Guru’s utterance in response to a supposed question by Bhai Nand Lal wherein the Guru delineates the deeds that become a Sikh and which do not become him. The worthy deeds for a true Sikh, as listed in the opening Dohira, are *nam* (or remembrance of Name Divine), *dan* (or giving in charity to the poor and the needy) and *isnan* (literally, bathing; personal piety – of body as well as of mind and soul) (1-2). In the following Chaupai, the poet says that the persons who do not go to the congregation in the morning, do not immerse themselves in the Name while sitting

in the congregation, keep talking while eulogies of the Divine are being sung, discriminate against the poor, etc. will surely earn Gurus' displeasure. Such a person earns disgrace in this world as well as in the next (3-5).

He who does not attend the *divan* (i.e. congregational gathering where eulogies of the Divine are sung), distributes *prasad* without having maintained the prescribed *rabit* and inhales snuff suffers at the hands of Yama; he who looks with lustful eye at the ladies participating in the congregation, nurtures wrathfulness and accepts money in lieu of marrying off a daughter or sister is disgraced by Yama; he who deems himself a Sikh but does not keep weapons continues to suffer in the cycle of transmigration; and all meditation goes in vain of the person who deceitfully or forcefully usurps the belongings of the guest (10-12). He who does not donate *dasvandh* and earns through falsehood becomes untrustworthy (14). He who combs his hair twice to keep them clean and tidy, ties his turban neatly and cleans his teeth every day never faces any suffering or sorrow (13).

Among the other don'ts for a Sikh are listed as slandering, forgetfulness of *dharma*, breaking the promise, eating *kuttha* meat (or meat of the animal killed the Muslim way), committing adultery, failure to immerse one's mind in the recitation/reading of the divine Word, speaking ill of a Sikh or saint, gambling, usurpation, listening to the slandering of the Guru, stealing money from the Guru's *golak* or till, going to a prostitute or indulging in extra-marital relationship, paying obeisance and meditating on any deity or idol other than Vahiguru or the Real One, and carrying on business through falsehood (15-22). The poet again states that the person who reflects on any text other than the divine Word suffers a hellish life and does not find peace either in this world or the next. Such a person remains ever in suffering; the cycle of his birth-death-birth does not stop for him; and he continues to suffer at the hands

of Yama (25). A true Sikh of the Guru is advised to deem the entire humankind as one brotherhood created by the Real One and he must not cause hurt or suffering to anyone: he who causes hurt or suffering to the fellow beings displeases the Lord (26).

Defining the Khalsa, the poet says that a true member of the Khalsa Brotherhood is he who abandons slandering; annihilates the five cardinal evils; effaces his duality and dubiety; abandons his ego; never looks lustfully at any woman other than his wife; remains ever immersed in the remembrance of Name Divine; patronizes a poor; destroys the evil; remembers Name Divine and dominates the Malechh; and rides a horse and wears arms on his person (27-31). The poet reiterates several times in these verses the importance of remembering the Name Divine. References to dominating or destroying the Malechh here is perhaps a natural reaction to the contemporary situation when the term '*malechh*' was used for the Mughal government which had become a symbol of oppression, injustice, highhandedness and tyranny.

Towards the end of the composition, the poet narrates what he claims to be the words of the Guru on the objective of his life. The Guru is claimed to have said that he will bestow sovereignty on the Khalsa; transform all the four *varnas* into one brotherhood; cause everyone to remember the Real One; ride the horse and fly the hawk and the Turks will flee away seeing him/the Khalsa; empower one member of the Khalsa to equal a lakh-and-a-quarter; and he who overpowers the enemy will be granted liberation. The concluding couplet that the Khalsa will rule and that none will remain defiant there and that only he who seeks protection with the Almighty will survive is now generally recited by the Sikhs in their daily congregational prayer: composed during the days when the Mughal government in Delhi had decreed extermination of the Khalsa and the invaders from south-west used to come at

will and molest the people of the region, such optimistic words ascribed to the Guru were aimed at encouraging the Khalsa to continue their struggle and ensuring them that ultimate victory will be theirs. There are also given a couple of lines in prose saying the family from which a boy trims/shaves his hair loses honour and if a person who earlier trimmed or shaved his hair but now becomes initiated and keeps unshorn hair earns honour for himself and his family.

There is another work called *Sakhi Rabit Ki* which is also attributed to Bhai Nand Lal: Piara Singh Padam has included it among other *rabitnamas* in his book on the subject.<sup>9</sup> However, there are certain commandments in this *Sakhi* which do not fit in the overall scheme of the Sikh thinking. For example, the *Sakhi* says that a Sikh must not trust the womenfolk and avoid sharing secrets with her; trimming or shaving hair has been compared with incest; and offering *sharadb* is favoured. Sikhism rejects the wearing of *janenu* without imbibing the values it stands for: Guru Nanak, in one of his hymns, has explicitly stated that blessed is the person who wears the *janenu* which is made from compassion, contentment, modesty, etc.<sup>10</sup> In that situation, who offers *janenu* made of cotton-thread to the wearer is irrelevant and does not fall within the ambit of a Sikh *rabitnama*. However, the writer here says that it is a great sin to get *janenu* from a Brahmin who smokes and eats meat. These and such other things mentioned in this work put a question mark on the authenticity of its authorship.

