CHAPTER-II

GENDER REFLECTIONS IN EARLY SIKH LITERATURE

1) GURU GRANTH SAHIB:

By the Grace of the One Supreme Being, of the True Name, the Creator, Devoid of Fear and Enmity, Immortal, Unborn, Self-Existent and the Enlightener.¹

Guru Granth Sahib, is the sacred scripture of the Sikh faith. ‘Granth’ a Sanskrit word, implies a book and ‘Sahib’ represents the Sikh mode of expressing respect and veneration. The Guru Granth Sahib contains the sacred compositions, in the form of short pieces of poetry, of the Gurus of the Sikh faith, up to the time of Guru Arjan, its compiler. The compositions of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, were added by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, a little after 1680. The language of the Granth is partly Punjabi, and alternates with medieval Hindi of the Braj variety, which had come to be adopted as the medium of philosophical – religious thought over Northern India. The Holy Guru Granth Sahib is written in the Gurmukhi script, and has a considerable volume of sacred and secular literature.²

Teja Singh, states that the Guru Granth Sahib, is not only the most authentic and the holiest scripture of the Sikhs, but it also introduces the spirit of the Bhakti movement in India and reveals the quest and mystic experience of man to reach the high domain of God. The first western scholar to translate some portions of the Guru Granth Sahib was E. Trumpp. He was followed by Macauliffe and Prof. Teja Singh. Complete translations of the Guru Granth Sahib have been published by Gopal Singh, Manmohan Singh and G.S. Talib. Some other scholars like Nihal Singh Suri, Khushwant Singh, Sohan Singh, Jodh Singh and Tarlochan Singh, too, have translated selected portions of the Guru

² Gurbachan Singh Talib, Selections from the Holy Granth (A Compilation of the Basic Writings of the Sikh Faith), Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 1-5.
Granth Sahib into English.\footnote{Teja Singh, \textit{Op.cit}, p. ix.} According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, “Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been the living voice of all prophets and preceptors.”\footnote{Sarup Singh Alag, \textit{An Introduction to Sri Guru Granth Sahib}, Sarup Singh Alag (Publisher), Ludhiana, 1997, p. 155.}

Arnold Toynbee, in his foreword to \textit{Selections From The Sacred Writings of The Sikhs}, \textit{Writes that the Guru Granth Sahib is part of mankind’s common spiritual treasure and the Sikhs’ perpetual Guru (spiritual guide)}.\footnote{Gurbachan Singh Talib, \textit{Op.cit}, p. 9.}

**Preparation of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib:**

The Sikhs consider the Guru Granth Sahib as the highest authority within the community and it plays a central role in the Sikh devotional and ritual life. Sikh belief in the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib is based on two fundamental assumptions: that its text is revealed and hence immutable and unchangeable, and that answers to all religious and moral questions are available in it.\footnote{Gurinder Singh Mann, \textit{The Making of Sikh Scripture}, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p. 4.}

History of the Sikh scriptural tradition can easily be traced back to the spiritual ministry of Guru Nanak, whose religious experiences form the very core of its origin. An analysis of his writings reveals that he intensely felt himself to be an intermediary of God to proclaim His Will. Responding to the Divine call, he set out to preach his mission to the people of different lands. Lastly, he settled at Kartarpur and founded a religious centre known as \textit{Dharamsala} where he taught the basic tenets of his faith to the people around him. During the itineraries (\textit{Udasis}) and his stay at Kartarpur, whenever Guru Nanak felt inspired by God, he composed hymns in various \textit{ragas} or metres. Upon his death, there existed a single codex of his codex of his \textit{Bani} which he bestowed on his successor Guru Angad Dev, upon the latter’s accession to Guruship.\footnote{Balwant Singh Dhillon (ed.), \textit{Studies on Guru Granth Sahib}, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2004, pp. 1-2. See also; Balwant Singh Dhillon, \textit{Early Scriptural Tradition : Myth and Reality}, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1999.}

Guru Nanak’s writings left an indelible imprint on the subsequent growth of Sikh scriptural tradition. It provided powerful stimulus to his successors to add new hymns to the received text. Though Guru Angad Dev’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 letters and popularized their use for scribing the sacred writings of the Sikhs. At his demise, he bequeathed the Pothi in his possession to his successor, Guru Ram Das.\(^8\) Guru Amar Das not only enriched the Sikh scriptural tradition but also took a keen interest to preserve its sanctity. The third Guru, took upon himself to educate the Sikhs about the pseudo-Guru and his writings. It is known through contemporary sources that Bulla Pandha was one of the leading scribes at the Court of Guru Amar Das, who had dedicated himself to scribe the Pothis of Bani for circulation among the Sikh Sangats.\(^9\) Under the leadership of Guru Amar Das, we see the updating of the Guru Harsahai Pothi, and from this point onward the expansion of the Sikh text seems to become an extraordinarily sensitive indicator of the evolving concerns of the community. The Goindval Pothis were compiled during the time of Guru Amar Das and contained the complete corpus of hymns of the first three Gurus. The addition of the hymns of the Bhagats from all levels of the social hierarchy to the sacred Sikh text was rooted in Guru Amar Das’s belief in the continuous nature of revelation and in an emphasis on the comprehensiveness of the Sikh community.\(^10\)

Although Guru Ram Das was actively involved in the organizational set-up of the Sikh Panth under Guru Amar Das, he was well-versed in the scribal tradition that had developed under his predecessor. On his part he introduced new ragas and metres to the scriptural text which reflect his poetic genius. He further reaffirmed that only genuine hymns of the Sikh Gurus were acceptable. Besides the Pothis, Guru Ram Das had taken initiative to prepare lectionaries (Gutkas) for the personal use of Sikhs, in which authenticated texts for liturgical purpose had been arranged. Well before the succession of Guru Arjan Dev, the Sikh Sangats had installed in the Dharamsalas a standardized corpus in some kind of uniform order.\(^11\)

The phase of expansion of the Sikh community, under the leadership of Guru Arjan Dev, corresponded with another updating of the scriptural text. According to traditional sources, Guru Arjan Dev borrowed the Goindwal Pothis from the Bhallas at Goindwal and to their contents added his own hymns and those of his father to produce

\(^9\) Loc.cit.
\(^11\) Ibid, p. 5.
an expanded Sikh text. The manuscript he compiled is at present in the custody of Karamjit Singh Sodhi at Kartarpur, a town founded by Guru Arjan Dev in 1593. Guru Arjan Dev covered a large span of human experience during his twenty-five years of Guruship and composed 2218 hymns, which makes him by far the largest contributor to the scripture. The ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur also revived the earlier tradition of writing sacred hymns. The writing of new hymns created the need to update the contents of the existing sacred corpus recorded in the Kartarpur Pothi. MS 1192, is the first document manifesting the expansion of the sacred text at this point in history.

The Guru Granth Sahib consists of approximately 3,000 hymns of carefully recorded authorship. Over 2,400 of these hymns were written by the six Gurus who lived between 1469 and 1675 in the Punjab. The remaining hymns are attributed to fifteen or so bards associated with the sixteenth century Sikh Court in the Punjab and fifteen non-Sikh saint poets known in Sikh tradition as the Bhagats (literally, “devotees”), who lived between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries in the northern and northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent.

The text of the Guru Granth Sahib is divided into three parts. The opening section is liturgical and includes three daily prayers. The Japji (Meditation) by Guru Nanak consists of thirty-eight stanzas and two couplets. The Rahiras (Supplication) contains nine hymns, four composed by Guru Nanak, three by the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das and two by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev. The Sohila (Praise) consists of five hymns, three by Guru Nanak, and one each by Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan. The Sikhs recite the Japji at sunrise, the Rahiras at sunset, and the Sohila at the end of the day just before going to sleep. The hymns in the main body of the Guru Granth Sahib are divided into thirty-one separate subsections created according to the musical mode (Raga) assigned for their singing. Each subsection begins with hymns of four stanzas (Chaupadas) and goes on to include hymns of eight stanzas (ashtpadis), four stanzas of six weeks each (Chhants), and other longer compositions containing a sequence of

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couplets and stanzas (vars). The final section of the Guru Granth Sahib is composed of miscellaneous hymns not set in any musical mode. These compositions include couplets authored by Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Kabir, Farid and a set of panegyrics (Sawaiye) by the bards. The text closes with the Raghmala (Garland of musical modes), a hymn of twelve stanzas grouping Ragas prevalent in the medieval Indian system of music into six families.

