

What is Sikhism?
Series 6

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Series 6

Scriptures of Sikhism

Sikh Awareness Society of USA
Tampa--Florida

Guru Granth Sahib

(The Holy Sikh Scripture)

Guru Granth Sahib is the Holy Scripture of the Sikh faith / Sikhism / Sikhi. Guru Arjan Dev the 5th Sikh Guru, compiled it as the revealed and final doctrinal authority of Sikhism in the beginning of the seventeenth century. He started the compilation in 1601 and completed it in 1604 A.D. He called it '*Pothi Sahib*' / '*Granth*'. It was, recensioned by Guru Gobind Singh in 1706 AD, when he entered the Gurbani of the 9th Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, at Talwandi Sabo, now called Damdama Sahib. It was installed as Guru Eternal on October 5, 1708 by Guru Gobind Singh and since then it is called 'Guru Granth Sahib'.

The Sikhs believe Guru Granth Sahib as the 'living' embodiment of ten Gurus and it is the only focus of Sikh faith. Guru Granth Sahib is treated with the same respect as the human Gurus received. In addition to the hymns of the Sikh Gurus it contains the writings and hymns of saints and preachers with different religious backgrounds, whose philosophy conformed to the spirit of Sikhism. Many verses composed by Gurus are either a contradiction or clarification of a similar verse of a Bhagat or an answer to the questions raised by Bhagats in their compositions. From Sheikh Farid (born 1173) to Guru Teg Bahadur (died 1675), the galaxy of writers covers full five centuries of India's spiritual thought.

Guru Granth Sahib is a literary classic and a spiritual treasure. It throws light on the path leading to the highest goal of spirituality. It contains the eternal truth, proclaims God, and shows the way of His realization. It lays down moral and ethical rules for the development of the soul and religious commandments for the progress of morality and attainment of salvation. In it philosophy is propounded through the songs of love and devotion. The message of love, truth, contentment, humility, fatherhood of God, brotherhood of man, restraint of passions, mercy on living beings, purity of mind and body, search for the self and Higher Soul, equality of man and equality of man and woman, service to others, liberalism in the matter of food and clothing, and references to the political, economic and social life of the people of Hindustan during the fifteenth century and sixteenth century constitute the main contents of Guru Granth Sahib. It is a guide to Sikh way of life. Its goal is of the ideal man, who attains perfection by linking himself with God. References to *Vedas* (Hindu) and *Katebas* (Semitic) scriptures are also found in it. Guru Granth Sahib rejects all types of *Karam Kanda* (ritualism: Fasting, pilgrimage, penance and ritual sacrifice) and all formalism for spiritual attainment. It lays stress on selfless action performed in the best interest of the society. It condemns asceticism, which has the effect of negativism. It lays stress on the dynamic attitude towards life. It supports normal family life (*Grahisti jivan*) and social commitment. It recommends leading of a pure life whilst fighting temptations and imperfection of this world. It is the only scripture where each and every conceivable aspect of human life has been addressed, discussed and analyzed. Mythological references are only illustrative and do not indicate any Guru's belief in mythological personages or their actions. In Guru Granth Sahib no status or sanctity has been given to any gods (*Devatas*), goddesses (*Devis*) or *Avtaars*.

In its present lithographed diction, Guru Granth Sahib contains about 5894 Hymns and Verses mainly in Punjabi, Hindi, Braj, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Sindhi, Lehndi, Dhaki, Bengali

What is Sikhism?

Series 6

and Marathi, in Gurmukhi script on 1430 pages, composed and arranged in well-known 31 Ragas i.e; tunes / musical settings (*Gurmat Sangeet*), except for the initial seven and last seventy seven pages. It is a treasure of Indian languages and musical Ragas. Ragmala at the end mentions the families of eighty four Ragas and Raginies.

Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture in the world, which mentions with respect Ram, Gobind, Hari, Allah, Rahim, Karim etc, (names for God) used by different religions and which includes writings of holy people born in other religions (Hinduism, Islam) in addition to the Sikh Gurus. It is the only source of Sikh philosophy that has been written and authenticated by the Gurus themselves and whose authenticity has never been questioned. It is the only scripture, which traveled through the generations without the change of a single letter. It is final and unalterable scripture.

