

# TRANSMISSION OF SIKH SCRIPTURAL TRADITION

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## Introductory

The history of Sikh scripture begins with Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, whose experience of the Numinous forms its very core and genesis as well. To express his spiritual experience Guru Nanak had evolved a curious blend of music and poetry. Whenever he felt inspired by God he composed hymns into various *ragas* and metres. During his tour to the West-Asia, he carried with him a *pothi* which is believed was nothing else but a collection of his hymns including the writings of medieval Bhagats that he had collected over the years. The Sikh sources confirm that the Sikh liturgy that had come into vogue at Kartarpur, the town established by Guru Nanak, mainly comprised of his hymns. The *Janamsakhi* tradition indicates that Guru Nanak directed his spiritual heir, Bhai Lehna to compile his hymns into a *pothi* which he bestowed on him on his succession to Guruship. The successors of Guru Nanak not only added new hymns to the received sacred texts but also took keen interest to preserve its originality. In the Sikh history we come across many references of the Sikh Gurus and their Sikhs engaged in copying the sacred writings and passing them on to their successors. Sources at our disposal indicate that in order to purge the entry of spurious writings as well as to provide the Sikhs of their own scripture, in 1604 Guru Arjan took up the gigantic task to compile and canonize the Sikh scripture into a volume which is popularly known as the *Adi Granth*. According to the Sikh tradition, the final canonization of Sikh scripture occurred in 1706 at Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda), where, Guru Gobind Singh besides incorporating the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur at their appropriate place, took upon himself to resolve the confusion regarding liturgical hymns as well as to purge the extra canonical writings that had crept into the Sikh Scripture over the years. The tradition holds that it was the Damdama volume which was invested with Guruship by Guru Gobind Singh upon his death in 1708.

Obviously, from the first revelation of Guru Nanak to the final canonization of Sikh scripture by Guru Gobind Singh in 1706 there is a time gap of more than two hundred years. Before and after the final canonization, the Sikhs of various hues have produced a number of manuscripts primarily to preserve and transmit *bani* in their own manners. There exist some textual variants in the old manuscripts of the Sikh scripture which have been the focus of attention of critics working on the Sikh tradition. In the recent years, in order to reconstruct the history of the Sikh scriptural tradition as well as to clarify its evolution and to fix the sure and certain text of the *Adi Granth*, some scholars have shown a keen interest to study the Sikh text from textual viewpoint. Their formulations revolve around the following suppositions that (i) the history of the Sikh text as it stands today is not clear, (ii) before taking the written form *gurbani* had been in circulation orally especially through musical tradition (iii) the *pothis* of *bani* that were prevalent prior to the *Adi Granth* had no canonical authority (iv) the available sources reveal very little about the criteria of selection adopted in respect of the writings included in or excluded from the Sikh scripture, (vi) behind the maze

of manuscripts, there may be an exemplar or ‘an early draft of the *Adi Granth*’, (v) the *bani* of Guru Nanak has been revised in the final version, (vii) Guru Arjan has modified his own hymns, (viii) *Mul-Mantra* has undergone a series of changes, (ix) a considerable number of genuine hymns of the Sikh Gurus have been left outside the scripture, (x) the writings of the Bhagats have been in and out of the Sikh scripture due to ulterior motives, (xi) the version produced by Guru Arjan in 1604 continued to be tampered with under the influence of socio-religious developments taking place in the history of the Sikh Panth, (xii) concern for the authenticated and correct text is a later phenomenon which was a direct outcome of granting Guruship to the *Granth* in 1708 by the Tenth Master, (xiii) it was Maharaja Ranjit Singh who took upon himself to establish the standard version of the Sikh Scripture, (xiv) the process of evolution of the text of *Guru Granth Sahib* is still going on, and finally (xv) the making of the Sikh Scripture is the result of a ‘collaborative approach’ which is based upon the ‘theory of working drafts’ prepared under the direct supervision of Guru Arjan and so on. The above formulations are not based on convincing evidence because the sources on which these findings are based have not been examined thoroughly and critically. In this context, especially to understand the existence of variant readings found in the manuscripts of the Sikh Scripture, a discussion on the nature of transmission of *Gurbani* would not be out of place.

The process of transmission of any text unfolds the ways in which it has been received at different stage of its history. A close look at the history of Sikh scriptural tradition confirms that for its preservation and transmission, various modes and traditions had come to exist in the pre-and post-*Adi Granth* periods. Though in the recent past a few scholars have taken up textual studies of the *Adi Granth*, yet the state of transmission of *gurbani*, especially the peculiar ways, means and traditions that were prevalent in the Panth, have not come into their focus. The present attempt seeks to underline the role and very purpose of the traditions that have emerged for the transmission of *bani* in the pre-*Adi Granth* period. It will help us to distinguish the features of various text families that were current in the Panth at those times.