### III

The author of the *Rabitnama Prahlad Singh*, Prahlad Singh, was also one of the court-poets with Guru Gobind Singh. Called Prahlad Rai before he received the initiation of the double-edged sword, he was a great scholar of Sanskrit and Persian and is said to have translated fifty Upanishads into Punjabi. Verses composed by him in Punjabi and Hindi are also found scattered in miscellaneous manuscripts.<sup>11</sup> Name of

the author is very clearly mentioned in the very beginning of the *Rahitnama* (3) but it becomes obvious from the study of its contents that the author is possibly not the Prahlad Singh who was a court-poet with the Guru. The colophon of the *Rahitnama* says that it was composed in 1752 Bikrami/AD 1695 but in the opening Dohira of it the author says that the Guru was camping at Abichal Nagar when he taught him the *rahit* which he has narrated in this *Rahitnama*. One, the Guru was very much in the Punjab in AD 1695 and he reached Nanded only in AD 1708. Two, the town of Nanded came to be called Abichal Nagar much later than even 1708. Also, he refers herein to the Khalsa *rahit*, but the Khalsa was created in 1699 – about four years after the date the author gives to his work. The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism is silent whether or not Prahlad Rai/Singh wrote any *rahitnama*<sup>12</sup> and Padam agrees that this *Rahitnama* does not seem to be the work of Prahlad Singh who was a court-poet with Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>13</sup>

As it is, the *Rahitnama*, written in Dohira and Chaupai meters, begins by saying that Guru Gobind Singh was in Abichal Nagar when he summoned the author, Prahlad Singh, close to him and asked him to listen to the *rahit* of the Khalsa (1-3). It seems the author has used this imaginary setting to provide credence and authenticity to what he says in this work. The *Rahitnama* contains commandments relating to both the personal and the corporate *rahit*. A true Sikh must get up early in the morning and recite the divine Word. He must remain ever immersed in the Guru's Word and follow the Guru's instruction. He should not have his dinner before reading/listening to the evening prayer, *Rahiras* (14). He should have faith in and meditate on the Akalpurakh or Real One alone and should not bow to any other god or goddess or idol because the latter can result in one's suffering in the continuous cycle of birth-death-rebirth (16). He must also render service to the fellow Sikhs. A Sikh who has faith in some tomb or a

temple built on the cremation site or any such other place is called *manmukh* or self-oriented: he is not a Sikh of the Guru (22). He who meditates on the Real One attains liberation for himself and also enables his entire lineage to get liberated.

The author makes a very important point when he says that the *granth* (or more precisely the Word as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib) be deemed Guru now (30). In the Sikh tradition, the Gurus are said to have become spirit-incarnate in the Word or Guru Granth Sahib. He also says that Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa under Divine instruction (30): the Guru has in one of his compositions identified himself with the Khalsa and said that the Khalsa is his own image. The author of the *Rahitnama* also says that Khalsa be taken as the Guru, manifest physical form of the Guru (24). He exhorts the Sikhs to bow before the Word, and to no one else. A Sikh should lovingly read or recite this divine Word because the Guru's Word, according to the author, is the very image of the Guru - *guru ka bachan guru ki murati*. The Guru is the savior of the Sikh who follows these instructions - *tis sikh mo main lino sarana* (35). Such a Sikh attains *jivan-mukti* or liberated state while still embodied. The author specifically states that only he is a true Sikh of the Guru who follows the *rahit* as prescribed by the latter (36).

Among the don'ts described in the *Rahitnama* under discussion, true Sikh of the Guru must never wear a cap on head and a *janenu* on his body (4). He must not gamble and visit a prostitute (4): remaining faithful to one's wife is a highly prized value in Sikhism and one is instructed against looking with lust at other's woman rather one ought to imbibe love with and participate in the congregation of the holy and serve the saintly, says Guru Arjan in one of his hymns.<sup>14</sup> A person who maintains any relationship with persons belonging to the schismatic groups of Minas and Masands and those who kill the female infant ultimately suffers in disgrace (6). Such

instruction is also found in some of the *bukamnamas*. A Sikh who utters falsehood, misappropriates money from the Guru's till and does not give away a small part (*dasvandh*) of his income to the Guru's cause is not liked by the Guru and he continues to suffer in the cycle of birth-death-rebirth (9). Such a person is called self-oriented and he leads a hellish life (11). The author says that a true Sikh of the Guru should never trust a 'Turk' (25). As it is, Sikhism deems the entire humankind – irrespective of one's caste, creed, race, sex, etc. – as the children of God. Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Akal Ustati*, has also said that the Hindus, Muslims and all others be deemed as one. Here the author's biased attitude towards Muslims could possibly be a reaction to the atrocities committed on the Gurus by the Mughal satraps under instruction from the Mughal emperors in Delhi.

