CHAPTER FIVE
Nanak : The Coming-of-Age of Nirguna Bhakti

Trudging headlong through the continent
Man contemplates Rabba* standing on one foot.

Controlling his wind-like mercurial mind,
rememberng Him, he bows —
Bending his head extremely low

On whom does he lean ?
Whom does he want to force?

How can it be said, Nanak?
Whom the Creator will bless with his bounties?

Swami keeps all under His command
Only the fool exposes himself. (Tr Myself Granth Sahib 4091-4092)

*(Rabba being Persian word for God, the posture of standing on one foot alludes to the icon of Shiva or a yogi.)

The above group of shlokas (translated by myself), are set to raga Saranga. They parody and comment upon the spiritual blindness that inflicts many a superficial, idol-worshipping devotee for whom bowing his head steeply is sufficient proof of his devotion to the Rabba or Swami of the universe. To come to Nanak after reading Kabir is the most logical progression. Ideologically the two share a lot in common and yet are poles apart as personalities

In this chapter I begin with an assessment of the work of Nanak the poet and social-activist. Then comes a sketch on his biography Since Nanak has always been predominantly seen as a Sikh guru and since the fact of his being the last major Sant-
poet has largely been underplayed, the chapter attempts to answer a few questions like. Why has the poet’s work not received enough academic (not theological) attention so far? How was he, as a Sant and a Sikh, placed at a significant turning point in history? What was his contribution? The chapter also makes an attempt to examine the poet’s work (which suffers from the lack of skilled translation), and attempts to trace in his work the subtle shades of influence.

Nanak was the last to come in the line of the Nirguna Bhakti poets the “Sants” as they were called popularly. Incidentally, he also became the founding saint of another religious tradition, Sikhism. The later fact has been emphasised too often, and sometimes (I think), been blown out of proportion by scholarship on Nanak. Their treatment of the poet too is coloured by their faith and reverence. It is exaggerated in its laudation, and fails to maintain a healthy objective distance or to furnish a critical analysis with adequate scholarly detail and illustration from the poet’s works. The normal pattern of existing scholarship on Nanak is, to discuss certain major compositions of the poet and ignore the treasure-trove of his less-known, shorter poems; composed to musical measures – ragas – and lying buried in the fourteen hundred and odd pages of the Adi Granth, (or the Granth Sahib, as it is more often referred to). They come alive on religious occasions or in the kirtan sung by the Ragis/priests, in the gurudwaras (Sikh temples).

The reverence surrounding the Sant has done more harm to the poet Nanak, than good. For when a people claim fetish possession upon a thing or a person, and build walls of love/possession around it, the unspoken message they convey to others is, ‘keep off’. It could then be. a wife, a piece of land or a free-spirited saint that has been appropriated and fenced within the walls of conservative devotion. The underlying cycle of ownership – territory (demarcation) –and fencing (indicating possession of property,) is the same in each case.

Nanak has been read more for his religious philosophy and for his role in the history of Sikhism, than for his poetry alone. Works of dispassionate scholarship too are few and scattered in between. There does not exist in the book bazaar, a single anthology of Nanak’s poetry in translation. Translated anthologies of poets of the Medieval period, like Kabir, Farid, Mira, Tukaram, Jayadev and others can easily be found. But for Nanak
one has only the bulky Adi Granth to trudge through. The poet Sant has come to be perceived only as part of a tradition comprising ten successive gurus, (six of whom wrote poetry) Their verse along with that of other Bhakti poets and Sufis, is compiled in the Granth Sahib. To examine them as well would be to deviate from the subject-matter of our thesis). In the ensuing pages I shall endeavour to show that Nanak was a poet of considerable calibre. A poet who was the logical product of his environment which was the Bhakti movement of medieval India. He ought to be read for his own sake, along with Basavanna (the eleventh century Lingayat poet), Namdev, Ravidas, Kabir, Narasimha, Tagore, Aurobindo and many others. All of them, great men, path makers, and poets of the same soil.

For the purpose of illustrating Nanak's verse, I have referred mainly to the basic translations that are available in the text of the Granth Sahib translated into Punjabi and English by the late Manmohan Singh of Amritsar. They have been translated from the original medieval Punjabi and Sadhbhasa. They lack the sophistication of an A.K Ramanujan or a Dilip Chitre's work *(1)*, but are good enough to introduce the reader to the spirit of the poet Nanak. To undertake to translate them all (nine hundred and forty seven in number), by myself would have been quite tedious at the moment, though I have translated a few. The couple of following dohas in both translation and transliteration will give the reader a feel of his work in the original as well as in translation:

Pain is arsenic and Han's name an antidote.
Pound it in the mortar of contentment with the pestle of your hands gift.

_Dukh mahuah maran Hari nam_
_Sila santokh pisuno hath dan_

Ever, ever take this medicine so your body does not pine away.
Otherwise death will pommel you at the final hour.

_Nit nit lehu na khije deh(a)_
_Ant(a) kal jum mare theh(a)._ (Tr. Manmohan Singh Granth Sahib 41-45)
Nanak has to his credit, a number of long poems, namely, "Japji", "Siddha Goshti" and "Dakhni Omkar", besides over nine hundred shorter poems (better called hymns, for they were meant to be sung), which are set to about thirty ragas of the Hindustani Classical Music's tradition (The names of the ragas have been listed in the end notes:*2). The "Japji" is regarded as the most important composition in Sikh literature. It is a description of "the Sadhana or effort that man has to make in order to realise the Divine". The 'Siddha Goshti' is a polemic against the ascetic and esoteric practices of the Siddhas, followers of the legendary Gorakh Nath. And the third long poem 'Dakhni Omkar', involves in a similar debate with the Brahmins. Among his other longer poems are the Vars (clusters of verses) written in raga Majh, raga Asa and raga Malhar. The poem 'Asa-Di-Var' enjoys a prime status in the Sikh system of worship. A Var in Punjabi folklore is a verse narrative of love and war. The Vars in the Granth, however, are philosophical and lyrical in nature. Their core stanzas have "distinctly metaphysical meaning", but at places they also adopt an aggressive and revolutionary tone.

Nanak's shorter poems (and those of his successor poet gurus), have been arranged in the Granth under three categories. Poems composed (and sung) in a particular raga are grouped together, so that all poems composed in one raga can be found in that particular section of raga Malhar or raga Basant, or raga Bhairav etc. In which raga a particular verse would be caste was determined by factors like the mood and subject of the poem, the time of the day when it should ideally be sung, and also the set of metaphors or seasons the poem was referring to. For instance, raga Basant would be for spring time associations, while raga Malhar would be for the monsoons (or night time), with its play on the cloud-thunder-lightening-darkness metaphors and the sentiment of joy and longing. As Bhai Avtar Singh Ragi says, in an interview to a journalist of the Times Of India: "It is natural to identify these poems by the author, what is unusual is that these poems were strung together and identified by the ... raga in which the hymns were first sung and possibly also composed." (Bhai Avtar Singh Ragi has been singing the hymns of the Gurus all his life. He belongs to a family associated with the third Guru, and has a treasure-trove of kirtans preserved since the medieval times under the rubric of gurmat sangeet.)
The second category employed in the arrangement of poetry in the *Granth* is that of poetic form and metrical structure according to which verse is segregated. There was, among the prevailing poetic meters and folk forms, a good degree of flexibility, owing to the fact that very little was written down and in the course of its oral transmission from one place to another it was liable to variation. Medieval Bhakti poetry is therefore not very strict in meter. Most of Nanak’s compositions use the two-line *sakhī* or *shloka* form. The lines always rhyme at the end and sometimes in the middle as well. The most popularly used meter is the *chaupai*, in which each line has thirty-two *matras* and is divided in the middle by a caesura, with sixteen matras on either side. The compositions are often classed as *ashta padis* or *chaupadis*. *Ashta* means eight and *chau* means four, therefore a composition having eight *padas* is an *ashta padi* and that having four padas becomes a *chaupadi*. The *pada* or *shabad* being metrically the loosest form. It was the most popular song form, that kept altering as it travelled from region to region and from one performance to another. It generally used the rhyming couplet. As S.S. Sekhon says in the *Encyclopaedia Of Indian Literature*.

> These compositions have a very definite metrical structure, but so many variations are rung upon the regular metres that superficial observers often miss the pattern. The expression is classical, chaste and well-thought-out, and yet an impression of spontaneity is given. (Vol. III 2871)

The third category of arranging poetry in the *Adi Granth* was under established folk forms like *Prabhatis* (hymns sung in the morning), *Allahnian* which are closer to the English elegy, the *Kirtan Sohila* which eulogised the divine and his beautiful creation (mostly nature poetry), and the *Ghorian* which are usually sung during a wedding or celebration of some kind. Other such forms used in the *Granth* include, the *Sodar* (meaning, your doorstep), *Wanjare* (meaning, gypsy or vagabonds.), *Pahare* and *Birharasa*. As I mentioned earlier, there is very scanty amount of scholarship on the poetics, style, and format of Nanak’s poetry which one finds spread under the above mentioned categories through the entire *Adi Granth*.

Broadly, Nanak’s work is perceived as (a) several short poems and five long compositions. These are further perceived as (b) poems written in his younger days and those that were composed during his older and maturer days. The verse attributed to the younger Nanak, is rich, has an aura of splendour about it and is profuse in the emotions
it portrays upon the canvas of the changing moods of nature. It is also more aggressive.
The following composition from "Asa-di-Var" is a sample:

The disciples play the music
and the preceptors dance.
They move their feet
and roll their heads.
Dust flies -- flies and settles
upon their locks.
Beholding them,
people laugh, and leave.
For the sake of bread,
they beat time.
They dash themselves
against the ground.
Sing Gopis, and sing Krishans,
Sing Sitas, sing Ramas and Kings.
Fearless is the Formless Lord ...

