

POTHI PARMESAR KA THAAN

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DISCUSSION

Pothi Parmesar Ka Thaan as a concept is unique to the Sikh religion. This sets Sikhism apart from other religions in a definitive manner. The Sikh scripture, which is in book form, has been elevated to the status of Guru or Teacher. It is interesting to note that “a most significant aspect of Sikh religion is the process which began with human Guru, continued during a period of duality in which there were human Gurus and a collection of sacred writings, and ended with the present situation in which full authority is enjoyed by the scripture”. In other words, *Pothi* (Granth) in Sikh parlance becomes the abode of *Parmesar* or *Sat Guru* or *Vahiguru*.

It is important to go back to the beginnings of the Sikh religion in order to understand the logic behind this concept. Guru Nanak was ready by 1499 CE at the age of thirty years to go forth in the wider world and share his message with the people. He began outlining a new path of universal love, equality for all and

unrestricted access to the Creator for His Grace. This appealed to the people and they started to follow the new way of life that he outlined.

The above led to Guru Nanak being recognized as God’s representative on the Earth who had been charged with the task of executing His command. He and other Sikh Gurus, however, maintained that the mortal human body is not to be deemed as the Guru. It is the light within that is the Guru. It is the *Sabd* that is the Guru, the Teacher. This has been authenticated by Bhai Gurdas in his *Varaan*:

ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ।

The Sabd as revealed by the Guru is the only authentic portrait of the Guru.

This is step number one of the process of making *pothi parmesar ka thaan* as *Sabd*, which the Guru receives becomes the written word that is incorporated in the book or

This paper deals with the following questions:

- *Who is Parmesar and what is His/Her authority?*
- *What is the logic behind a book being equated with the dwelling place of the word of God?*
- *What is the scope of this book and all, which is covered in it?*
- *Historical and current status of the book.*

Pothi. Since other religions also talk about God, Guru Nanak realized that it was important to outline what is meant by God as per Sikh teachings. Guru Nanak’s first utterance, which he wrote down became the preamble to the opening hymn of the Sikh prayer, the *Japji*, which appears at the beginning of the *Pothi Sahib*:

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ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ

ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ

ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

ik-o^Nkaar

sat naam kartaa purakh nirbha-o

nirvair akaal moorat ajoonee saibha^N

gur parsaad.

The One primordial essence manifest in all,

is the Truth,

is the Creator;

is without fear and enmity,

(**Editorial Note:** The font of gurbani has been replaced with that of Unicode Ravi font along with the transliteration with permission from the Website: srigranth.org of Dr KS Thind by the Editor to maintain the format.)

*Has a timeless form
is beyond the cycle of rebirth, is self-
existent,
and is realized by the grace of the
Guru*

Here we have a comprehensive and clear definition of God, His authority including His/Her attributes as per Sikh teachings.

Building on the above base, Guru Nanak started his mission to educate his disciples as per the new path he had started to outline. Continuing with the process and to reinforce his credentials, Guru Nanak stated:

ਹਉ ਢਾਢੀ ਵੇਕਾਰੁ ਕਾਰੈ ਲਾਇਆ ॥

ha-o dhaadhee vaykaar kaarai laa-i-aa.

ਰਾਤਿ ਦਿਹੈ ਕੈ ਵਾਰ ਧੁਰਹੁ ਫੁਰਮਾਇਆ ॥

raat dihai kai vaar Dharahu furmaa-i-aa.

ਢਾਢੀ ਸਚੈ ਮਹਲਿ ਖਸਮਿ ਬੁਲਾਇਆ ॥

dhaadhee sachai mahal khasam bulaa-i-aa.

ਸਚੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਾਲਾਹ ਕਪੜਾ ਪਾਇਆ ॥

sachee sifat saalaah kaprhaa paa-i-aa.

ਸਚਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਭੋਜਨੁ ਆਇਆ ॥

sachaa amrit naam bhojan aa-i-aa.

gurmatee khaaDhaa raj tin sukh paa-i-aa.

ਢਾਢੀ ਕਰੇ ਪਸਾਉ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਜਾਇਆ ॥

dhaadhee karay pasaa-o sabad vajaa-i-aa.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚੁ ਸਾਲਾਹਿ ਪੂਰਾ ਪਾਇਆ ॥੨੭॥

ਸੁਧੁ

naanak sach saalaahi pooraa paa-i-aa.

॥27॥ suDhu

AGGS, M 1, p150.

*I was once a worthless minstrel then
the Divine One gave me work;
I received the primal injunction: Sing
divine glory night and day!
The sovereign called the minstrel to
the True Mansion:*

*I was given the robe of honouring and
exalting;*

I tasted the food of the true ambrosial

Name.