### **Scribal Tradition**

Unlike the scriptures of other religions, the Sikh scriptural tradition has come down from the persons whose writings it records. Though, a scholar may look upon the above claim as little bit exaggerated, especially in the absence of documentary evidence, yet there seems to be no reason to disbelieve that right from its very manifestation *gurbani* was not being committed to writing. It looks plausible that Guru Nanak being born in a *khatri* (trading community of Punjab) family had got education in the art of reading and writing. Without a mediocre knowledge of accountancy, it would have been extremely impossible for him to carry the job of a *Modi* (store-keeper) at Sultanpur Lodhi. It is a worth noting that he presents himself as a *Shair* (poet) also whose poetic works are considered par-excellence in the history of Panjabi literature. His discourse with the *Nath-Sidhas* depicting the highest qualities of didactic skills is well-preserved in the *Adi Granth*. Similarly, his compositions, namely *Asa Patti* and *Ramkali Onkar* which have been composed on the basis of *Gurmukhi* letters are a living testimony to the fact that he was a literary figure. Moreover, on the basis of his writings we can say that his mind was always centred upon writing the glory of God. In *Ramkali Onkar*, we come across a reference, wherein he advises a traditional teacher that instead of indulging in rigmarole writing, he should inscribe the Name of Sustainer of earth. He appreciates the scribe who is engrossed in recording the True Name. Keeping in view these facts, we can

well-imagine that he might have been translating his religious experience into writing on its very manifestation. Evidently, the book which according to Bhai Gurdas, the Guru carried with him on his tour to west-Asia, was nothing else but a collection of hymns which he had got together over the years.

The testimony of the *Janamsakhi* tradition regarding the recording of *gurbani* is very revealing. It describes how Guru Nanak revealed the *Sabad* to the entire people assembled around him, how the people assembled submitted themselves to obedience, how the devoted Sikhs then put the *Sabad* into writing and how the devotional singing was held at *Dharamsala* where written hymns were also recited in the congregation. We are told that some devout Sikhs accompanying him had also taken upon themselves to commit the *Bani* into writing on its revelation. For example, *Majh ki Var* and *Sidh Gosti* had been recorded by Saido Gheeho, who was with Guru Nanak on his tour to Southern India. Similarly *Malar ki Var* had been reduced to writing by Hassu and Shihaan who were accompanying the Guru during his tour in Kashmir. Guru Nanak's stay at Kartarpur was most productive and eventful for the development of Sikh scribal tradition. Bhai Mansukh, a trader of Lahore who had come into the fold of Guru Nanak's faith, stayed for three years at Kartarpur, primarily to prepare *pothis* of *gurbani*. Here at Kartarpur, besides explaining the significance of *Japuji*, Guru Nanak directed his spiritual heir (Guru) Angad to reduce it to writing and recite it, obviously to get it endorsed from him. It indicates that what had been composed and recorded by Guru Nanak so far was entrusted to (Guru) Angad to arrange it into a *pothi*. Thus, well before the departure of Guru Nanak, first redaction of his sacred writings had come to be preserved in a codex, which he bestowed upon Guru Angad on his appointment to the Guruship.

Guru Nanak's writings had left an indelible imprint on the subsequent growth of Sikh scriptural tradition. It provided powerful impetus to his successors who went on to add new hymns to the received text. Though, Guru Angad's writings are not much in size, but his pontificate marked the next stage in the development of Sikh scribal tradition. His real contribution lies in the fact that he standardized the *Gurmukhi* script and popularized it for recording the sacred writings of the Sikhs.

Guru Amar Das not only enriched the Sikh scriptural tradition but also took a keen interest to preserve its originality. It seems detractors of the Guru, chiefly the *Udasis* were posing a serious threat to the unity and doctrinal originality of the nascent Sikh faith. Guru Amar Das took upon himself to educate the Sikhs about the unripe writings of the pseudo-guru which had got currency in the Sikh circles. To prevent the possible interpolation of Sikh tradition, he is credited for evolving the thesis of *Sachi* versus *Kachi-bani*, which later on became a standard rule to canonize the Sikh scripture. Since, with the addition of the third Master's hymns as well as that of the medieval Bhagats, the size of Sikh scriptural tradition was expanded considerably. Consequently, he thought it prudent to arrange the codex afresh. From contemporary sources, we find that Bulla Pandha was one of the leading scribes at Guru Amar Das' court who had dedicated himself to scribe the *pothis* of *gurbani* for circulation among the Sikhs. Adhering to the tradition established by his predecessors, Guru Amar Das handed over the codex prepared by him to his successor, Guru Ram Das.

