

# POTHI PARMESAR KA THAAN - A PERSPECTIVE

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### INTRODUCTION

Sikh history reports that Guru Nanak used to write his hymns in a *pothi* (book or *pustaka*), kept in great care by him. During his travels (*udasis*), whenever he visited a holy place, he used to collect the hymns of his contemporary religious heads or devotees as well as their predecessors. Thereafter, selecting such hymns, as were in coherence with his mission, he used to write these in his *pothi*, along with his own hymns. This fact is confirmed by Bhai Gurdas in his ballads (*vaars*). Describing Guru Nanak's visit to Mecca, Bhai Gurdas writes [1]:

ਆਸਾ ਹਥਿ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਕਛਿ ਕੁਜਾ ਬਾਂਗ ਮੁਸਲਾ ਧਾਰੀ ।

*He held staff in his hand, pressed a book under his armpit, caught hold of a metal pot and mattress.*

The book (*pothi*) that was carried by Guru Nanak, as mentioned by Bhai Gurdas, must be the book containing these hymns (*bani*). In conversation with qazis at Mecca, a qazi asks ਪੁਛਨਿ ਫੋਲੁ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੂੰ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਵਡਾ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੋਈ ।

*They asked Baba Nanak to open and search in his book whether Hindu is great or the Muslim (Muslim).*

Meaning thereby that consulting your

book, tell us that according to your religious belief if a Hindu is great or a Muslim? Obviously, the book being referred to, was the book (*pothi*) containing the religious hymns (*bani*).

A few days before his death, Guru Nanak handed over guru-ship to Guru Angad. At the occasion, he handed over this *pothi* to him [2, p 3].

ਸੋ ਪੋਥੀ ਜੁਬਾਨਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਅੰਗਦ ਜੋਗ ਮਿਲੀ ॥

*The Pothi was handed over to Guru Angad.*

Finally, this *pothi*, came to Guru Arjan which contained not only the hymns of his four predecessor gurus but that of other devotees (*bhagats*) as well. Guru Arjan, in addition to his own writing he also collected the hymns written by his contemporary distinguished religious or holy persons. Thereafter, all these hymns of Sikh Gurus and *Bhagats* were compiled into a *granth*, now called the *Aad Guru Granth Sahib* (AGGS). Some writers say that he himself added the *bani* of *Bhatts* also in the AGGS. According to

*This article traces the historical information about the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) right from the writing of bani by Guru Nanak; and collection of bani of other Gurus and of Bhagats to compile it into a granth and declaring it "Pothi Parmeshar ka Thaan" by Guru Arjan. Finally, to the stage when this "Pothi" was declared the "Guru of the Sikhs" by Guru Gobind Singh.*

Nanakshahi calendar, the compilation of the *Granth* was completed by Guru Arjan on 16th August 1604. This *pothi* (*Granth*) was enshrined in *Darbar Sahib* on 1st September 1604. This is called as first installation (*Pehla Parkash*) of the *pothi*. This *pothi* has been referred to by Guru Arjan in his hymns as "*Pothi Parmesar ka Than*".

ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ॥ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਿ ਗਾਵਹਿ ਗੁਣ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੁ ॥

(AGGS, M 5, p 1226.) Note\*

*This Holy Book is the home of the Transcendent God. Whoever sings the Glorious*

*Praises of the God of the Universe in the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, has the perfect knowledge of God.*

At present this *pothi* is preserved by the *Sodhi* family of *Kartarpur*, near *Jalandhar*. So it is known as the *Kartar Puri Bir*. The second *bir* (volume) of *pothi* is known as *Damdami Bir*. *Guru Gobind Singh*

compiled this *bir* and included the hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur in it. Bhai Mani Singh was the scribe for this *bir*.

On 20th October, 1708, one day before his death at Nader, Guru Gobind Singh declared Damdami *Bir* as his successor and commanded the Sikhs to revere this *granth* (*pothi*) as Guru. It is pertinent to add here that the principle of "Gurbani as Guru" or "Sabd is Guru" is accepted by the Sikhs since the time of Guru Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh only ordered that after his death no person should be adored as Sikh Guru rather it should be taken as "Sabd is Guru".

Several historical references are available bestowing of Guru-ship to *pothi* (*granth*) by the tenth Sikh Guru. For instance, *bhatt vahi* (record book) written by Narbud Singh. At that time, he was present at Nanded, with Guru Gobind Singh [2, p 190].