The oil press, the spinning wheel,
and the quern potters wheel;
the many endless deserts;
whirl winds and tops; the churning
staves, the threshers, and the breathless tumblings
of birds --
    mounted upon a stake, all are whirled.
He alone swings
    around mortals,
bound in entanglement.
Each must dance in accord with their deed.
. ..........Dancing and leaping
are the mind's yearnings.
Nanak they who fear Him, also love Him. (Granth Sahib 1534)
A subtle sense of euphemism and irony runs through the vibrant dance music and whirling movements of the poem. Here it is the circular spinning movement that is troped upon, to ultimately convey the larger meaninglessness of all movement. "Dancing and leaping are the mind's yearnings / Nanak they who fear Him also love Him." It is characteristic of Nanak, to voice in the last few couplets of every poem, his ideology on the formless One. Here we have his theory that fear and love are two sides of the coin of Bhakti. The element of "fear of God" seems to be an Islamic influence. None of the bhaktas, not even Kabir before him, have ever referred to it. The above poem also gives us a glimpse of the Medieval rural Punjab, the countryside, "its whirl winds and spinning tops" (the children play with), "the dancing mendicants" (a reference to the yogis), and "the tumbling birds", with the mythological deities turned into common names by Nanak who pluralises them as Krishnas, Sitas, Ramas and Kings.

Nanak's maturer poetry is marked by condensed thought and architectural perfection. Of his longer poems, the "Japji", the "Dakhni Omkar", and "Siddha Goshti", are supposed to have been written by the older Nanak, presumably at Kartarpur, where he settled down to a farmers life, at the age of fifty.

The "Japji". Jap means to recite, and therefore the "Japji" - The Recitation. It is Nanak's most known and most translated work of poetry. It is also his most somber and theological composition. It is placed at the beginning of the Granth Saheb. The composition consists of thirty-eight principal stanzas (pauries as they are called), and an additional preliminary one. It can roughly be divided into four parts: (a) the first seven pauries, beginning with an invocation. They define Nanak's concept of God and put into relief the seeker's confusion regarding how to achieve divinity. (b) The next twenty stanzas take the seeker step by step on the way till he arrives at the vision of the great divine reality. (c) The third part consists of four stanzas describing the attitudes and outlook of one who has tasted the divine, and (d) the last portion. again seven pauris, is in the nature of a summary which describes more clearly, than the second part of "Japji", the stages on the seeker's path.

"Dhakni Omkar", is a longish poem in Raga Ramkali, with an incantatory rhythm and short lines that rhyme at the end. The language is figurative, rich in imagery, and has an
almost tartan sense of splendour Nanak here is preoccupied with singing paeans to the
divine light, the supra soul who works “through wind, water, fire and varous shapes / 
The One soul (that) wanders through the three worlds.” The poet’s theological concerns
and his concept of the divine find expression again and again, as he weaves yet newer
texts of symbols and the imagined, to describe the kingdom of the formless being. His
canvas is infinity beyond the bounds of time age and place. The poet speaks in terms of
four ages, three worlds etc. and creates an unnatural world strewn with the gems and
pearls and sapphire of God’s name and grace A land where the swans abound,
extraordinary swans which can separate milk from water, and so on. He speaks
sometimes of the path of spirituality and the seeker in general terms. The poetic style
resembles that of the *Rig Veda* and the *Upanishads*. It is incantatory and shares the
same sense of continuous calm:

The mercurial mind remains not still
The mind-deer secretly eats the green shoots of sin.
He who enshrines the Lord’s lotus feet
in his heart lives eternally. (Granth Sahib 3044)

Sometimes Nanak speaks of his own personal progress through the poetic labyrinth:

My shyness and hesitation has died and perished;
Now I walk unveiling my face. (GS 3039)

I surrender my mind unto the Lord
and lay before him my body and soul (GS 3057)

The treasure of the myriad
of pearls, jewels, and emeralds
is in the True Guru’s hand. (GS 3059)

Having consolidated the need to abstain from over indulgence of worldly comforts and
attachments, Nanak closes the poem with an emphasis upon the importance of
meditating and remaining in constant remembrance of the divine.

--- Nanak,
He alone is learned, he the wise scholar
who wears the necklace of Ram’s Name (GS 3065)

Of the three longer poems of Nanak, presumably composed later in his life, “Dakhni Omkar” is the most splendid and imaginative in its array of images, colourful detail and landscapic grandeur as the poet paints God’s kingdom from the buzz of a bumble bee around a lotus in muddy waters, to the sun, moon, the stars and wind and other surreal realms – images that soften the seventy of the theme. His treatment of creation echoes the approach of the Upanishads. The following lines illustrate this:

He works through wind, water, fire and various shapes
The One soul wanders through the three worlds. (GS 3036)

Descending low the ambrosial rain
is incessantly falling
The sublime shabad, embellishes the mortal (GS 3037)

The “Japji” and the “Siddha Goshti” on the other hand, are more somber, (especially the “Japji”), and unembellished. Their prime concern is the theological theme. While the “Japji” unfolds the fundamentals of Sikh metaphysics, and delineates ways and means for the individual human soul to seek reunion with the Universal Soul; the “Siddha Goshti” spells out further details of some of Nanak’s philosophy. It argues effectively the futility of the practices of the Karma-kandis, particularly the yogis who lay much store by Hatha-yoga. It advocates the path of Sahaj yoga, based on nam simran, the ultimate object of which is the creation of the ideal man. Except for the “Japji” where Nanak’s thoughts and insights are well-structured, with an almost architectural precision; all other verse of his uses meter and rhyme and is set in some musical measure (raga).

The “Siddha Goshti”, set to the raga Ramkali, is a treatise in the question-answer form of dialogue with other yogis. The setting is a country fair at Batala in Punjab, and the characters are, the poet Nanak and a group of ascetics fond of displaying miracles and flaunting their magical powers. Yogis in Nanak’s days had strayed from the path of genuine spirituality. They derived pleasure from bullying and lived off the common people. They get more than their share of criticism in Nanak’s works, the obvious reason
being the strong hold they had upon people and their misuse of it in the medieval Punjab. At the commencement of the treatise, they try to bully and subdue Nanak with their awful miracles. On failing to do which they initiate a debate, questioning Nanak's faith vis-à-vis their own. The replies that Nanak makes to the yogis in their own idiom, (which use terms like "tenth door", "mystic harmony," and the sun and moon as they occur in yogic parlance), sum up very accurately the Sant-poet's philosophy and spiritual stature.

By remaining as the lotus untouched by water, and the duck on the stream, 

By concentrated fixing of the mind in the holy word, 

Says Nanak, is crossed the ocean of existence. (GS 3067)

"Asa-di-Var" consists of fifty seven compositions comprising of shlokas and pauris. Forty one poems of these are Nanak's compositions, and sixteen shorter pieces (most of which come towards the end), are by the second guru, Angad Dev. Essentially sung in the morning, the "Asa-di-Var" begins with hymns in the praise of Rabba (God). Later the mood changes as Nanak's roving eye picks upon the wrong doings of men towards men. The verse is iconoclastic, bold, aggressive, and laced with sarcasm and irony towards the ideological aberrations in society: "There is a famine of truth, / falsehood prevails, and the blackness / of the Dark age has made men demons." (GS 1546) The Pandits are butchers, they waylay people with the trap of ritual:

While mentally blind, the Pandit is named surjan. 
The man-eaters say the prayer. 
They who wield the Scalpel
wear the thread around their neck. (GS 1556)

There is no thread for the sexual organ
and no thread there is for the woman...
No thread for the feet, no thread for the hands, the tongue, the eye! (GS 1555)

Nanak makes a parody of the whole ritual. The superficial reading and ritualising of the Vedas is also criticised
With your mouth you utter falsehood
like the precious ornaments,
And recite the three line Gaoatn
three times a day (1553 GS)

The term Gaoatn above, refers to the Gayatn Mantra *(3) The Vedas reiterate the same roadmap, says Nanak

By reading and studying them
one finds four doctrines in them
Chensh all life, love, and meditate
on the Lord
and call the Self lowly
Then O Nanak, will salvation be obtained.

As is characteristic of Nanak, the sobriety of the aggressive social curative is relieved by elements of the dramatic, the musical and the theatrical. The following poem substantiates the point. Its underlying thread of anger is masked by the element of theatrics laced with thick irony and sarcasm:

Both advance and sin are the King
and Minister, and falsehood is
the Master of Mint.
Lust the assistant official, is summoned and consulted
and they all sit together and chalk out evil plans.
The subjects are blind and without wisdom,
they quench with bribe, the official's flame of greed

The divines dance, play musical instruments
and disguise and decorate themselves
They shout aloud and sing
of epic poems and heroic deeds
The fools call themselves scholars
and with devices and cavils
they love to amass wealth.
The virtuous disfigure their acts of ment.
by asking for the door of salvation.

They call themselves continent,
leave home and hearth
They know not the way of life.

. . . . none calls himself imperfect.

If the weight of honour
be put into the hind scale
then alone O Nanak is man
properly weighed. ( GS 1546-1547 )

While Nanak tends to be descriptive and even prescriptive sometimes, in the poem above, he beautifully creates a state of ecstasy that is almost frenzied and lunatic in its reaching out to the sentiment of the sublime. On the whole, one can say that "Asa-di-Var" is a collection of verse whose main subject is to ridicule, to question, and to attack the social-ills breeding beneath the blanket of religion and hypocrisy. Themes like, the mean place given to women in society, the hypocrisy of both Hindu and Muslim priests, the futile practice of asceticism, and the spiritual amnesia of the rich, are some of them. The work ends with the poet reaffirming that, "the Lord's is the true sacrificial thread.
Such a thread is worn in the Lord's court and it breaks not."

Numerous legends and tales of miracles surround the life story of Nanak. Their source, the "Janam Sakhis", cannot be relied upon since they are the product of legend and faith. Having trudged through the legends and conjecture surrounding the birthplace and other detail of Nanak's life, and having cancelled out many a version against another, one is left with a bare outline of biographical detail upon which one can rely. Some repetition of the facts of Nanak's life (already given in chapter three on Bhakti in North
India,) I regret, cannot be helped, since it is necessary for the flow and convenience of the argument. Here is an account of the life of Nanak, as told by McLeod.