#### IV

*Rahitnama Bhai Daya Singh* is another work in the *rahitnama* genre: The author, according to Piara Singh Padam, was one of the five Beloved Ones (Panj Piare) selected by Guru Gobind Singh at the time of the creation of Khalsa in AD 1699. He received the initiation of double-edged sword from the Guru himself and was also one of the five who gave the same initiation to the Guru. These five enjoy a highly venerated position in the Sikh tradition. It was in 1677 that he came to the Guru's court when his father and other members of the family came to pay obeisance to the Guru at Anandpur and decided to settle there permanently: Daya Singh's father was a devotee of the Gurus and had earlier visited Guru Tegh Bahadur at Anandpur more than once. Daya Singh, who was then a young boy of about 16 years and was well versed in Punjabi and Persian, now engaged himself in the study of classics and *gurbani*. The Nirmalas claim him to be one of their forbearers. He was also deputed to carry the letter, *Zafarnamah*, the Guru had addressed to Emperor Aurangzib

who was then camping in Ahmadnagar. He came back with the news of the death of Aurangzib and joined the Guru at Kalayat (Rajasthan). Thereafter he accompanied the Guru to Nanded and died there. Two different shrines have been built in his memory at the places where he put up in Ahmadnagar and where he was cremated at Nanded.

The *Rahitnama*, ascribed to Bhai Daya Singh, begins with the author's request to Guru Gobind Singh to instruct him in the *rahit* or way of life which can lead one to liberation: the scene of this dialogue is stated to be Anandpur. However, as in case of some other *rahitnamas*, the above averment about the Guru himself prescribing this *rahit* seems to have been made only to provide authenticity to the work. There are some anachronistic references in the *Rahitnama* which create doubts about the authenticity of its authorship: at one place the author says that 'he who takes ablutions at Muktsar attains liberation'. At another place he talks of Abichal Nagar where one should go to pay the penalty for the expiation imposed publicly for transgression of a Sikh religious or moral code: the reference here is to the tossing of turban in a clash in which case both the person who tosses another's turban and the one whose turban is tossed off are required to pay the penalty. But what is important here is that the modern-day Muktsar was then called Khidrana and that it was near the pond of Khidrana that the battle against the invading Mughal forces had taken place and the Guru had declared 'liberated' the forty Sikhs who had earlier disowned the Guru at Anandpur but realizing their mistake had come to seek forgiveness and received martyrdom fighting in that battle. The town of Nanded also came to be known as Abichal Nagar much later. There are also some other issues included in the Sikh *rahit* here which a Sikh who had remained so close to the Guru will never approve of.

The author begins with a reference to the creation of



Khalsa on which occasion, the author says, the goddess appeared and all the gods were also present; different gods bestowed different things required for the preparation of the *amrit* (for example, the iron bowl to prepare *amrit* was given by Yama; the sword, called Sarabloh's *karad* here, by Kal; sweetmeats were poured by Indra; *kes* or hair were given by goddess Chandi; and so on.) and for the preparation of *karah prasad* (for example, sugar was given, says the author, by Visnu, ghee by Brahma and flour by Mahadev or Siva). At another place, he also calls Khalsa the 'incarnation of Akalpurakh'. The Sikh Gurus believed in and wanted the Sikhs to have faith only in the almighty Real One; all gods and goddesses have been His creation and, as a scriptural hymn says, these gods and goddesses yearn to have human existence because it is only then that ultimate liberation is possible.<sup>15</sup> Then the author goes on to describe the method of preparing and administering of *amrit* and the importance of receiving it. The five initiated Sikhs should put pure water in an iron cauldron, recite Guru Nanak's *Japu(ji)*, Guru Gobind Singh's *Jap Sahib*, *Swaiyyas* and five stanzas of the *Anand* while continuously stirring the water with the *karad* or double-edged sword.

The author gives a long list of do's and don'ts as part of the *rahit* for an initiated Sikh. A true Sikh must remember God with each breath he takes: in fact, the Khalsa, he says, is he who submits himself completely to Akalpurakh. He must not bow before or worship any god or goddess; must not observe any fasts or go on pilgrimages; must not bow to any tomb or any such other place. However, at another place he says that 'he who has not taken ablutions in Amritsar is impure' and 'one does not become 'a Sikh without visiting Kesgarh while in Anandpur'. He should visit the *gurdwara* daily and must not visit any place where his mind gets diverted away from the Guru. He should participate in the congregation of the saintly but must not go there empty-handed. He should

recite and/or listen to the Divine eulogies in the congregation. A true Sikh must not slander the Bedis (the sub-caste in which Guru Nanak was born), Trehans (the sub-caste in which Guru Angar was born) Bhallas (the sub-caste in which Guru Amar Das was born), and Sodhis (the sub-caste in which Guru Ram Das and the following Gurus were born). It depends on individual perception whether this prescription violates the Sikh doctrine of equality of the entire humankind. Sarup Das Bhalla, the author of *Mahima Prakash*, also makes undue appreciation of some of his ancestors even by distorting some historical facts.