Another reference is *Rehatnama* of Bhai Nand Lal. At that time, Bhai Nand Lal was also present at Naded, in the army camp of Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah [3, p 54].

Bhai Nand Lal asks Guru Gobind Singh:  
 ਤੁਮ ਜੁ ਕਹਾ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਦਰਸਨ ਕਰਿ ਮੁਹ ਆਇ । ਲਖੀਏ ਤੁਮਰਾ ਦਰਸ ਕਹਾਂ ਕਹਹੁ ਮੋਹਿ  
*What you have stated, Oh My Gurdev, 'come to seek my vision'. Please enable me to understand, how we can pursue this.*

Guru Gobind Singh ji said:  
 ਤੀਨ ਰੂਪ ਹੈ ਮੋਹ ਕੇ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਨੰਦ! ਚਿਤ ਲਾਇ । ਨਿਰਗੁਣ, ਸਰਗੁਣ, ਗੁਰਸਬਦ, ਕਹਹੁ ਤੋਹਿ  
*Listen O' Nand, there are three forms of mine, And these, you must understand, are the Formless, Attributive and the Guru's Sabd, the Celestial Word.*

ਜੋ ਸਿਖ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਕੀ ਚਾਹਿ । ਦਰਸਨ ਕਰੇ ਗੁੰਥ ਜੀ ਆਹਿ ।

*The Sikh desirous of the Guru's Darshan, Should go and have the Darshan of Granth*  
 ਮੇਰਾ ਰੂਪ ਗੁੰਥ ਜੀ ਜਾਨ । ਇਸ ਮੇਂ ਭੇਦ ਨ ਰੰਚਕ ਮਾਨ ॥

*Recognize the Granth Jee as my embodiment, and concede to no other perception.*

Giani Gian Singh's couplet (*dohra*) [4, p 353], which is recited at the end of Sikh prayer (Ardas) in all the *gurdwaras*, the world over, is as under:

ਆਗਿਆ ਭਈ ਅਕਾਲ ਕੀ, ਤਬੈ ਚਲਾਯੋ ਪੰਥ ।  
 ਸਭ ਸਿਖਨ ਕੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ, ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਨੀਓ ਗੁੰਥ ।  
 ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁੰਥ ਕੇ ਮਾਨੀਓ, ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਗੁਰਾਂ ਕੀ ਦੇਹ ।  
 ਜੋ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੇ ਮਿਲਬੋ ਚਹੇ, ਖੋਜ ਸਬਦ ਮੇਂ ਲੇਹੁ ।

*Under orders of the Immortal Being, the Panth was created. All Sikhs are enjoined to accept the Granth as their Guru. Consider the Guru Granth as an embodiment of the Gurus. Those who want to meet God, can find Him in its hymns.*

In the above couplet, it is explained that if someone wants to seek the Timeless Being (God), or he wants to know his form, then he should search for Him in *gurbani* - Sabd Guru.

ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ॥  
 ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਿ ਗਾਵਹਿ ਗੁਣ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੁ ॥

*This Holy Book is the home of the Transcendent God God. Whoever sings the Glorious Praises of the God of the Universe in the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, has the perfect knowledge of God.*

First of all, let us try to understand the God, whose dwelling place is "*pothi*", as proclaimed by Guru Arjan. In the hymns of the AGGS as

a prologue to "Jap" bani, the God has been described as as follows:

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

*One Universal Creator God. The Name Is Truth. Creative Being Personified. No Fear. No Hatred. Image of the Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent. By Guru's Grace.*

This phrase is a Commencing Verse (but commonly known as *Mool Mantar* or invocation - (*anglacharan*). Articulating the attributes of God, Guru Sahib reports Him as a Timeless Being implying thereby that He is formless. It is beyond human capability to describe God's attributes ਗੁਣ ਬੇਅੰਤ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹਣੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਸਕੈ ਪ੍ਰਦੂਚ ॥

(AGGS, M 5, p 578)  
*(His) attributes are beyond description and numerous. None can describe these.*

It is a prevalent view that the identification of a person, an object or a power can be done from its attributes. But the problem is that the power has no form. How can we recognise its characteristics? Guru Sahib enunciates this enigma as: ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵਸਿਆ ॥

ਤੇਰਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਲਖਿਆ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥  
 (AGGS, M 1, p 469.)  
*I am a sacrifice to Your almighty creative power which is pervading everywhere.*

*Your limits cannot be known.*  
 ॥1॥Pausell

Oh! all pervading and all permeating God (Timeless Being), Oh! all immanent and transcendent God, I am a sacrifice to Your almighty creative power.