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 AD, probably in the month of April. His father was Kalu, a Bedi Khatni living in the village of Rai Bhoi di Talvandi, and his mother was named Tripta. Kalu and Tripta had one other child, a daughter whose name was probably Nanki, and whose husband's name was Jai Ram. Guru Nanak was married to the daughter of Mula, a Chona Khatri of Batala, who had formerly resided in the village of Pokho di Randhavi. His wife's name was Sulakhni, and two sons, Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand were born to them. As a young man, Guru Nanak worked in the town of Sultanpur, probably in the employment of Daulat Khan Lodi. This must have been during the last decade of the fifteenth century. While in Sultanpur, he experienced a sense of the divine call, and it was evidently in response to this that he began a period of travelling in and perhaps beyond India, accompanied for at least some of the time by a bard named Mardana. Neither the pattern nor the extent of his travels can be established, but it may be assumed that he visited a number of the more important centres of both Hindu and Muslim pilgrimage. The period of travelling probably ended in or shortly before 1520 as it seems likely that Guru Nanak witnessed Babur's attack upon the town of Saidpur in that year. (146)

McLeod is of the opinion that Nanak's references to Babur in his works, seem to point to the invasions of the 1524 capture of Lahore which was ghastly, rather than the 1520 sack of Saidpur. However in the absence of any recorded evidence, it is difficult to come to any definite conclusion. For all we know, Nanak may have composed the 'Babur Vani' (vani means speech/poetry), even in 1526 A.D., at the end of Babur's string of five invasions. Quoted below is an excerpt from Nanak's 'Babur Vani' series, which also make a valuable first-hand historical document. Here we see Nanak's poetic genius and his narrative skill. The poem also reveals the poet's anguish and his faith in divine justice. He begins the verse on an interrogative note:

Where are those sports, stables, and horses?
Where are the drums and bugles?
Where are those sword-belts and chariots?

....        .                        . .
....    . those mirrored finger-rings and
   beautiful faces?

...        .
For this wealth many are ruined
and it has disgraced many.

Without deeds it is not amassed,
and it departs not with the dead
He whom the creator destroys, him
He first deprives of virtue.
When they heard of Babur's invasion,
Millions of Pirs failed to halt him.

He burned houses, resting places,
and strong palaces,
And the princes cut to pieces,
he caused to roll in dust.
No Mughal became blind
and no one wrought any miracle.

There raged a battle between
the Mughals and Pathans, and
the sword was wielded in the battlefield.
They the Mughals aimed and fired
their guns and they the Pathans
attacked with the elephants.

They whose letter has been torn
in God's court
must die, O my brethren.
There were the women of Muslims,
Hindus, Bhattis and Rajputs.
The robes of some were torn
from head to foot, and some
found dwelling in the cremation ground

How did they whose majestic husbands
came not home,
pass their night?

The Creator of himself acts
and causes others to act
To whom should we complain? (GS 1384-1386)

History narrates that during the reign of Ibrahim Lodi (1517 to 1526 A.D.), Babur invaded Punjab five times. Plunder, loot, murder and rape was committed on a large scale without discriminating the Hindus from the Muslims. Driven by their lust for political power, Muslim rulers cared little for anything else. The Qazi fraternity too had lost its hold upon them. Around this time a lot of Hindus who had embraced Islam, converted back again. From this point onwards, the zeal of persecution was confined only to the Kings and the Qazis. The liberal minded members of the Muslim community and the Sufis no longer appreciated it. Besides the 'Babur Vani', there are various hymns of Nanak in the Granth which were probably inspired by occasions like the birth of a new born, a marriage, or a death that Nanak happened to witness. Even today the same verses are sung, recited by the Sikh community on their respective occasions.

Coming back to the later part of Nanak’s life; the poet had evidently received some land from a wealthy follower, on the right bank of the Ravi, where he settled to the life of a farmer and a householder, along with his family and a few disciples. Thus the village of Kartarpur was built. This probably took place after the Guru’s travels had ended:

For the remainder of his life he lived in Kartarpur, but made brief journeys from there to places within easy reach. These destinations probably included Pak Pattan and Multan. Contacts with Nath Yogis were frequent and on one occasion the Guru evidently engaged a group of them in a debate at the village of Achal Batala.
During his years in Kartarpur, Guru Nanak must have attracted many disciples, one of whom was Lahina, a Trehan Khatri of Khadur Lahina must have impressed the Guru by his devotion and ability, for prior to his death, Guru Nanak renamed him Angad and appointed him as his successor in preference to either of his sons. The Guru died in Kartarpur, towards the end of the fourth decade of the sixteenth century, in 1539 (McLeod 146).

An interesting incident (which may or may not be a myth) is connected with Nanak's appointment of Angad as his spiritual successor. The selection was based upon the severest possible tests including a weird one. The Guru asked Lehna, his own sons Lakhmi Das and Sri Chand among others around him, to consume as food a carcass that was found lying. None proved faithful enough to obey Nanak's order except for Lehna. He got ready to obey the Guru's instruction but actually found no carcass on lifting the cover. Nanak bestowed his grace on Lehna, infused him with his own spirit and gave him the name Angad, meaning a part of his own anga (body). Guru Nanak placed an offering and bowed reverently before Angad before he died in 1539 A.D. at Kartarpur.

The practical reform and foundations that Nanak had laid were to go a long way. Doctrinally he had clarified and summarized the vast theology of the Sants. He left behind him a large body of verse. And structurally he established among his disciples, the sangat (congregation) which met regularly to sing hymns and meditate, the dharamsala (religious hall) which provided a place for worship, and the pangat (also known as langar, the communal kitchen), attached to the dharamsala. The practice of langar served to physically break all barriers between caste. Scripturally also, he undermined the importance of the Vedic scriptures by replacing them with hymns of his own and those of other like-minded bhaktas and Sufis. (The hymns in one way were the Vedas reinterpreted):

The Rig Veda says, Ram is fully contained everywhere.
And among the deities, Ram Nam is most exalted.
On uttering His nam, the sins depart.
And then Nanak, man obtains salvation. (GS 1551)
Nanak and the Sants thus went all the way erasing the written word but not quite. They were rewriting upon the erased word, the bani (or vani) of the Sant community. The *Granth Sahib* was not alone in its efforts. Many other granths were compiled with the verse of Sants and Sufis by lesser known poets. Dadu Dayal was one *(4).*

The alphabet called the *gurmukhi*(5) was further improved upon by Nanak, and was given its final touches by Angad, who also added his own poetic work to the corpus that Nanak had left behind in the *gurmukhi* script. The first five Gurus composed extensive *bani* (verse), and the fifth Guru, Arjan, bound the *bani* of all the Gurus with some hymns of several earlier mystic poets (i.e. the Sants, Sufis and bards), of high spiritual stature, in one big volume of sacred scriptures of the Sikhs, called the *Granth Sahib.* *(6)* The compiling of the *Granth Sahib* was undertaken by Guru Arjan, as a preventive measure. Although on the face of it, the action seemed spontaneous, "the compilation of the *Granth* was a political act" *(Nirmal Das 'Introduction', *Songs of Kabir*). All this while, Guru Arjan had been the target of his elder brother Prithi Chand's frustration and jealousy. One of Prithi Chand's ploys was the writing of verse under the name of Nanak by both Prithi Chand and his son Manohar Dass Meharban. Using the name 'Nanak' was a prerogative of the spiritual Sikh leaders alone. In the face of these counterfeit verses, Guru Arjan's decision must have been an attempt to control and ultimately discredit such compositions by codifying the true verses of the gurus in an authorized version. It was the result of Prithi Chand's treacherous scheming that Guru Arjan was eventually tortured and killed by the order of Jahangir in 1606 A.D.

Guru Arjan's murder entirely changed the previously peaceful Sikh community into an aggressively militarized one. Hereafter the gurus dedicated themselves to training their followers in the art of defence and warfare. From Jahangir onwards the Mughal emperors too became progressively stauncher, and unsparingly fanatic. Finally, the Muslim's persecution of the Hindus at large and their attempts at suppression of the Sikhs lead gradually to the militarisation of the Sikhs. The Khalsa – a society of warrior saints, was created by Guru Gobind Singh – the tenth Sikh guru. He also put an end to the successive line of Sikh gurus, and installed the *Adi Granth* itself as the manifest spiritual preceptor. Gobind Singh did not include his verse in the *Adi Granth,* except for one composition called 'Shabda Hazare'. After the Guru's demise, his work was compiled by Bhai Mani Singh in a collection called *The Granth Sahib of the Tenth*
The completed version of the *Adi Granth* came to about six thousand hymns. The distribution of authorship by the gurus themselves is as follows: Nanak (974), Angad (62), Amar Das (907), Ramdas (679), Arjan Dev (2,218), and Tegh Bahadur (115) The contributions of the Sants and Sufis are Jaidev (2), Farid (134), Beni (3), Namdev (60), Tniochan (4), Parmananda (1), Sadhana (1), Ramananda (1), Dhanna (4), Pipa (1), Sain (1), Kabir (54), Ravidas (41), Bhikan (2), and Surdas (2) Included also are many odes by court poets and musicians employed by the gurus.

The language of the *Granth Sahib* is old Punjabi, which was a colloquial version of the *Apabrahmsa*. More appropriately speaking, it was a mix of *Khari Boli* (the dialect spoken in and around Delhi, Meerut), Persian and Sanskrit. It was known all over north India as Sant Bhasha or Sadhbhasha ('bhasha' in Hindi means, language). Baba Farid's compositions are all in this language.