The language of the hymns recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib has been called “Sant Bhasha”, a kind of lingua franca used by the medieval Saint poets of northern India. But the broad range of contributors to the text produced a complex mix of regional dialects. The Sikh Gurus themselves used Punjabi in many of their hymns, but like other contributors they also used elements of Apabhramsha (a later dialect of Sanskrit), Braj Bhasha (the language of the Braj region around Mathura), Hindui (the language spoken around Delhi), and a heavily Persianized Punjabi. All this makes the Guru Granth Sahib, a rich repository of dialects that were prevalent in medieval northern India.16

The Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture in the world, which was compiled by one of the founders of a religion himself and whose authenticity has never been questioned. The Guru Granth Sahib, as we find it today, is not arranged subject-wise, but according to the musical measure in which a hymn is meant to be sung in. There are in all 31 such measures (or Ragas), namely, Sri, Majh, Gauri, Asa, Gujri, Devgandhari, Bihagra, Vadhans, Sorath, Dhanasri, Jaitlsri, Todi, Bairari, Tilang, Suhi, Bilawal, Gound, Ramkali, Mali Gaura, Maru, Tukhari, Kedara, Bhairo, Basant, Sarang, Malhar, Kanra, Kalyan, Parbhati, and Jaijaivanti. Most of the Sikh Gurus were themselves great musicians, masters of the classical style. Guru Nanak always kept the company of a Muslim drummer, Mardana, who played on the rebeck while Guru Nanak sang to large audiences. Guru Arjun Dev himself was a great vocalist and an instrumentalist. And as the whole Guru Granth Sahib is written in poetry of the highest order, both music and poetry have formed an inseperable part of the Sikh ritual and the Sikh cultural pattern, and runs through the blood of every man and woman of this aesthetic faith.17

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The Guru Granth Sahib contains, besides the writings of the Sikh Gurus, compositions of almost all the medieval Hindu Bhaktas, like Kabir, Ramanand, Ravidas, Surdas, Sain and Bhikan from U.P.; Jaidev from Bengal, Namdev, Trilochan and Parmanand from Maharashtra; Pipa and Dhanna from Rajasthan; and Beni who was popular all over Northern India. The writings of five Muslim—Baba Farid, Bhikhan, Satta, Balwand and Mardana are also incorporated in the Granth.\(^{18}\) It also contains the writings of eleven Bhatts - Mathra, Jalap, Harbans, Talya, Salya, Bhal, Kulh Sahar, Nal, Kirat, Gayand, Sadrang.\(^{19}\)

**Essence of The Guru Granth Sahib:**

It reflects the tolerant spirit of Sikhism.\(^{20}\) The Sikh Gurus declared that true religion consisted of only two things, love of God’s Name and purity of conduct. Religion, according to the Gurus, is not a set of doctrines, but a clean way of life dedicated to God.\(^{21}\) The Holy Guru Granth Sahib, with all the variety of its contents, is a corporate entity and has to be interpreted consistently in the light of the over-all teaching of the Gurus.\(^{22}\)

Although Sikhism accepts the Hindu theory of Karma and life hereafter, it speaks of the possibility of rising above the maze in which life, death and rebirth go on, independent, as it were, of human volition. Human actions determine the subsequent forms of life to be assumed after death. It thus advocates that by righteous living and grace it is possible to escape the vicious circle of life and death and attain salvation. God being an abstraction, godliness is conceived as an attribute. The way of acquiring godliness or salvation is to obey the will of God. The means of ascertaining God’s will are largely rules of moral conduct which are the basis of human society. Godliness being the aim of human endeavour, the lives and teachings of the Gurus are looked upon as aids towards its attainment. Guru Amar Das carried out a vigorous campaign against the practice of Sati, thereby he brought about the emancipation of women from social

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oppression and religious cruelty. Through the Guru’s teachings, men began to see and realize the worth of Women, and so the women began to receive the respect and honour they deserved.\textsuperscript{23}

According to Trumpp, the Guru Granth Sahib, is the treasury of the old Hindi dialects. Besides, it is a source-book for compiling a socio-cultural history of North India of the medieval time. Its idioms and proverbs have become the stock-in-trade of every Punjabi for all occasions, no matter what his religion, profession or place of residence.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Women related quotes from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib :}

In the present scenario, it is not possible to completely and flawlessly comprehend the deteriorating and degenerating socio-economic, political and cultural environments of that particular period in our history, of which the Sikh Gurus and other prominent saints of that time were contemporaries. Anarchy prevailed on account of recurrent invasions starting first with Babur and ending with Ahmad Shah Durrani. North India therefore witnessed decades of violence, bloodshed and an unstable society emerged as a result. It was the age of tyrannical oppressors and barbaric invaders, whose most common and most vulnerable targets were the women. The society in turn got more rigid, thereby imposing social taboos which had to be adhered too. Amongst all this, although the men being better placed in the social hierarchal set-up had to bear the brunt of this socio-political instability, for the women at every step was an acid test. Blind faith and superstition ruled over rationality. The Sikh Gurus tactfully dealt with the issues misleading the people and successfully managed to create awareness and consciousness in a society engulfed with darkness. Gender issues probably weren’t given as much importance as they command today. The custom of child-marriages leading to early widowhood, purdah system, the practice of Sati, prohibition of widow-remarriages, all existed as a vicious circle. They were born out of blind faith, hearsay and lack of education; both among the men as well as the women. Male and female duties in society were very clearly defined and non-performance or failure in the performance of these duties could mean facing severe punishments and in extreme cases, even social ostracism. Sociology is replete with these details. Recently, the most severe attack on the non-

\textsuperscript{24} Gopal Singh (tr.), \textit{Op.cit}, p. xix.
availability of historical material related to gender issues amongst the Sikhs has come from Doris R. Jakobsh, a non-Sikh scholar, who in her, Relocating Gender in Sikh History – Transformation, Meaning and Identity, (2003), is critical of the attitude of the Sikh Gurus with regard to the issues concerning women in contemporary society. Lack of historical material regarding women’s studies is also lamented upon by her. However, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib, is replete with numerous instances where the women are referred to either directly or indirectly.

In explaining the position that women occupy, Sikhs invariably turn to the Guru Granth Sahib. Reacting sharply to many of the baseless allegations of Doris, J.S. Grewal, in his, Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab, drills through the point that Guru Nanak brings in the question of gender, in connection with the idea of impurity.

“The love of gold and silver, women and fragrant scents, horses, couches, and dwellings, sweets and meats—these are all lusts of the flesh. Where in the heart can there be room for the Name?”

(SGGS, p. 15)

Some of the practical manifestations of maya are set out in the extract quoted above from Siri Ragu 4. Wealth, women, sons, power, status, worldly honour, comfort, food—these are the attractions which the world extends and which call forth man’s lust, greed and pride. These are the allurements which stimulate his evil impulses and so lead him into the trap.

“The woman of Merit scatters Merit; the one without Merit writhes in distress.
If she wants to seek her Lord, (let her know that) He wouldn’t be Met through falsehood.

There is neither the boat, nor raft, about; how will one go across the River where our Lord Abides?" (SGGS, p. 17)

"Attachment to progeny, wife is poison
None of these at the end is of any avail." (SGGS, p. 41)

"O my father, gift away to me the Dowry of the Lord’s Name.
Let the Lord be my Wear, His Glory my Beauty, that my Task be accomplished.
Blessed is the Lord’s Worship; the True Guru has blessed me with it.
In all lands, nay, in all Universe Pervades the Glory of the Lord; the Gift of the Lord’s (Name) is matchless;
All other Dowry displayed by the self-willed is false egoism and vain show.
O my father, bless me with the Dowry of the Lord’s Name." (SGGS, p. 79)

"Shed thy Lust, Anger, Falsehood, Slander, Ego and love of Maya;
Shed thy lust for the woman; and attain, within the dark world, to God, the Immaculate.
Shed thy pride and thy attachment to thy sons and wife, and thirst for Desire, and be Attuned to thy Lord.

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29 Doris R. Jakobsh, Relocating Gender In Sikh History–Transformation, Meaning and Identity, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 11:

Doris R. Jakobsh, Relocating Gender In Sikh History–Transformation, Meaning and Identity, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 11:

30 Gopal Singh (tr.), Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol. 1, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p. 71:

Gopal Singh (tr.), Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol. 1, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p. 71:
Nanak: the True one Cometh into thy mind, and, through the True Word, thou Mergest in the Lord’s Name.”31 (SGGS, p. 141)

In the words of Guru Amardas, a woman who lives a virtuous life in her parent’s home attains an abode in the home of her in-laws.32 (SGGS, p. 162)

The concept of human equality is best brought out by the following quote from the Guru Granth Sahib, which sums up the entire debate on the issue of gender equality.

“Among all the women and men, Lord’s Light permeates.”33 (SGGS, p. 223)

“The whole day the Egocentric is concerned with vain desires: At night, he is overwhelmed by sleep and all his nine organs are out of tune. He is overpowered by his woman and obeys her he like a bondslave. How impure and foolish is such a being? Him, the vicious one, lust infests and obeys he implicitly the command of his woman. But he, who follows, the lead of the Guru, is True and Pure. The Lord Himself Creates men and women; it is the sport of the Lord alone.

