

# MUNDAVANI

By Giani Gurdit Singh

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A Review by P.S. Bawa\*

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@ The book has been, at the time of first edition, reviewed by the renowned scholar of the Sikh Lore, Dr. I.J. Singh of New York University, vide SR: April 2004.

- Ed. SR

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Sri Guru Granth Saheb (SGGS) is an integral part of Sikh ethos and society as well as the basic beliefs. Its blessings are sought during all rites of passage. Its recitation is conducted on all occasions, happy or sad, for seeking inspiration and solace. It is accepted as it is given to us in print, in separate words, standardization of pages, easy for reference. It is not easy to imagine the original form in calligraphy with all words attached to each other in a line. Therefore what we have now is the result of a dedicated effort of researchers and scholars who have spent a lifetime in deciphering the early text, and keeping the authentic compositions of the spiritual Masters without any change in the punctuation or formation of a word.

Since the *birhs* were written in hand, there were various developments over a period of time. The copying mode provided scope for the reproducer to include that which he considered to be appropriate. Moreover, there were persons who were jealous of the house of the Gurus and wanted to insert some of their own compositions. This came to be known as *kachhi baani* (unripe compositions, in other words, not authentic). In this way developed three texts that differed in terms of inclusions and exclusions from the original. In some, the compositions of the Ninth Guru were not included, while in others the *raagmala*, and some other compositions, not of the Gurus or the saints, were included.

There was, therefore, a need for an authentic and authorized version of the SGGS so that the devotees were not subjected to spurious compositions and develop faith around the fake. It is also pertinent to realize that there was fear of some of the texts being lost or submerged in the process of copying wherein the copiers could exercise their 'discretion'. An examination of some of the holy texts of other religions proves the point that most of the compositions were lost in the course of time. The Fifth Guru was conscious of the loss to the texts of other holy books. Due to the oral tradition of rendering the *Vedas*, much of the compositions are lost to posterity. The same happened in the case of *Puranas* that is left with only 5461 verses out of around 23000. The Buddhist scriptures contained in the *Tripitakas* are not considered the complete teachings of the Buddha. According to researches, there were only 10,000 *slokas* in the Mahabharata, now there are 30,000. It is not known how and when the additions were made. The Guru was also cognizant of the attempts made by his brother Prithichand who had attempted alterations.

The mode applied by the Fifth Guru to ensure that nothing was added to the Granth was to put a seal on the compositions, in order to prevent any additions to the authorized text. For this purpose, he composed the *Mundavani* that was both an invocation and a humble expression of thanksgiving for the accomplishment of the gigantic task. Therefore, *Mundavani* is considered as the final verse of the text. It is the culmination of the process.

Even the Tenth Guru added the compositions of the Ninth Guru before the *Mundavani* and not after it. The Granth was completed in the year 1604 at Sabbo Talwandi. *Mundavani* is therefore a stamp or a seal that indicates that it is the finale of the text and there is nothing after that. It implies that anything contained in the text after the *Mundavani* is to be considered as an addition and not a part of the same.

Then, how is it that there is *Raagmala* at the end of the Granth? This is the conundrum that has engaged scholars over time. It is also the theme of the book by Giani Gurdit Singh who has, through research and argument, concluded that *Raagmala* is not part of the text, anointed by the Gurus, but an addition in subsequent time, probably by Bhai Banno, as it is contained in the Banno *birr* and copies thereof, that even contained other compositions like *Ramkali rattanmala*, *Hakikat rah mukaam*, etc. However, this appears to be a consequence of the non-availability of standardized version of the compilation as it was not in printed form, and provided flexibility to the copiers to use discretion, there being no check as such. Then over a period of time, a controversy developed after the scholars searched for the authentic version. But two schools appeared. One believed that the *Raagmala* was a composition of Alam who wrote his long poem 21 years before the compilation of the SGGS, while others asserted that Alam lived in the time of Aurangzeb and had stolen the *Raagmala* from the SGGS to include this in his *Madhavalan Kamkandla*. This led to a scholarly exploration by Hindi and Punjabi scholars and it was finally established by researchers that Alam was a contemporary of Akbar, and the *raagmala* was a part of his text in stanzas 63-72 of his composition.