Structurally the *Adi Granth* can be divided into three sections: (a) the introductory portion containing hymns that have acquired liturgical importance and use. (b) The ragas containing the hymns of the six Sikh gurus followed by those of the Sufis and Saints – in all thirty one. (c) thirdly, a miscellany of works that did not quite fit under the previous two categories. This section also contains the slokas of Kabir and Farid. As Kshitimohan Sen comments in his comprehensive work on *Medieval Mysticism In India*, the same method of arrangement was followed in the collection of songs and sayings by all the sants. Also, compilation of the *Granth Sahib* was not a solitary venture. There existed other such collections like the *Harare Vani* collected by Jagannath the disciple of Dadu Dayal. The *Angabandhu* – a collection of Dadu's writings put together by disciple Rajjab. And yet another, which by the order of Dadu, his disciples had collected:

It consists of the writings of sadhus of different sects. One of its copies is available with the sadhu Sankardas. ...and contains writings of sixty eight bhaktas ( the *Adi Granth* has thirty one mystic poets), among whom there are many Mussulman names such as Garibdas, Kazi Kadam, Shaikh Farid, Bakhna, Rajjab and others. (*Medieval Mysticism* 111)
Besides these two more collections that deserve mention were the Sarvanjali by Rajah and the Gunganja-nama by Jagannath. Both are unique collections of the sayings of Indian Sadhaks.

Dadu (1544 to 1603 A.D.), like Kabir and Nanak, was also driven by the quest for pure spirituality, and worked all his life towards unity between the Hindus and Muslims. Many of his disciples, such as Rajjab, Bakhna, and Wazir Khan among others, belonged to Islam. Kshitimohan Sen narrates:

With Akbar the Great, Dadu had a discussion for forty days. The story goes that just after this Akbar removed his own name from his coins and in its stead printed Jalia Julalu hu on the one side and Allahu Akbar on the reverse (Medieval Mysticism 111-112).

The episode enhances our admiration for Akbar’s vision, and liberal thinking. Until Akbar’s times, and a little beyond (till the father’s influence on son Jahangir lasted), the environment was supportive of religious syncretism, conducive to socio-spiritual reform, and a culture of give-and-take prevailed.

The Bhakti movement which had begun from the South, seventh century onwards, had by now spread all the way up to the west, north, and east of India over a period of eight to nine centuries. There was the Vithoba movement of Jnanadeva in Maharashtra, Chaitanya’s Vaishnava Bhakti in Bengal and Onssa and in Banaras the radical Brahmin scholar, Ramananda and his disciples, who sowed the seeds of further evolution in the Bhakti ethos, by removing all form of image-worship and distinctions based on caste differences. He was the first to initiate the concept of a common kitchen and langar among his disciples; and to commence the chapter of the Sant tradition.

The Sant tradition was essentially a synthesis of three principle dissenting movements: drawing its features mainly from (a) Vaishnava Bhakti - of which it was regarded as an off shoot or progression, (b) the Hatha yoga of the Nath yogis, (c) and a marginal contribution from Sufism. The Sants were in agreement with the Vaishnavas and the Sufis, that the basic religious response was, love. Vaishnava Bhakti was perceived as adopting the Saguna aspect of Bhakti while the Sants were seen as Nirguna bhaktas. The fundamental difference between the two lies in the fact that (a) the Sants offered their love directly to the supreme God and not to an avatar (i.e., a reincarnation), (b) their
expression of love was strictly through inward meditation and devotion and (c) thirdly since they completely discarded external ritual, their crusade against all forms of religious hegemony was profounder and more effective. The following poem confirms the general spirit of liberal spiritualism:

Come Sajana, that I may behold thy vision
Standing at the door of my house
I watch for thee!
Within my heart is great yearning

In my heart is great yearning
hear me, O Sajan
I have faith, in thee

Having beheld thy sight
I have become fearless
The pain of birth and death is ended.

.......
(on seeing her Lord ....

The Lord is not far. He lives in every heart
All the mortals are his brides (GS 2490-2491)

Composed in raga Suhi, the above poem uses the Vaishnava allegory of conjugal relationship with the suprasoul, all along retaining its Saguna concept of a formless universal, and all-abiding God. It is a clear statement of the Sant’s account of borrowings and withdrawals. It demonstrates in particular, the ironing out of the erotic element, “.. the eroticism of the Bhakti tradition of the middle ages has been consciously toned down. A strong moral censorship is seen at work so that erotic feeling is disciplined into conjugal warmth.” (S.S Sekhon 2871)

The influence of the Naths, which was considerable, emerges in much of the basic terminology used by Kabir and later by Nanak, in a rejection of all exterior forms, ceremonies, caste distinctions, sacred languages and scriptures, in a strong emphasis
upon unity as opposed to duality, and in the concept of a mystical union which destroys this duality (The chapter on Kabir, studies Nath terminology in some detail). It is significant that the term which both Kabir and Nanak use most frequently to express the experience of mystical union is *sahaj* — a word which not only transports us into the Nath theory but even beyond it and into the earlier world of *tantric* Buddhism. Nanak's works are seeped with Nath terminology which no longer retains in Nanak its Nath character, but passes instead for figurative language appropriate for mystic expression. Some frequently used allegoric expressions are, the tenth gate, ambrosial nectar, the soundless sound, nectar — water, the lotus and the bumblebee, the five evil passions, also called the five thieves, alms, begging bowl, binding together water, air, celestial strain at the tenth door, the great lamps of the sun and moon, the six ringed abbey of the human body, and sometimes Nanak's direct address to Gorakh and Machhindar.

Unlike Kabir who uses the *Ulatbamsi* technique to express the subvertive chaos of the spiritual vision, Nanak at such moments resorts to highly lofty and sublime forms of expression, often creating touchingly beautiful structures of metaphor and metonymy. On such occasions his style resonates with the finest poetry we can find in the *Upanishads*.

Sufism at first sight, seems to have contributed significantly to the Sant tradition. But the appearance, in McLeod's opinion, is misleading:

> Affinities certainly exist, but they might not necessarily be the result of sufi influence... Islamic insistence upon the unity of the Divine may have consolidated the monotheistic base of sant thought, but their monotheism could also have been an inheritance from the Bhakti Movement. (213)

McLeod has a point but we cannot be so dismissive. The Sufi faith must be accredited for bringing to us the concept of God as a formless, universal soul, subtle as light. The *Koran* says no human form can ever be God. It defines god as pure truth — exactly the term which Nanak uses. In fact the following short verse (crisp and mantra-like) taken from the *Koran*, on pure Truth, compares beautifully with the invocation of Nanak's "*Japji*". It also reflects upon the poet's extensive scholarship. Here the divine is perceived as the true and singular:
Say
It is God, Unique
God the Ultimate
God does not reproduce
and is not reproduced
And there is nothing at all
equivalent to God  
(Tr. Thomas Cleary 162)

Both, Kabir and Nanak often refer to the suprasoul as the light within. The raids and plunder of the Arabs, their destruction of the temples and idols must also have been instrumental in the Sants discarding all external signs and thus reducing unnecessary pain and asking the bewildered people to install both temple and god within. All else was penshable except the soul — the atman The few terms that Nanak uses like Hukam, Khuda, Patshah etc he had absorbed into his own system, and reinterpreted. The Sants*(7), may not have used much of Sufi terminology in their work. Their poetry is largely an Indian representation with Nath terms, frequent references to Vedic systems and concepts and metaphors having Yogic impact, but their evolved concept of God as formless, omnipresent and One, must surely have infiltrated through Sufism. The short verse I have just quoted is an example from the Koran.

The Upanishads, as I understand, do refer to the state of nothingness as a goal, but never to the Godhead as single and formless. The chief doctrines that we encounter there are, firstly the idea of a supreme god Prajapati who is creator, and preserver of the universe, and secondly, the idea of an impersonal creative principle. Prajapati as Lord of creatures, was the main subject of theosophical speculation. Then came Rudra (later called Shiva), the God of the people, and thereafter Vishnu who was constantly identified with the all important sacrifices. Later on as the Bhakti movement evolved further, the Sants completely denied recognition to the Trinity gods, except for their symbolic value in poetry as such. Nanak in his verse repeatedly refers to them as the elements of nature, working under God’s Hukam.
I shall quote a page out of J.S.Grewal's book, *Guru Nanak in History*, to catch up with the reality of day to day existence at the local level among people living around the bend of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

The mutual contact of Hindus and Muslims had been gradually developing at several levels. In politics and administration, a closer contact was imposed by the historical circumstance and it was paralleled by a greater give- and- take in the economic sphere. If some Hindu works are being translated into Persian for the advantage of edification of Persian knowing Muslims, many Hindus were learning and teaching Persian or even using it as the medium of artistic expressions. Regional languages are being adopted by some of the Sufis for a communication of their ideas to both Muslims and Hindus. Certain fairs and festivals were attended by both Hindus and Muslims and, among the common people, it was perhaps not uncommon to worship a legendary saint or a local deity.

Even among the serious professors of religion it was not uncommon to exchange ideas on matters of belief and practice. Mutual appreciation resulted sometimes in piece-meal adoption of ideas or practices from a faith other than one's own. In the fifteenth century Muslim Sufis, it is said, mixed with Hindu Sadhus, Sannyasis and Jogis for inspiration and guidance, without acknowledging the source in public. Similarities between different forms of faith were occasionally recognised and appreciated. Some new forms of belief and practice were adding to the richness and variety of the religious scene. And there was a good deal of rivalry between the various religious groups. In the midst of this rivalry, many of the contestants had come to believe that salvation was the birthright of every human being irrespective of his caste, creed or sex. On the whole it was a rich and lively religious atmosphere. And it was this atmosphere that Guru Nanak breathed. (*GN in History* 138-139-140)

Nanak like his Sant comrades, carried forth the idiom of reformative protest, which had characterised the tradition of the Bhakti movement in particular the tradition of the Sants. In the following passages, it will be my endeavour to examine how far the poet was a part of the Sant tradition, where his contributions lay, and how he steered the movement further.
Since the time of Gautama Buddha, the Indian religious sentiment had come to harbour two attitudes—one that cherishes the Vedas and the *Upanishads* and the other that firmly denied their scriptural authority, favouring instead, the path of enlightenment gained through personal experience of the supreme. The Sants were situated in the second line of tradition. On the whole they sought to deny the accepted notions of the holy—they rejected the Vedas, the *Upanishads*, idol worship, ritual, Brahminism, the castes system and all else that went with it.

