

# Bhatt-Bani in the Holy Granth Sahib

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The editorial pattern of Guru Granth Sahib is the gift of the illustrious Guru Arjun Dev. The current volume of the Granth (total pages 1430) follows in the main the editorial scheme set by the Fifth Guru, with addition of Guru Tegh Bahadur's Bani-compositions including his verses in Raag Jaijavanti. The first recension popularly known as the Adi-Granth comprised three broad divisions: (a) the liturgical section with prayers of daily routine; (b) the musical section that is by far the largest part (1340 pages of the present edition); (c) the miscellaneous part of compositions which are not set to Raag measures but dwell on various poetical metres. The contributors of the Granth include six Gurus, 15 Bhagats, 12 Bards (Bhatts) plus one Dum, a couple of associates of the Gurus, making a total of 36 authors.

## **Place of Bhatt Bani**

The verses composed by eleven Bhatts in the Swayya metre are to be found in the Miscellaneous division of the Granth, which starts with Sahaskriti Saloks, followed by Gatha, Phunhas, Chaubolas and Saloks of Bhagat Kabir and Shiekh Farid. These are followed by Guru Arjun's 20 Swayyas and 123 Swayyas by the Bhatts. After these, Saloks left over from the Vars are placed including 57 Saloks of the Ninth Guru, followed by Mundavani and another Salok by Guru Arjun Dev. The Granth ends with Raagmala that bears no one's name as its author. One Bhatt, viz, Balwand, together with his associate Satta the Dum, composed Ramkali Var, which praises the first Five Gurus as also refers to Mata Khivi, consort of Guru Angad, by name. This and a few other historical allusions are available in the Bhatt verses.

## **The Number of Bhatts**

How many Bhatts composed panegyrics glorifying the Gurus? Scholars are not in agreement about their count. Some believe they were 17, while others hold them to be eleven. The names of the Bhatts are not explicitly stated at the head of their respective hymns, unlike the case of Bhagat Bani. But the internal evidence of the verses and their styles, as also the numerical figures point to the count eleven. Some of the names do appear in the verses, for instance Bhika, Kirat, Jalap, Mathura and Haribans. Bhatt Kalsahar mentions his own name in several verses, but sometimes he calls himself 'Kal' and 'Tal'. At least in six verses in reference to Guru Ram Das, the word 'Kalchare' also signifies Kalsahar. In addition to these 11 Bhatts, the author of Ramkali Var 'Balwand' (in association with Satta) is also considered to be a Bhatt-poet.

## **Activities of the Bhatts**

It is well known that the Bhatts used to keep records of their contemporary events and their Bhatt-Vahis are believed to be quite reliable in this respect. Their descendants are still active at several centres of pilgrim interest. Many of the Bhatts were poets who roamed about the country and instantly composed verses and hymns, impressing the audience. A group of Bhatts, possibly headed by Kalsahar, visited Goindval, as indicated by Nalh in one of his verses. The visit occurred during the pontificate of Guru Arjun, around 1581-82. Before this, the Bhatts were in search of some true saint, as is evident in one of Bhikha's verses, which expressly states that for one whole year the group moved from place to place but did not find any spiritual guide to their satisfaction. Bhikha confirms this in his praise of Guru Amar Das.

### **Their Vaishnav Faith**

The Bhattas belonged to Brahmin community and were followers of the Vaishnav faith. They held Sri Ram and Sri Krishna as Divine incarnates, and on meeting the Gurus in Punjab, believed that Guru Nanak and his four successor Gurus were Ram and Krishna reborn. Bhatt Kalsahar says, during Satyuga it was Guru Nanak who overpowered Bali; in the Treta-age, Nanak was Ram of the Raghu clan; in Dupar Nanak was in the form of Krishna who delivered Kans. And in the Kali-yuga "You are called Nanak, Angad and Amar Das". He adds: "Your praises are sung by Ravidas, Jaidev and Trilochan. Also by Kabir, Namdev and Beni, in addition to innumerable Yogis, Jangams, Vyas and Brahma. Guru Nanak placed his hand on the forehead of Bhai Lehna who became Guru Angad.