*Those who, through the Guru feast
on the Divine food win eternal joy
and peace.*

*Your minstrel spreads your glory by
singing your Word.*

*Nanak says, by exalting Truth we
attain the Absolute One*

Dispersed throughout the scripture are sayings of Guru Nanak that reinforce over and over the point that God sends him the Word (Sabd) or divine truth which he speaks as directed:

ਤਾ ਮੈ ਕਹਿਆ ਕਹਣੁ ਜਾ ਤੁਝੈ ਕਹਾਇਆ ॥

taa mai kahi-aa kahan jaa tujhai
kahaa-i-aa.

AGGS, M 1, p 5.

*I speak only what You O God inspire
me to speak.*

ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ

ਗਿਆਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥

jaisee mai aavai khasam kee banee
taishraa karee gi-aan vay laalo.

AGGS, M 1, p 722.

*As the Word of God descends to me.
So I make it known, O Lalo*

ਸਚ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਆਖੈ ਸਚੁ ਸੁਣਾਇਸੀ

ਸਚ ਕੀ ਬੋਲਾ ॥੨॥੩॥੫॥

sach kee banee naanak aakhai sach
sunaa-isee sach kee baylaa. ॥2॥3॥5॥
AGGS, M 1. P 723.

*Nanak utters the Word of the True
One and proclaims the Truth at the
appointed time.*

ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਨ ਕੈ ਸਦ ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਜਿਨ ਏਕ

ਸਬਦਿ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਈ ॥੪॥੯॥

naanak tin kai sad balihaaree jin ayk
sabad liv laa-ee. ॥4॥9॥

AGGS, M 1, p 879.

*I am ever a sacrifice to those who
concentrate on the Word of God.*

ਗੁਰ ਮਹਿ ਆਪੁ ਸਮੇਇ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਰਤਾਇਆ ॥

gur meh aap samo-ay sabad vartaa-i-

aa.

AGGS, M 1, p 1279.

*God is merged in Guru and dispenses
His Word through Him.*

ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ ॥

sabad guroo surat Dhun chaylaa.

AGGS, M 1, p 943

*The Word is the Guru and the mind
that attunes to it is the disciple.*

Guru Nanak's third, fourth and fifth successors also contributed to fortifying Guru Nanak's concept of the revealed Word:

ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਇਸੁ ਜਗ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਕਰਮਿ ਵਸੈ

ਮਨਿ ਆਏ ॥੧॥

gurbaanee is jag meh chaanan karam

vasai man aa-ay. ॥1॥

AGGS, M 3, p 67.

*The revelation of the Guru is the Light
of the World*

*Through it God's Grace descends into
the human soul.*

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣਹੁ

ਗੁਰਸਿਖਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਮੁਹਹੁ ਕਢਾਏ

॥

satgur kee banee sat sat kar jaanhu

gursikhahu har kartaa aap muhhu
kadhaa-ay.

AGGS, M 4, p 308.

*Accept the Revelation of the true
Guru as true forever, for it is God
Himself who makes the Guru utter it.*

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਹੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਮਿਲਾਵਾ

ਰੇਇ ॥

gurmukh banee barahm hai sabad
milaavaa ho-ay.

AGGS, M 3, p 39.

*The gurbani is God and it is through
it that humans obtain union with God.*

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਹੈ ਨਾਮੁ ਰਿਦੈ ਵਸਾਈ ॥

gurmukh banee naam hai naam ridai
vasaa-ee.

AGGS, M 4, p 1239.

The gurbani is God's name and this

name I enshrine in my mind.

ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ॥

pothee parmaysar kaa thaan.

AGGS, M 5, p 1226.

The holy book is the abode of God.

The above quotations from *Gurbani* make it very clear that the Sikh Gurus were narrating the revealed Word as it came to them. Gurus were messengers for transmitting the Word of God.

To conclude this section, it is worth noting that the Sikh Gurus Relayed God's message. Gurus took great care in communicating that the Word they were saying was regarded as the revealed Word.

Gurus did not promote a personality cult as they emphasized repeatedly that they were conveying what God wants them to say. Gurus also emphasized that the mortal human body is not to be deemed as the Guru. Instead, it is the light within that is the Guru. It is the *Sabd* that is the Guru, the Teacher. *Sabd* and Guru are interconnected. Reference to the following quote from *Gurbani* further clarifies this point.

In the 38th stanza of the Japji, Guru Nanak states:

ਜਤੁ ਪਾਹਾਰਾ ਧੀਰਜੁ ਸੁਨਿਆਰੁ ॥

jat paahaaraa Dheeraj suni-aar.

ਅਹਰਣਿ ਮਤਿ ਵੇਦੁ ਹਥੀਆਰੁ ॥

ahran mat vayd hathee-aar.

ਭਉ ਖਲਾ ਅਗਨਿ ਤਪ ਤਾਉ ॥

bha-o khalaa agan tap taa-o.

ਭਾਂਡਾ ਭਾਉ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਤਿਤੁ ਢਾਲਿ ॥

bhaa^Ndaa bhaa-o amrit tit dhaal.

ਘੜੀਐ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਚੀ ਟਕਸਾਲ ॥

gharhee-ai sabad sachee taksaal.