31 Gopal Singh (tr.), Op.cit., p. 132:


33 Ibid, p. 737:
Says Nanak: “O Lord, all this is Thy Creation and good is all that Thou createst.”34 (SGGS, p. 304)

Kabir whose writings are an integral part of the Guru Granth Sahib, categorically states that he considers women as equals.35 (SGGS, p. 327) Kabir also lays great stress upon the virtues of chastity and faithfulness to be imbibed by one and all by considering these twin values as indispensable in women.36 (SGGS, p. 328)

“For the love of silver and women the fool is entangled in duality and forgets the divine Name.”37 (SGGS, p.416)

In McLeod’s view, Sampad (riches) is certainly one of the primary manifestations of maya in Guru Nanak’s works, but so to is Kaman (woman). Other temptations receive less emphasis, but obviously they are not to be regarded as negligible.38 Both Doris in her, Relocating Gender in Sikh History-Transformation,

34 Gopal Singh (tr.), Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Vol. 1, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.296 :
   \( ek\) \( \text{d}h\) \( \text{b}h\) \( \text{n}f\) \( \text{f}n\) \( \text{w}Bw\) \( f^{j} y^{o}/ rBk\ldots \)
   \( o\text{le}h\ T\{x? \text{df}j\text{m}k\ Bt/ \{s \ fGf\ fYb\ldots \)
   \( wBw\{y\k d? f\text{f}o \text{v}r\text{m}w\{ \{ ? \ fB\{ d\{ t\} f\{ Gb\ldots \)
   \( v\{d\le\text{n}\text{f}j\text{m}n\ k\{g\{\{\text{e}\} \text{w}\text{k}\text{t}\} / \{n\text{g}\text{f}\{t\} \text{w}\{X}\ f\text{y}\text{b}\ldots \)
   \( e\text{f}\text{w}\{f\text{n}\k\{g/ e\{\{X}\ B\{ \{ v\{r\} \text{g}\{f\} \text{s}\ u\text{b}\ldots \)
   \( f\{\text{f}r\}\{o\{? \text{n}\text{f}\{j\}n? \{i\} \text{u}\text{b}\ldots \}\ f\text{f}\{g\{\{\text{e}\} \text{G}\ Gb\ldots \)
   \( i\{k\) \( \text{g}\{g\{\{\text{f}\} \text{f}\text{g}\{f\} \text{T}\{\text{g}\{f\}h\{n\} \text{B}\{ \{f\} \text{y}\{b}/ \{fGf\ f\text{y}\text{b}\ldots \)
   \( \{G\) \( \text{s}/\text{h}\ \text{pD}\{\text{p}\} \text{d}\text{k}\text{D}h \text{BkB}\{ \text{G}\ Gb\ldots \)

   \( rT\{Vh \text{e}\text{p}\text{h}\{o\ i\h\ldots \)
   \( \text{a}j\{kT\ldots \)
   \( J\{e\ \text{Gk}\} \text{d}/\text{t}\{ \{G\ \text{Bk}\text{h}\ldots \text{f}e\text{n}\{k \text{i}k\text{B}T\} \{eT\} \text{B}\{g\}\text{k}o\ldots \)

36 Ibid., pp. 1095-96, Kabir :
   \( rT\{Vh \text{e}\text{p}\text{h}\{o\ i\h\ldots \)
   \( f\{p\{\{\{\text{e}\} \text{h}j\{j\} \{e\{? \text{Bk}\text{f}\text{g}\{f\}d}/\text{y}\{f\} \text{f}\{d\} \text{p}\text{u}\text{k}\text{f}\{s}\ldots \)

37 W.H. McLeod, Sikhs and Sikhism, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 186 :
   \( \text{n}d\text{k} \text{wBk}\ldots \)
   \( e\{B\} \{e\text{w}\text{B}h\{j/s\} \text{rT}\text{ko}k\ldots \text{d}/\text{f}\text{p}\text{X}\text{k} \text{b}k\ldots \text{Bk}\text{w}/ \text{f}\text{t}\text{k}\text{ko}k\ldots \)

38 Loc. cit.
Meaning and Identity, and McLeod W.H., Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society, assert that Sikh history consists almost wholly of 500 years of the doings of men. Further in McLeod’s view, the interpretation that we place upon Guru Nanak’s Var Asa shalok may have been a little naïve. On close thought, it may be concluded that the inference that the position adopted by Guru Nanak comes very close to the situation commonly argued as ideal today.

Regarding the Plight of Women and the miseries faced by them by way of Babur’s invasion:

The tresses that adorned these lovely heads,
And were parted with vermillon,
Have been shorn with cruel shears;
Dust has been thrown on their shaven heads.
They lived in ease in palaces,
Now they must beg by the roadside,
Having no place for their shelter.
Glory unto Thee, O Lord of Glory,
Who can understand Thy ways, O God?
Surely Thy ways are strange and Thy dispensation!
When these whose heads are shorn were married,
Fair indeed seemed their bridegrooms beside them.
They were brought home in palanquins carved with ivory.
Pitchers of water were waved over their heads
In ceremonial welcome, Ornate fans glittered waving above them.
At the first entry into the new home,
Each bride was offered a gift of a lakh of rupees;
Another lakh when each stood up to take her post in her new home;
Coconut shreds and raisins were among the delicious fruits,
served to them at their tables.
These beauties lent charm to the couches they relied on.
Now they are dragged away, with ropes round their necks;
Their necklaces are snapped and their pearls scattered.
Their beauty and wealth were once their greatest assets,
Their beauty and wealth are their greatest enemies now;
Barbarous soldiers have taken them prisoners and disgraced them.
God casts down, God exalteth, whomsoever He Will.
Pursuing worldly love and sensual pleasure,
If these folk had taken heed to the future,
Need they have been reduced to such plight?
The Princes of Hindustan have lost their heads.
Desecration and desolation follow in the footsteps of the Great Moghal, Babar, None, none in Hindustan can eat his supper in peace.\textsuperscript{39}

\textit{(Rag Asa, SGGS, p. 417)}

“As the woman has her periods, month after month, So does impurity abide in the mouth of the Impure, and continually they are scorched

Guru Nanak openly chides those who attribute pollution to women because of menstruation and asserts that pollution lies in the heart and mind of the person and not in the cosmic process of birth.\(^{41}\)

“If pollution attaches to birth, then pollution is everywhere (for birth is universal).

Cow-dung (used for purifying the kitchen floor by Hindus) and firewood breed maggots;

Not one grain of corn is without life;

Water itself is a living substance, imparting life to all vegetation.

How can we then believe in pollution, when pollution inheres within staples?

Says Nanak, pollution is not washed away by Purificatory rituals;

Pollution is removed by true knowledge alone.”\(^{42}\) (SGGS, p. 472)

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\(^{40}\) Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 2, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.466:

\(^{41}\) http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smspublications/sikh%20women%20rights.pdf.

\(^{42}\) Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 2, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.466:
Guru Nanak points out the meaninglessness of the belief in sutak, and instead makes impurity inher in moral evil.
The Mind’s sutak is avarice, the Tongue’s falsehood;
The Eyes’ sutak is the coveting of the body of another’s woman and his wealth;
The Ear’s sutak is pleasure in hearing slander:
Through such defilement, Nanak, men and their souls are dragged bound to the city of Yama. (SGGS, p. 472)

The notion of impurity (Sutak) to which the Brahmin attaches crucial importance is rejected by Guru Nanak. Impurity is everywhere: inside cowdung, in wood, in every grain, and even in water, which is the source of life. Impurity enters the kitchen itself. The only way out is to discard the very notion through proper awareness. The impurity of the mind is avarice; impurity of the tongue is falsehood; impurity of the eye is to look at another women (other than one’s wife) with lust; impurity of the ear is to listen to slander. Human beings caught in these impurities are bound for hell. The whole idea of Sutak is an illusion. Birth and death occur through God’s will. Things created by God to eat and drink are pure. They who realize this are free from the superstition of Sutak. Food, water, fire, salt and ghee are regarded as holy; when the Brahman eats them, they turn into offal. What deserves to be denounced is the mouth that does not utter the Name and partakes of food without devotion to the Name.

The most researched quote from the Guru Granth Sahib, is invariably by Guru Nanak from his Asa di Var.

“From the woman is our birth; in the woman’s womb are we shaped.
To the woman are we engaged; to the woman are we wedded.
The woman is our friend, and from the woman is the family.
If one woman dies, we seek another : through the woman are the bonds of the world.
Why call woman evil who gives birth to kings and all?”

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43 Gurbachan Singh Talib, Selections from the Holy Granth (A Compilation of the Basic Writings of the Sikh Faith), Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, 1982, p. 60:

44 J.S. Grewal, Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2007, p. 110:

45 Gurbachan Singh Talib, Selections from the Holy Granth (A Compilation of the Basic Writings of the Sikh Faith), New Delhi, 1982, p. 61:
From the woman is the woman; without the woman there is none;
Nanak: without the woman is the One True Lord alone.
The fortunate and gracious, pearl-like, mouth that utters the
Lord’s Praise.
Is luminescent, Nanak, and it sparkles in the True Court.\(^{46}\)

\[(SGGS, p. 473)\]

However, there can be no reproduction without women, and there can be no
humanity without reproduction. Human beings are conceived by women; men are
betrothed to women and marry them; new generations are born; if one woman dies, man
seeks another. Why should they be denounced who give birth even to Rajan? God alone
is independent of women. They who sing his praises are fortunate; their countenances are
bright in God’s court.\(^{47}\) These utterances are held to summarise completely the attitude of
all Sikhs to the place that women occupy and it would seem to maintain complete
equality for women with men, not just for the Sikh but for everyone. Guru Nanak’s words
certainly carry us well beyond the conventional view of his time or, for that matter, the
present time as well. The other Gurus, too, in McLeod’s view support the stand taken by
Guru Nanak, opposing such practices as dowries, seclusion and female infanticide as
reflecting unmistakably the view held by Indian society in general of the place held in
that society occupied by women.\(^{48}\) The views of the Sikh Gurus were vastly ahead of
those of their contemporary society or at least (assuming we are not in the business of
apportioning praise and blame) they were vastly different from them.\(^{49}\)

Harinder Kaur Sekhon, in her article, *Equality, History, Status of Women in Sikhism*,
affirms that the secondary status of women was unacceptable to Sikh
philosophy. Women were recognized as the spiritual equals of men and Guru Nanak
understood and appreciated the unifying role of women in society and worked for their

\(^{46}\) Gopal Singh (tr.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Vol. 2, World Book Centre, New Delhi, 1997, p.467:

Gzvj jh Gzv[ T[g? Gzv? pldM[ B e']. BkBe Gzv? pldok j/e' ,ak :j].