### **Swayya: Their Favourite Metre**

The Bhatt-Bani as recorded in Guru Granth Sahib, is in the poetic metre 'Swayya'. It is a non-Raag measure and has its own variations of style. At least three chhand-metres are mentioned in the Swayyas: *Radd* (in Nalh's praise of Guru Ram Das, 5<sup>th</sup> swayya); *Jholna* (Nalh's 13<sup>th</sup> swayya); and *Sortha* (in Kalsahar's praise of Guru Arjun). The numerical arrangements of Swayyas is indicative of the authorship of particular verses and also of the change of style in a swayya. As for the names of Bhattas, interesting rhyme in pronunciation is noted, for instance Kal (Kalsahar), Salh, Bhalh, Nalh, Balh. Other names that do not fall in this category are Jalap, Kirat, Bhikha, Gayand, Mathura and Haribans. All of them, however, make use of the Swayya metre for their verses.

### **Language and style**

The language of Bhatt-Bani is a mixture, deriving its vocabulary from Sanskrit and employing Bhagat-Bani diction. The Bhattas used to sing odes (*Vars*) to brave fighters and eventually developed a specific lingo known as Bhattashri. Some of their verses recorded in Guru Granth Sahib are easy to follow by the Punjabi readership, but a large number of Swayyas are not that easy. Bhatt poets often indulge in exaggeration and use of glittering phraseology in their verses. Quite often two Bhattas follow each other in the same style. While entering their poetry in the Adi-Granth, the rules of Gurbani grammar and word-endings were applied, in order to bring the verses in line with the rest of Bani compositions. Some of the Swayyas clearly indicate that their authors were familiar with the Gurus' and Bhagats' phrases and vocabulary. Bhatt Gyand's repeated use of 'Waheguru' in his verses is proof of the popularity of the term in the Bhatt period.

### **In Praise of the Gurus**

One major contribution of Bhatt-Bani is the praises showered on the first Five Gurus. Kalsahar who composed a total of 54 Swayyas, devoted 10 of these to Guru Nanak whom he calls 'Param' (Supreme) Guru. According to Kalsahar, Guru Nanak was bestowed with both 'Raj' and 'Yog' and as such he enjoyed Raj-Jog which characterized all the rest of Gurus as well. Kalsahar composed ten Swayyas in praise of Guru Angad Dev, who attained to his height of spirituality as 'Jagat Guru' through contemplation of Naam. The Bhatt insists that by having '*Darshan*' of the Guru, all sufferings vanish. Similarly, he pays tribute to Guru Amar Das who held all spiritual powers (riddhis and siddhis) by dint of *Naam Bhagti*. Passing on to Guru Ram Das, the poet refers to the pool of Nectar (Amrit-sar) established by the Fourth Guru. Kalsahar regards Guru Arjun as the harbinger of 'Janak Raj' in the region and the treasure of knowledge that is *Guru-Bani*.

The Bhatt poets who sang encomiums to Guru Amar Das included Jalap, Kirat and Bhikha. Salh and Bhalh also put down one Swayya each in praise of the Third Guru. According to Kirat, God (Narain himself) descended on the earth for the salvation of humanity. Bhatt Kirat's Swayya in reference to Guru Ram Das is quite popular among the Sikhs (starting

with *Hum Avgun Bharai*). Nalh too chants his devotion to Guru Ram Das in his 16 Swayyas. He prays to the Guru for protection of his '*Iajj*' (honour). Gayand composed 13 Swayyas in praise of the Fourth Guru whom he believes to be incarnate of the Divine. His 'Wah-Wah' phrase is popularly recited by the Sikhs. Bhatt Mathura composed seven verses each in praise of Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjun Dev. His high devotion to the Gurus impresses the readers. The Divine Essence is absorbed in the Essence, culminating in the succession of Gurus. Guru Arjun, for him, is Hari himself. Similar sentiments are voiced in the compositions of other Bhattas.