ਜਿਨ ਕਉ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰਮੁ ਤਿਨ ਕਾਰ ॥

jin ka-o nadar karam tin kaar.

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਦਰੀ ਨਦਰਿ ਨਿਹਾਲ ॥੩੮॥

naanak nadree nadar nihaal. ॥38॥

*Let continence be your workshop,
patience the goldsmith,
intellect the anvil and knowledge the
hammer,
let fear (of God) be the bellows,
sincere effort the fire
and His love the crucible wherein
the nectar Naam is
melted and therefrom the Shabad is
coined.*

In the above stanza, Guru Nanak establishes that *Shabad*, *Naam* and God dwell on the same platform. Similarly, Guru Nanak stated in the *Sidh Ghoshti* that *Shabad* is the Guru and the awareness of its sound is the disciple ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ ॥

(sabad guroo surat Dhun chaylaa.)

In the end, disciples of the Sikh Gurus showed complete trust in the Gurus to the extent that no one questioned the validity of their sayings and teachings. The personal integrity, moral character and ethical living by the Gurus went a long way in upholding their sway on the people.

Pothi (Granth) provides comprehensive information on the Sikh doctrine on God, His nature, man and his relationship to God; man's relation to his fellow humans, other creatures that inhabit this earth and the environment.

The first version of the *pothi* was completed by the 5th Guru, Guru Arjan, in 1604 and installed at

Harmandir Sahib. Guru Arjan bowed before the *Pothi* by acknowledging that the contents of the book merited higher authority than he enjoyed as a Guru. He further reinforced this point when the *Pothi* was taken to his quarters for the night. He slept on the floor while the *Pothi* was placed on the bed. The last five Gurus, from Guru Hargobind to Guru Gobind Singh, gave their full allegiance to the *pothi* and gave it the same respect as its compiler Guru Arjan practiced.

This *Pothi* is extant and is now referred to as *Kartarpur wali bir*. This phase lasted until 1706 when Guru Gobind Singh added the hymns of the 9th Guru, which resulted in its second version. This task was undertaken by the 10th Guru at Damdama Sahib. When Guru Gobind Singh was nearing the end of his life, he anointed the Damdama Sahib *Pothi* as the eternal Guru thus ending the chain of human Gurus. Since then the Damdama *Pothi* has assumed the title of *Aad Guru Granth Sahib* (AGGS) and is the acknowledged scripture of the Sikh community.

The AGGS (second version) has been in existence for over three hundred years. Its authenticity, authority and status have never been challenged by any one. It remains the sole scriptural authority of Sikh theology.

All rites of passage for a Sikh person such as birth, the naming of a child, marriage, death, the celebration of happy and/or sad occasions are performed under the guidance and in the presence of the AGGS. The AGGS is regularly consulted as the Guru for guidance by individuals.

One of the best examples that illustrates the status and authority of AGGS is the famous incident that took place in 1920. A large segment of low caste individuals decided to adopt the Sikh religion, which led to their becoming baptized *Khalsa*. To

mark this occasion, this group went to Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar to offer prayers and *Karah Parshad*. Those in charge of the Harmandir Sahib refused their offering as they were from the so-called untouchable class. This was in complete contravention of Sikh doctrine, which affirms equality for all. After much discussion, it was agreed to seek guidance from the AGGS.

Based on the established procedure, the AGGS was opened randomly and the following passage turned up:

ਨਿਗੁਣਿਆ ਨੇ ਆਪੇ ਬਖਸਿ ਲਏ ਭਾਈ

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਲਾਇ ॥

niguni-aa no aapay bakhas la-ay bhaa-ee satgur kee sayvaa laa-ay.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਉਤਮ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮਿ

ਚਿਤੁ ਲਾਇ ॥੧॥

satgur kee sayvaa ootam hai bhaa-ee raam naam chit laa-ay. ॥1॥

ਹਰਿ ਜੀਉ ਆਪੇ ਬਖਸਿ ਮਿਲਾਇ ॥

har jee-o aapay bakhas milaa-ay.

ਗੁਣਹੀਣ ਹਮ ਅਪਰਾਧੀ ਭਾਈ ਪੂਰੈ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ

ਲਏ ਰਲਾਇ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

gunheen ham apraaDhee bhaa-ee poorai satgur la-ay rala-ay. rahaa-o. AGGS, M 3. p 638.

Upon the worthless God bestows grace, if they will serve the True Guru.

Exalted is the service of the True Guru, to hold in remembrance the divine name.1.

God offers grace and mystic union.

We are worthless sinners yet the True Guru has drawn us to that blissful union.

Upon hearing the above passage, those who were opposed to accepting the offering of the newly Baptized Sikhs relented and proceeded to execute the rites for distributing the *Karah Parshad* thus ending the dispute.

This event established the ultimate authority of the AGGS as the arbiter of disputes and disagreements. It further solidified the status of the holy book as the supreme authority for the Sikh community. No one has disputed this to this day.

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