(a) The thread is spun from cotton.
the Brahman comes and twists it.

The goat is killed, cooked and eaten
and everyone then says
‘put on the sacred thread.’

when the thread wears off
it is thrown and replaced
by another

Why should the thread break
if it has any strength?  
( *GS* 1555 )

(b) Where have Hindus and Turks come from?
Who started these fine distinctions?
Think, ponder in your heart fool
who will go to heaven or hell?

For love of woman
you circumcise—
I shall never believe O brother.
If Khuda had wished me to be a Turk
He would have cut it off himself...  
( *GS* 1537 )
The following couplets on the theme of 'flesh', are from Nanak's Var in raga Malhar. These compositions shock the reader out of his/her frigid composure (even today), and leave a lasting impact. The following poem parodies notions of non-vegetarianism and piety among other things:

(c) Flesh, flesh the fools quarrel
   They know not of meditation and gnosis

   They know not what is flesh,
   and what the green, or in what
   does Sin consist.

   It was a habit of the gods
to kill rhinoceros and perform
sacred feasts after burning the offerings.

   They who abandon meat and hold
   their nose when sitting near it,
   devour men at night.

   They practice hypocrisy and flaunt it
   Ignorant of his meditation and gnosis.
   Nanak, what can we say to the blind?

   ... He is blind who does blind deeds.
   ... When man and woman meet at night
   with flesh they co-habit.

   From flesh we are conceived, from flesh born.
   We are the vessels of flesh.

   The soul too has found abode in flesh
   .. .... . . . . . . . . . . . .
The Puranas and the Muslim's Koran both sanction flesh
Flesh it has been in the four ages.

O Pandit, you understand not yourself
But you instruct people.
How wise you are indeed

O Brahman
Do you know from where this flesh has sprung?

From water are produced corn,
sugarcane, cotton.
And from water the three worlds
are said to have sprung

Says the water 'I am good in many ways.
Many are my modifications.'

Abandoning all these relishes,
one becomes a solitarian, Nanak deliberates  ( GS 4256-4257 )

The Sants denied all visible, external manifestations, and advocated instead, a devotion that was subtle, natural, free of all earthly ritual and bondage, and based upon love and devotion for a Godhead that was itself eternal, non-incarnated, and Nirguna (without attributes). The Sants define god as the universal goal, as the immanent spirit, that moves the cloud, or cracks the chicken egg and parts a continent into two pieces of land by bringing in the ocean. It was this very thirst, among the Bhakti, Sant, and Sufi poets, for divine experience, best reflected in His creation around us and within in the stirrings of the soul moved by the treasure of sublime experience.

In such a modern and transcendental tradition a Kant, a Coleridge, or a Wordsworth would not have been out of place The medieval poets's love affair with sublimity gave
vent to sublime expression. The Bhakti movement in medieval India brought with it, not only religious reform, but also a linguistic and literary revolution of the highest possible order. It was the most modern of movements of reform until late nineteenth century, when the sentiment of nationality and love for the mother land gnpped the peoples imagination, once again binding them in one common thread.

The mystic poets, excelled themselves by transcending the material and the obvious. This is where their poetic appeal and strength lies. By translating divinity into the subtlest of experiences, the Sants had reached the same plain where great poets, great thinkers, great musicians and great scientists reach in their quest for truth and reality in their subtlest and final forms. I am tempted at this point, to mention Kant's *Critique Of Judgement*, where Immanuel Kant delves into the realms of 'sublime' and 'transcendental' experience. According to Kant, the sublime is purely a state within the mind. He writes, "Sublime is the name given to what is absolutely great. It is a greatness comparable to itself alone. Hence the sublime is to be sought only in our own ideas." (*Cr. of Judgement* 97)

Devotion for the Medieval age mystics of India was essentially a focusing upon the God beyond the God, whose abode was silence (anahad naad – the "soundless sound" – of Om), and whose form was as subtle as light – that luminous aura of nothingness. There are frequent references to god as divine light in the poetry of the Sants. Nanak's concept of the divine is best expressed through his *mool mantra* i.e. the " invocation" to the 'Japji':

\[
\text{[In translation]} \\
\text{The one universal being} \\
\text{the real} \\
\text{the spirit, creator.} \\
\text{The controller and enjoyer,} \\
\text{beyond restraint, beyond rancor} \\
\text{He is the timeless form.} \\
\text{Never born, self creating} \\
\text{He is known by the Guru's grace.}
\]

\[
\text{[In transliteration]} \\
\text{Ik Omkar} \\
\text{Satnam} \\
\text{Karta Purakh} \\
\text{Nirbhau Nirvair} \\
\text{Akal Moorat} \\
\text{Ajooni,} \\
\text{Sai Bhang} \\
\text{Guru Prasad.}
\]
Nanak defines the divine as the one only, who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and immanent. In his address he often uses terms like Hari, Ram, Gopal, Paramesvar, Jagdis, Prabhu, Allah, Khuda, Padshah, Sahib, Rabba, Swami, etc. to refer to God, besides using adjectives like O Formless one, or O Immanent Being, and so on. The name he uses most frequently is, Hari. The role of the guru in the process of salvation has been underscored by both Kabir and Nanak, for whom the guru is synonymous with the immediate representation of the divine. A Guru (which would translate as master, in English) was someone who had arrived at the perfected state and who in turn helped others achieve that state of perfection. Finding such a perfect one was indeed, tough. Both the young Kabir and Nanak, according to one opinion, had searched relentlessly for a spiritual guru with little success. They had finally settled with their inner voice to guide them and be their light / guru.

In the quest for salvation, a heart full of intense devotion was regarded as the most essential ingredient. Here the Sants went a step further than the Vaishnavites. They argued that the devotees love for God was not enough material, the grace of God indicating that salvation be granted, was the other crucial requisite. The divine grace translates itself through the shabad (i.e inner voice/vision). In compositions of both Nanak and Kabir, there is a good deal of emphasis upon the absolute need for the guru and the guru's grace. The guru more often is, the shabad, the inner voice, the illumined conscience (that lies dormant in people at large), of the fearless champion of truth. Therefore the mystics stress upon inner cleaning and purging so that grace can be received when it is given. In his verse Nanak repeatedly emphasises this aspect of Bhakti.

The mortal wanders, strays, and staggers
in eighty four lacs of births.
Not knowing the Guru he is caught
in the noose of Yamadut.

..... ... ....................... ........
If man’s inner strife is ended,
then he sings the Lord’s praise
and through the satguru
merges in the sahaj
... ****** ****** ****** ******
Rare is the one, who washes off
his inner filth with the Name.
Yes some rare one practices,
the truth, by the Guru's grace
Then cease his comings and goings  ('Prabhat', GS 4437-4438)

Thus the shabad as the vehicle of salvation which enables man to wash off ego (haumai is the term Nanak uses), and to acquire detachment from maya. In Nanak's system of theology, the practice of truth (sachh), meditation on the word (shabad), and upon the essence (i.e. Nam), are essentials for reaching the state of the sahaj – the perfect union with the Divine.

To categorise and distinguish between the shabad and nam is not easy, for often they are used interchangeably. Nam (an esoteric term for essence), seems to refer to the object of salvation and shabad is the medium to salvation. Nam therefore is the material (soul) and shabad the means (the vision) which is imparted to a seeker/devotee by the Guru. Another concept which is integral to Nanak's theology is that of hukam (command or will of the divine order). The hukam as conceived by Nanak is an all-embracing principle. The concept of hukam is very essential to his philosophy. It is the subject of the very first stanza of Nanak's "Japji".

By His hukam the universe comes to be –
though it is difficult to say how it is so.
By His hukam the living beings come to be
and by His hukam they receive merit.
By His hukam exist the high and the low,
and by hukam each obtains his share of joy and gnef.
Some receive gifts by His hukam some toil in vain.

Whatever is, is by His will, nothing beyond its sway
Who understands His hukam alone finds freedom from haumai.
Hukam has originally been translated by Sohan Singh, (in *The Seeker's Path* ), as will, and Haumai as ego. I have purposely retained the original terms, in my translation of the paun on hukam, in the "Japji". Again and again in his songs, Nanak asks people to stop fretting and submit to the hukam of the divine order which we ordinary mortals cannot understand. Even in the sack and pillage of Sayyadpur, by Babur and his armies, the poet sees the operation of the divine order or hukam. The following verse reflects the poet's anguish and the acceptance of His hukam.

Having conquered Khurasan, Babur has terrified Hindustan
The Creator takes not the blame on Himself,
and has sent the Mughal as death's myrmidon.
So much beating was inflicted that people shranked
Did thou not feel compassion?
Those O Maker are the equal Master of all.
If a mighty man smites another mighty man,
the mind is not angered.
If a powerful tiger falling on a herd, kills it,
then its Master is to be questioned.
The dogs have spoiled and laid waste
the priceless country
and no one pays heed to the deed...

Towards the end of the poem, Nanak calls Babur, a worm and attributes the whole incident of the plunder, to the workings of the divine will, as part of the divine law of justice, and perhaps a deserving punishment for a people riding on ego.

... O Lord, Thou thyself join and
thyself separate, and this
is thy greatness

If someone gives himself a big name
and revels to please his mind,
in the eyes of Rabb(a), he is but a worm,
for all the corn that he pecks
If the mortal remains dead of ego
in his life, Nanak then alone can he
reap the fruit of worship. (Tr. M Singh GS 1200-1201)

While the bhava holds a significant place in Sant theology, Nanak attaches to it, the emotion of fear which according to him is, a prerequisite to the love of god. The concept of the “fear of God” in Nanak is the other side of the coin of “love of God”. The fear element is equally essential since it remote controls the entire universe, inspires unquestioned obedience to his hukam (command/will), and keeps the world and its creatures from straying. The fear of God extinguishes other minor fears in the devotee and helps him/ her be fearless and undaunted by the travails of life. A few sample verses from the Granth Sahib:

In fear the wind, and breeze ever blow
In fear flow lacs of rivers ... ... ... ...