\(^{47}\) J.S. Grewal, *Lectures on History, Society and Culture of the Punjab*, Publication Bureau,

Delhi, 2007, p. 192.

p.1.
emancipation. Sikh scripture categorically states that man and woman together make society a composite and well-balanced whole; the two are complimentary to each other and should not be viewed as a threat to one another.\textsuperscript{50} The Guru reprimands those who consider women as inferior to men. He sees them as active partners in advancing goodwill, general happiness and the collective moral values of society. This declaration definitely requires women to be placed in high esteem.\textsuperscript{51}

“Worldly love that we behold is insincere.
Wife, friends to their own pleasure are all attached.”\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{(SGGS, p.536)}

In the words of Guru Tegh Bahadur;

“Woman, associates, progeny, mounts, wealth, even lordship of the earth, All these are false, evanescent : Devotion to God alone will abide.”\textsuperscript{53} \textbf{(SGGS, p. 631)}

In Doris’s opinion, numerous passages in the scripture associate woman with \textit{maya}, that which is sensual as opposed to spiritual.\textsuperscript{54}

“O man, what evil understanding hast thou harboured?
Thou art engrossed in the pleasure of other men’s women and in slander, and the Pervading God, thou, worshippeth not” .\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{(SGGS, p. 632)}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{50} http://www.gurmat.info/sms/smspublications/sikh%20womens%20rights.pdf.
\bibitem{52} Sarup Singh Alag, \textit{An Introduction to sri Guru Granth Sahib}, Sarup Singh Alag, Ludhiana, 1997, p. 38 :
\begin{verbatim}
d/ttixkoh wjbj l.
irs w? M[m d/yh gqlsh.
\end{verbatim}
\bibitem{53} \textit{Loc. cit} :
\begin{verbatim}
dlok wjs g[s oE ;zgs XB g[oB ;G wj.
\end{verbatim}
\bibitem{54} Doris R. Jakobsh, \textit{Relocating Gender In Sikh History–Transformation, Meaning and Identity}, New Delhi, 2003, p. 11.
\bibitem{55} Mannmohan Singh (tr.), \textit{Sri Guru Granth Sahib}, (English and Punjabi Translation), Vol. 4., Amritsar, 2001, pp. 2072-2073 :
\begin{verbatim}
;sfj wjbj g.
wB o e[lB[ wfs s2 bhj.
\end{verbatim}
\end{thebibliography}
“Engrossed with other’s wealth and other’s women, he passes his life in vain”. ⁵⁶ (SGGS, p. 633)

Guru Tegh Bahadur recurrently stresses on the role played by women in distracting an individual from treading on the spiritual path. The futility of human relationships is brought about in this passage written by the ninth Guru in the Holy Granth. ⁵⁷ (SGGS, p. 633)

On page 634, of the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Tegh Bahadur, while addressing the reader as a dear friend tries to drill through the fact that the ones we love and depend upon greatly are actually the ones to desert us in crisis. ⁵⁸

In order to convey their message, the Sikh Gurus make reference to a woman of bad repute in the following quote from the Guru Granth Sahib:

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⁵⁶ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 2076:

⁵⁷ Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 2077:

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 2079-80:
“They, who turn their back upon the True Guru, find no place or room of refuge.
They wander from door to door like a divorced woman of bad character and evil repute. “59 (SGGS, p. 645)

Guru Amardas vehemently criticized the barbaric practice of Sati and his writings from the Holy Granth bear testimony to this fact. He writes that a woman who utters the name of God with her mind, body and mouth is pleasing to the Lord. Apart from this, no other rules are laid for the profession of the Sikh faith by women. The only criteria is single-minded devotion to God. The egalitarian status of the Sikhs within the Sikh Panth is further reinforced by Guru Amardas, when he writes that the Guru (Lord) equally loves all Gursikhs, like his friends, sons and brothers.60 (SGGS, p. 648)

“Like a wicked woman, they go from house to house with an impure mind.” 61 (SGGS, p. 651)

“Deluded foolish female! Why blame on God?” 62 (SGGS, p. 695)

Although the hymn is addressed to his wife, its message is universal. God, it is said never does anything wrong or bad. Since the fault lies in us, therefore, it is improper to blame God for everything that goes wrong because pain and pleasure are the result of our own deeds and doings. Bhagat Trilochan tries to impress upon his wife that one must face the consequences of one’s deeds. The only way to save oneself from them is to ever remember God with complete devotion. This can save man from all kinds of bondage. God’s grace and remembrance of his name are the only means to wash off the Karmic effects.63 Bhagat Namdev too considers women as equally worthy of the Grace of God.64 (SGGS, p. 693)

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59 Mannnon singh (tr.), Op.cit., Vol. 4, p. 2116 :

60 Ibid, p. 2126 :

61 Ibid, p. 2138 :

62 Sarup Singh Alag, Op.cit, p. 55 :

63 Doris R. Jakobsh, Relocating Gender In Sikh History–Transformation, Meaning and Identity, New Delhi, 2003, p. 12.

64 Manmohan Singh (tr.), Op.cit, p. 2269 :

84
Guru Nanak understood the plight of those women who were robbed of their chastity and honour by the mughal soldiers.

"Jaisi Main awai Khasam ki bani taisra kari gian ve Lalo!
My cherished Beloved, I speak what the Lord prompts me to utter.
Babur has descended upon India with the wedding party of lust,
And forcibly demands surrender of India’s womanhood.
Decency and the Law have hidden themselves;
And evil is strutting about in triumph.
Mohammadan and Hindu priests are discarded,
and Satan is making marriages.
The Mohammadan women mutter the Koran,
and invoke their God in this hour of distress.
So also are in panic the women of Hindu faith and the lower castes.
Nanak, blood is the theme of the hymnal for such a wedding;
Blood is also the saffron paste to suit it.
In this city of corpses, Nanak sings praises of the Lord, and proclaims His Law." 65 (SGGS, p.722)

It is to the third Guru, Guru AmarDas, who succeeded Guru Angad Dev in 1552, that both scriptural and popular sources attribute a shift towards the inclusion of women in the Sikh panth. It is to him that tradition credits a definitive criticism of society beyond that of religious ineptitude; much of this criticism is directed towards the situation of
women in society.\textsuperscript{66} Sikhism strongly condemns the practice of ‘Sati’, alongwith female infanticide and dowry.\textsuperscript{67}
“They are not called Satis, who burn themselves with
their husband’s corpses.
Nanak, they are known as Satis, who die with the sheer
shock of separation.
They too are known as satis, who abide in modesty and
contentment. Who wait upon their Lord and rising in
the morning ever remember Him.
The wives burn themselves in the fire with their husbands.
If they heartily love their spouse, then suffer they great bodily
and mental pang ever otherwise.
Nanak if they love not their husband, why should they
burn themselves in fire?
Whether the husband be alive or dead, such wife remains
far away from him”.
(SGGS, p.787)

Equal rules and high standards of morality have been set in the religious
scripture of the Sikhs for both men and women by way of references made towards the
ideal relationship between a husband and wife.

“They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together.
Rather they alone are called husband and wife, who have one
soul in two bodies”.
(SGGS, p. 788)

“The love of worldly valuables is like the love of an accursed,
ugly, unchaste she-sorcerer”.
(SGGS, p. 796)
The fourth Guru, further brought out the egalitarian concept in the following
verse:

“Women and men and all the men and women have welled up from
the one Lord, the Enemy of pride.”
(SGGS, p. 983)

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68 Manmohan Singh (tr.), Sri Guru Granth Sahib, (English and Punjabi Translation), Vol. 5,
Amritsar, 2001, pp. 2563-64:

69 Ibid, p. 2567:

70 Ibid, p. 2592:

71 Ibid, Vol. 6, p. 3224:
The mother’s position is further elevated by the following hymn by the reverend Saint Namdev:

“Blessed, blessed thou art, O Mother Devki, on whose home was born the Lord, the Master of wealth”.

(SGGS, p. 988)

Sikhism introduced the concept of God as Mother and Father. The fifth Guru reinforces the high status given by the first Guru to women.

“Thou art my Father: Thou art my Mother:
Thou art the Blesser of my vital breath and of my Soul.
Thou art my Master: I am Thy Servant, O God:
Yea, without Thee, there is not another for me.
O God, Bless me with this Boon,
That I hymn Thy Praises ever and forever more.”

(SGGS, p. 1144)

“The blind-man abandons his own, and has an affair
With another’s woman. He is like the parrot, who is
Pleased to see the simbal tree, but at last dies Clinging to it.”