As Guru Ram Das was actively involved in the organizational set-up of the Sikh Panth under Guru Amar Das, we can well-imagine that he was in full knowledge of the Sikh scribal tradition that had developed in the hands of his predecessor. On his part, he introduced into

the Sikh text new *ragas* and metres which reflect his poetic genius. Following faithfully in the foot-steps of his predecessor, he would not allow the pseudo-gurus to confuse the originality of *gurbani*. He reaffirmed that only genuine hymns of the Sikh Gurus were acceptable. Ever since the pontificate of Guru Amar Das the range of the Sikh mission had widened, *Manjidars* and *Masands* had fanned out across the region, the number of the Sikhs had swelled and *Dharamsalas* had sprung up in far-flung areas. For the purpose of worship and study authentic codices of the sacred writings were required. It called for renewed efforts to prepare the *pothis* of *gurbani*. Guru Ram Das encouraged the Sikhs to take up copying of the sacred text in a big way. He remarked that labour of those Sikhs is also sanctified whose hands are engaged in writing the glory of God. It suggests that during his pontificate copying of *pothis* of *gurbani* had developed into a pious pastime for the Sikhs. The editorial note, namely *Japu Guru Ram Das Ji Ke Dastakha Ka Naqal* (Japu copied from the copy recorded by Guru Ram Das in his own hand) found recorded in the old manuscripts of the *Àdi Granth*, leads us to point out that Guru Ram Das had deeply involved himself in the scribal activities going on at his court. From the above note we can visualize that besides the *Pothis*, Guru Ram Das had taken the initiative to prepare lectionaries (*gutkas*) for the personal use of the Sikhs, in which authenticated text for liturgical purpose had been arranged. Early Sikh literature which provides glimpses into the life in *Dharamsalas*, informs us that public reading of *gurbani* was an essential part of the Sikh liturgy. Obviously, this practice of public reading would not have been possible unless *gurbani* was not available in written form. All these factors point to the fact that well before the succession of Guru Arjan Dev in 1581, the Sikh congregations had installed in the *Dharamsalas* a corpus which possessed text arranged in a uniform order. Guru Arjan Dev's remarks that "*Pothi* is veritably the abode of God" coupled with the evidence provided by the Sikh sources confirm that he had inherited a definitive corpus of sacred writings from his father, Guru Ram Das.

On his succession to Guruship, Guru Arjan Dev contributed enormously to nurture the Sikh scriptural tradition. We have enough evidence to suggest that under his patronage the hymns of Sikh Gurus were being committed to writing. He appreciated the Sikhs who had dedicated themselves to record the sacred writings. Bhai Gurdas informs us that there were numerous *Gursikhs* who were engaged in writing the compositions of the Sikh Gurus in order to prepare the *pothis* not only for their personal use but for others as well. Unfortunately, once again the Sikh scriptural tradition had come under serious threat of interpolation. Prithi Chand, elder brother and rival of Guru Arjan Dev, had entered into an alliance with the Mughals to usurp the guruship of Sikh Panth. The internal crisis within the Sikh Panth was so acute that even *Masands*, *Rababis*, *Dooms* and *Bhatts* were found divided between two rival camps. Now we have enough evidence to suggest that to establish their line of guruship, Prithi Chand, his son, Miharban and grandson, Harji had started composing *Kachi-bani* in the name of 'Nanak'. To purge the entry of spurious and un genuine writings into the Sikh scriptural tradition, Guru Arjan Dev decided to codify the Sikh scripture once for all into a volume popularly known as the *Àdi Granth*. Thereafter in the words of Bhai Gurdas, having collected the treasure of *bani* (the *Àdi Granth*), Guru Arjan Dev was always engrossed in propagating it through *kirtan* and religious discourses.

### **Reading and Recital Tradition**

Another mode for the transmission of *gurbani*, which had developed in close proximity to the scribal tradition, related to reading or recitation of the sacred text. The Sikh Gurus had

provided to the Sikhs the *pothis* of *gurbani*, which had been duly installed in the *Dharamsalas*. The *Dharamsala* was not merely a shrine, it also served as a centre of learning where arrangements to impart teaching in *Gurmukhi* and sacred writings of the Sikhs also existed. Besides the *Kirtan* session, public reading or recitation of liturgical texts, namely *Japuji*, *Sodaru*, *Arati* and *Sohila* also took place in the *Dharamsalas*. Bhatt Gayand while highlighting the personality of Guru Ram Das, refers to the practice of reading of sacred hymns which was prevalent among the early Sikhs. Obviously, the practice of reading in congregation was not limited only to the liturgical texts but much of the compositions included in the *pothis* were also read aloud for the benefit of those Sikhs who were not capable of reading. There is every reason to believe that *Dharamsalas* were not only repositories of the sacred writings, but also centres of Sikh learning without which propagation of *gurbani* at a large scale would not have been possible. Because the copies of the Sikh text were being made for liturgical and worship purpose thus, while assessing the merit of a manuscript one has to keep in mind the purpose for which it has been produced and was being used.