The author of Guru Granth Sahib is God Himself. He revealed the religious truth to the Sikh Gurus and ordained them to spread it to mankind all over the globe. Guru Nanak did not claim divinity, only that he was a messenger of God, ਜੈਸੇ ਮੈ ਆਵੇ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ ਗਿਆਨ ਦੇ ਲਾਲੇ-“*Jaisay mein aavay khasam kee bani, Taisra kari gian vay Lalo*” ie “As the word of the ‘Master’ comes to me so I make known to thee” (GGS, Tilang M1, p.72). Guru Nanak bestowed the Guruship to the Shabad (Divine Word) in his Bani, ਸ਼ਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਪੁੰਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ-“*Shabad Guru Surat Dun Chela*” ie, “Shabad is Guru, conscience and intention towards it make one its disciple” (Ibid, M1, p.943). Thereafter, all the Gurus of the House of Nanak taught the same principle, i.e *Shabad (Bani i.e, The Divine Word)* is the Guru. Guru Amar Dass said, “ਵਾਹੁ ਵਾਹੁ ਬਾਣੀ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ ਹੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਜੇਵਡੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ॥-Waho waho bani nirankaar hai tis jevad avar na koay i.e; Praise be to the Bani of the Formless, Whom none can equal” (Ibid, p .515). Guru Ram Dass says, ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰੇ। ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਕਹੇ ਸੇਵਕ ਜਨੁ ਮਾਨੇ ਪਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ-“*Bani Guru, Guru Hai Bani Vich Bani Amrit Spray, Gurbani Kahay Sewak Jan Maanay Partakh Guru Nistaray*” ie, “Bani is the Guru and Guru is the Bani and it contains the elixer of life. If the devotee obeys what Bani teaches us, the Guru confers His grace on him” (Ibid, M4, p.982). Guru Arjan says, “ਪੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਆਈ॥ਤਿਨਿ ਸਗਲੀ ਚਿੰਤ ਮਿਟਾਈ॥-*Dhur kee bani aae tin saglee chint mitaaee* i.e; Bani has come from God, it effaces all worries and anxieties” (Ibid, M5, p.628). He further adds, “ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨ-“*Pothi Parmesher Ka Than*” ie, The Book is the Abode of God” (Ibid, M5, p.1226).

It is believed that he, who attentively reads, sings, listens and acts upon the hymns of Guru Granth Sahib, attains bliss and is brought into direct personal contact with the Guru-‘God’, “ਭਗਤਿ ਭੰਡਾਰ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਲਾਲ॥ ਗਾਵਤ ਸੁਨਤ ਕਮਾਵਤ ਨਿਹਾਲ (Ibid, p376). Therefore, Guru Granth Sahib is treated to be the presence of the Guru himself in the Sangat. It is the presiding deity in every Gurdwara or Sikh place of worship and every visitor there bows before it in reverence before assuming his / her seat. When moved, it is accompanied by five initiated Sikhs.

NB:

- Sikhs have the original scripture and it is not subject to textual analysis by any one. It is the eternal Guru of the Khalsa (Sikhs).
(SGPC Amritsar, Jan 5, 1996)

What is Sikhism?

Series 6

- In Sikh scriptures, the word 'Guru' has been used to denote at least three different senses. First, it has been used for God Himself, secondly, the word has been referred to as teacher-Guru and finally it is used for the Holy Sikh scripture, "Guru Granth Sahib".
- Translation of Guru Granth Sahib cannot be installed in a Gurdwara.
- Guru Granth Sahib is not like the idol in a Hindu temple nor the statue of the virgin in a Catholic Cathedral. It is the means and not the object of worship.
- The installment of Guru Granth Sahib is mandatory at a Sikh service.

History of Guru Granth Sahib

The Bani was recorded in books (*Pothis*) from the time of Guru Nanak and passed on from one Guru to another and finally when Guru Arjan received it from Guru Ram Dass as an ancestral treasure, he said, ਪਿਉ ਦਾਦੇ ਦਾ ਖੋਲਿ ਡਿਠਾ ਖਜਾਨਾ ਤਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਮਨ ਭਇਆ ਨਿਧਾਨਾ-“*Pio Daday da Khol Ditha Khazana, Taan Meray Man Bhaia Nidhana* (GGS, M5, p186) i.e, As the inherited ancestral treasure (Gurbani of ancestors- Gurus) was opened and viewed, then my mind was illuminated with the treasure (Gurbani)”. In this ancestral treasure he added his own Bani, the Bani of the Bhagats and Bhattas (Minstrels). The first edition of the 'Granth' as we know it today, was compiled by Guru Arjan and he called it 'Pothi Sahib/Granth' (now Guru Granth Sahib). He started the preparation of the Granth in 1601 AD. The scribe was Bhai Gurdas, an uncle (*Mama-ਮਾਮਾ*) of Guru Arjan Dev. The first (original) volume sealed by Guru Arjan was installed in Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Harmandar--Golden Temple) on August 16, 1604 AD, with Baba Buddha as first Granthi. Hence-forth, Guru Arjan and his successors always took a lower seat for themselves than the Granth, whenever the two happened to be together.

