

# SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB (volume 1)

*Tr. in English by Kartar Singh Duggal*

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*A Review by Jaswant Singh Neki\**

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“**Sri Guru Granth Sahib** is an outstanding religious scriptures in the world”. It is a unique confluence of a large number of diverse spiritual streams, and subsumes - as well as synthesizes - many different Faith traditions that have diverse cultural and philosophical moorings. Besides the Sikh Gurus, its authors also include some Muslim Sufis, Hindu Bhaktas, (a majority of whom hail from the ‘low castes’), and a number of Court poets of the Gurus belonging to diverse religious denominations. Thus, it becomes a unique pluralistic religious Scripture. No wonder then, that in spite of its voluminous size (1430 pages), it has attracted many scholars to undertake its translation.

Trumpf as well as Macauliffe made the first attempts at the translation of substantial portions of the Granth into English. It is generally believed that while the former could not fully empathize with the spirit of the Holy Book, the latter over-relied on the Bhai Tradition of exposition. When Dr. Gopal Singh brought out the first complete translation of the Text, it was hailed as a remarkable feat of labour and scholarship. A few years later, Gurbachan Singh Talib and Manmohan Singh also brought out complete translations. The former was welcomed for its elegant diction, the latter was found useful for knowing exact literal connotations. Principal Teja Singh, another stalwart of Sikh learning, also started his translation, which appeared very promising, but he was denied by destiny the opportunity to complete it. While they all served some function or another, none of them was completely satisfying to one who wanted to enjoy both the poetic as well as the spiritual aspects of the Granth.

The Holy Granth has a uniformly exquisite style. It consists of elegantly rhymed verse with a great variety of meters, set to the classical Indian musical system, itself somewhat modified by the Gurus. There is consummation of every verse form, with the Raga as well as the thematic content. Thus, a unique harmony has been woven into its pluralistic substance. While the Gurus have not promulgated a formal philosophical system of their own, they have given enough indication that some such system has been subsumed under their compositions. That is why, even when they employ a traditionally prevalent philosophical term, it does not, necessarily, connote in the Gurus’ works what it does elsewhere. All this makes translation of this work a rather daunting undertaking.

If Kartar Singh Duggal has ventured to try his pen for this purpose, obviously, he has not found the existing translations completely satisfying. One can empathize with his uneasiness. **Some translators have stuck to ‘word for word’ translation, which can convey the literal sense all right, but fails to unfold the figurative implications and the mystical import of the original. Other translations have chosen to employ archaic linguistic expressions that irk the modern reader. Some have made contrived effort at poeticizing the prose translation. That often makes it abstruse, sometimes, even jarring.** Since all the translations are in

prose, they fail to convey the aesthetic elegance of the language and the superb musical and lyrical qualities of the original.

Duggal's literary credentials are impeccable. He is a literary stalwart of Punjab. His versatility in the use of various genres is well known. Even in his prose, his sensitivity to rhythm and rhyme is quite patent, his scholarship of works in the relevant spiritual traditions is evident from his previous, shorter, works on Bulleh Shah and Kabir. He is therefore justified in considering himself equipped enough to accept the challenge of rendering this holy book into English. **He has, however, chosen to *transcreate* rather than to translate the book. Transcreation is far more difficult an undertaking than translation. It involves imbibing the spirit of the original text fully and recreating it as a new work, providing a form an idiom that enables the reader to enjoy the recreated work with almost the same satisfaction as is obtainable from the original.** It is an uphill task. Puran Singh has been the only writer before Duggal, who gave us excellent samples of transcreation of portions of Gurbani and other pieces of Punjabi literature. Duggal will necessarily have to measure his transcreational skill with his.

I have spent time in perusing the first volume of Duggal's transcreation and not only enjoyed it but also benefited from it. His diction is simple and free from archaic expressions; so it is easily understood.

Contrary to the practice of many translators (such, for instance, as Swami Rama), Duggal does not employ protracted digressions to explain refractory concepts. He just simplifies those concepts. Some scholars may not find this completely satisfying, but the alternative is either laborious footnoting or expansive explications within the text. Duggal has chosen to refrain from both these. That makes for smoother reading. At places, the particular connotation of a line, term or concept that Duggal has accepted may well be at variance with a connotation that is more popular with scholars, but, one can be sure that Dr. Duggal would have sufficient personal justification for it.

Duggal's transcreated version of Sri Guru Granth Sahib provides both formal and substantial satisfaction which, is generally consonant, but nowhere far removed from that, which, one derives from the original. One often comes across passages of outstanding lyrical beauty, with natural poise, smooth rhyming and fidelity to the original. Here is a random example:

If the True Guru is kind,  
What you ask, you achieve.  
If the True Guru is kind,  
You never come to grief.  
If the True Guru is kind,  
No pain comes your way.  
If the True Guru is kind,  
You cherish every day.  
If the True Guru is kind,  
There is no fear of death.  
If the True Guru is kind,  
You have peace and mirth.  
If the True Guru is kind,

You have the nine treasures.  
If the True Guru is kind,  
It's merging with Truth without measure. (P. 393)

In general, the transcreation has been able to provide the quality of recitation that approaches the original in many places. However, Duggal has, in places, shown a bit of over-concern for rhyme. That makes it appear as somewhat of a forced effort in many places. Here is one such example:

Those who remember and meditate on You,  
They lead a peaceful life in the world.  
They attain liberation and salvation, those who dwell on You.  
Their noose of death is uncurled.  
Those who remember You are free from fear;  
All their fears are no more heard.  
Those who slave and serve my Lord,  
With my Master's divinity they get merged.  
Many a time blessed are those who remember the Lord.  
Nanak is sacrifice to them in deed and word. (P. 25)

In the above passage, 'uncurled' appears to be a constrained rhyme. The same way, addition of 'in deed and word' (at the end of the last line) has been necessitated by the need of the rhyme scheme. The same can be said about the line 'All their fears are no more heard'. That became necessary for rhyming it with 'Lord', 'merged' and word. Otherwise, it seems superfluous and not necessitated by the original. Parenthetically, the word 'slave', in the seventh line, does not give the intended meaning. The use of this term as a verb is rather tricky. One slaves *at* or *over* some job. One does not say, 'slave a person' unless one intends to mean 'enslave' rather than to 'serve as a slave'. Fortunately, such passages are extremely infrequent in this work.

Notwithstanding these lapses, which are not unlikely to happen in a work of such magnitude, this work comes out as quite outstanding and makes a remarkable *transcreational* addition to the many translations already available.



## **SRI GURU-PANTH PRAKASH (Punjabi)**

***By Rattan Singh Bhangu***

***Edited by Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon***

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Rattan Singh Bhangu, the author of Panth Prakash, was the grandson of famous warrior Sardar Mehtab Singh Mirankotia who killed Massa Rangar in the holy precincts of Golden Temple, to liberate it from the sacrilege created by the marauder. This is considered to be an authentic source of Sikh history after the Guru 'period' pertaining to the most crucial phase of the Sikh struggle during the

eighteenth century. The author was persuaded by Captain Murray of the British army to compile the history of Sikh struggle leading to establishment of Khalsa Raj. The author started the work on this project in 1809 and completed it in 1841. It is based on interviews, family history and the information collected by the British and French officers about Punjab. Panth Prakash is basically an oral history text of the Sikh struggle during 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

Rattan Singh Bhangu had no training in historiography and there were no written accounts available regarding Sikh History. So he faced a formidable task to complete his project. The text was written in old Punjabi verse. Bhai Veer Singh, the great Sikh savant, got it printed in Vazier Hind Press, Amritsar in 1914. Balwant Singh Dhillon, the Editor of the present volume has done an excellent job by comparing the old hand written manuscript of Panth Prakash with printed edition of Bhai Veer Singh. The edited version contains footnotes to explain the discrepancies of the old printed editions and the textual material. Singh Brothers have taken pains to publish and print it in the book form.

**Panth Prakash** is an epic tale of Sikh struggle. It starts abruptly with the exit of French presence in and around Delhi, the fall of Marhatta empire and the onslaught of the British empire in northern India. British officers were baffled to know the rise of Sikh empire in Punjab and hence they were keen to explore the Sikh religion and culture. Thus a dialogue starts between captain Murray and the author, who was persuaded to write an account of the Sikh struggle.

The author traces the history of Sikh Gurus briefly and explains the need for creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. Surprisingly, Bhangu is trapped by popular mythology and he considers Guru Nanak as an avtar of Raja Janak, the father of Sita! In the same vein, he narrates the story of Chandi Puja by Guru Gobind Singh to create the Khalsa. On the Baisakhi day of 1699, 5000 Sikhs were baptised into the Khalsa fold. Bhangu gives a vivid picture of the baptised Sikhs, called Nihangs, who were soldiers of the Akal Purakh. They were 'moving armies of the Khalsa, took ration from the Sikh women and if need be looted the village folk and collected taxes'.

**Panth Prakash** is the only source of historical account of Banda Bahadur and the establishment of Sikh rule in Punjab. The revolution started by the victories of Banda Bahadur was short lived as he lost support of Mata Sundari and a faction of the Sikhs, known as Tat Khalsa. In fact, Sikh historians have not done justice to the role played by Banda in liberating Punjab and creating an egalitarian society based on the Sikh principles. It was a nascent Khalsa democracy which could not survive even for a decade. The crucial phase of Sikh struggle leading to the consolidation of power in the form of Sikh confederacies (*Misals*) in Punjab forms the core of Panth Prakash. The Sikhs were fighting against the Mughals, Abdalis and Durranis, to liberate Punjab. They left their homes and hearths and were hiding in the jungles. It was a fight for survival. Golden Temple (Harimandir) was blown up to destroy the Sikh Centre of inspiration and spiritual power.

It is fascinating to read the sterling role played by Nawab Kapoor Singh Virk and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in guiding the Sikh affairs. The Sikh holocausts known as *Chhota* and *Vadda Ghalugharas* are described by Rattan Singh Bhangu. The internecine quarrels between Sikh confederacies also find some mention. Baghel

Singh conquered Delhi and established Sikh gurudwaras. It was a high tide of Sikh power. The author gives a fair account of Marhattas, Rohillas and their association with Sikh Sardars. Most of these conflicts ended in loot, plunder or conspiracies. It was a period when Mughal empire lost its vitality and the British East Indian Company advanced as a sovereign power to establish its rule over India. The role of cis-Satlej Sikh states to checkmate the progress of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, siding with the British, does not find a mention. The author has failed to recount the current affairs of Khalsa Raj established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The formation of Phulkian states, and the role played by Ala Singh in Sikh affairs, however, finds a mention in Panth Prakash. It will be appropriate if this original source of Sikh history is translated into English.