### **Musical Tradition**

The style of expression underlying the Sikh scripture is a blend of music and poetry. It is most suitable for singing in public. For devotional purpose, the medium of *Kirtan* had been employed. Beginning with Guru Nanak almost all the Sikh Gurus were gifted singers and connoisseurs of music as well. Even, they had employed some *Rababis*, a class of professional musicians to perform the *Kirtan* at central Sikh shrine. Resultantly, the musical or singing tradition had developed into a powerful mode to transmit *gurbani* among the Sikhs. Notwithstanding its appeal to popularize the message of *gurbani*, the musical tradition had certain limitations. The bands of musicians had to perform the *Kirtan* orally, consequently instead of committing to memory the whole corpus, they had memorized only selected hymns possibly relating to liturgy and for some special occasions. They were supposed to perform *Kirtan* only for a couple of hours in the morning and evening, so they need not to memorize the Sikh scriptural tradition in its entirety. Considering the medieval milieu, the musical tradition would not have been capable to reach every nook and corner of the Sikh world. It remained confined to a few big urban centres where the Sikhs had sufficient resources to support and employ the bands of musicians. Moreover, the size of the Sikh sacred writings has been expanding under the successive Sikh Gurus, so to keep pace with it orally was a gigantic task. It is quite possible that for the sake of memory or for convenience, the musicians may have noted down their favourite hymns in small note-books, similar to the collections of modern day *Ragis* which sometimes they carry to perform the *Kirtan*. Subsequently, it gave rise to another scribal tradition which was minor in nature and comprised of selective writings possibly arranged thematically. It is quite possible that the musical bands which had flourished at far away regions were prone to the regional or local influence. Though, the musicians among the Sikhs had much in common but certain musical variants and modifications had crept into their repertoires. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that musical tradition was only a means to popularize the message of *gurbani* but was not an end to preserve it for posterity. To sum up, we can say that besides the scribal tradition of *gurbani*, public recitation/reading and singing modes were quite popular among the early Sikhs. Anyway musical variants present in a manuscript can be of vital importance to determine its connection with other text families.

### Schismatic Traditions

The schismatic trends within the Sikh Panth were also transmitting *gurbani* in their own manner. In recent studies impression has been given as if the rivals of the Sikh Gurus have no role to play in the transmission of *gurbani*. In fact every manuscript of *gurbani* has been taken as a product of the mainstream Sikhism. However, evidence at hand points to the contrary. One should not forget that while appointing his successor, Guru Nanak had not followed the hereditary principle. Guru Angad's spiritual identification with the Master and his capability to carry on the mission faithfully, were the major factors which had weighed upon Guru Nanak to appoint him on the seat of Guruship. It is well-known in the Sikh tradition that after putting his son, Sri Chand to a series of trials, Guru Nanak had decided in favour of Guru Angad which was quite contrary to the age old practice of hereditary succession prevalent in India. Though, Sri Chand was a deeply religious person, yet it seems plausible that Guru Nanak had not found him worthy for Guruship simply because of his other worldly attitude. On the other hand, Sri Chand instead of reconciling himself to the decision of his father, went ahead to lay his claim on Guruship, subsequently establishing a separate sect known as the *Udasis*. He had started preaching the teachings of Guru Nanak in his own way which contrary to the ideals of Guru Nanak, laid stress on celibacy and asceticism. Besides controlling the Sikh centre at Kartarpur, he has been successful to attract a sizeable following to his fold. The schism created by Sri Chand had assumed alarming proportions which was a matter of serious concern for Guru Amar Das. To wean away the Sikhs from the influence of the *Udasis*, Guru Amar Das exhorted the Sikhs not to follow the *Udasi* way of life.

It seems, Sri Chand also possessed some sort of apocryphal writings attributed to Guru Nanak which laid emphasis on asceticism. Guru Amar Das was quick in response to warn the Sikhs to be aware of the pseudo-guru and his 'false' writings. He vehemently opposed the circulation of *Kachi-bani* which had been most probably composed by Sri Chand to propagate his peculiar beliefs as well as to establish his own seat of gurudom. It is very significant to note that to educate the Sikhs about the worthlessness of *Kachi-bani*, Guru Amar Das propounded the idea of *Sachi-bani* and inspired them to sing it because it belongs to the highest kind of revelation. The above injunctions of the third Master are very significant because they indicate that some *Udasi* writings were already in circulation. It is a foregone conclusion that among the early discontented descendants of the Sikh Gurus, Sri Chand was fairly successful to establish a parallel line of guruship to the Sikh Gurus. In the light of above evidence one can well imagine that the scriptural tradition which had come to be propounded by Sri Chand and his followers, besides the sacred writings of Guru Nanak, comprised the 'false' writings attributed to 'Nanak'. Although exact identification of *Kachi-bani* circulated by Sri Chand, especially in the absence of documentary evidence, is not possible, yet the ideals followed by him lead us to suggest that the extra-canonical writings, namely *Ratanmala*, *Jugawali*, *Faqarnama*, *Hazarnama*, *Pran Sangli* etc. which depict a strong bias towards asceticism and *hath-yoga* practices had their origin in the *Udasi* tradition. From the very beginning and during the period of persecution of the Sikhs some of the historical Sikh shrines had been in the possession of the *Udasis* where they carried on their literary activities quietly and constantly. Obviously, the *Udasi* scribes or scribes trained

in the *Udasi* lore were prone to include 'false' writings in their collections. Similarly, the scribes who were commissioned by the *Udasi* establishments in order to prepare the copies of Sikh scripture, were exposed to the *Udasi* influence, hence some of the *Kachi-bani* compositions which had originated at the instance of the *Udasis* came to be attributed to the Sikh Gurus. Now it is the task of text critics to check the antecedents of a manuscript to unravel the tradition from which it has descended. In other words they have to discern carefully whether it is the product of *Udasi* tradition or how far it has been under its influence.