(SGGS, p. 1165)

Sikh Gurus declared that marriage is an equal partnership of love and sharing between husband and wife, who merely sit together. Married life is celebrated to restore to woman her due place and status as an equal partner in life.
The fifth Guru asserts, “The Lord is my Protector, my Mother and Father, through whose meditation one comes not to grief”. 77 (SGGS, p.1183)

“He, the Lord, is my Mother, Father and Kinsman and my mind is blessed with His Bliss”. 78 (SGGS, p.1226)

“The wife and husband greatly love each other and meeting together, they increase their love still more”.79 (SGGS, p. 1249)

“Between wife and husband there is great love, sitting together they hatch evil designs”. 80 (SGGS, p.1250)

2) VARAN BHAJ GURDAS:

Bhai Gurdas Bhalla is a figure of considerable importance in early Sikh history. The date of his birth is not known, but he is said to have been a nephew of the third Guru, Amar Das. 81 Bhai Gurdas was one of the prominent Sikh personalities, who contributed massively to the interpretation and dissemination of the message of Gurbani. He was a contemporary of Guru Arjan Dev and worked as an amanuensis of Guru Granth Sahib. He was well-versed in the vedic and Islamic tradition. He was equally proficient in the contemporary languages like Punjabi, Hindi, Sanskrit, Braj and Persian. Though an eminent scholar, he mastered the message of Gurbani and transmitted it both through his missionary tours of the different parts of the country and also by writing it down. His major compositions are Varan and Kabitt Savaiyas. The Varan is his basic composition which carries in it the message of Gurbani. Various topics of the Gurbani are taken up by

77 Manmohan Singh (tr.), *Op.cit*, Vol. 7, p. 3900 :

78 *Ibid*, p. 4042 :


80 *Ibid*, p. 4124 :

him such as God, Man, Nature, Gurmukh, Manmukh, Nadar, the Sikh way of life, practical aspect of Gurbani, the concept of human responsibility towards other fellow beings and the prominent contemporary Sikhs at the time of the Sikh Gurus.\textsuperscript{82} The Varan of Bhai Gurdas are originally in Punjabi.\textsuperscript{83}

These writings are considered the best specimens of Sikh literature and philosophy.\textsuperscript{84} He was privileged to be associated with Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Hargobind.\textsuperscript{85} The year S.1636 (A.D. 1579) is given as the date of his admission by Guru Ram Das to the Sikh community and for a number of years he worked as a missionary in Agra.\textsuperscript{86}

Bhai Gurdas became greatly influenced by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru in 1579 AD. He received his early education under the guidance of Guru Amar Das. Bhai Gurdas travelled to far away places like Agra, Lucknow, Burhanpur, and Rajasthan to spread Guru’s word under the direction of Guru Amar Das. He returned to Punjab after the death of Guru Ram Das. He had the opportunity to study and observe Sikhism closely in the company of Guru Arjan Dev Ji. This was a very difficult time for the fifth Guru and a period of great challenges and difficulties for the Sikhs. Bhai Gurdas was the first custodian of the Akal Bunga (Akal Takhat Sahib). During the time of Guru Hargobind, Bhai Gurdas went to many far away places like Kabul, Kansi, Banaras, to spread the message of the Guru. The Sikh congregation was so impressed by Bhai Gurdas that they erected a Gurdwara in his memory in Kabul.\textsuperscript{87}

When Guru Arjan decided to compile and prepare a Holy Granth for the Sikh devotees, he chose Bhai Gurdas to assist him in this noble cause. Guru Arjan Dev sifted and scanned the available material with the help of Bhai Gurdas, who was the sole aide of the Guru in compiling the Guru Granth Sahib, which was very meticulously prepared. This copy of the Guru Granth Sahib written in the handwriting of Bhai Gurdas is preserved till today with the family of the Guru’s descendants at Kartarpur in the present

\textsuperscript{82} Gurnek Singh (ed.), Surinder Singh Kohli (tr.), \textit{Bhai Gurdas–The Great Theologian, His Life and Work}, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2007, p. iii.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid}, p. iv.
Jalandhar district of Punjab. None of his own works were included in the scripture which he transcribed, but his Vars are traditionally regarded as ‘the key to the Guru Granth Sahib’ and his compositions are specifically approved for recitation in Sikh gurdwaras. Bhai Gurdas also contributed in the excavation of the sacred pool at Amritsar. Guru Hargobind entrusted the construction work of the Akal Takht, in front of Harmandar, to Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Buddha, the two most revered Sikhs of the time. Bhai Gurdas was also appointed by Guru Hargobind to teach his young son, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ancient classics. He offered Ardaas at the time of Guru Arjan Dev’s wife; Mata Ganga’s death in 1621, and also at the time of Bhai Buddha’s death in 1631.

He thereby performed both the religious and social duties assigned to him by the Gurus. His exposition and interpretation of the Sikh tenants is unparalleled till today. Bhai Gurdas was the first ever Sikh theologian who not only expounded the doctrines and concepts of the Gurbani but also preached the messages imparted by the great Gurus for the humanity at large. Bhai Gurdas was a great scholar of Persian and Sankrit and of comparative religion. He was an exceptional poet, unparalleled in history.

According to Jodh Singh, Bhai Gurdas may be rightly termed as the first exponent of Sikh way of life rooted in the original lines of the Holy Scripture he had worked on as an adept amanuensis with Guru Arjan Dev. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, in his Mahan Kosh, opines that no Code of Conduct (Rahitnama) is of more importance than the works (Varan and Kabitts-Savaiyas) of Bhai Gurdas. He was a scholar well-read in Indian philosophy and Indian culture.

His comments on all the Vedas and the six schools of Indian philosophy are glaring examples of his erudition. He shows the practical superiority of Gurmat which is enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib. He is equally critical about the ritualistic worship

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92 Ibid, p. viii.
95 Ibid, p. 2.
and particularly the belief in good and bad omens based on auspicious and inauspicious time and events.\textsuperscript{97} In his Varan, he has explained the doctrinal terms and aspects of Gurbani in view of showing their clarity, usefulness and sophistication.\textsuperscript{98} Sikhism is a distinct religion that has its own metaphysics, sociology and epistemology. Bhai Gurdas also accepts it as a separate and original religion.\textsuperscript{99} There is no mention anywhere of the marriage or any other family and progeny related details of Bhai Gurdas. It is therefore almost assumed that Bhai Gurdas was a celibate.

He, however, very much appreciated the part played by women in both social and religious life. He had an enormous respect for them and in one poem, refers to them as “being a gateway to salvation”.\textsuperscript{100} \textit{(Var 5, Pauri 16)} This Pauri is entirely devoted to the Woman. Gender egalitarianism is very aptly brought about by Bhai Gurdas.

“In her mother’s home the girl is fondled and dearly loved by parents. Among the brothers she is a sister and lives (joyfully) in the full fledged families of the maternal and the paternal grandfathers. Then offering ornaments and dowry etc., and by spending lacs of rupees she is married. In her father-in-law’s house she is accepted as the married wife. She enjoys with her husband, eats variety of foods and always remains bedecked. From a temporal and spiritual point of view, a woman is half of man’s body and assists him to the door of deliverance. She assuredly brings happiness to the virtuous.”\textsuperscript{101}

The above stanza highlights that Bhai Gurdas rejected the then prevalent view, that women were temptresses and seducers of men. In turn, he insisted that men should regard women as their equal, not only in respect but also in consideration, and that they are not merely sex objects to be exploited. All male members were instructed to regard women as either mother, sister or daughter depending on their age, except one’s wife. All

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
\item \textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 25.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Gobind Singh Mansukhani, \textit{Hymns From Bhai Gurdas’s Compositions}, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1996, p. xiii.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Jodh Singh, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 156.
\end{itemize}
kinds of sexually perverted behaviour were strongly denounced as both anti-social and irreligious.94 A woman’s transition from a girl to womanhood is to be accorded utmost respect as she is regarded as the equal of her spouse in both virtue and wisdom.

Further reference is made by Bhai Gurdas to the sorry plight of widows wherein their mere sight is regarded as a bad omen. It clearly reflects the superstitions prevalent in the society of those times, whose intensity was such that it made a scholar like Bhai Gurdas to not only comment upon it but to also criticize the custom. It is superstitious to draw good or bad omens from meeting a widow, a bare headed man, water, fire, sneezing, breaking wind, hiccups, lunar and week days, lucky-unlucky moments and going or not going in a particular direction.”93

Prostitution too has been condemned in the subsequent lines of the same Var and stanza where Bhai Gurdas writes that if a woman behaves like a prostitute and does everything to please everybody, how can she be loved by her husband. The Gurmukhs who reject all superstitions enjoy happiness with their Lord and get across the world-ocean.94

In, Var 5, Pauri 10, once again illicit relationships are condemned along with the prevalent custom of Sati and other vices. Deluded by them (priests), people worship departed heroes, ancestors, Satis, deceased co-wives, tanks and pits, but all this is of no avail. They who enjoy not only the Holy congregation and the Word of the Guru, die and are born again and rejected of God. It is the follower of the Guru, i.e. Gurmukh who wears (God’s name as his) diamond necklace.95

Var 6, Pauri 8, highlights the sanctity given by Bhai Gurdas to the institution of monogamy, by way of description of the characteristics of a knowledgeable person. Having one woman as wife he (the Sikh) is a celibate and considers any other’s wife his

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93 Loc.cit: thBb ceh ft;lk; by y{ y[ u[yh ftT] ot? Gskok.
   r{ow jy cb gko T[skok. (Var 5, Pauri 8)
   Blfo g[ey] g[ld]h nrfB fs egd jvheh tsokok.
  fFf{ fko Gdql Gw fdd e]b j] k] ?skok. (Var 5, Pauri 8)
95 Ibid, p. 150:
  efo eos j{f e]s f]flu g[lf] d{[bhw/ r?D uzD/D/. iX im/s/ w2BhufB ahnkA t{[s NGVh N]/. kX zrf s r{ o pd ftD[ wfo wfo izwfb d]h ftr]/. r{ow jy jho/ jfgo go/). (Var 5, Pauri 10)
daughter or a sister…..In the congregation of such people anybody could become authentic as well as respectable.106