In fear are the men of miracles,
Buddhas, the demigods and the yogis.

In fear is stretched the sky ......... .
.. The Lord has written the wrt of His fear
on the foreheads of all.

Nanak. the true, formless, alone is fearless (GS 1531-1532)

All the Sant poets, including Nanak and Kabir, were married men who led a family life and worked for their living. Stress was laid on leading a balanced householder’s life, while practising meditation (nam japana), truth (sachh), and an implicit faith in the divine will (hukam), which would finally lead to complete surrender followed by a union with the Godhead. The Sants, as we know, carried on with their occupational jobs all their life. Ravidas remained a cobbler, Sain a barber, Kabir a weaver, Namdev a calico printer, Dadu a cotton carder, and Nanak a farmer (an occupation he took up by choice).
Reading through the verse of Nanak, one is struck by the realisation that he was not only a great mystic, but an equally sound scholar and thinker. His reference to Vedic theology and to yogic practices is quite profuse. His compositions are generally so structured as to contain some *slokas* / *pauris* of pure poetry interspersed with a *sloka* or two, expressing the philosophy of the poet. Then again come a few *slokas* of pure poetry which can at once be minute in detail and magnificent in its aspect; followed by a doze of Nanak's philosophy The strategy of interspersing poetry with a couplet here and there of reformatory / theologic value, is fine when it is spare. But there are times when the message of the sage overrides the interests of the poem, and takes away from its strength. Considering that Nanak was a sensitive poet with a considerable body of excellent poetry to his credit, one wonders if the over-doze of theology in some of his compositions is the result of external editing, induced later on, to serve the interests of the sect. However, poetry for Nanak was a serious job, since it was also the only medium of communication for bringing about social reform, and for establishing for the Sant (and Sikh) tradition, the ideal text for spiritual growth and healthy living. Nanak was the last of the major Sant poets and the first / founder poet of the Sikh faith. The Sant poets had taught people to become warriors of the soul and to pull out the tree of temptation, ego, and sin, like weed. The nine Sikh gurus who were to follow Nanak, would translate the tenets of the Sant tradition, and become, not only warriors of the soul, but warriors of the soil as well.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Nanak's poetry has not received so far the attention it deserves (which could even be included as a part of the findings of this work!) By now however, an imaginative reader would have formed some opinion about the poetic strength and grace of Nanak's verse, which is many times stronger in the original language. Despite the loss of its linguistic flavour, terseness of expression, and the original rhythm, magnified by the absence of sophisticated handling in the hands of a literature person equally familiar with the English language and prosody; Nanak's translated poetry comes forth as a gem that needs polishing. Let us read the following poem in this light. Notice the sublime landscopic style so characteristic of Nanak, mark the spirit of transcendence and how he tropes upon the metaphor of the bumble bee!

Himself the bumble bee, the flower, the creeper.

By Himself (He) unites man
to the company of friends saintly.
O bumble bee
suck such fragrance that the trees
may bloom, and the woods, reverdure
Sahib Himself is Laxmi and
Himself her spouse
Installing the world. He Himself enjoys it
Himself the calf, cow and milk,
Himself the pillar of the body mansion
Himself the deed and the doer... .
And by Himself becoming the devotee
He reflects
upon Himself.

............... ....................... .... ( GS 3924 )

In Kabir one meets a degree of obscurity and at times contradicting statements, both of
which we do not find in Nanak. As McLeod so aptly propounds:

Kabir was above all a mystic and the pattern of his thought is determined
by this quality. The result is both profundity and obscurity... A poem of
pronounced mystical inclinations would doubtless find in Kabir’s works,
something of the depth of meaning which Kabir himself had experienced,
but most men would not. Many could however appreciate the pattern
which Guru Nanak sought to expound,... Kabir’s works have
commanded an immense popularity, but the popularity has been
accorded to thoughts in isolation, not to an integrated pattern of belief. It
has been the pithy saying, the striking aphorism, which has brought Kabir
his popularity.... The Kabir panthis possess a system of belief, but it is
one which remotely resembles the original teaching of the sect’s
eponymous founder. ...Guru Nanak on the other hand produced a
coherent pattern and one which, with some addition by later gurus is
followed to this day by orthodox Sikhism. In his own way, Guru Nanak
was also a mystic and, as with Kabir, the climax of his thought is to be
found in an ineffable union with God, the formless one. The climax itself
was beyond analysis or expression, but not the path to it, and in this
respect Guru Nanak is much dearer than Kabir. ( McLeod  149-150 )
Nanak expounds his thoughts in a more readily understandable fashion. The clarity and coherence of his thought also contribute to the effectiveness of his communication. In his works Nanak comes through as a poet who is highly concerned for the moral and spiritual welfare of humanity, towards which end his poetry (mostly sung in a particular raga), becomes a medium of qualitative and thought provoking communication. Clarity is one of Nanak's strong points, which somehow in Nanak never detracts from the aura and mystery of the poem, which is generally sculpted through references to sublime thought and ethereal metaphors. Thus what Kabir creates through his *ulatbamsi* style and dense figurative style, Nanak makes up for it by appealing to our heightened sense of the harmonious, the ungraspable and the sublime which is vast, infinite and varied. His love of nature, his sensibility and the pristine images born out of it remind one of Wordsworth. (The two seem to share a similar poetic sensibility and spiritual perception.) We cannot go into the details of the comparison, but juxtaposed here are two poems that will give the reader a better judgement: (a) Nanak's poem sees the entire nature as singing a eulogy to the almighty:

A plate-like sky,
the sun and moon
its prayer lamps,
the milkyway of pearls!
Incense is the sandal-tree
its fragrance the breeze fans constantly.
And the lush green wealth of forests makes flower offerings.

How beautiful is your prayer service!
Celestial symphonies play within
O eraser of this life-death ring.

Thousand-eyed and yet sans eyes
Thousand-eyed and yet formless
Without nostrils and yet a plenty, O omnipresent one...

Your soul the soul of all life-form,
Your flame burns bright in every spirit.
The Lord's guidance is the match stick,
Thus lit alone, the arti completes. (Tr Myself GS 2174)

(b) A stanza from Wordsworth's pastoral poem “Michael” which is the story of a simple soul's leading on the edge of the woods, a life of divine simplicity.

Upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale
There dwelt a shepherd, Michael was his name,
An old man, stout of heart and strong of limb.
Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
Intense and frugal, apt for all affairs,
And in his shepherds calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone, and, oftentimes,
When others heeded not, He heard the South
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills. (The Golden Treasury Of Longer Poems 199)

Both Nanak and Wordsworth share the same sage like vision of the poet soul towards nature which for them is a source of divine mystery, music and unparalleled beauty. Thus the religion of the Sant poets was not centred around temple and deity, but is the earliest modern thought and expression we can find in Indian history. It would be quite correct to say that both Nanak and Kabir's was a religion of experience, of the 'real' rather than the notional. They both offer a synthesis, and in each case the nature of the synthesis reflects the personality of the author. While Nanak reminds one of Wordsworth, Kabir with his cocky, reckless and highly mystical style brings to one's mind the same depth and mystery which one associates with the style of Coleridge. A comparative study would be very interesting. But for that, one would need to write another thesis.
It was an ongoing practice with the *Saguna* and *Nirguna* Bhakti poets, to discard Sanskrit and compose in the vernacular language. In the North Indian belt it was Ramananda who initiated this practice. The language in which Nanak composed his verse was called *Sadbhāsha*. There were two varieties of Hindi being spoken in the medieval age: (a) Western Hindi whose parent language was *Prakrit Sauraseni* and (b) Eastern Hindi, which had developed from the *Prakrit Ardhamagadhi*. The principal dialects of western Hindi were *Bangroo* (spoken in the western ganges and south-east Punjab), *Braj bhasa* (of the Mathura region), *Bundeli* (of Bundel Khand and Narmada valley), and *Khari Boli*, the language spoken around Meerut and Delhi. The language in which Nanak composed verse was mainly *Khari Boli* (also referred to as colloquial Punjabi), with elements drawn in from Old Rajasthani, Sanskrit and Persian.

Another aspect of Nanak's poetry-writing was its relation with music. Not only did its prosody have a rhythm and an incantatory lilt to it, the poems were also written to be sung at different places on various occasions during Nanak's travels with his disciples Bala and Mardana. Nanak was fond of music, and had a good working knowledge of Indian classical ragas (musical measures) and was a good composer. Nanak's disciple Mardana too was a good singer, who accompanied him constantly on these tours with his rebeck. Mardana was a practising Muslim who sang *kirtan*. The other companion, Bala was a Hindu Jat and had accompanied Nanak on a few of his tours. Music, for Nanak (as for Kabir and others), was the purest mode of devotion. Once he settled in Kartarpur to a farmer's life, *satsang* became a regular activity. Later on, the works of Nanak and the other Sant *bani* compiled in the *Granth Sahib*, (which includes the six Sikh poets and thirty one non-Sikh mystic poets), came to be regarded as the word of the Guru which was sung by Ragis (singers who only sing from the guru *bani*), based on the ragas in which it had been composed. It is amazing but the Sikh tradition gave rise to four kinds of religious singing. First being the traditional *kirtan* sung by the Ragis, which is an expression of Bhakti, a quest for the *nirajan*, the eternal being. This music is meditative, invocative and uplifting. The prime focus here is the word (i.e. poetry), not music. The second variety is that sung by the descendants of Mardana who have preserved the tradition set by Mardana, through the centuries. They are known as Rhababis — practising Muslims who sing kirtan. Then there were the Dhadis — bards from the time of the sixth Guru Hargobind Singh, in the early seventeenth century. They would sing standing upright. The stance had changed because the Gurus wrote odes in...
a fast moving meter to popularise an aggressive form. This form of singing today has disappeared. The fourth type is that of the two and a half-hour long morning prayer, “Asa-di-Var” which was borrowed from the folklore of Rajasthan. (Gathered from an interview - A Faith That Sings - with Bhai Avtar Singh Ragi in the Times Of India)

A much less talked about facet of Nanak’s poetry is its expression of boundless joy and beauty in its union with the divine and the divine’s creation, which mirrors the glory of the formless, all pervading spirit. He speaks of the flora and fauna of the Central Punjab and the seasons and trades of the place of his birth:

Just as the buckets hung on the chain
of the Persian wheel rotate,
emptying one and filling another.

