POTHI PARMESAR KA THAAN
(ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਦੇ ਸੌਗਦ ਵਾਂਕੁਤਰੇ)
to Guru Amar Das ji when he was bestowed as the third Guru and in his time he also sought to bring together the Bani of the preceding Gurus into one pothi. He commissioned the services of his grandson Bhai Sahansar Ram to this effect and recited the bani to the scribe. This pothi was kept by Sahansar Ram and was later passed to his father - Bhai Mohan. It henceforth became known as the Mohan pothi.

During the compilation of the Mohan pothi, Bhai Datu and Baba Budha - both contemporaries of the first and second gurus were asked to recite those hymns (Sabds) that they had come to learn by heart, many more it is said were collated from pieces of paper and from the pothi handed down from guru to guru. It is said that Bhai Datu had in his possession a pothi which contained many hymns (Sabds) of the first Guru. The Mohan pothi is in two volumes, the first volume is 600 pages and the second 448. It is in 14 sections and contains the bani (hymns) of the first three gurus and Bhagat Kabir, Bhagat Trilochan, Bhagat Nam Dev, Bhagat Sain, Bhagat Ravi Das, Bhagat Jai Dev, but not of Bhagat Farid. Notably it does not contain all the hymns (sabds) of Guru Nanak. [3-4, 16]

The Aad Granth

By the period of the fifth Guru - Guru Arjan, jealousy had grown amongst the Sikh disciples - particularly sparked by his elder brother, Bhai Prithi Chand, who had claimed ascension to the spiritual throne over Guru Arjan. Bhai Prithi Chand had allegedly composed his own bani (hymns) - some of it a corrupted version of previous gurus' hymns - in an attempt to claim authenticity. As a result of this, in the year 1603, Guru Arjan sought to update the collection of hymns.

The Guru erected a tent by the side of the Harimandir Sahib - which was then under construction and called for Bhai Gurdas - a renowned Sikh scholar - for the purposes of scribing this new version. The guru called for all previous pothis to be submitted to him, in the interests of the task at hand. The spot where this pothi was compiled, is marked today as Ramsar. [3-4, 16]

It is said that when the guru sent messengers to Bhai Mohan - possessor of the previous pothi, the latter was in deep meditation and did not wish to be disturbed. Every time the representatives returned to Bhai Mohan, he was found to be sitting in meditation and hence they returned in dismay. Bhai Mohan is said to be a very devout Sikh of positive character and good spiritual prowess. The guru then decided upon visiting the Sikh personally. On that occasion he sang a hymn (Sabd) outside the door of Bhai Mohan - thereby awakening the Sikh out of his meditation, it was thus that the guru acquired the Mohan Pothis. [3-4, 16]

This compilation was the most complete to date and added to it were the compositions of Bhagat Farid. This version became known as the Aad Granth. A ceremony was performed on the occasion when the Holy Granth Sahib was completed during August of 1604 - It coincided with the completion of the gurdwara - Harimandir Sahib. On that day, the guru placed the Holy Granth Sahib on a gadi (seat) that he would normally sit on and himself sat on a gadi (seat) lower to that. Baba Budha was made the first granthi (custodian of the Holy Granth). [3-4, 16]

Pothis and Sikh Scholars

As is well known, there are eight English translations of Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) - by Dr Gopal Singh, S. Manmohan Singh, S. Gurbachan Singh Talib, S. Pritam Singh Chahil, Gurbachan Singh Makin, Kartar Singh Duggal, Dr Darshan Singh and Dr Sant Singh Khalsa) [13]. Similarly, there are five punjabi interpretations (Sri Guru Granth Sahib Nirmai Steek by Giani Harbans Singh, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan by Prof. Sahib Singh, Arth Bodh - Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji by Dr Rattan Singh Jaggi, Sri Ameer Bhandar Sampradai Teeka by Sant Kirpal Singh, Santhya Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji by Bhai Vir Singh, and one Hindi translation with meanings (by Sh. Manmohan Sehgal) [21]. Thus a total of 14 different interpretations of the verse 'Pothi Parmesar Ka Thaan' are available. A few representative interpretations are presented below;

According to Dr Sant Singh Khalsa [15] the English translation of the above verse is;

*This Holy Book is the home of the Transcendent Lord God. (Saarang, Fifth Mehl, p 1226)*

Prof Sahib Singh in his teeka (interpretation) titled 'Sri Guru Granth Darpan' [12, 18] provides the following interpretation for the above verse.

**Gian Badan Singh** in his *Faridkot Vala Teeka* [20] interprets the above verse as:

(पेघी - हृद षडयुग निम्न हृद षडयुग दी मिलन मानून सिद्धि भक्ति ते रुतकृति। ग्रंथी - मिलन दर ते यं।)

Giani Badan Singh in his *Faridkot Vala Teeka* [20] interprets the above verse as;

(पेघी - ग्रंथी साधु ग्रंथमेत्र वा (घर्षण) अपमान दे दे।)

According to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji Steek* [22] the interpretation of the above verse is as follows:
Bhagat Kabir, a saint poet of Aad Guru Granth Sahib, describing the state of medicants, refers pothi as a prayer book.

\[ \text{Pothi} \] Bhagat Kabir, p 871

Pothi - A Sacred Book

Guru Arjan describing the importance of contemplation on God, refer to pothis as sacred books.

\[ \text{Pothi} \] AGGS, M 5, p 761

Pothi - Hindu Scriptures

Describing the contemporary social and religious environment, Guru Nanak in his hymns of Raamkalee, refers to pothis as the Hindu scriptures.

\[ \text{Pothi} \] AGGS, M 1, p 903
Guru Arjan in his Raag Gauree Maajh hymns refers to pothis as holy Hindu scriptures (vedas).