Referring to the outer symbols a true Sikh must maintain, the author says a member of the Khalsa Brotherhood should maintain unshorn hair, tie them in a knot and cover them with 'a neatly tied turban'; keep a comb in the hair and comb them twice daily to keep them clean and tidy; wear shorts which he deems a symbol of modesty; and keep a sword in his hair but at another place he also says that a Sikh should 'wear arms of Gurus' *ban?*. He does not refer to the iron bangle which is today one of the five *ke?*s every initiated Sikh is obliged to wear. However, he gives a lot of importance to hair which he says are the image of mother and the place or the body where water from the hair falls becomes pious. He also prescribes *tankhab* or penalty for dishonoring the hair or the turban tied to cover the hair. If the turban of a Sikh gets tossed off in a clash, both the person who causes it and whose turban falls off are guilty and he prescribes *tankhab* for both of them.

As for his other habits and behavior, the author says that he must eat, sleep and speak in modesty: Guru Nanak, in his famous composition *Sidh Gosti*, also says that it is by reducing sleep and partaking meager sustenance that one realizes the essence (i.e. realizes the Real One).<sup>16</sup> He should make his both ends meet through honest labour and serve the fellow Sikhs: he should give for philanthropic causes *dasvandh* or tithe out

of his income. He should address the fellow Sikhs with respect and must not call any of them by his or her first name alone; he should deem all equal and interact with others with humility. He advises a Sikh to avoid the evils of having a lustful eye on the others' wealth and others' woman, slandering others, gambling and drinking. He should have no social relations with the Masands, Dhirmallias, Ram Raias and persons with shaven head. He should avoid telling a lie and also give up the evils of ego, attachment, slander, violence, etc.; he must not pay obeisance to tombs or shrines of other religious traditions, should not observe fasts or visit places of pilgrimages, bow before gods and goddesses, etc. He who kills a female infant or gives his daughter/sister in marriage to a person with shaven head will suffer in hell. If an initiated Sikh bows at a Turk's door, wears *janen* and worships idols of any deity, he becomes liable to punishment for the infringement of religious discipline.

We find in this *Rahitnama* some inner contradictions such as the appearance of all gods and the goddess at the time of the creation of Khalsa at one place and advice against bowing to any god and goddess at another. There are some other commandments also which are not in agreement with the teachings of the scripture: for example, he asks Sikhs to deem their own religion great (like the huge Sumer mountain) and that of the others insignificant (small or insignificant like *rai* or a mustard seed) and not to trust Yogis, Jains, Munis, Turks, etc.; never to put oil to the hair; to behead the person who slanders the Guru; a Khatri should not ride a horse; a Singh feeding a Hindu is like performing a *yajna*; must not study Persian; and so on. This puts a question mark on the authenticity of the authorship of this *Rahitnama*.

V

*Rahitnama Bhai Chaupa Singh* is also called *Rahitnama Hazuri* because, as the author claims, it was prepared under instruction of Guru Gobind Singh and it also had the Guru's

approval. Chaupa Singh Chhibbar, earlier name Chaupat Rai who became Chaupa Singh after having received *khande di pahul* at the time of the creation of Khalsa in 1699 and who is said to be the author of this work, was in the service of the Gurus' household from the time Guru Har Rai, went to Patna with Guru Tegh Bahadur and acted as an attendant of (Guru) Gobind Singh at Patna when the latter was a child. Kesar Singh Chhibbar, in his *Bansavalinama*, says that 'Chaupa Singh was selected by Guru Gobind Singh himself to produce the first *rabitnama* for which the Guru is said to have promised to inspire him and direct his words: he completed the *rabitnama* in three-four days and proclaims that he who follows this *rabit* attains *sikhi*.'<sup>17</sup> The first copy of it was made by Sital Singh Bahurupia and the copy thus prepared was taken to the Guru for *imprimatur*: it seems just a ploy by the author to provide credence and respectability to his work.<sup>18</sup>

This *Rabitnama*, in prose, is quite detailed and comprises many injunctions some of which are in conflict with the accepted code of Sikh conduct. It begins with a statement saying that 'a Sikh should abide by the Guru's command and must not bow to 'Brahma' (i.e. Hindus gods and goddesses) or 'Muhammad' (i.e. Prophet Muhammad of Islam) because the Guru is his savior'. It lays much emphasis on faith in the Guru, remembrance of Name Divine and the maintenance of five *k's* after receiving the Khalsa initiation. A Sikh, he may be an initiated Khalsa or a *sahijdhari*, should get up early in the morning, bathe or at least wash face, hands and feet, and read the *Japu(ji)* five times. He should then go to the congregation in the *dharamsala* and listen to the singing of Divine eulogies but he must not go there empty-handed. In the evening, he should read *Rahiras* participating in the congregation in the *dharamsala*. He should deem the Word as contained in the scripture as his Guru and read/recite it daily. He also makes a very important theological statement saying

that ‘mere *darsan* or glimpse of the Guru’s person is not enough but liberation is attained only by one who abides by the Guru’s instruction’. Earning through honest means and sharing part of that with the needy is declared obligatory for a Sikh: feeding the hungry is like making an offering to the Guru’s coffers, he says.