So is this play of my Husband.
He acts as is his wondrous glory.. ( 'Prabhati', GS 4386 )

The animal imagery in Nanak often has an element of the other world. The poet relates himself with the Chakwi who is separated from the Chakwa at night, or with the Chatrik who hangs upside-down from the tree-branch waiting for the rain drops to fall into his open mouth*(9). He employs these “unnatural” metaphors only when he has to give the philosophical exposition of a point of traditional philosophy, but never when he employs nature as the background of his theme or emotions. The following poem is a sample of the unusual metaphor. It begins with an address to a swan where Nanak asks the swan (as one wayfarer might ask another) if she has ever seen the Sahib. In the next stanza he himself becomes a swan leaving behind the body which is a mere compound of air, water, earth and fire. But even the state of spiritual awakening is got only if one has a good destiny. The poem, in raga Malhar

Thou wearest white clothes and
speakest sweet words.
Sharp is thine nose and black thine eyes.
Hast thou ever seen thy Lord O sister?

By thy night I fly, O my Sahib,
and flying up ascend the sky.
I see my Sahib in water, dry land,
mountains, riverbanks, places,
and interspaces, O brother.

He who has fashioned the body
has also provided features and put within
an intense thirst, and desire to fly.

Neither this body shall go nor shall go
its wings in the yonder.
for it is the mere aggregate of air, water, and fire.
Nanak if man has good destiny
he meditates on Him, by adopting
the Guru as his Pir.

This wise the soul, abiding in this body,
merges in the Sahib (GS 4147).

While most of the quoted poems, translated by Manmohan Singh, have passed
through some edition at my hands*(10), the above quoted poem has been inserted
exactly as I found it in the Granth Sahib version. I have only replaced the late
Manmohan Singh’s use of expressions like ‘True Lord’ and ‘God’ with the originally
used terms like Pir and Sahib. Another poem with some editing in raga Malhar. Here
again, Nanak is a solitary swan, whose haunting stoicism conveys a pristine depth, and
an eerie sense of stillness which brings one close to an experience of divinity. An
excerpt:

The pied cuckoo and the fish find peace
through water,
and to the deer the bell’s note is pleasing
the sparrow hawk chirps through the night.
Flying amidst trees and plants I remain hungry, 
but by lovingly in-drinking the Name
I am sated.

My eyes gaze is fixed on Thee
my tongue comes out thy Name
and I thirst for thy vision,
O Lord of the Will

( GS 4203 )

Nanak’s concept of poetry does not rest so much on technical skill (the use of figures of speech like interrogation, alliteration, exclamation and wordplay is minimal), as it does on the message and its poetic appeal. The sweep of his subject matter is so great as to be almost cosmic. As Madanjit Kaur and Piar Singh observe in Guru Nanak’s Life And Thought:

From a flower in the field or the cooing of a bird in the bush, he goes to the sun and the moon, the seas and the mountains and the starlit firmament above, and the totality of forces that sustain them. From the crows black tresses of a newly married maiden which are oiled with rare scents before she is taken into captivity by the invading hordes of Babur, he changes to fundamental causes which lie at the rise and decline of nations. There is not much on earth and under the sun which escapes the touch of his poetic impulse, and the language itself becomes a pliant servant in his hands to suit the subject matter. Nothing comparable is to be found in the whole range of the Indian literature, whether ancient, medieval, or modern, except certain portions of the Rig Veda. ( GS 181-182 )

Yes, the poet’s style does bear an affinity with the style of some portions of the Rig Veda and the Upanishads. However, I cannot join M. Kaur and P. Singh in their claim that “nothing comparable to Nanak’s poetry is to be found ... in all of Indian Literature...”, for I have not read all that comes under ancient, medieval and modern Indian Literature. Scholarship on Nanak, as I mentioned earlier, in the past has often been guided by the parochial reverence of the Sikh community. Reading through Nanak’s poetry, one is
amazed to see the numerous references he makes to the celestially controlled systems of the Universe listed in the Rig Veda, the Upanishads, (especially, the Mandukya, the Chandogya, the Prasna and the Katha Upanishads), and in the Bhagvad Gita. His frequent references include the sixty-eight pilgrimage stations, the eighteen supernatural powers, the eighteen castes, the seven underworlds, the six religious rites, the nine regions of earth, the five nectars and so on — the list is exhaustive.

His poetic style, and many of the metaphors he uses also bear a similarity with the verses in the Upanishads. For instance the following shloka (couplet) from the Katha Upanishad could almost pass for a hymn by Nanak.

Beyond the senses are the objects (of the senses) and beyond the objects is the mind; beyond the mind is the understanding and beyond the understanding is the great self. Beyond the great self is the unmanifest, beyond which is the spirit. Beyond the spirit there is nothing. That is the end (of the journey) That is the final goal (Tr. Radhakrishnan The Principal Upanishads 625)

Nanak’s approach to the concept of Creation also finds the influence of the Upanishads. The following shlokas are from the Chandogya Upanishad:

The Sun is Brahman — this is the teaching
An explanation thereof (is this). In the beginning this (world) was non-existent. It became existent.
It grew. It turned into an egg. It lay for the period of a year. It burst open, then came out of the egg shell. two parts, one of silver and the other of gold.

That which was of silver is this earth, that which was of gold is the sky
What was the outer membrane is the mountains, that which was the inner membrane
is the mist with the clouds
What were the veins are rivers
What was the fluid within is the ocean
And what was born from it is the yonder sun \textcopyright \textit{The Principal Upanishads 399}

The two parts of the egg, of silver and gold translate into figurative material that Nanak uses in a poem in Raga Basant. Even other references like, the water of the Ganges, the fine rice and milk, the fire and firewood etc. to which the \textit{Upanishads} make ritualistic reference when prescribing something, alludes to the \textit{Upanishads}. The poem:

Cooking place is of gold, and of gold are the vessels
The silver lines of the square are extended afar

The water is of the Ganges and
the fire from the firewood of
\textit{Carissa carandas} tree

The food is of the fine rice
boiled in milk.

O my soul, these are not at all of any account,
until thou art saturated with the true Name. \textcopyright \textit{GS 3849}

Nanak's verse shares with the \textit{Upanishads}, the same prosodic rhythm, the same serenity, and equipment to explain all, with the primitive sense of beauty. In the poem above, he refutes the notion of sacredness, but with such a feel for purity, that when he negates the relevance of all ritual in the last couplet, one is taken by surprise.

The founding sound of the \textit{anahad nada} (the "soundless music" to which the mystics refer), is often ascribed as \textit{Om}. The \textit{Om}, perceived as complete in itself, as the all containing, \textit{Om} as brahmin. A verse from the \textit{Mandukya Upanishad} on the sound \textit{Om} (spelt here as "Aum"):

\textit{Aum}, this syllable is all This An explanation ....
All that is the past, the present, and the future, all this is only the syllable Aum. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the syllable Aum. (The Principal Upanishads 695)

Three Upanishads – the Mandukya, the Katha, and the Prashna – speak about the concept of Om (Aum), which Nanak has incorporated in the invocation of the “Japji”.
The great tree with leaves representing the songs of the Vedas, described in chapter fifteen of Bhagvad Gita is also mentioned in the Granth Sahib. The philosophy of the Vedas and the Upanishads was later elaborated into six systems (the samkhya, yoga, nyaya, vaisesika, mimansa and vedanta), to which Nanak often refers in his compositions. One such reference reads like this “Six the sacred texts, six the gurus who wrote them; six the messages they left.” Nanak obviously had a great deal of familiarity with the Vedas and the Upanishads as is apparent from the detailed allusions he makes to them. Even his concept of what poetry should be like is based upon the lofty poetic standards of the Upanishad, with which he shares a similar poetic sensibility and an ecstatic stance before the treasures of nature/creation. But this is where the similarity ends.

In spirit however Nanak was both a Sufi and a Sant. A hardcore iconoclast like his forerunner Kabir, a humanist, a spiritualist, and a social reformer. He was probably the first poet to stand openly by the lot of women and to promote the value of their status as mothers and a men’s partners in life. Contradicting the Upanishad’s overemphasis upon the role of the male semen in the regeneration of life, Nanak wrote:
Within a woman, the man is conceived, and from a woman he is born.
With a woman he is betrothed and married,
It is a woman a man befriends and the system of propagation sustains.
When one’s wife dies, another is sought.
It is through a woman that man restrains his passions
Why call her bad from whom are delivered, kings?
From a woman a woman is born
Without a woman there can be none.
Nanak, only the one True Lord is without a woman ('Asa-di-Var' GS 1563)

It must be noted that nowhere in Nanak’s entire work do we find derogatory reference to a woman, not even as Maya the temptress is she denoted. (In Kabir’s poetry the temptress Maya -- not woman directly -- comes under heavy shelling.) Concerned about the upliftment of women, who are the foundation of a society, Nanak often refers to the woman kind as mothers and life partners; often he equates spiritual happiness with connubial bliss. As Anil Chandra Bannerjee puts it, “the idealisation of connubial bliss was intended to soften the rigours of daily life and to show that heaven and earth could meet even in humble homes” (GN and His Times 189). Adding further to Bannerjee’s statement, one can say that by idealizing the conjugal relationship, Nanak’s verse also irons out the erotic element so characteristic of Vaishnava Bhakti poetry, and introduces instead, a strong moral code.