Guru Nanak makes it obvious that he is talking of the God who is a creator

of the whole Universe. The God is immanent in all creation.  
ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਕੈ ਵਸਿਆ ਸੋਇ ॥ (AGGS, M 4, p 83)

*He created the Creative Power of the Universe, within which He dwells.*

It is obvious from the above discussion, that the infinite God (God) dwells in the Nature. But we are habitual of identifying an object, a person or a power by its attributes. How to recognise this "Timeless Being" called as God. The next verse of the gurbani hymns, helps us to sort out this problem. Let us see which source does Guru Nanak suggest us to recognise the attributes of the God.  
ਪ੍ਰਭ ਬੇਅੰਤ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਕੋ ਪਾਵਹਿ ॥

(AGGS, M 1, p1028)

*God is endless; following the Guru's Teachings, some find Him.*

Guru Nanak proclaims in his hymns, the method to know God (Timeless Being) and His attributes. He emphasises that if someone wants to be aware of God or wants to know about His immanence in nature, then he/she must contemplate on Guru's teachings (*gurmat*). By understanding the essence of gurbani, one must visualize God in His creation. Guru Nanak also cautions us that it is not an easy task. Thereby only a very few people are able to do so.

Describing the attributes of immanent and transcendent God, Guru Nanak calls Him a creator or Truth. This Truth has been described as Timeless Being (Akal Purkh), Supreme Soul (*Paramatma*) and God (*Parmesar*). Guru Nanak proclaims that this God or Timeless Being was True (in existence) in the primal beginning. He was True throughout the ages. He is True here and now and He will remain True forever.

This eternal Truth is defined in Commencing Verse of the AGGS. Visualizing Him in the marvelous beauty of nature, Guru Nanak

declares that I am a sacrifice to the Almighty creative power, which is pervading everywhere. Sikh Gurus perceived this Truth in its numerous manifested and un-manifested forms. They described His countless attributes in the AGGS, M 5, p 250.  
ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੁ ਆਕਾਰ ਆਪਿ ਨਿਰਗੁਨ ਸਰਗੁਨ

ਏਕ ॥

ਏਕਹਿ ਏਕ ਬਖਾਨਨੋ ਨਾਨਕ ਏਕ ਅਨੇਕ ॥

*He Himself is formless, and also formed; the One God is without attributes, and also with attributes. Describe the One God as One, and Only One; O Nanak, He is the One, and the many.*

Despite His countless characteristics and numerous forms, He is One and formless. He is creator as well as destroyer. He is the preserver of all creation and perceives it Himself. He pervades and permeates in animate beings and inanimate things. He is immanent in plants, trees, birds, animals and humans:

ਆਪਹਿ ਕੀਆ ਕਰਾਇਆ ਆਪਹਿ ਕਰਨੈ

ਜੋਗੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਏਕੋ ਰਵਿ ਰਹਿਆ ਦੂਸਰ ਹੋਆ ਨ

ਹੋਗੁ ॥

*He Himself acts, and causes others to act; He Himself can do everything. O Nanak, the One God is pervading everywhere; there has never been any other, and there never.*

In the 37th stanza (*pauri*) of 'Jap' bani, it is articulated that God dwells in the Realm of Truth (*Sach Khand*):

ਸਚ ਖੰਡਿ ਵਸੈ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੁ ॥

ਕਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਨਿਹਾਲ ॥

(AGGS, Jap # 37, p 8)

*In the realm of Truth, the Formless God abides. Having created the creation, He watches over it. By His Glance of Grace, He bestows happiness.*

Analysing this verse in the light of gurbani, we might arrive at the right

conclusion, otherwise we will be in a bad situation. As God is immanent in Nature, so it is pertinent for us to know that whether Realm of Truth is outside God's creation or is it the "Creation" itself. Gurbani sheds light on this mystery as follows. The essence of the formless God is all pervading in his creation e.g. the whole Universes. Based on his research, Guru Nanak perceives and experiences this formless God in all things and beings:

ਖੋਜਤ ਖੋਜਤ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਦੇਖਿਆ ॥

(AGGS, M 1, p 838.)