Since the *Rahitnama* is a post-Khalsa creation, the author makes a reference to the preparation of *amrit* and also the method of administering *amrit* (*amrit samskar*) or initiation into the Khalsa Brotherhood. He emphasizes the maintenance of *kes* or unshorn hair, wearing of *kirpan* or sword, *kachhh* or long breeches, reading of the divine Word and participation in the *sadh sangat* or congregation of the saintly. The hair, he says, be taken as the Guru’s gift and a Sikh must keep them clean and tidy by combing them daily twice. He also instructs them to snap all ties with the Minas, Ram Raias, Masands, people who shave their heads and who commit female infanticide. A Sikh is also advised not to keep company of Turks, Yogis, Brahmins, and the persons who do not wear turban, have matted or unkempt hair and besmear their bodies with ashes. He should avoid slandering, deception, stinginess, jealousy and such other evils. He should be compassionate, philanthropist and sweet-tempered. He should not have faith in any person or place except the Guru. The *Rahitnama* recommends the value of fidelity for both man and woman: any illicit relationship with a Muslim woman is especially condemned.

The *Rahitnama* is important because it gives dates of several incidents from the life of Guru Gobind Singh. According to it, Guru Gobind Singh was born in Patna on Sunday, Magh *vadi* 7 Bikrami 1718/AD 1661: although the tradition believes the date to be Poh *sudi* 7 Bikrami 1723 /22 December 1666 but some old chronicles including the Bhatt *vahis* agree with Bhai Chaupa Singh. In 1722 Bikrami, when

the Guru was four, he wore small arms to play with other children of his age: the attendants would move along carrying his small shield, sword and bow. The child Gobind Rai started learning Gurmukhi from Chaupa Singh in 1724 Bikrami and Hindi from Kirpa Ram in Bikrami 1726. The Guru's marriage took place in Bikrami 1728: the author refers to only one marriage of the Guru. According to the author, Guru Gobind Singh was formally anointed Guru in 1733 Bikrami/AD 1676, i.e. a few months after the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur. The Guru composed the *Jap* in 1734 Bikrami and punished some corrupt Masands on the occasion of Hola Mahalla (held in the month of Phagun) in 1754 Bikrami. Next year in 1755 Bikrami, the Guru is said to have sent *bukamnamas* asking various *sangats* not to own any Masands: Dr Ganda Singh, in his collection of various *bukamnamas*, has included one such *bukamnama* of Guru Gobind Singh addressed to the congregation of Machhiwara saying, among other things, that 'the *sangat* is my Khalsa' and that they 'should not acknowledge any Masands'.<sup>19</sup>

However, there are certain injunctions referred to in this *Rahitnama* which are obviously in conflict with the established code of conduct and there is mutual contradiction in some of them. It says that a Sikh should first bow to the rising sun in the morning and also bow to the new moon every month and then greet the fellow Sikhs: at another place, he also says that he who bows to the rising sun is guilty of infringement of religious discipline. The date for the Guru's anointment was fixed after consulting Pandit Devi Das, who had been giving discourses on the *Sahaskriti Slokas* for thirteen days after the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, and in consultation with the Masands. The Guru is said to have performed the *saradh* of his father on Maghar *sudi* 5, 1735 Bikrami: Sikhism rejects this and such other rituals and ceremonies as futile. The Panj Piaras selected on the day of Khalsa creation are said to be

famous Hindu saints in their earlier existence. The goddess Sakti, in the form of Mata Sahib Devan, came and put *patashas* or sugar-bubble in the iron cauldron in which the Guru was preparing *amrit*. The milk, curd, etc. of a sheep's milk is declared taboo for a Sikh. If a Sikh invites some Sikhs and Brahmins for food, the host should seat the Brahmins first and the Sikhs only after that. As it is, the same bias in favour of the Brahmins is found in Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bansavalinama* also: both Kesar Singh and Chaupa Singh belong to the same dynasty.

## VI

*Prem Sumarg Granth* (*su* i.e. good or true; *marg*, i.e. path; *prem*, i.e. love) is a piece of writing which evokes "a model of Sikh way of life and of Sikh society", a supremely noble way that is marked by love. It is an early eighteenth century work though it is not possible to arrive at any exact date of its composition.<sup>20</sup> It is an anonymous work but the author seems a great and visionary scholar who "had imaginatively conceived of a state which would simultaneously take up and solve the linguistic, ethical, cultural, political, military and financial problems of the people". Though the author presents the work as a communication by Guru Gobind Singh of the commandments he received from the Akalpurakh but the work cannot be attributed to the Guru and the entire ploy seems, as in the case of several other *rahitnamas*, to have been used to lend credence and respectability to the work. Written in prose, it is perhaps the most voluminous of all the *rahitnamas* and is also the most comprehensive prescribing the norms of behavior, religious as well as social, public as well as private for all members of the Khalsa Brotherhood. It is the only *rahitnama* which also describes a model of Sikh polity as well as civil and military administration.