Another rival tradition, which tried to compete with the main Sikh tradition, belonged to Baba Mohan and had its origin at Goindwal. However, it should not be confused with the original tradition that had developed under the patronage of Guru Amar Das. The chief factor for its outgrowth was that Guru Amar Das' descendants, especially his son Mohan, had not reconciled to the nomination of Guru Ram Das to Guruship. The Sikh scriptural sources confirm that though Guru Amar Das had prevailed upon his sons to accept the spiritual authority of Guru Ram Das but it seems they had submitted to him hesitatingly and temporarily. According to Bhai Gurdas, the nomination of Guru Ram Das to Guruship was such a terrible shock for Baba Mohan that he had lost his mental balance. On the basis of evidence at our disposal we can very safely state that Baba Mohan was not only a rival contender but had actually established a parallel line of guruship at Goindwal.

Guru Ram Das' compositions are replete with information which throw immense light on the nature of hostility and opposition that had developed against the mainstream Sikhism. To undermine Guru Ram Das' position his detractors encouraged desertions from Guru's side to their camp. To check the exploitation of the Sikhs at the hands of his detractors, Guru Ram Das had to decree that the Sikhs should not take commands from anyone else. Instead, the Sikhs were advised to shun away from the company of such fellows. Guru Ram Das remarked that the deserters and their associates were destined to ruin. In his view first Guru Nanak had proscribed them and again Guru Angad had proved them false. Guru Amar Das had come to the conclusion that they were wretches and hopeless fellows. Now at fourth generation Guru Ram Das had forgiven them to redeem these evil detractors.

We also observe that the detractors had worked out various schemes to achieve their objectives. Significantly, in the vein of Sikh Gurus they tried their hand on poetry and circulated it under the pen name of 'Nanak'. They were churning out spurious compositions to attract the Sikhs to their camp. Now we are fairly in a good position to assess the nature of opposition that Guru Ram Das was facing at the hands of his rivals. On the basis of Guru Ram Das' observations, it is crystal clear that his rivals aspired for Guruship, coveted the wealth of the Guru's establishment, cast envious eyes on the spiritual wealth i.e., *bani* of the Gurus, indulged in tirades and slanderous campaigns to malign the Guru, encouraged desertion in the ranks of the Sikhs and imitated the Sikh Gurus to compose *Kachi-bani* and worked on alliances to grab the seat of Guruship. Who were these detractors or rivals? Identification of them is not an impossible task. Evidently it was none else but Baba Mohan and his relatives whose hostility towards Guru Ram Das had engulfed the Sikh Panth in a serious internal crisis. Against the backdrop of Guru Ram Das' above observations, the claim of Baba Mohan and his descendants, which we find recorded in the colophon of the *Ahiyapur Pothi*, becomes more significant and meaningful too. The said claim states that the custodians of the *Pothi* had got the blessings of three generations of the Sikh Gurus and that anyone

following the Guru outside their progeny would certainly go to hell. It provides enough insights into the very purpose of the *Pothi*. It reflects that Baba Mohan and his descendants had refused to accord recognition to Guru Ram Das, and instead they wanted to establish a hereditary line of guruship. The extant Goindwal *Pothis* carry a clear proof that Baba Mohan and his close relatives had compiled a sort of scripture, so the Sikhs can be attracted to their establishment. The tradition developed by Baba Mohan and his descendants is well preserved in the extant *Goindwal Pothis*. Very truly it has incorporated the spurious writings of the Mohan tradition which they had composed in imitation to the Sikh Gurus. The nature of apocryphal writings included in these *Pothis* puts a question mark on their genuineness.

Among the rival traditions which laboured hard to establish itself in parallel to the main Sikh tradition, owes its origin to Prithi Chand and his descendants, commonly known as the *Minas*. It was also an outgrowth of sectarian interests that had developed in reaction to Guru Arjan's succession. The Sikh sources are unanimous in their view that even during the life of Guru Ram Das, the issue of succession had become highly debatable because Prithi Chand, had made his stand publicly known that he desired to succeed his father. To usurp the Guruship he not only schemed to outwit his younger brother (Guru) Arjan but had also cast his net to manipulate the position in his favour. He had become so impatient and rowdy that he had started picking up feuds with his father, Guru Ram Das. He had stooped to such a level that Guru Ram Das had to declare him a *Mina* (crooked). The scriptural as well as historical sources provide enough insights into the nature of hostility that Guru Arjan had to face at the hands of his rival, Prithi Chand.