Besides the claim of the scholars that it was a composition of poet Alam, there are other arguments adduced to convince that it was not a part of the SGGS. The theme of the *raagmala* does not conform to the overall tenor of the Granth. There is no indication of any of the ethos for which the holy text stands. It is only a genealogical refrain of the *raags* in the normal form. There are also *raags* and *raaginis*, that is, their male and female forms, as well as the sons of the consorts. It must be borne in mind that there was a tradition of giving shape to the sounds in order to add to the salient and significance and the satisfaction of the patrons who, in their imagery of the raga or the *ragini*, appeased their senses. This was also the beginning of the schools of paintings based on the raga themes. A *raag* is only a sound and nothing more. There is no mention of the *ragini* in the SGGS. Moreover, the holy text has only 31 ragas and 17 *ghar*, while the *Raagmala* has mentioned a set of 84 members in the extended family 6 primary ragas, 30 *raginis* (five consorts of each raga), and 48 sons (six sons of each couple). The latter is only an attempt at visualization of the sounds in order to give more taste to the senses.

The editing of the SGGS has been meticulous - in the sense that not only are the *raags* prescribed for the compositions, but also the further instructions as to be sung in a certain tradition like that of *Yanarey ke ghar gawna*, *Peherain ke ghar gawna*, *Ek suan ke ghar gawna*, *Gauri bi Sorath bi*, *Raney kailash tathha malwey ki dhun*, *Tundey aasraj ki dhuni (Asa di Var)*, *Suan ke ghar gawna*, *Rai mehmay hasney ki dhun*, *Malak murid tathha suheyay ki dhuni gawnee*, etc. The Guru was meticulous in describing the manner the composition was to be rendered. He could not have countenanced any deviation from the norm or permitted a composition that was at variance with the main structure of the *raags* in the text. Nine of the *raags* included in the holy text do not find any place in the *raagmala*. These are *Manjh*, *Bihagra*, *Vad-hans*, *Jaitsri*, *Ramkali*, *Malli Gaura*, *Tukhari*, *Prabhati*, and *Jaijawnti*. And all the *raags* of the *raagmala* are not part of the text that has only 31 refrains. So it is not likely that this composition would have found any favor with the Guru who had taken intense pains to edit the text.

Another significant deviation is in the numbering process. The Guru had diligently numbered the compositions and added these at the end of each *raag*. For example, each verse has a number, and a composition has a total thereof, at the end. Secondly, at the beginning of each composition, there is a distinct reference to the author, like *Mahilla pehla, dooja, teeja*, and so on. All the compositions of the *Bhagats* (saints) have their names inscribed with a suffix 'Ji' in reverence to them. But there is no authorship ascribed to the *raagmala*. It just starts as such. There is no reference to its authorship, as has been the practice in the all the foregoing 1429 pages of the text. Besides, all the stanzas of the *raagmala* are numbered 1. This seems incongruous in view of numbering of each line in all other compositions. Thus it may be inferred that the *raagmala* did not have the blessings of the Guru who had concluded the compilation at the *Mundavani*, thus putting a seal on the text so that it could not be altered in any form.

It is, therefore, significant that the *raagmala* appears *after* the *Mundavani*, not *before* it. If the Guru had anointed it, he could have easily done so before putting his final seal as the composition had already existed 21 years earlier. That this was not done like that is an evidence of the fact that either the Guru had not come across this poem or he did not approve of it as befitting the overall tenor of the holy text. The final shape to the compilation was given by the Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, who completed the authenticated version at Sabbo Talwandi, thus including the compositions of the Ninth Guru. There are references to this fact by many scholars. The myth that the concept of *raags* and *raaginis* had appealed to the Guru for inclusion is beyond the logic of editing of the SGGS.

The work presents a forceful argument that the SGGS ends at *Mundavani*, that *raagmala* is a composition of Alam, that it was included by Bhai Banno, and therefore it is not a composition of the Gurus and hence, by implication not to be accepted as an utterance of the Guru and thus not deserving of the eminent position of being the culmination of the holy text at the time of *akhand path*. The author has, in his painstaking study, drawn copiously from the researches of scholars, examined many *birrs*, and supports his thesis with the help of many photographs and source material.