The *Prem Sumarg* comprises ten chapters and each chapter is further divided into several *bachans* (lit. utterances; topics)

which come to a total of 112 in all. The opening chapter, comprising 4-5 pages, serves as a sort of prologue to the main text. Herein the author reminds us of the Guru's autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* wherein the Guru says that the Creator-Lord sent him into this world with the primary objective of elimination of evil and spread of righteousness, protecting the saintly and annihilating the wicked: the Guru accepted the Divine command and following His Will created the Khalsa. According to the author of the *Prem Sumarg*, the Guru here reiterates the Divine command asking the Khalsa to fulfill that divine mission of annihilating the evil: as in all the *rahitnamas*, the evil is personified in the form of the Muslim rule. No doubt, Sikhism favours acceptance of religious plurality and does not condemn any religion or religious scripture,<sup>21</sup> but this kind of resentment against the Muslims can be understood as a reaction against the oppression and tyranny let loose on the Sikhs by the Mughal government in Delhi and the invaders from Afghanistan. The author is well aware that the objective of the Guru's life could not be realized during his lifetime; Banda Singh Bahadur tried to establish a Sikh sovereign state but could not succeed. Thereafter the Sikhs had to face severe persecution when even royal decree was issued for their extermination. It is in this background that the author makes a forecast of a period of persecution but also gives the hope of the final Sikh victory.

Thereafter the *Prem Sumarg* enumerates various religious and social values which every Sikh must imbibe. He begins by stressing on the need for ever remembering God: he says that a true Sikh must get up early in the morning, read Guru Nanak's *Japn(ji)* and Guru Gobind Singh's *Jap* five times in the morning and again at noon, in the evening he should read these two *banis* along with *So Dar*, and readings from the *Bachitra Natak* and *Sobila* before going to bed. Alongside this spiritual discipline, the author stresses the need for the cultivation of



the values of honesty, selfless help and love and effacement of the evils of ego, anger, greed, adultery, falsehood, etc. He also delineates in detail the method of Khalsa initiation and various values of social behavior every member of the Khalsa Brotherhood must imbibe. Among these could be included stress on remaining always armed, to work honest for living, to help others and willingly accept the Will of God in all situations (1-3). Thereafter the author describes the ceremonies to be observed at the time of birth of a child (4), rules regarding marriage and remarriage (5) and the death rites (7). He sets rules for the selection of the partner, proper age for marriage and favors widow remarriage (5). A Sikh girl, he says, must marry only in a Sikh family but a Sikh boy could marry a non-Sikh girl but she must be initiated into the Khalsa Brotherhood. Death should be willingly accepted as the Will of God and one must not weep and wail. He abjures all relationships with Masands and those who tonsure their heads on certain occasions: a Sikh must not attend the funeral of such persons.

The author also writes about the kind of food a Sikh should take and the intoxicants he should avoid are also discussed in detail (6). A Sikh is obliged to be very hospitable, and he must never eat alone: if he has to eat alone, then he must keep a meal apart for the first visitor. Thus, he emphasizes the value of sharing with and serving the fellow human beings. At one place, he puts some restrictions saying that a Sikh must not accept food from people of certain castes but it seems this is because of the nature of their occupation because otherwise he proclaims the entire humankind the children of the same universal Father. He lays a lot of emphasis on loving relationship among the Sikhs as a community: they must be always ready to help one another. No discrimination should be made on the basis of one's caste and the entire Khalsa Brotherhood be deemed to belong to only one caste. He considers truthfulness a highly prized value and says that a

false person who commits perjury is liable to be cast in the dark pit of hell.

Discussing the Sikh polity and civil and military administration, the author favours monarchy, a benevolent monarchy to be the ideal form of government: he gives absolute powers to the king with the only check on him being of his own conscience: he does not favour any institutional check on his powers. Such an absolute monarch must be assisted by a sagacious minister and some learned councilors. Nobody among the subjects should think of violating the royal decree and the king should have the power to punish anyone who even slightly disregards his command. This kind of absolute monarchical system goes against the spirit of the Khalsa because it tends towards democratic republicanism: even Guru Gobind Singh himself submitted to the will of the Five on a couple of occasions and Banda Singh Bahadur was also asked to go by the advice of the five Sikhs who were sent with him by the Guru. But the author expects the king to be impartial and just, benevolent and equally considerate towards all religions but he should give special attention to the Khalsa. It is declared obligatory on the part of the king to ensure that none of his subjects suffers for want of food and shelter.

The special features of the *Prem Sumarg* are its attempt at highlighting the idea that the mission of the Gurus was divinely inspired, the Khalsa was created in the Will of God and that the Khalsa was to strive for the fulfillment of that mission. It is the most comprehensive of all *rahitnamas* and prescribes rules for all spheres of the life of a Sikh – religious, social and political. Birth, marriage and death ceremonies are prescribed; equality (not egalitarianism) among the Khalsa is emphasized; and rules of polity are articulated. He accepts the present persecution as the Will of God and predicts a final victory in favour of Sikhs.