Sikhism because of its principles and vigorous preaching by the Gurus was acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims. The mass acceptance of the Sikh faith by the common people made Sikhs a potential force. The erosion of the Muslim and Hindu faiths surprised the leaders of both ---Qazis and Brahmins. Both of them began to consider Sikhism a challenge to their respective faiths, the Muslims in addition felt challenge to their political power. The Muslim government therefore tried to suppress Sikhs and spread of their faith, the upper caste Hindus actively collaborated with them in this resolve. The tensions that followed between the Sikhs and the provincial administration at Lahore resulted in the execution of Guru Arjan. Guru Arjan's only son Hargobind succeeded him as the 6th Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Hargobind got many copies of Aad Granth prepared for the propagation of Bani. Maximum number of copies was prepared during the period of Guru Har Rai.

The combination of provincial Mughal officials, *Minas* (The rival claimants to Guruship i.e, Pirthi Chand, brother of Guru Arjan and his progeny) and upper caste Hindus forced Guru Hargobind to leave Amritsar. He moved the headquarters of Sikhism from Amritsar to Kiratpur, in the Shivalik foot hills, in May, 1635 AD. The *Minas* gained control of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, which remained in their occupation for over six decades till 1699 A.D. During this period the *Minas* in collaboration with the upper caste Hindus created havoc with Sikh theology, philosophy and history. The minas had employed two Brahmins named Hari Das

What is Sikhism?

Series 6

and Keso Dass for corrupting and denaturalizing Sikh Scriptures. They introduced mythological stories into them. Meharban son of Pirthi Chand himself wrote *Janam Sakhi* (biography) of Guru Nanak reducing him to the status of an *Avtaar* (incarnation) within the pantheism of Hinduism. The *Minas* composed their own Granth, in which they included the compositions of the first four Gurus besides their own but excluded the compositions of Bhagats, as they were from low castes. The *Minas* installed their own Granth at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Har Mandar--Golden Temple) in place of Guru Arjan's *Granth*, which was taken away by Dhir Mal (grandson of Guru Hargobind) to Kartarpur (in Bist Doab) in 1644 AD. The original manuscript is still in the possession of Sodhis at Kartarpur and is now known as *Kartarpuri Bir*. Due to the hostile attitude of the provincial government neither Guru Har Rai nor Guru Harkishen ever visited Amritsar. Guru Teg Bahadur, during his visit to Amritsar was not allowed to enter Gurdwara Darbar Sahib by the *Minas*.

Guru Gobind Singh formally consecrated Sikhism, on the Vaisakhi day 1699 A.D; and abolished caste system in Sikhism by asking all initiates to drink 'Amrit' from the same vessel. The Hindu hill Rajas around Anandpur Sahib, who had been willing to accept the teachings of equality as preached by Guru Nanak, were not willing to drink Amrit from the same vessel (Communion bowl) along with the Shudras (low castes), as Guru Gobind Singh wished them to do. They took it as a threat to their *varn Ashram Dharma* i.e Hinduism, whose very foundation is based on the caste system. They vowed to destroy Guru Gobind Singh and his newly consecrated Sikhism in the form of 'Khalsa'. At first they tried on their own, but having failed, they sought the help of Moghul Emperor at Delhi and also the provincial Muslim governor of Lahore. The joint forces of Hindustan from Delhi, provincial forces of the Punjab from Lahore and the forces of the Hindu Hill Rajas of the Punjab, attacked Guru Gobind Singh, who entrenched himself inside the forte at Anandpur. Having failed to capture the forte and dislodge the Sikhs, they laid siege to the forte. Siege also proved a failure and the joint forces were unable to kill, capture or force Guru Gobind Singh into submission. The besiegers entered into an agreement with Guru Gobind Singh to provide him and his forces, a safe passage if he left Anandpur and settled at 'Kangar' in the 'Malwa' region of the Punjab. The Guru along with the Sikh forces left Anandpur in the darkness of the night between 4th and 5th December 1704. Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikh forces had hardly covered a few miles when forgetting all promises and solemn pledges, the joint Moghul and Hindu hill Raja forces attacked them from the rear. The hostile forces continued in hot pursuit of the Guru and his Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh successfully defeated the pursuing forces at Muktsar and then retired to Talwandi Sabo (now Dandama Sahib) in Bathinda district. In his journey from Anandpur to Talwandi Sabo, the entire valuable literature including the Bir of *Granth Sahib* were washed away in the flooded Sirsa Rivulet, all his four sons, mother and many Sikhs embraced martyrdom. At Talwandi Sabo he wanted to have a 'Path' (Recitation) of Aad Granth from the original Bir signed and sealed by Guru Arjan Dev. He sent five Sikhs to Kartarpur to bring the volume of Aad Granth, which was lying there in the possession of the descendants of Dhirmal, but the request was turned down with sarcastic remarks, that if he was the Guru, he should produce the Granth himself. The Sikhs returned to Talwandi Sabo and narrated the whole story to Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh was *Hafiz* of *Aad Granth Sahib*. He dictated the whole volume from his memory, which was jointly calligraphed by Bhai Mani Singh and Baba Deep Singh, jointly turn by turn. In this volume he entered the Bani of his father, ninth Guru (Guru Teg

