

language change during the long period of six hundred years.

However, since its inscription in Aad Granth Sahib, compiled in 1604, there is no possibility of alteration of even a single word in this text. This most sacred scripture is installed in Harmandir Sahib (also known as Golden Temple), Amritsar. The authenticity and originality of any text of Bhagats and Sufis has to be compared with the text of the present published form of Guru Granth Sahib alone. Other than this, there can be no other criterion.

In Raag Aasa, there are two other compositions of acrostics employing the letters of "Painti Akhari" of Gurmukhi script, one of Guru Nanak Sahib Ji on page 432 by the title "Patti Likhhi" and the other one of the 3rd Nanak, Guru Amar Das Ji on page 434 by the title "Patti". These are in the manner of the then prevalent form, but resemble the present day "Painti Akhari" of Gurmukhi. They are in the spoken Punjabi language of that period which cannot be compared with present-day colloquial Punjabi.

The 5th Nanak, Guru Arjan Sahib Ji (1563-1606) did not singularly collect the banis of different Bhagats and Sufis. Guru Nanak Sahib Ji (1469-1539) and his four successors collected the banis, over a period of 135 years from 1469 to 1604. There is historical evidence of Guru Nanak Sahib Ji collecting the bani of Hazrat Sheikh Fariduddin Masood Ganj-i-Shakar (1175-1265) during his meeting with his eleventh successor, Hazrat Ibrahim Farid-i-Sani i.e., called Farid the second, at Pak Patan, now in Pakistan. During his visit to Bengal, he collected the bani of Bhagat Jai Dev Ji (1201-1245). The bani of others were also collected during the course of various travels of the Gurus.

Preserving Authenticity of Gurbani

I would like to mention that an ordinary person or writer takes due care to ensure that he does not make mistakes and that one's work is authentic and above any criticism. It would



Guru Granth Sahib is a resource of learning and not an object of worship. Unless we learn from it, the relationship between the Guru and Sikh is not established. If we do not follow this principle, a Sikh will be presumed to be a worshipper but not a follower of a living Guru, that is, Guru Granth Sahib

be naive for any one to imagine that a person of the stature of a Guru, while compiling the most sacred text which is to serve as a beacon light for humanity and foster universal brotherhood, and which is established in Harmandir Sahib and hundreds of other Gurdwaras, might not have taken care to maintain the originality and authenticity of the text.

To preserve and protect the authenticity and sanctity of this text, many measures were adopted and several sacrifices were made. The eldest son of the 7th Nanak, Guru Har Rai Ji was the celebrated scholar Ram Rai. In 1661, Guru Sahib sent him to the court of Emperor Aurangzeb for rendering explanation of certain hymns. Instead of doing justice with the theme, he avoided debate and replaced only one word, *Musallman* with *Beiman* while quoting from *Asa-di-Vaar*. When Guru Sahib learnt about this, he asked his son not to show his face ever and also directed Sikhs not to have any association with him and his people. This first ex-communication of Sikhism stands valid till today.

Regarding rewriting text in Guru Granth Sahib, the Gurus have followed a pattern. Wherever any confusion arose regarding interpretation or a need was felt for more explanation, without interfering with the original text, the Gurus have compiled a separate

version in their own name, and included both the versions in Guru Granth Sahib. For example we can see Jap Ji Sahib of Guru Nanak Sahib Ji. On page 8 of *Salok*, the last line is, "Jini naam dhiyaiya gaye maskkat ghal, Nanak, te mukh ujle hor keti chutti naal". To explain it further, the 2nd Nanak, Guru Angad Sahib Ji compiled the same bani of *Salok* on page 146 under his name and included one extra word "hor" saying, "Jini naam dhiyaiya gaye maskkat ghal, Nanak, te mukh ujle hor keti chutti naal". From page 1410 onwards in the chapter "Waran Te Wadheek" Guru Nanak Sahib Ji's 33 *Saloks* are inscribed. Out of it, *Salok* 27 goes like this, "Lahore shahar zahar kahar sawa pehar". To explain the changed circumstances of Lahore city during his period, without amending the original text, the 3rd Nanak, Guru Amar Das Ji compiled *Salok* 28 and added to it saying, "Lahore Shahar Amrit Sar Sifti Da Ghar".

Apart from other hymns, a chapter of "Salok Sheikh Farid Ke" starts from page 1377, in which 130 *Saloks* are inscribed. Out of this, the 3rd Nanak, Guru Amar Das Ji has compiled and added his own name to *Salok* 13 on page 1378, *Salok* 52 on page 1380 and *Salok* 104 on page 1383. This clearly indicates that this bani was very much with Guru Sahibs, who could write an explanation about it. The 5th Nanak, Guru Arjan Sahib Ji has compiled and added his name to *Salok* 75 on page 1381, *Salok* No. 82-83 on page 1382, *Salok* 105, 107-110 on page 1383 and *Salok* 111 on pages 1383-1384.

The chapter of "Salok Bhagat Kabir Jio" starts from page 1364, in which 243 *Saloks* of Bhagat Kabir Ji

are inscribed. Out of this, the 3rd Nanak, Guru Amar Das Ji has compiled and added in his name to *Salok* 220 on page 1376. And the 5th Nanak, Guru Arjan Sahib Ji has compiled and added his name to *Saloks* 209-211 on page 1375, *Salok* 214 and *Salok* 221 on page 1376.