## VII

*Rahitnama Bhai Desa Singh* is perhaps the most recent of all the *rahitnamas* discussed above: it is a late eighteenth century versified work comprising 146 couplets. The author gives some biographical information as well as the objective of writing the *Rahitnama* towards the end of the work in a biographical note. He says that his name is Desa Singh and he is a ‘disciple’ or follower of Guru Gobind Singh. He spent some time in the Muralivala Bunga at Amritsar where Jassa Singh (Kalal) Ahluwalia lived for several years. From Amritsar, he went on to Patna, the birth-place of Guru Gobind Singh, to pay obeisance at the *gurdwara* and returned after spending twenty days there (125-27). He says that the Guru appeared to him in a dream when one day he fell asleep on the way back to Punjab. The Guru told him that first of all he composed the *Jap* followed by what we know as *Akal Ustati*, *Bachitra Natak*, *Chandi Charitras*, *Gian Prabodh*, *Chaubis Avtar* and four-hundred stories in what is titled *Charitropakhayan* (128-38).

The author goes on to say that after the Guru had said all these things, he uttered one thing for the author also: the Guru wanted him to put to pen the *rahit* for the Khalsa because one remains ignorant without following the prescribed *rahit*. No one else has described it and you should now abide by my command and write the required *rahit* or code of conduct for the Khalsa (140), the author claims to have been told by the Guru. He listened to the Guru’s command and then humbly expressed his inability as he felt himself highly incapable of accomplishing the task: how can a ‘foolish and ignorant’ person like me describe the code of religious conduct’, said the author (142)? Listening to this, the benevolent Guru said that he himself would inspire him and that the author will only have to put words on the paper. Saying this, the Guru disappeared and the author woke up, looked around in wonderment but saw nothing – neither the Guru nor his horse nor anything

else.

The opening five couplets in the Soratha meter are a kind of invocation to the Guru: the author bows to the Guru, reflects on the Guru's feet and prays to him to bless him with the knowledge of *rahit* or code of conduct of a Sikh. Thereafter follows what, according to the author, the Guru says about the *rahit* for the Khalsa. The first and foremost *rahit* for a true Sikh of the Guru is to receive *amrit* or initiation of the double-edged sword (6). Thereafter is described the method of preparing *amrit* as well as of administering it. He must get up early in the morning, bathe and recite Guru Nanak's *Japu(ji)* and Guru Gobind Singh's *Jap*; he should recite the *So Daru* in the evening and (*Kirtan*) *Sobila* before bedtime. He should select some compositions from 'both' the *granth*s<sup>22</sup> and remember them by heart (37-38). A Sikh must learn Gurmukhi language from another Sikh and then acquire any other education from other sources also.

The *Rahitnama* also contains instructions for the members of the Khalsa Brothers as regards their outer appearance. God created human life as and when He created the entire manifest phenomena: at that time God provided hair on the human head as an embellishment of the body (79). Since hair on the head (and the beard and moustache on the face of the male members) happen in the Will of God, we must willingly accept His Will: how can a person who goes against the Divine Will and trims or shaves his head realize the Creator-Lord (80)? However, hair become a person only if he follows the *rahit* in totality. He must never abandon *kirpan* sword and *kachchh* or long breeches. He is silent about the *kara* or iron bracelet and comb, but maybe he includes the *kara* among the arms and comb becomes a necessity to keep the hair clean and tidy. Stressing the significance of following the *rahit*, the author says that only he who lives the *rahit* is a Sikh of the Guru: one cannot be called a Sikh if one does not follow the *rahit* (86-88). As a

result of living the *rahit*, all evils get effaced from one's mind and one imbibes love with *dharmā* or righteousness. He who violates the *rahit* is called noble by none, he is ever in delusion, suffers disgrace in this world and hell hereafter. Such a person is *tankhabhia* or one liable to receive punishment for transgressing religious discipline (89).

A true Sikh of the Guru earns his living through honest means and gives a part of that earning (*dasvandh*) in charity to the needy: he who earmarks *dasvandh* or tithe out of his income for philanthropic purposes earns esteem in the world (11-13). He can take up any profession such as agriculture, trade or any other but he must work hard and honest. He should completely efface off his mind the evils like of lust, wrath, pride, avarice, etc.: these are the evils which the author considers inimical to a person's mind. On the other hand, he should imbibe the values of compassion, righteousness, devotion, etc. He must not smoke or drink any intoxicant: the author includes in them hookah, tobacco, hashish, liquor, etc. From this we can infer that these might be the intoxicants common among some people. However, he does not mind if someone takes a bit of opium and hemp, rather he says that one can take the small quantity without any hesitation. He only cautions that one must not take these things in large measure so that one does not get addicted to them. He also recommends having liquor before entering the field of battle but he must not take it on any other day. He is against partaking of *mas machhali* or non-vegetarian fare (25) but at another place he says that one can take the meat of a goat prepared the Sikh way (*jhatka*) but he must not take meat of any other animal (32). Illicit relationship with other woman, gambling, falsehood, theft and liquor are the five evils which every sagacious Sikh must abandon (44).