Once again in the same Var, Pauri 12, infidelity is criticized. Worthy of praise are the hands of such a Sikh who by coming in touch with Guru becomes indifferent to worldly materials and lays not his eyes on another’s wife or property; who loves another Sikh and embraces the love, devotion, and fear of God; and who effaces his ego and does not assert himself.107

The need to respect women and hold them in highest esteem is brought out in Var 29, Pauri 11, wherein Bhai Gurdas outlines the fundamental duties of a Sikh. According to Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh ought to treat beautiful women of others as his mothers, sisters, and daughters. Out of infatuation for his son, wife or family, he should not betray and deceive anyone.108

The Vars of Bhai Gurdas differ in form from those of the Guru Granth Sahib. His Vars accord more with the customary form, a heroic ode of several stanzas (Pauris), but no Shlokas.109

A scriptural scholar par excellence, Bhai Gurdas’s writings reflect and lament greatly on the socio-religious, economic and political situations of his times. His deep

J/ek Bkoh iishfill]h go Bkoh Xh G?D tykJ?.
go XBj)[no rkl] fIT[ weoD fjzid] w[.bukD?.
xo pkoD r[o fylk] ;aq wbo w[;bukD?.
gkeqojw] g[oB pqjw] fmrkB] fXnkB r[oyfj] fskD?.
;Xzrfs fwsfb gfs gotkD?.. (Var 6, Pauri 8.)

107 Ibid, p. 173 :
feofs ftafs efo Xow dh Ej[ d/ e? Gbk wBkt?.
gkoj] gosf; ngsf; f] go sB go XBj] E B bkt?.
r[o fy r[o fy gli e? Gks] Gofs G? Gkkf Gkt?.
rkg] rkl] B nrkg] rDk?.. (Var 6, Pauri 12.)

108 Ibid, p. 198 :
d/ fy goljhnkA uzrhnkA wtkA G?DkA Xhnk ikD?.
g[sq ebsq e[Nezp[d/ fy w'] w[f] B Xj] fXnkD?.. (Var 29, Pauri 11.)

knowledge and understanding of contemporary happenings and their intensity forced him to quote the practicalities and harsh realities of life in his writings. His close association with the Gurus too is a well-known fact which may have further prompted him to go ahead and draw a realistic picture of the society and its degenerating standards, particularly showcasing the position of women, who were till then not active participants of the society. Sikh scholars and historians are of the view that there is very little mention of women and their role and status in Sikh studies but a close analysis of historical and scriptural evidence available will reveal that the above claim is not wholly true. There are references which need to be sifted and portrayed appropriately.

3) HAGIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

(I) The Janam Sakhis:

*JANAM SAKHI*, i.e. life story, is the term used to designate traditional narratives of the life of Guru Nanak. Several *Janam Sakhi* traditions have evolved, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From small beginnings these traditions rapidly expanded and diversified, supplementing the early nucleus with additional anecdotes and interpretative discourses. The *Janam Sakhis* constitute a substantial corpus of both narrative and exegesis. Their language is mostly Punjabi and their script almost always Gurmukhi. The connotation of *Janam Sakhi* is life-story or a biography. In Sanskrit, *Janam Sakhi* would broadly mean ‘the evidence of the divine mission of the Guru.’

The *Janam Sakhis* present unanimous testimony concerning details of his birth, parentage, and family connections, and there is unanimity concerning the general outline of his life story.

McLeod refers to the *Janam Sakhis*, as hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak, each consisting of a series of separate incidents, or chapters, entitled *Sakhis* or *goshs*. Although these incidents are normally linked in a chronological sequence, the order is frequently erratic and in a few cases it is totally absent. The script used for all the important *Janam Sakhis* is Gurmukhi, and the language used is either Punjabi or the

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composite dialect called Sadhukkari or Sant Bhasa. These Janam Sakhis are considered as largely unsatisfactory sources of study on account of being based on legend and hearsay and an underlying historical element.\(^{112}\) However for the purpose of research and advanced studies in Sikhism, these Janam Sakhis are relied upon, since they present vast details on the personal life as well as the philosophy of Guru Nanak.

The first Var (Pauris, 23-45) and the eleventh Var of Bhai Gurdas, (Pauris 13-14), highlight a number of traditions of the Guru period and thus is a primary source of Guru Nanak’s life.\(^{113}\) In his introductory note, Surinder Singh Kohli, mentions that amongst all the Janam Sakhi traditions available, Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala, occupies an important place and unparalleled popularity.\(^{114}\) He lists the various Janam Sakhis in their respective order and describes each one of them in brief.

The Janam Sakhis of the Bala, or Bhai Bala tradition deserve notice, not because they possess any intrinsic reliability, but because of the immense influence they have exercised in determining what has generally been accepted as the authoritative account of Guru Nanak’s life. Throughout the nineteenth century, until the discovery of the Puratan manuscripts, the authority of the Bala version was unchallenged.\(^{115}\) This version is however considered as least trustworthy by McLeod.\(^{116}\) This Janam Sakhi was composed on the instructions of Guru Angad.\(^{117}\) This Janam Sakhi has 267 life stories of Guru Nanak.\(^{118}\)

Miharban Janam Sakhi was written at the behest of Manohar Das Miharban, son of Prithi Chand and grandson of Guru Ram Das. McLeod calls it the most neglected Janam Sakhi.\(^{119}\) This Janam Sakhi offers much more extensive interpretations of the scriptures which it quotes.\(^{120}\) This Janam Sakhi has 153 life stories of Guru Nanak.\(^{121}\)

\(^{116}\) Ibid, p. 22.
\(^{118}\) Ibid, p. 12.
\(^{120}\) Ibid, p. 20.
term **Puratan Janam Sakhis**, or ‘Ancient Janam Sakhi’ refers to a small group of Janam Sakhis, which are clearly from a common source which has never been found. It is, however, generally used with reference to the composite work which was compiled by Bhai Vir Singh and first published in 1926. The two most important versions of the Puratan Janam Sakhis are the Colebrooke and Hafizabad versions. The first of these was discovered in 1872 by Dr. Trumpp, while examining the Gurmukhi manuscripts in the possession of the India office Library, London. The manuscript had been donated to the Library of East India House by H.T. Colebrooke, probably in 1815 or 1816, and is accordingly known either by his name or as the Valaitvali Janam Sakhi, (the Janam Sakhi from overseas.) The second version of the same Janam Sakhi had been acquired the previous year in the town of Hafizabad by Bhai Gurmuk Singh of Oriental College, Lahore. Gurmukh Singh passed on the manuscript to Macauliffe who divided off the individual words and had it lithographed at his own expense. The version was designated as the Hafizabad Janam Sakhi and is also referred to as Macauliffe-vali Janam Sakhi.\(^{122}\) This Janam Sakhi has 57 sakhis in it.\(^{123}\)

The **Gyan Rratanavali**, or Mani Singh Janam Sakhi, attributed to Bhai Mani Singh, which has suffered from neglect. This Janam Sakhi is held in high esteem because its author Bhai Mani Singh was approached by some Sikhs with the request that he should prepare an authentic account of Guru Nanak’s life.\(^{124}\)

Commenting upon the reliability of these Janam Sakhis, Mcleod is of the view that they may be regarded as examples of hagiography and any inclination to treat them as biographies will distort both our understanding of Guru Nanak and our appreciation of the true value of the Janam Sakhis themselves.\(^{125}\) This Janam Sakhi has approximately 117 anecdotes of Guru Nanak.\(^{126}\)

Presenting his opinion on the use of Janam Sakhis as sources of information on the life of Guru Nanak, Khushwant Singh says that the material on which the present-day biographies of Guru Nanak are based is most inadequate from a historian’s point of view.

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\(^{125}\) *Ibid*, p. 33.