The paeans (praises) sung by the Bhattas are to be seen collectively. All of them are one in holding the Gurus as the Ship (*Bohitha* or *Jahaaz*) for ferrying people across the Sea of mundane existence. The Gurus are as '*Paaras*' – The Philosopher's Stone – whose touch turns base metal into gold. Guru Amar Das, says Kalsahar, has the sign of Lotus (*Barij* or *Kamal*) in his right hand and all spiritual powers are in front of him, whereas the worldly powers sought by the folks are held in his left hand. In paying obeisance to the Gurus, peace of mind and spiritual satisfaction can be attained. No one can hope to win emancipation without the Guru's blessing. The bard Mathura is convinced that whosoever meditates on Guru Arjun, would not be subject to transmigration. God himself has put the canopy of Grace over the head of Guru Arjun Dev.

#### **Historical References**

Apart from the praises of Guru Nanak and the four successor Gurus, Bhatt Bani contains a number of references to the life-history of the Gurus. Evidently, the Bhatt-poets came into close contact with the Gurus and grasped their genealogy. Some of their utterances confirm what the historians and biographers in general have stated. Bhatt Nalh clearly mentions Goindval situated on the banks of river Beas, where the Bhattas met with Guru Arjun and experienced the bliss. Their verses repeatedly depict the sequence of Guru Nanak up to Guru Arjun, pinpointing the Spirit or the divine Jyoti passing on from the first Guru to the second and so on. Bhatt Salh pays tribute to Guru Amar Das 'Son of Tej Bhan' – And the bard Kalsahar utters the praises of Guru Ram Das 'Son of Har Das'. He sings the glory of Guru Arjun who appeared in the 'Home of Guru Ram Das'. Such references indicate Bhattas' intimate knowledge of the Guru-household.

#### **Classical References**

The authors of Bhatt-Bani seem to be great admirers of Raja Janak whose reign of '*Janak-Raj*' had no parallel. Kalsahar addressing Guru Ram Das says "Janak Raj becomes only to you." Again, referring to Guru Arjun, he says Satyug-like reign of Janak Raj has now prevailed. Guru Nanak is believed to have personified in various forms during the Four Yugas, viz. Satyug, Treta, Duaparn and Kaliyug. He was 'Ram' and he was 'Krishna' of the Classical period. Bhatt Nalh seeks protection of Guru Ram Das, just as Draupadi's honour was saved by providing endless robes to her. And Sudama of modest means was honoured by Krishna. The names of Harlot Ganika, Narad, Jasoda, Sanakas and several other angels and devils are mentioned in the verses. Even Nehaklank, Machh Kachh, Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and Shiva figure in the classical-mythological references in the Swayyas, which are composed to eulogize the Gurus.

#### **Significance of Bhatt-Bani**

*Guru-Bani* is the outpouring of divinely inspired spirits. Similarly *Bhagat-Bani* is an independent entity collected and selected by the Gurus and incorporated in the Holy Granth. But the Swayyas composed by the Bhattas are unique in the sense that they are testimony to the spiritual heights of Gurbani. The Bhattas did not belong to the family circle of the Gurus, nor were they associates of the Bhagats. They came to realize the Divine Essence present

in the Gurus in person and in their sacred Word. Their recognition of the greatness of Gurus speaks eloquently in their verses and hymns.

Bhatt-Bani has ideological affinity with *Guru-Bani* as well as *Bhagat-Bani*. All the three centre around the vision of Naam. The Bhattas share with Gurbani their faith in the efficacy of *Sat-Santokh-Gyan* as the vehicle of deliverance. They endorse the name '*Waheguru*' for the godhead. Their firmly rooted faith in the immortal character of *Amrit-Bani* brings out their Sikh Spirit.

The linking of Guru Nanak and other Gurus with Raja Janak, may be an off-shoot of the Bhattas' way of looking at the historical-mythological tradition of India. They believe it was Nanak and none else who operated in the person of Ram and Krishna. This is their own unique way of expressing their sentiments. They adopted the poetic metre Swayya for paying tributes to the Gurus, even though they were quite familiar with the use of classical Raags in Gurbani. Whatever the methods and means they chose for their poetry, their dedication to the Gurus is evident and crystal clear.