A Sikh of the Guru should never visit a prostitute; adultery is strongly condemned in the Sikh scripture and fidelity is declared a prized value for both man and woman. He should

have deep love for his wife but must not look with lust on any other woman: the younger ones be deemed as his own daughters and the elder ones be respected as mothers (13). He should marry within his own *varna* and must not develop love or make matrimonial alliance with a woman who is a Muslim or who belongs to the Dum caste or who is from other *varna* or who is an adulteress. He must abandon evils like gambling, stealing, robbery, etc. He should protect the cow (i.e. the weak) and the Brahmin: one can see an obvious bias in favour the Brahmins. On the other hand, he should neither work under a Turk nor bow to him, neither befriend him nor trust him. He should serve the Khalsa meeting with whom makes one feel elated (21). He should love the other Sikhs and must not nurture any feeling of enmity towards another Sikh: he must never wield a weapon against a fellow Sikh. Khalsa is the very image of the Guru and one attains supreme bliss by rendering service to the Khalsa (22). The comments against the Turks (Muslims) and repeated calls for war against them indicate that the work might have been written during the days when a ferocious struggle was going on between the Sikhs on one side and the Mughal government in Delhi and Afghan invaders on the other. Interestingly, all the *rahitnamas* speak against the Muslims but they nowhere condemn their religion (Islam).

The poet has at places made statements which contain universal truth in them. Friendship with the adolescent, excessive conversation with the youth and company of the evil are sure to result in unhappiness (56). One must never speak ill of any of the religious traditions of the world: all these religions are the abode of God and the Name Divine abides in them (60-61). A judge must do justice and he must not decide a case by taking a bribe; one must never give a false witness (64). The poet also touches upon the method of preparing and serving of *langar*: he also advises that the person

serving *langar* must not make any distinction between the persons sitting to partake of it and no one who comes there should go back without partaking food. He also prescribes the method of preparing *karah-prasad*.

## VIII

Guru Nanak and the succeeding Gurus set for their followers a strict moral code and a distinctive pattern of personal appearance and social behavior. The Sikh moral code and the rules of social conduct can be articulated from the study of numerous scattered references in the scripture. Since most of the literature in the *rahitnama* genre was produced after the creation of the Khalsa, it also contains prescriptions about the outer appearance as stipulated by the Tenth Master at the time of the Khalsa creation. These *rahitnamas*, most of them written in the eighteenth century, attempt at enumerating the moral code, social conduct and the Khalsa *rahit*. With the sole exception of the *Prem Sumarg Granth*, all the *rahitnamas* discussed above are ascribed to the Sikhs closely associated with Guru Gobind Singh. Also, these *rahitnamas* are said to have been pronounced or authenticated by the Guru though none of them is directly ascribed to him.

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2. Harbans Singh, Ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* (Vol. III). Patiala: Punjabi University, 1997 (rpt. 2002), p. 426
3. Nripinder Singh, "Rahitnamas and Aggrandizement of Khalsa Tradition" in Dharam Singh, Ed., *Sikhism and Secularism: Essays in Honour of Professor Harbans Singh*. New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1998, pp. 305-06

4. *Sri Gur Tirath Sangrahi*, 1884, pp. 120-121
5. Piara Singh Padam, Ed., *Rahitname*. Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1974 (rpt. 2015), pp. 46-47
6. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 305 (*gur satigur ka jo sikhu akhae su bhalke utbi hari namu dhiavai/udhamu kare bhalke parabhati isnanu kare amrt sari navai*)
7. *ibid.*, p. 72 (*satsangati kaisi janiai/jithai eko namu vakhaniai*)
8. *ibid.*, p. 1377 (*kabir ek ghari adbi ghari adbi hun tea adh/bhagatan seti gosate jo kine so labh*)
9. *Rahitname*, pp. 61-64
10. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 471 (*daia kapahu santokhu sutu jatu gandhi satu vatu/ehu janenu jia ka hai ta pade ghatu*)
11. *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* (Vol. III). Patiala: Punjabi University, 1997 (rpt. 2002), p. 354
12. *ibid.*,
13. *Rahitname*, p. 47
14. Guru Granth Sahib, p. 274 (*par tria rupe na pekhai netra/sadh ki tabal santsangi het*)
15. *ibid.*, p. 1159 (*is dehi kau simarahi dev/so dehi bhaju hari ki sev*)
16. *ibid.*, p. 939 (*khandit nidra alap abaran nanak tatu bicharo*)
17. Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* (Ed. Raijasbir Singh). Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2001, VIII: 523-25
18. *ibid.*, 526
19. Ganda Singh, Ed., *Hukamname*. Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967, pp. 152-52
20. J.S. Grewal, "The Prem Sumarag: A Theory of Sikh Social Order" in Harbans Singh and N.G. Barrier, Eds., *Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh*. Patiala: Punjabi University, 1976, p. 165. However, Piara Singh Padam, *Rahitname*, is of the view that it might have been written around AD 1765 or even a little later.
21. The Guru Granth Sahib says that the Vedas (i.e. the Indian scriptures) and the Katebas (i.e. Semitic scriptural literature) be not called false rather false are those who do not reflect on them. See GGS, p. 1350. A simple look at its contributors also makes it clear that Sikhism does not believe in revelation being



the monopoly of any particular creed or caste or person.

22. The author seems to imply the Guru Granth Sahib and the *Dasam Granth*. Of course, the latter cannot be equated with the former but there are certain compositions in the latter which, by tradition, form part of the Sikhs' daily regimen of prayers.

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