*Searching, searching, I have seen Him in each and every heart.*

All this visible and invisible creation is Realm of Truth. As Creator's creation is True so it is the Realm of Truth:

ਸਚੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਖੰਡ ਸਚੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ ॥

ਸਚੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਲੋਅ ਸਚੇ ਆਕਾਰ ॥

(AGGS, M 1, p 643.)

*True are Your worlds, True are Your Solar Systems.*

*True are Your realms, True is Your creation.*

Keeping in view the discussion about God and His attributes, now the question arises that from where we have obtained this information/knowledge. This knowledge has been obtained from gurbani, from the wisdom of *sabd* Guru and by contemplation on Guru's teaching. Sikh Gurus have addressed these hymns (*bani*) by several different names viz. *dhur ki bani* (hymns from the primal God), *satgur ki bani* (hymns of True Guru), *Brahm Gian* (knowledge of God), *sach ki bani* (hymns of Truth) etc. In my opinion, the gist of all this is that these hymns (*gurbani*) contain knowledge about the attributes of God or Truth about the Timeless being (God):

ਤੂੰ ਅਪਿ ਸਚਾ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਚੀ ਆਪੇ ਅਲਖੁ

ਅਥਾਹਾ ਹੇ ॥

*You Yourself are True, and True is the Word of Your Bani. You Yourself are invisible and unknowable.*

ਸਚ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਆਖੈ ਸਚ ਸੁਣਾਇਸੀ ਸਚੁ ਕੀ ਬੋਲਾ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 1057.

*Nanak speaks the Word of Truth; he proclaims the Truth at this, the right time.*

Now the question arises that how the Sikh Gurus, devotees and holy persons obtained the hymns (from the primal God) and the knowledge about the ultimate reality?

These hymns contain the knowledge about the ultimate reality (Truth), which was obtained by the Sikh Gurus, devotees and holy persons through their intuitive vision and spiritual enlightenment. When Guru's consciousness or spirit merges itself in the God's consciousness or essence, then whatever Gurus perceived and experienced that they expressed in their hymns.

This knowledge about the attributes of God is the Truth or bani (sacred hymns):

ਸੰਤਨ ਕੀ ਸੁਣਿ ਸਾਚੀ ਸਾਖੀ ॥

ਜੋ ਬੋਲਹਿ ਜੋ ਪੇਖਹਿ ਆਖੀ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 894.

*Listen to the true story of the Saints.*

*They speak only of what they see with their eyes.*

This state of mergence in or union with God, is expressed in gurbani (hymns of Gurus) as:

ਹਰਿ ਜਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਹੋਇਆ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਹਰਿ ਇਕੇ ॥

*The God's humble servant becomes the God, Har, Har; O Nanak, the God and His servant are one and the same.*

We obtain the knowledge or truth about the attributes of God from the *pothi*. Keeping this fact in our view, if we say that *pothi* is

the dwelling place of God, then it will not be inappropriate. In gurbani, the whole creation or nature, is also stated as the temple or home of God: ਪਉਣੁ ਪਾਣੀ ਧਰਤੀ ਆਕਾਸੁ ਘਰ ਮੰਦਰ ਹਰਿ ਬਨੀ॥

ਵਿਚਿ ਵਰਤੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਆਪਿ ਝੂਠੁ ਕਹੁ ਕਿਆ  
*Air, water, earth and sky - the God has made these His home and temple. He Himself is pervading everywhere, O Nanak. Tell me: what can be counted as false?*

Proclaiming that this creation is God's dwelling place, Guru Ram Das emphasises that this is a fact and that there is no possibility of untruth in it.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion one can say that *pothi* is the dwelling place of God (ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ), because, firstly, the sacred hymns (gurbani) is enshrined in it. Secondly, by contemplation on sabd Guru (gurbani) one can perceive the essence of God in all beings and things and within oneself as well:

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਮਹਲੁ ਘਰੁ ਦੀਸੈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 839 *Through the Word of the Guru's sabd, the Mansion of the God's Presence is revealed within the home of one's own heart.*

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**NOTES\*** : AGGS stands for Aad Guru Granth Sahib, published by the SGPC, Amritsar; M stands for Mahla – Succession number to the House of Nanak; P stands for page of the AGGS.

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