What is Sikhism?

Series 6

Bahadur). The present volume prepared and recensed by Guru Gobind Singh is known as *Damdame wali Bir or Damdami Bir*. When Guru Gobind Singh was preparing to leave for *Deccan* (South) to meet Emperor Aurangzeb, the Sikhs requested him to make arrangements to avoid a recurrence. Guru Gobind Singh appointed Baba Deep Singh to make copies of Aad Granth and teach meanings of Gurbani to Sikhs, thus making Dam Dama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo) the Sikh seat of learning and he called it *Guru Ki Kanshi* as a counter part to Hindu seat of learning in Kanshi (Banaras). Four more copies of the Granth were, made by Baba Deep Singh, which still exist today. Later on numerous copies of *Damdami Bir* were prepared by devout Sikhs. The volume signed and sealed by Guru Gobind Singh was taken to Kabul by Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1762 A.D; and became untraceable thereafter.

Guru Gobind Singh made Granth Sahib his successor when he departed from the world. He told the Sikhs not to grieve as even if they would not see him in physical manifestation, he would remain ever present among them. Finding his end near Guru Gobind Singh ended the human Guru-ship and vested it with the Sikh scriptures, *Pothi Sahib / Granth* and accorded it the status of Guru Granth and said, “*Sabh Sikhian ko hukam hai Guru manio Granth*”, and since then it is revered as ‘Guru Granth Sahib’.

There are several documents, which attest the fact of succession having been passed on by Guru Gobind Singh to Guru Granth Sahib. For instance, Bhai Nand Lal, who was present by the side of Guru Gobind Singh when he breathed his last at Nander (Hazoor Sahib) in his *Rehatnama** (popularly known as *Tankhahnama / Nasihatnama*) thus records Guru Gobind Singh’s last words in his Punjabi verse:

He who would wish to see the Guru,
Let him come and see the Granth.
He who would wish to speak to him,
Let him read and reflect upon what says the Granth.
He who would wish to hear his word,
He should with all his heart read the Granth,
Or listen to the Granth being read.

After Guru Gobind Singh, the Granth Sahib became the Guru and received divine honours. It is for the Sikhs the perpetual authority, spiritual as well as historical. They live their religion in response to it.

Singh Sabha reformers used printing press for producing copies of Guru Granth Sahib with a standard text of 1430 pages. First lithographed edition of Guru Granth Sahib was prepared in 1904 A.D. The present day *Bir* of Guru Granth Sahib with separate words called *Pad shed wali Bir* was first published in 1945.

*The work popularly known as Tankhahnama of Bhai Nand Lal is one of the earliest Rahitnamas. A copy of this work dated 1718-19 in the library of GNDU (MS770) which refers to the work as Nasihatnama.