We find that Prithi Chand had entered into an alliance with the Mughal officials who out of jealousy were not found unwanting to promote his interest. In order to eliminate Guru Arjan, Prithi Chand conspired with Sulhi Khan, a Mughal official who because of his untimely death could not carry out the plan. Thereafter in collusion with the provincial level Mughal officials he incited the royal court against the mission of Guru Arjan. Even a petition drawn against Guru Arjan was put before Emperor Akbar but Prithi Chand and his associates had to face discomfiture because their allegations were unfounded and uncalled for. Having failed to dislodge Guru Arjan from Ramdaspur, Prithi Chand moved to Hehar, a village near Lahore, where he founded a parallel centre to that of Guru Arjan. However, in the wake of confrontation with the Mughals, Guru Hargobind had to vacate Amritsar. After the departure of Sixth Guru, the descendants of Prithi Chand had full control of Amritsar almost for a century, where they carried on their literary pursuits without any disturbance. The volume and variety of literature produced by the *Mina* line of guruship speak loudly and clearly of their motives.

An examination of the *Mina* literature leaves no room for any doubt that Prithi Chand and his son Miharban were prolific writers and went on to compose spurious writings in the name of 'Nanak'. Their literary works speak volumes of hard work which they had put in to establish the *Mina* tradition. We are told that a *Granth* which had been compiled by the *Minas*, also included the writings composed by them. On the pattern of the Sikh Gurus they had their own bands of musicians. They had employed a number of professional scribes who were entrusted with the job to prepare copies of their writings.

Although most scholars have followed the traditional line to accuse the *Minas* for having corrupted the Sikh scripture, yet the vital issue as to how the *Mina* tradition conflicted with the main Sikh tradition in its approach to doctrinal and theological issues has not been

adequately explored so far. Even no one has taken the studies to identify the characteristics or definitive features of the *Mina* tradition. Surely the above task is formidable, especially in the absence of *Mina* scripture, but the literary works of Prithi Chand, Miharban and Harji that have survived, are replete with the traces that can unfold the mysteries surrounding the *Mina* tradition. We have abundant evidence to prove that the primary concern of the *Minas* was to establish their line of guruship. In contrast to the Sikh Gurus, the *Mina* tradition deviates considerably in its approach to both Hinduism and Islam. On the one hand it accepts the Semitic prophets and on the other it eulogizes the Hindu *avtars*. It does not hesitate to call Babur as *Marad ka Chela* and justifies Mughal rule over India as a divine dispensation. The Brahmanical system, *hath-yoga* beliefs and practices, *Sarguna* mode of bhakti etc., which stood discarded by the Sikh Gurus, were reintroduced into the *Mina* variety of Sikhism. A thorough and extensive study of the *Mina* literature can be of immense value to find out how the *Mina* tradition was different from that of the main Sikh tradition.

Another tradition, the *Hindalias* that was totally heterodox in nature, also deserves our attention. It owes its origin to Hindal, a jat of Jandiala (Guru), now in the district of Amritsar. The Sikh sources describe that previously he had been a follower of Sakhi Sarwar who had come under the spell of Guru Amar Das to dedicate himself to the service of *langar* at Goindwal. It is said that he was one of the *Manjidars* to whom Guru Amar Das had entrusted the responsibility to preach Sikhism in and around his village. Since he was fond of meditating God in the name of Niranjan, his followers came to be known as the *Niranjanias*. Though his association with Guru Amar Das is a debatable issue, yet we can safely state that Hindal who was a contemporary of Guru Arjan Dev, had embraced Sikhism at some stage of his career. Subsequently, he drifted away from the main stream Sikhism to establish his own seat of gurudom at Jandiala. Bidhi Chand, the son and successor of Hindal carried on the *Niranjanian* tradition and provided it an independent outlook than that of the Sikhs. The *Niranjanian* literature produced under the patronage of Bidhi Chand, has no scruple to denigrate Guru Nanak and his successors. It is replete with accounts that Hindal stood on a much higher spiritual pedestal than that of Guru Nanak. It also informs that Hindal has composed a number of compositions. Significantly, some writings which are *raga* oriented have survived in the *Niranjanian* works. It is equally noteworthy that his writings have been entered under the authorship of *Mahala 1*, a distinctive feature of the Sikh text to record the *Bani* of Guru Nanak. An analysis of the *Niranjanian* literature reveals that Hindal has compiled a sort of *Granth* wherein besides his own writings, the hymns of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad and medieval Bhagats have been included in it. A cursory glance at the writings of Hindal indicates that to compose them he has borrowed heavily from the *bani* of the Sikh Gurus. Even to initiate their followers the *Niranjanias* have coined a formula that contains some peculiar features which put it apart from the Sikh tradition. The scholars of Sikh studies are unanimous in their view-point that to serve their vested interests, the *Niranjanias* have played a vital role to distort the Sikh tradition. Hence, the scholars doing textual studies have to be cautious in their approach as the possibility of *Niranjanian* documents representing their version of the *Bani* of the Sikh Gurus surfacing at some stage of history cannot be ruled out altogether.