The first attempt to write a biography was made more than fifty years after Nanak’s death and, although many people who had known the Guru personally were alive at the time, little attempt was made to record their impressions. Therefore, many other biographies, or Janam Sakhis (literally, birth stories) as they are known, were written. We do not know who wrote the first one, nor on what material it was based. The styles of these Janam Sakhis clearly show that they were written (with the exception of the biography of Bhai Mani Singh) by semi-literate scribes for the benefit of an wholly illiterate people. They abound with stories of miracles performed by the Guru; they contradict each other on material points; and some were obviously tampered with to suit the interests of those who had been left out in the succession to Guruship. Their contents are further vitiated by the Guru’s own compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib and by the Vars of Bhai Gurdas. However, it is asserted that the Janam Sakhis cannot also be ignored altogether.127

Sakhi 23 of the Puratan Janam Sakhis, is set in a land called Kauru, or Kavaru, a land ruled by female magicians. They tried everything to enchant Mardana and Guru Nanak. When their efforts failed, Nur Shah, the queen, herself came and on being unsuccessful once again, the women submitted to the divinity of the Guru.128 The Puratan Janam Sakhis, refer to Guru Nanak’s mother but she is not named.129

Except the Miharban, almost all the Janam Sakhis, include this Sakhi, which describe the Guru’s visit to a country ruled by female magicians. There is variation found in the accounts but the essence of the story is the same. All maintain that Mardana, who went ahead of the Guru to beg for food, was put under a spell by one of these enchantresses and turned into a sheep. When the Guru went in search of him efforts were made to work magic on him also, but to no effect. The women eventually acknowledged his superior power and made their submission to him.130

According to McLeod, although the Sakhi, may be outrightly rejected as a wonder story, it no doubt leads to the assumption that the land kavaru, being referred to

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130 Ibid, p. 110.
might be Assam (Kamrup), which was a famed home of the Tantras, and the magic described in the Sakhi has been taken as a description of tantric practices.\textsuperscript{131}

McLeod, goes on to analyse this Sakhi in great details, both challenging and rejecting it. He clarifies that in the first place, Kamrup was not ruled by women, during the period of Guru Nanak’s lifetime, as the rulers of both Eastern and Western Kamrup were men and not women. Moreover, the possibility of a kingdom within Kamrup being ruled by women is also ruled out. A very interesting fact brought out here by McLeod here is that Matrilineal descent was a feature of Khasi and Garo society, but it was not one which produced queens or chieftainesses. As a result of this custom, women inherited not power or property, but such inheritances descended through them to their sons.\textsuperscript{132}

McLeod further rejects this Sakhi, on the ground that stories concerning Stri-des, (the land of women), were already very popular long before Guru Nanak’s time, but it does correspond closely to the Stri-des of puranic and tantric legend. Regarding the location of the occurrence of this particular Sakhi, The India Office Library manuscript B-40, gives the land an unspecified location ‘beside the ocean’, the Gyan-Ratanavali places it in the south country immediately before the crossing to Ceylon, and the Puratan and Bala versions set it in kauru or Kavaru. Miharban and Bhai Gurdas omit it altogether.\textsuperscript{133}

McLeod’s analysis brings to light a few amazing facts. One, that the people of the time were no doubt fascinated with the idea of an all-woman government, definitely a Utopian thought, secondly inheritance rights still vested in the hands of the men, but, the women did have some amount of an influence in deciding the inheritor. Thirdly, these women were no ordinary ones but supposedly had magical powers, and hence were in a position to at least challenge a Guru of the stature of Guru Nanak. The earliest visible traces of matriarchy are found in this Sakhi.

Sakhi 11, of Miharban Janam Sakhi, briefly describes the marriage of Guru Nanak, who was betrothed to the daughter of Mula, a Chona (Khatri) of Batala, at the age

\textsuperscript{131} Loc.cit.  
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, p. 112.
of 16. In Gosht 22, his wife’s name is given as Ghumi.\textsuperscript{134} The name of Guru Nanak’s sister also is not recorded.\textsuperscript{135}

\textit{Bhai Bala Wali Janam Sakhi}, mentions Guru Nanak’s exemplary love for his sister, Nanaki. It is popularly believed that the Guru physically transported himself within seconds, whenever his sister Nanaki expressed her desire to see him.\textsuperscript{136}

The \textit{Puratan Janam Sakhi} refers both to Guru Nanak’s sister and wife but does not provide their names. The Guru’s father-in-law is named as one Mula, a Chona Khatri and Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand are mentioned as the sons of Guru Nanak. The \textit{Miharban Janam Sakhi}, states that Nanak’s mother was Tipara and that his wife was Ghumi. His sister is not mentioned but plainly indicated in reference to Jai Ram as Guru Nanak’s bahanoi (brother-in-law). Once again, names of his wife’s father and sons are given. The \textit{Gyan Ratnavali}, names his mother Tripata and Nanaki as his sister. Guru Nanak’s wife is referred to but not named. The \textit{Bhai Bala Janam Sakhi}, provides the maximum details on the family life of Guru Nanak, whereby his mother is Tripata, maternal grandmother is Bhirai; Mother’s brother-Krisna; sister-Nanaki; wife-Sulakhani; wife’s mother-Chando Rani; etc.\textsuperscript{137}

The \textit{Adi Sakhis} or the ‘First collection of Sakhis’ were discovered by Mohan Singh Dewana of Punjab University, Lahore, in the University’s Library. This happened at some unspecified date prior to the partition of India in 1947. A \textit{Janam Sakhi} manuscript which recorded a version different from any of the extant traditions was discovered and Mohan Singh Dewana named this collection as the ‘\textit{Adi Sakhis’}. However, Mohan Singh Dewana did not make a complete copy of the manuscript and efforts to trace it made in early 1969 proved unsuccessful. In the meantime, however, four manuscript copies of the same collection had been located on the Indian side of the border by Professor Piar Singh of Punjabi University, Patiala, and in October 1969 Piar Singh published a printed edition of the text. The name ‘\textit{Adi Sakhis}’ is considered misleading as it implies a precedence which in fact, the \textit{Janam Sakhi} does not possess. Therefore the theory that the \textit{Adi Sakhis} represent a ‘first’ collection must be rejected.

\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Ibid}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 102-103.
However, the Adi Sakhis in their earliest extant forms are the products of a continuing process of expansion. The only possible information that can be asserted through the original Adi Sakhis collection is that they must have been compiled during the seventeenth century; and secondly, that it incorporates material from earlier sources. Apart from other valuable contents, the Adi Sakhis contain information on the birth of Guru Nanak, his betrothal and Guru Nanak’s visit to the country ruled by women.

The B40 Janam Sakhi or the B40 manuscript (so called because of the number which it bears in the India Office Library catalogue) is perhaps the most important of all extant Janam Sakhis. This is partly on account of the quality of its illustrations; partly because of the unusually specific information which is provided concerning its origins; but chiefly because it is the most representative of all Janam Sakhis, in terms of its content. It is like all Janam Sakhis, a composite product. Oral and written sources have both been used by its compiler.

It is the oldest extant manuscript of the Punjabi language. The year of its completion is 1733 A.D. and the Janam Sakhi manuscript has 57 paintings.

The B-40 Janam Sakhi also portrays the betrothal and marriage of Guru Nanak. The B-40 Janam Sakhi names Kalu as Guru Nanak’s father in Sakhi no.2a. There is also reference to Guru Nanak arriving in a country ruled by women in Sakhi no.22, where the women of the kingdom changed Mardana into a ram. The B-40 Janam Sakhi provides a valuable insight into the peaceful society of that time as the compiler of this Janam Sakhi lays stress upon the belief in the Guru’s mystical presence within the Sangat.

(II) Dasam Granth:

In very simple terms, the Dasam Granth, is hypothetically, a collection of the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh. According to Macauliffe, Bhai Mani Singh

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139 Ibid., p. 43.
140 Ibid., p. 278.
141 Surjit Hans (ed.), *B-40 Janam Sakhi; Guru Baba Nanak Paintings*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, n.d., p. 5.
145 Ibid., p. 265.
compiled the compositions and translations of the tenth Guru, and of the bards who were associated with him. Subsequently the composition was known as the Granth of the tenth Guru (Dasam Granth) though this title was not given by Bhai Mani Singh.\textsuperscript{146}

Authorship of the Granth is debatable and controversial till date, therefore certain portions of the Granth are not generally relied upon by the Sikh historians. This is reasonable because after the execution of Bhai Mani Singh, Sikhs took the volume to Talwandi Sabo, as several learned Sikhs resided there. On analysis, it was found that many of the tales and translations in the volume, as at present found, ought not to have been included in it, for they are of Hindu origin, not fit for perusal and none comparable with the hymns contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikhs therefore maintained that the Hikayat or Persian tales, and the whole of the Triya Charitar, or stories illustrating the deceit of women, should be omitted, and included in a separate volume, which may be read, not for a religious purpose, but for the entertainment and delectation of the public.\textsuperscript{147}

The compilation can be conveniently divided into four parts: mythological, philosophical, autobiographical and erotic. The Pakhyan Charitar and the Hikayats are fables of the wiles of women in a corrupt and decadent society. The stories are not original and abound with erotic passages.\textsuperscript{148}

The Dasam Granth consists of the Bachitra Natak (Play Marvellous), Gian Prabodh (consciousness of Knowledge), Shabad Patshahi X (Verses of the Tenth Sovereign), Sastra Nam Mala (The Necklace of the Names of Weapons), Pakhyan Charitar (Tales of Deceit), Zafarnamah (The Letter of Victory), Hikayat, comprises of stories in Persian language, written in Gurmukhi characters.\textsuperscript{149} It also contains Chandi Charitar, Ramavtar and Krishnavtar. Pakhyan Charitar (Tales of Deceit) covering 7555 verses of Charit Kavya, is the largest composition in the Dasam Granth. “Patshahi X” is mentioned at the very beginning of the work as the signature title. The 404 tales may be divided into categories such as tales of the bravery, devotion, or intelligence of women,

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, p. 260.
78 in number, of the deceitfulness and unscrupulousness of women, 269, of the deceitfulness of men, 26.\textsuperscript{150}

The *Akal Ustat* is a poetical composition by Guru Gobind Singh in the *Dasam Granth*. About one-third of the poem is a satire on false methods of worship. It presents a mixture of devotional lyrics and philosophical reflections.\textsuperscript{151}

The Guru’s *Akal Ustat* (Praise of the Immortal), rejects the belief that a widow who cremates herself with her husband’s corpse obtains salvation. “If salvation be obtained by burning oneself in the fire, why should not the Sati and also the serpent which liveth in hell be saved?” If salvation were obtained by dwelling beneath the earth, the snake which dwelleth in the nether regions should also be saved.\textsuperscript{152} On the one hand, we have a singular instance of the Guru denouncing and condemning the socially cast injustices on women of the period.