Other Scriptures of Sikhism

Dasam Granth

Dasam Granth forms part of the canon of the Sikh faith. Some compositions of the Dasam Granth like Jaap Sahib, Tav Parasad Sawaiyye and Benti Chaupai are part of daily prayers (Nitnem) of the Sikhs. These compositions are also part of Sikh baptism (*Khande dee Pahul*). The languages used in the Granth are Punjabi, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi and Braj. Its present printed version has 1428 pages. The contents of this Granth are:

- I. Jaap Sahib
2. Akaal Ustat
3. Bachitar Natak (Autobiography of Guru Gobind Singh)
4. Chandi Charitar
5. Chandi di Var
6. Gian Parbodh
7. Chaubis Avtar (24 incarnations of Vishnu)
8. Brahm Avtar
9. Rudar Avtar
10. Shabad Hazare
11. Swaiyye:
 - (i) Tav Parsad Swaiyye
 - (ii) 33 Swaiyye
12. Khalsa Mehma
13. Shastar Nama Mala
14. Charitropakhyan: (Now stands deleted from the compilation by the SGPC)
15. Zafar Nama (Epistle of victory-a letter written to Emperor Aurangzeb)
16. Hikayat

History of Dasam Granth:

Entire literature belonging to Guru Gobind Singh was lost in the flooded Sirsa River during the march from Anandpur Sahib. After the demise of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Mani

What is Sikhism?

Series 6

Singh on the instructions of Mata Sundri (Sahib Kaur) assumed the charge as care taker (*sewadar / Granthi*) of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar in 1721 A.D. During his this tenure as sewadar of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib he is said to have collected the available hymns of the Bani of Guru Gobind Singh and also translation of some ancient Hindu Sanskrit Granths, made by 52 poets employed by Guru Gobind Singh, with great efforts and compiled them together into one volume, about 26 years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh (scholars differ on this point). This Granth came to be known as 'Dasam Granth' also called *Daswein Patshah da Granth*. The authenticity regarding some of the contents of this Granth ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh has remained a matter of controversy in the Sikh world since its compilation. As of now following versions of this scripture, which vary in contents and details have come to the notice of the scholars:

- 1) Bhai Mani Singh wali Pothi
- 2) Patnay wali Pothi by Sukha Singh
- 3) Gurdwara Moti Bagh Patialay wali Pothi
- 4) Sangrur wali Pothi
- 5) A version prepared by Giani Mohoinder Singh Rattan, published in 1967.

NB:

Guru Gobind Singh had not compiled any Granth named as Dasam Granth. Its name Bachittar Natak is recorded in Granth itself 151 times. Its old copies do not carry the name "Dasam Granth" and the SGPC never accepted it on par with Guru Granth Sahib, the treasury of Sikhism.

The praise and acceptance of gods (*Devatas*), goddesses (*Devis*) or any incarnation of God (*Avtaars*) is totally against the Sikh religion. Thus any composition in Dasam Granth can never be of Guru Gobind Singh in which goddess Durga and other gods and goddesses and incarnations of Hinduism are praised and accepted. The compositions relating to the Hindu legends clearly seem to have been interpolated.

Writings of Bhai Gurdas & Bhai Nand Lal

The holy Sikh Scripture Guru Granth Sahib, hymns of Guru Gobind Singh, compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal form part of the canon of the Sikh faith.

As per Sikh religious code of conduct (*Sikh Rehat Maaryda*) only hymns from Guru Granth Sahib, Hymns of Guru Gobind Singh, compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal, can be recited in Gurdwaras.

Gutka in Sikhism

Gutka literally means a box meant for keeping valuables, but in Sikh literature it means a hand book of hymns (Banis) of *Nitnem* (daily devotional routine) and some other Banis of the Sikhs. All Sikhs have usually more than one *Gutka* in their homes. They recite *Path* (recitation of hymns) from these *Gutkas*. Like Guru Granth Sahib the Sikhs give special respect to *Gutka* because it consists of *Shabad* (the word). It is usually kept on a high shelf wrapped in a fine piece of cloth (*Rumala*) separate from other things, even the books.

Gutka is not a work of any Sikh Guru. As Sikh history goes *Gutka* was made by

What is Sikhism?

Series 6

Bhai Mani Singh during his custodianship of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Amritsar in the eighteenth century when the Sikhs were facing worst type of persecution in their history at the time of oppressive Muslim government and had left their homes and hearths to the safety of jungles, mountains and deserts. He felt that it was not possible for the Sikhs to carry the full volume of Guru Granth Sahib with them under those adverse circumstances and thus recitation or listening to Gurbani was not possible in their daily life. He took Hymns and verses of Gurbani from Guru Granth Sahib and made *Gutkas* for daily morning and evening *Banis* to be recited by every Sikh.

What is Sikhism?
Series 6