It is obvious that the rivals of the Sikh Gurus had also produced codices of *gurbani* ostensibly to attract the Sikhs to their fold. For that they had commissioned scribes whose

primary interest lay in projecting their peculiar beliefs and practices. In fact the entry of apocryphal writings into the Sikh scriptural writings can largely be attributed to the scribes working at the behest of their masters, the rivals of the Sikh Gurus. Thus, all the manuscripts which presently we have in the different libraries and private collections and those which might be surfacing in near future, are not ought to be the product of main Sikh tradition alone. While analyzing the contents of a manuscript of *gurbani*, we will have to be vigilant whether it contains the characteristic features of the schismatic elements or not.

### **Janamsakhi Tradition**

In the transmission of *Bani* the role of *Janamsakhi* tradition was no less insignificant. It is believed that initially the *Janamsakhi* tradition had been in circulation oral form. The *Pratan Janamsakhi*, *Àdi Sakhian* and *Sachkhand Pothi* of Miharban which represent the earliest version of the *Janamsakhi* tradition, are said to have been compiled towards the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century. If it is true then some of the *Janamsakhis* are contemporaneous to the *Àdi Granth*. There is no denying the fact that to build the image of Guru Nanak as well as to carry his message to the masses, the *Janamsakhis* have been a very popular mode. At the same time to express their peculiar beliefs and ethical leanings, the *Janamsakhi* authors have employed the mode of *bani* quite effectively. However, a preliminary examination of various *Janamsakhis* reveals that quite a number of extra-canonical writings attributed to Guru Nanak, have crept into these works. Even the text of some hymns that appears in the *Janamsakhis* is quite different than that of the *Àdi Granth*. It indicates that either the authenticated text was not available with the *Janamsakhi* authors or they were in the habit of recording everything attributed to Guru Nanak coming in their way without any scruples. Since the purpose of *Janamsakhis* was not that of the scripture, thus the *Janamsakhi* authors did not bother much for the authenticated text. Any way the manner in which the text of *bani* included in the *Janamsakhis* differs with that of the *Àdi Granth* needs in-depth investigations. Similarly, how far the scribes making copies of *Àdi Granth* have been influenced by the *Janamsakhis* sources is an important issue awaiting attention at the hands of critics.

### **Role of Scribes**

Though, the role played by the scribes in the transmission of *gurbani* was quite significant, yet it has not been adequately commented upon by the critics. They assume that almost all the documents relating to *gurbani* are the legitimate works of the main Sikh tradition. In fact the schismatic elements within the Panth had also produced codices of *gurbani*, ostensibly to attract the Sikhs to their fold. For that they had commissioned their own scribes whose primary interest lay in projecting their peculiar beliefs and practices. In fact the entry of apocryphal writings into the Sikh scriptural writings can largely be attributed to the scribes working at the behest of their masters, the rivals of the Sikh Gurus. The point which we wish to put-forth here is that while doing textual studies, religious outlook or affiliation of a scribe responsible for producing a document, is equally important and needs to be probed, otherwise conclusions drawn will not be able to stand the test of scrutiny.

As described earlier, though copying of *gurbani* had developed into a pastime for pious Sikhs but there existed professional scribes whose livelihood was on the copying of *Àdi Granth* texts. They responded to the requirements of Sikh congregations and individual Sikhs in an arbitrary manner. It seems besides producing small prayer books (*gutkas*), they also made available selection of hymns for the purpose of study and public singing. Though, they

produced the copy of the text as desired by their patrons yet their role in selecting the version of the text arbitrarily cannot be ruled out altogether. There is no doubt that the role of professional scribes in the transmission of *bani* was quite considerable but their criteria to select the text or preference for popularizing a particular recension of *Bani* has remained a mystery so far which needs to be unveiled. Similarly, scribal habits/practices of the scribes associated with various traditions within the Panth, namely the *Udasis*, the *Bhallas* and the *Minas* have not yet been examined critically. The *Khatris* of Punjab who had set up their business establishments on all the trade routes running across medieval India had played a very significant role in introducing Sikhism to the people of distant lands. They belonged to a literate community and there was no dearth of scribes among them who were engaged in copying of Sikh text for subsequent installation in their shrines. A preliminary survey of the manuscripts of the Sikh Scripture found in the Sikh shrines outside Punjab reveals that they had a preference for a particular recension of the Sikh Scripture. Thus the role of scribes coming from mercantile community, namely *Khatris*, *Aroras* and *Bhatias* and the scribes patronized by them have not come into the focus of our critics.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion suggests that besides the Sikh Gurus and their Sikhs, the schismatic elements within the Sikh Panth were also transmitting *gurbani* in their own manner. However in the recent studies impression has been given as if the transmission of *gurbani* had remained strictly under the domain of the Sikh Gurus and their rivals had no role whatsoever in the transmission of *gurbani*. Consequently, the state of transmission of Sikh scriptural tradition especially the peculiar ways, means and traditions that were in vogue in the Sikh Panth have not yet come into the focus of textual studies. For example early attempts to compile *gurbani* independent of the Sikh Gurus, musical or oral repertoires, small prayer books (*gutkas*) of personal use, early commentaries on the Sikh text, textual tradition preserved in the *Janamsakhi* literature and works outside the Sikh tradition especially in the anthologies of Maharashtra and Rajasthan have not yet been fully explored for the studies on Sikh scripture. To decide about the characteristic features of text families, cross-fertilization between various recensions and the nature of variant readings all these aspects of *gurbani* transmission have remained out of focus so far.