The Pandits, the religious scholars, study the books of the Vedas. Some become renunciates, and bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage.

Pothi and Present Situation
Guru Nanak in his hymns of Siree Raag, describes the state of his contemporary religious scholars/preachers, who recite their religious scriptures (pothis) without contemplation. He warns them of the futility of such an exercise, as it is laced with self-centred approach for material gains only.

Pothi - A way to meet the Lord
Guru Nanak suggests a way out of such a predicament. He emphasises that contemplation on what is mentioned in the holy scriptures (pothis) and thereby imbibing the love of God in oneself leads to spiritual enlightenment.

Impermanence of Pothi
Impermanence is an undeniable and inescapable fact of human existence from which nothing that belongs to this Earth is ever free. Everything in life is temporary. Everything is subject to change and alteration in the world. There is nothing in this world that is fixed and permanent. Existence is a flux, and a continuous becoming.

The infinite treasure of the Naam abides within the minds of the devotees. Birth and death, attachment and suffering, are erased in the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy.

AGGS, M 5, p 761.
The sacred shrines of pilgrimage, Gods, temples and holy books; rosaries, ceremonial tilak marks on the forehead, meditative people, the pure, and the performers of burnt offerings; wearing loin cloths, bowing in reverence and the enjoyment of sacred foods - all these, and all people, shall pass away.

From above discussion it is obvious that the word 'pothi' represents a holy religious scripture (AGGS inclusive), which can be used as a sacred prayerbook as well.

Parmesar

Parmesar or Parameshwar means the Supreme God. It is transliterated from the Sanskrit word, ईश्वर (īśvara). It refers to the sole deity in monotheism. The word "param" meaning the highest, is added to “Ishwara” to intensify the title of God. The word Parameshwara is a compound word formed by joining three words-parama + Ish +vara. The word parama means 'supreme'. The word Ish (Isha) means the ruler/master/owner. The word Vara means the best/ the noblest/ the excellent. Thus the word Parameshwara literally means 'the excellent supreme ruler / master' [7].

Parameshwara is also known as Absolute Reality or Absolute Truth. The term Parameshwara (Supreme Lord) is used specifically to indicate the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is also the “supreme controller”. And yet it is common that in many Vedic scriptures the term Ishwara is used as a short form for Parameshwara. According to Shaiva puranas and siddhantas, Lord Shiva is Parameshwara. According to Bible translations into Hindi and Urdu, the Supreme Lord who loved the world and gave his only son so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life, as it is written in John 3:16, is Parameshwara [5].

Parmesar in Sikhism

Guru Nanak describes God as nirankar (from the Sanskrit nirākāra, meaning "formless"), akal (meaning "eternal") and alakh (from the Sanskrit alakśya, meaning "invisible" or "unobserved"). Sikhism's Holy Scripture, Aad Guru Granth Sahib, starts with the figure "1", signifying the unity of God. Nanak's interpretation of God is that of a single, personal and transcendental creator with whom the devotee must develop a most intimate faith and relationship to achieve salvation.


Sikhs believe in a single God that has existed from the beginning of time and will survive forever. God is genderless, fearless, formless, immutable, ineffable, self-sufficient, omnipotent and not subject to the cycle of birth and death. God in Sikhism is depicted in three distinct aspects: God as deity; God in relation to creation; and God in relation to man. During a discourse with siddhas (wandering Hindu adepts), Guru Nanak was asked "Where was the Transcendent God before creation?" He replied:

We can only express a sense of wonder about the beginning. The absolute abided endlessly deep within Himself then.

AGGS, M 1, p 940. Siddh Gost.

Thaan (Thaan) in Aad Guru Granth Sahib
In Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the word 'Thaan' (and its variants e.g. suthaan, asthaan etc) is used 77 times to describe different things such as a seat, a place, a home, a dwelling, a shelter or a shrine. A few relevant verses are presented to authenticate the premise.

**Thaan (Thaan) - A Seat**

मथुर भाटियाँ अभिन भुज भाज

मथुर भाज

( AGGS, M 5, p 48)

True is His Empire, and True is His Command.

True is His Seat of True Authority.

AGGS, M 5, p 48.

**Thaan (Thaan) - A Shelter**

रिसीरे रिसी देवी देवी देवी

रिसीरे देवी देवी देवी

( AGGS, M 5, p 395)

The Guru has given shelter to the shelterless.

AGGS, M 5, p 395.

**Thaan (Thaan) - A Shrine**

ॐ नमः ब्रह्म भवेन देवी भवेन देवी

( AGGS, M 1, p 687)

The spiritual wisdom given by the Guru is the True sacred shrine of pilgrimage, where the ten festivals are always observed.

AGGS, M 1, p 687.

In the light of above discussion the interpretation of the verse 'Pothi Parmesar ka Thaan' should be; a holy religious scripture (e.g. AGGS) is a treatise, which provides the knowledge and wisdom of God.

**CONCLUSION**

A historico-critical study of the verse पॊथी पत्थरी वा घर || (Pothi Parmesar ka Thaan), leads to the conclusion that a holy religious scripture (e.g. AGGS), is a treatise which provides the knowledge and wisdom of God. The AGGS advises us to avoid the ritual of pothi (holy religious scripture) recital, rather it exhorts us to understand the real meaning of what is written in it. The AGGS urges us to become a God conscious being (Brahm Giani) - a person who always delights in doing well to others.

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