One Sufi poet who influenced Nanak considerably, is a must-mention before I can close the chapter. And that is Baba Fand, whose hymns are also included in the Granth Sahib. Baba Farid (1173 to 1265 A.D.) was a liberated spiritualist, and a God-seeker in the true sense of the Chisti Sufi order. He had both Muslim and Hindu following which often annoyed the ruling Sultans of his times. He wrote poetry of a high order and was among the first poets to compose in Punjabi. His compositions were discovered by Nanak (who seems to have absorbed comparatively more of the Sufi influence as I have pointed out during the chapter). Farid’s verse finds substantial place in the Granth Sahib, along with his other mystic comrades all converging from various faiths and walks of life, in a congenial and cosmopolitan atmosphere. Among other forerunners of Nanak in Punjabi poetry are the yogis of North India, in particular, Charpat (890 – 990 A.D.), and Gorakh Nath (940 – 1031 A.D.). However their work, available to us today, is extremely scattered and scanty. We can therefore safely say, the Nanak was the first major poet of Punjabi literature, who combined in himself the stature and genius of a great man of letters.

Nanak was the first major poet of Punjabi literature. The poet also left behind him a well-structured system of theology; and most important of all, Nanak steered the Sant tradition further by translating the modern doctrines of the Sants into practical life. The Bhakti and the Sant traditions had already induced the practice of satsang (community
singing of elevating mystic hymns), among the Indian public. Nanak added to this the practice of langar where all used to sit together and eat food cooked in a common kitchen. A practical means of erasing caste distinctions – this was first begun by Ramananda, but it was not followed too seriously. (Later, in the reformist revival of the nineteenth century Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi would undertake the task of removing caste distinctions with a fierceness). Another unique concept he introduced was that of daswandi (das meaning the number ten, and daswandh meaning the tenth portion). According to the daswandh principle, every ideal/perfect human being was obliged to regularly use one tenth of his earnings for the benefit of his society. The idea was to give formal credence to the habit of sharing and to inculcate among people a sense of social responsibility – a sentiment so lacking in our society today.

The most significant contribution that Nanak made to society was, initiating the culture of passing-on the spiritual leadership of a religion which was at that point in time, a non-religion (Nanak disowned all social garbs. He is well known for saying, ‘There is no Hindu. No Muslim.’) The privilege of the guru-gaddi (as we know from the “corpse incident”), was very hard earned. It was installed upon one who had gone far on the path of sahaj marga, and would be able to inspire and guide the herd of humanity. It should be perceived as a very practical and responsible decision on Nanak’s part. For he ensured that the disciples were in good care after his demise and that the vision of the Sants lasted stronger down the centuries.

Indeed, great was the impact made by the Bhakti Movement upon the country’s collective psyche. Between the two of our poets, Time accorded more popularity to Kabir, and to Nanak it gave an organised community of strong following. The Sant philosophy and the implementation of its tenets by Nanak (and by the nine gurus who were the result of the Sant foundations), upon the future generation brought forth rich dividends in history. The tradition of successive spiritual preceptors (selected after rigorous screening), maintained a tight leash of control; supervising and grooming like a gardener, the grand plan of an effort, which deemed to make lions out of ordinary human material.
Notes

Both the late A.K Ramanujan, and Dilip Chitre are excellent poets writing in English, and have translated poetry from their mother tongue into English. Ramanujan has translated profusely from the Tamil and Kannada languages into English I have used three of his books of translated poetry in my thesis. Their titles are: Speaking Of Shiva (shaivist poetry of the eleventh century Karnataka), Hymns For The Drowning (being Vaishnava poetry of Tamil Nadu around the eighth century), and the Poems Of Love And War (featuring fourteenth - fifteenth century verse which makes a departure from the earlier bhakti mode of writing into the sensuous songs sung by the temple devadasis). Dilip Chitre’s much acclaimed work of translation is his collection of Tukaram’s poetry called Says Tuka. Tukaram was the most modern poetic genius of the seventeenth century Maharashtra.

(ii) Ragas included in the Granth Sahib: Raga Tilang, Jaitsree, Dev-Gandhari, Gujn, Ramkali, Maru, Nat-Narayan, Gauri, Malhar, Kedar, Bhairo (what we call Bhairav now a days), Raga Basant, Saranga, Kannada, (in Punjabi it is spelt Kanra), Kalyan, Bibhas, Jaijawanti, Siri (i.e. Shri raga), Raga Majh, Bilaval, Dhanasri, Gauri Purbi, Suhi, Wadhansa, Sorath, and some more combination ragas with Gaun raga – raga Gauri-Purbi-Dipki, Gaun-Bairagan, Gauri-Guareri, Gauri-Majh, and raga Gauri-Mala.

(iii) The Gayatri (or Savitri,) mantra is a sacred verse of the Rig Veda. In translation it reads like this, “We meditate on the adorable glory of the sun; may he inspire our intelligence.” There is a metre called Gayatri which has three feet of eight syllables each. The Gayatri mantra is in this metre. See page 299, The Principal Upanishads, translated by S. Radhakrishnan.

(iv) Dadu was the most celebrated disciple of Kabir. Born in Ahmedabad (1544 to 1603 A.D.), he died in village Narana in Rajasthan. He was regarded as a great poet. His language is a mix of Braj bhasa and Khari boli. He founded the
The heroic struggle for Indian Independence, the prophet-rebel-poets, and the reform movements that the soil threw up in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, already had an example before them in history. Another model they had before them was in the Maratha king Shivaji. Shivaji from the very beginning, nourished strong spiritual leanings, and shared a deep relationship with the saint-poets Ramdas and Tukaram. He was known to go to the jungle and sit for days in meditation in the silence. The similarities between Shivaji and the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh are very striking.

It must be noted that in both cases, of the Sikhs and the Marathas, the battle for the liberation of the soil and the liberation of the soul, went hand in hand. Both people were guided by their strong faith in the divine, communicated through the power of poetry and music whose presence ensured strong character-building, the heart of a lion, and a will to live morally and in harmony. This same spirit was to become the torch bearer in the nineteenth century. Whether it did or not, and why, we shall examine in the concluding chapter.

A Summary: This chapter analyses Nanak as a Nirguna poet closer in style to the incantatory and positive verse of the Upanishads, than to the Nath and Vaishnava tradition of verse writing. As a social activist and as a reformist however, his efforts to explode the limitation of religious framework and chart a new course for an active and unfettered creed of faith ironically led, a century later, to the formation of yet another religion. The chapter also examines the futuristic implications (both national and parochial), of Nanak’s and Kabir’s Sant ideology, since in them we have the finest confluence of Sufi and Bhakti mysticism. Nanak’s deployment of Arabic and Persian terminology, his pantheistic Nature poetry and his honest response to the larger scheme of his socio-political reality have also been explored.

In a small way, the chapter also makes references to some obvious parallels the two Sants share with romantic poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. In Kabir’s and Nanak’s work one also finds a manifestation of Kant’s theory of the sublime art and sentiment which he has traced to the realm of spirituality. The Bhakti poets as we have examined so far, were not only great spiritualists and mystics, but they were also people who were intensely involved with the social, moral and religious fabric of their environment. The mystics of India reaffirm the Kantian thesis that great creative impulse always has its roots in spirituality and in a sense of tradition/history.(11)
Parabrahma Sampradaya with a view to uniting different faiths in one bond of love and comradeship. The anthology of religious literatures of different sects was compiled under his instructions in the late sixteenth century. The *Granth Sahib* was compiled much later in 1604 A.D., a year after Dadu's death.

(v) "Nanak's diction is a blend of words from various languages — Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Punjabi, Sindhi, Khanboli, with, of course, a preponderance of Braj" (2870). From the aspect of language, his works can be divided into three parts: (a) those more or less in the Apbhramsha style, (b) those in the Hindvi style and (c) those predominantly in pure Punjabi. "On the whole these compositions offer an instructive study in the development of the language in that period. It may be observed that in none of the three styles is there any consistent purity of linguistic form" (2871). Taken from the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi.

(vi) In 1603-1604 A.D. Guru Arjan had a tank dug in Amritsar, naming it Ramsar (the pool of Ram), which surrounds today, the Golden Temple — i.e. the Hari-Mandir Sahib. While the pool was being dug, the Guru had sat besides it and compiled the *Granth Sahib*.

(vii) "Popular scholarship regards Namdev, Ravidas, Kabir and Nanak as the main pillars of the Sant tradition. McLeod in his book ascribes to Namdev the status of the first great Sant and the second place he keeps for Ravidas. For although Ravidas follows Kabir, his work corresponds more closely to that of Namdev. Both Namdev and Ravidas belong to the earlier stage of the Sant movement, to the stage in which the links with Vaishnava Bhakti are more prominent and the evidence of influence from other sources much slighter. The evident external paraphernalia of worship has been discarded but the nature of devotion offered by these earlier Sants resembles the adoration of the bhagats, rather than the deeply mystical experience of Kabir and Nanak." (McLeod 154)

(viii) The modern or royal Hindi was artificially extracted from Khari Boli by Lalluji Lal, about a century ago in the Fort William College at Calcutta. (*Guru Nanak's Life And Thought* 178)
(ix) the Chakor is an Indian bird famous for its legendary love for the moon and the Chatrik is well known for hanging upside down in expectation of the first drops of rain.

(x) I do not wish to undermine in anyway the merit and the massive scale of the work that the late Manmohan Singh has accomplished. He has translated the entire Granth Sahib into modern Punjabi and English, which has been of immense assistance to my thesis work.

(xi) I refer to Kant here because I studied his Critique of Judgement and explored his concept of the 'sublime' for my M.Phil thesis titled, The Concept of the Sublime, in Longinus Burke and Kant. Maharaja Sayajirao University. Baroda, 1984.

Works Cited


Kaur, Madanjit & Piar Singh (Eds.). *Guru Nanak's Life And Thought.* Amritsar: Guru
Nanak Dev University, 1991.