For reconstructing the history of Sikh scriptural tradition one is expected to go through a maze of manuscripts especially that pre-date 1604, the year of *Adi Granth's* codification. The Sikh tradition informs us that Guru Arjan while compiling the *Adi Granth* had some other sources at his disposal besides the volume inherited from Guru Ram Das. Unfortunately none of the early sources or the original writings of the early Sikh Gurus, have survived. A few years back some scholars in their pursuit to reconstruct the history of Sikh scriptural tradition, have identified three main sources of early Sikh scriptural tradition- the *Guru Har Sahai Pothi*, extant *Goindwal Pothis*, and *MS # 1245* of G.N.D. University, Amritsar. At that time it was concluded that these sources had originated one after another to culminate in the form of *Adi Granth* in 1604. Now instead of 'an early draft of the *Adi Granth*' theory of so many 'working drafts' that were prepared under the direct supervision of Guru Arjan has been floated. In this category *Bahawal Pothi*, *Wanjara Pothi* and *Bhai Rupa Pothi* have been projected as the 'working drafts' on which Guru Arjan has worked to produce the final version. Though these sources have been extensively used to reconstruct the evolution of the

Sikh sacred text yet they have not been subjected to rigorous examination to test their antecedents. On the other hand family accounts or tradition woven around them has been taken on its face value to decide about their very origin and purpose. Instead of 'accurate description' sometimes 'misleading account' has been provided. The variety of textual variants present in these sources proves that these sources represent different text families which are the product of different groups who were interested in preserving a particular version of scripture. Moreover, there is no dearth of similar manuscripts which are available even today at various places. Shall we place all those manuscripts which are of incomplete nature and do not match with the standard version in the category of 'working drafts' that too without establishing their antiquity? This approach will end up nowhere.

Usually Guru Arjan is credited for producing the first canonical text of the Sikh tradition. However an analysis of *gurbani* indicates that during the Guruship of Guru Amar Das three basic principles to fix the Sikh canon had come into vogue. Firstly, the writings of Guru Nanak and hymns coming down from his legitimately appointed line of successors form an integral part of the Sikh scriptural tradition. Secondly, the compositions of pseudo-gurus composed in the vein of 'Nanak' are not acceptable. Finally, the unprincipled, false or forged writings that violate the basic tenets of the Sikh faith are of no religious merit for the Sikhs. While looking into the antecedents of a manuscript of the Sikh Scripture besides the other critical norms one has to keep in mind the above thesis propounded by Guru Amar Das.

What is of particular significance of a manuscript source is not that it has been displayed at a particular religious place or has been in possession of a family descending from the Sikh Gurus. In spite of all these merits, the antiquity, authority and authenticity of a source have to be established. For it, rigorous inquiries such as: When was it recorded? Who was the scribe? Whether it is an original version or a copy of it? What was the use or purpose of it? Whether the scribe recorded it for personal use, for an institution, for a group or for a patron? And so on are required. Each source or even their smallest parts have to be examined in an analytical and surgical manner.

To recapitulate, one can say that various ways, means and traditions had contributed towards the transmission of Sikh scriptural tradition. Besides the Sikh Gurus and their Sikhs, the rivals of the Sikh Gurus were also engaged in the transmission of *gurbani*. Resultantly, we have a wide variety of manuscripts in the shape of full text of the Sikh Scripture, collection of hymns of the Sikh Gurus alone, collection of important texts such as *Japu*, *Anandu*, *Sukhmani*, *Bawan Akhari*, *Ramkali Onkar*, *Sidh Gosti*, collection of *Vars* ( ballads), liturgical texts (*gutkas*), texts for study (*Panj Granthi/Das Granthi*), musical repertoires, exposition of *Gurbani*, collections of hymns along with the composition of Guru Gobind Singh, collection of *gurbani* made for personal use and study, and the writings of a particular author. Before using the evidence of any manuscript one is required not only to authenticate its antique value on the basis of historical criticism but also to evaluate the historical milieu out of which it has originated. Similarly, the process through which it has been composed, the sources employed for it and the very purpose and use made of it, have also to be enquired into.