In the chapter of "Aasa Bani Bhagat Dhapne Ji Ki" on page No.487, the 5th Nanak, Guru Arjan Sahib Ji has compiled and added in his name a complete Shabad "Gobind Gobind Gobind Sang Namdev man leena."

On page 947 a chapter is titled as "Ram Kali Ki Var Mohalla 3, of the 3rd Nanak Guru Amar Das Ji. It's *Shabad* 2, starts with the *Salok* of Bhagat Kabir Ji in his own name and is followed by the verses of Guru Sahib.

Undoubtedly, Guru Sahibs revered the original text and kept it fully intact. Every Sikh is also supposed to do the same. In every *Ardas* (concluding prayer) a pardon is sought, for any inadvertent mistake (addition, omission or wrong utterance) made during recitation or musical rendition of a word or alphabetical character of any word from any bani of Guru Granth Sahib.

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Acrostics as mystical writings

At the age of seven Guru Nanak went to school and the schoolmaster wrote the alphabet on a wooden tablet for Nanak. After just one day Nanak copied the alphabet from memory and made an acrostic on the alphabet.

The acrostic called the Patti or tablet in the Rag Asa, is as follows: The One Lord who created the world is the Lord of all. Fortunate is their advent into the world, whose hears remain attached to God's service. O foolish man who have thou forgotten him? When you adjusted thine account, my friend, thou shalt be deemed educated. The Primal Being is the Giver, He alone is true. No account shall be due by the pious man who understandeth by means of those letters. An acrostic is a poem or a puzzle in which the first or last letter of each line spell out a word, phrase, or name. When it's the last letter, it's often referred to as a telestich. A double acrostic has the first and last letters forming new words. The word ACROSTIC comes to the English language via the Latin derivation of the Greek words, 'AKRON' (end) and 'STIKHOS' (line of verse). Acrostics date from before the time of Christ. A Roman poet, Quintus Ennius (d. 169 BC), wrote a poem in which the first letters of each line spelled out, 'Quae Q. Ennius fecit' (Q. Ennius wrote this').

The Sybylline Prophecies were acrostics. A fact which made Cicero suspect they were written by humans.

A truly amazing acrostic was found during archeological digs at Pompeii and the old Roman city of Cirencester. More than just an acrostic, it combined the elements of a word square and a palindrome. It can be read from right to left, left to right, upwards and downwards! Tony Augarde, in The Oxford Guide to Word Games, suggests that the SATOR acrostic may have mystical significance much like the Greek word for fish, 'ICHTHYS' (which consists of the first letters of the Greek words for, 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour.') Several Psalms are acrostics. In Psalm 119, each group of eight verses is preceded by 'Aleph', 'Beth', etc., and the stanzas each begin with that particular letter. From Commodianus (400 AD), who composed many Christian poems in acrostic form, to the first Bishop of Sherborne (705 AD), acrostics have recurrently been included in mystical and spiritual writings.

Courtesy: Encyclopedia of Sikh Religion and Culture, www.about.com



The wooden palaki in which the original "pothis" were carried from Goindwal to Amritsar by Guru Arjan Dev Ji. This palaki is now at Goindwal Sahib.

Scriptural questions about Gurbani

When journalism enters the domain of belief and faith, particularly in a multi-cultural society like India, utmost care should be taken by writers. The nuances of belief may appear illogical and irrational to someone who sees it in a cursory manner, but to the devout there is a deeper aspect which cannot be wished away easily. WSN felt that it would be appropriate to provide readers with excerpts from Khushwant Singh's piece that Nanak Singh Nishter comments upon

Khushwant Singh

Having spent the best part of my life working on Sikh history and translating selected passages of the Gurbani, I felt I owed it to myself to read the Granth Sahib from cover to cover before I call it a day. So I did; not recite it in the sing-song manner as most people do, but read it in silence with ball-point pen in hand marking difficult words and passages. I had their translations by my side.

Many questions rose in my mind. Knowing the bigoted, unintelligent approach of the self-appointed custodians of matters scriptural I will not open up a public debate. But there are some historical and linguistic aspects of the Gurbani which need elucidation. To start with, I would like scholars to compare the hymns of Bhakts Kabir and Namdev as they appear in the Granth Sahib with those in Hindi and Marathi. How did they travel from Varanasi and Maharashtra to Amritsar where

the fifth Sikh Guru Arjun compiled the Sikh scriptures around 1600? Kabir dohas in Hindi are different from Kabir's language in the Granth Sahib. The most difficult to understand is how Kabir could have composed the acrostics based on the Gurmukhi alphabet at a time when the alphabet had yet to be finalised?

The case of Namdev's baani is equally puzzling. I recall the late P N Oak, ICS, then Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, asking me to give him Namdev's baanee in the Granth Sahib. P N Oak was Maharashtrian studying writings of Maharashtrian saint-poets. He went through the material I gave him and said: "It is Namdev but the vocabulary is different." Did Guru Arjun re-write both Kabir and Namdev before incorporating their works in his compilation? Would Punjabi, Hindi and Marathi savants throw light on the subject?

(Relevant Extracts, courtesy: Deccan Herald, Saturday, July 03, 2004; For link to the full version, please visit www.WorldSikhNews.com)