Elsewhere in the *Dasam Granth*, there are 404 tales, with themes of love, sexual intrigue and violence.\textsuperscript{153} Regardless of whether its authorship can be attributed to Guru Gobind Singh or not, the work is of considerable importance in understanding gender construction in the immediate post-guru period, writes Doris R. Jakobsh.\textsuperscript{154} With respect to the portion of the *Dasam Granth* most directly concerned with females, *Charitropakhian*, we find a male-authored text tailored to a male audience presenting a male assessment of females.

Does Doris here mean to say that the section of the *Dasam Granth* devoted entirely to the wiles of women and their miserable projection in print, indicates the position of women in contemporary society, more than the equality and superior aesthetics and morality advocated by the Guru Granth Sahib. For her, authorship of the *Dasam Granth* is not at all important, what is important is the rude mockery that the women are subjected to within the *Dasam Granth*. There are conferences and symposiums being held in the present times to equate the Guru Granth Sahib alongwith

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, pp. 60-61.
\textsuperscript{153} Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History-Transformation, Meaning and Identity*, New Delhi, 2003, p. 44.
the *Dasam Granth*, and various arguments are being put forward strongly in favour of holding the two at par with each other. But history rejects all kinds of religious fanaticism and therefore scholars, historians and students of Sikh studies do not believe in the claim of some religious sections that the *Dasam Granth* is indeed a work of Guru Gobind Singh. It is both strange and ironical that the *Dasam Granth*, inspite of being shrouded in controversy, is firstly considered at par with the Guru Granth Sahib by some and secondly, it is being highly revered and respected by the same group, although it is not only unfair and unjust to place it in the same league as the Guru Granth Sahib, in the absence of adequate proof in its favour.

According to Khushwant Singh, the most disputed writings in the *Dasam Granth* are the erotic portions in the *Pakhyan Charitar*. There is enough evidence in the text itself to prove that these portions were not written by Guru Gobind Singh.  

It is most unlikely that the Guru as the spiritual leader of his people would have ever allowed his name to be associated with a composition of the type of *Pakhyan Charitar*. His lofty character and the value he set on Spartan living do not go with the prurience of the kind found in some of the passages of the *Dasam Granth*. The conclusion arrived at by the scholar here is that much of the writing of the *Dasam Granth* is from the pen of poets other than that of Guru Gobind Singh. The only portions that can with some certainty be ascribed to him are those which he, during his own lifetime, exhorted his followers to recite as parts of their prayer or read in the performance of ritual such as baptism. Some of the compositions may have been his but any categorical assertion on the subject would be hazardous.

The *Janam Sakhis* are considered as hagiographical accounts, with no historical proof regarding their whereabouts to support them and similar is the case with the *Dasam Granth* and the debate over its authorship, the *Gurbilas* Literature also suffers more or less the same fate, which leaves us with just one standard work in the Sikh religion, the Guru Granth Sahib. It is not only a source of true knowledge but in a great way the perhaps the only authentic source, which advocates egalitarianism in all aspects of man’s life, the humanity at large is addressed throughout the Guru Granth Sahib, where a true

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Sikh is asked to rise above the distinctions of caste, creed, colour, customs, traditions, sex, religion, etc, in short the concept of Universal brotherhood being advocated today has its origins in the Guru Granth Sahib.

(III) Gurbilas Literature:

In the seventeenth century we see the scope of Punjabi literature expanding in several ways. The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, each a masterpiece of Punjabi poetry, have been seen by Sikh scholars as the key to the Guru Granth Sahib. It is true that Bhai Gurdas sings of Sikh beliefs and practices but he sings also of the Sikh Panth. In fact the social and cultural life of the region finds ample space in his Vars. A new form of Punjabi literature took shape in the seventeenth century: the Janamsakhi. Among many other things, the *Janam Sakhis* represent the earliest examples of Punjabi prose which is remarkable for its simplicity and economy of expression. The Sufi poets carried forward the literary tradition of Shaikh Farid and Shah Husain. Damodar Gulali, a writer of the Multan region, composed the folklore of Hir as a piece of secular literature to be sung by minstrels for all Punjabis; Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh.  

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, apart from some new *Janam Sakhis*, we come upon *Gurbilas* literature, starting with *Sainapat’s Gursobha* in the early 18th century and culminating in the classic works of Bhai Santokh Singh and Ratan Singhm Bhangu, both completed in the 1840’s. The eighteenth and nineteenth century historiography in the ‘*Gurbilas*’ literature provides accounts of how the Gurus and their closest disciples embedded the scripture in courtly symbolism and stipulated models for a future ministry that would evoke imaginaries of the text as a worldly sovereign. For contemporary Sikhs, these textual references legitimate the careful choreography of their actions in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Descriptions of what the Gurus did in the past function as prescriptions for proper handling of the text in the present.

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The Gursobha or Gurbilas are basically the accounts of Guru Gobind Singh. Although they are in biographical form, it would be wrong to refer to them as biographies. The Gursobha of Sainapat was the first to be composed immediately after the death of Guru Gobind Singh and before the establishment of the Sikh rule under Banda Bahadur. Towards the end of the 18thC, the Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi by Sukha Singh, once again dealing with the life and works of Guru Gobind Singh. The Gursobha advances the cause of redemption by recording the miraculous events of the life of Guru Gobind Singh, who according to it was born to redeem the earth of all evil.  

The Sri Gursobha by was Sainapat written in 1711, almost immediately after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. The work apart from mentioning the battles of Guru Gobind Singh also refers to him as ‘God’. Facts regarding his physical appearance and his military genius is aptly described. The theological importance of the Khalsa is also underlined. The Gursobha become a defacto manifesto of Sikh rule in the 18thC. The Udasi stamp is partially visible in Sukha Singh’s Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi, written in 1797. Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi, provides explicit details of the historical importance of the vision of Guru Nanak.

The Gur Sobha or "The Splendor of the Guru"—as a form of historical representation, suggesting reasons for the importance of the representation of the past as history within Sikh discursive contexts. The text in question provides an account of the life, death, and teachings of the last of the ten living Sikh Gurus or teachers, Guru Gobind Singh. The article argues that the construction of history in this text is linked to the transition of the Sikh community at the death of the last living Guru whereby authority was invested in the canonical text (Granth) and community (Panth). As such a particular rationale for history was produced within Sikh religious thought and intellectual production around the discursive construction of the community in relation to the past and as a continuing presence. As such, the text provides an alternative to modern

161 Ibid, p. 246.
164 Ibid, p. 249.
165 Ibid, p. 250.
166 Ibid, p. 251.
European forms of historical representation, while sharing some features of the "historical" as defined in that context. The essay relates this phenomenon to a broader exploration of history in South Asian contexts, to notions of historicality that are plural, and to issues particular to the intersection of history and religion. Later texts, through the middle of the nineteenth century, are briefly considered, to provide a sense of the significance of Gur Sobha within a broader, historically and religiously constituted Sikh imagination of the past.\footnote{http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118501960/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0.}

The Gurbilas form of writing like the Janam Sakhi form, was used by writers to put forth ideas that were unknown to the original works in that genre. The Gurbilas Patshahi 10 and Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi are two important and contemporary works of this kind. The authorship of Gurbilas Patshahi 10, attributed to Koer Singh is also debatable. Written in the mid-eighteenth century, it is based on the ‘Bachittar Natak’ and Sukha Singh’s Gurbilas Daswin Patshahi. This work is heterodox in nature. According to it Goddess (Devi) asked for the creation of the Khalsa.\footnote{Surjit Hans, Op.cit, p. 267.} Guru Gobind Singh, here is portrayed paradigmatically as a hindu incarnation.\footnote{Ibid, p. 268.}

‘Women, people, land and money are faithful to none’, writes the author. Regarding this, Surjit Hans maintains that such ideas would have been simply suicidal and silly for the Sikhs to hold in the middle of the eighteenth Century.\footnote{Ibid, p. 269.}

Believed to have been written by Sohan Kavi in 1718 A.D. is another equally important work, the Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi. Guru Hargobind here is portrayed in the image of Guru Gobind Singh.\footnote{Ibid, p. 270.} It is also observed that the Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi, is of negligible importance as a source of information on the life of Guru Hargobind. The author of this Gurbilas projects Guru Hargobind a 19th C lay enthusiast of Sikh shrines seeking cures for petty ills of life.\footnote{Ibid, p. 271.}

It also projects Baba Buddha as a great Sikh.\footnote{Ibid, p. 272.} The Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi is an excellent corpus of evidence on the nineteenth century rituals of the Sikhs about the

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Guru Granth Sahib, the ceremonies at Harimandir Sahib, and the rites of birth, marriage and death.\textsuperscript{174} Surjit Hans infers that the \textit{Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi} can be sub-titled, ‘Magic and the Decline of Religion’.\textsuperscript{175}

\textit{Gurbilas} as a literary genre is unique in Sikhism. The genre tries to explicate the political programme of the community in terms of Sikh theology. It is a challenge of Sikh politics of today and its exponents. We can define our politics either theologically or rationally. To do it in either of the ways leads what is “less fortunate”.\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Loc.cit.}