Having established that *raagmala* is not part of the SGGS and consecrated by the Gurus, how is it that it continues to be a part of the printed Granth? The author has tried to refer to this in an indirect way. In this context the role of two scholars and one premier Sikh institution is under the scanner. The two prominent Sikh scholars had reversed their stand and supported the *Raagmala*, one on the basis of a Hindi source that was proved later on, by research, to be wrong, and based upon false and imaginary premises. The other scholar recanted, it appears, under the patronage of an institution that provided him with extensions in the job. Similar was the role of the Shiromini Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) that had adopted a constant refrain that *Raagmala* was not part of the SGGS and whose pronouncements had helped courts decide cases as there were problems in Kuala Lumpur (1907 and 1910), Nairobi (1917) and other places. But then under the political circumstances or compulsions (either not explored by the author or not indicated intentionally), the SGPC came out with a resolution that it should be left to the individual to recite the *Raagmala* as 'its recitation neither benefitted nor its exclusion harmed'. How this neutral stand emanated remains a mystery till some scholar delves into the recesses of reason. There is one clue. Whereas the religion consultative committee had, in 1937, proposed and decided that the *bhog* should be at *Mundavani*, some people followed the dictate while others did not. In 1945, elections to both the assembly and the SGPC were to be held. Since the issue had become contentious, the status quo was proposed and the matter was left to the devotees.

For the time being, the *Raagmala* remains a part of the printed text and is generally being recited at the conclusion of the *path* (recitaitaion). The holy text has 1430 pages whereas the hand written ones have a variation like 533 pages in Kartarpur *Birh*, 557 in the Patiala, 590 in the Patna, 278 in the Baba Ala Singh Burj, and 517 and 596 in the *Birhs* with the author. This is clear from the photographs in the book. Thus the pagination task has rendered referencing possible. It is the contribution of the printed version that is now available in word form and not one sentence in one line formation. This has enabled the devotee to read the text properly.

Having established, for the time being, that the *Raagmala* was not ordained by the Gurus, it begs an answer whether it is strictly appropriate to recite it. As has been mentioned above, there is no consensus at this stage. The issue seems to be pending with the SGPC. It could be a hot potato for handling. However, since *Raagmala* is part of the printed version, it continues to be recited generally. Maybe the devotee feels that it is purely a genealogical table and taxonomy of the *ragas* and has no reference whatsoever to the fable of love between the poet and the court dancer! There is no mention of the author. It appears as an independent composition with a flavour of being neutral. Since the devotees do not know the source and the context, they could find it as an invocation to the glory of the *raags*. And since almost all the compositions of the SGGS are set to music, perhaps, the devotee feels, this is not out of place even though it does not conform to the number of the *raags* in the holy text. It is only a recitation of the names of the *raags*, and nothing more. Hence it continues to be accepted as part of the text. There is all likelihood that so long it is part of the SGGS in its printed form, it shall continue to be recited, as after having read 1429 pages, one may not inclined to leave one last page unread. When the person bows to the SGGS as Guru, he does so to the whole and not the whole minus one page. Hence the practice of recitation of the whole text has continued.

**Giani Ji's book is nevertheless worthy of sober attention and can be the basis for any mandate by the Akal Takht, should the community require settlement of the issue once and for all. But this appears to be a big 'if' as the community may not be prepared to risk a controversy that could divide it into two pedantic camps: those adhering to the tradition, as it appears in practice at the moment, and those who side with research scholars.**



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**By (Late) Prof. Harnam Das [Ed. by Dr. Amrit Kaur Raina]**

**Published by Udaan Publications, Mansa (Punjab) 151505**

***A Review by Saran Singh***

The late Prof. Harnam Das, MA (Punjabi & Persian) held the post of head of Deptt.of Punjabi, S.D. College, Ambala Cant. A prolific writer and profound oriental scholar, several of his articles were featured in *The Sikh Review* during the Journal's initial two decades in 1960's and 1970's.

His gifted daughter, Amrit Kaur Raina, Principal Mata Gujari College for Girls at Sardulgarh, District Mansa (Punjab) is blessed with a rare catholicity of mind and thought, at home with Indian literature and philosophy – whether that is inherent in Guru Granth Sahib or in various later strands of thought, such as the devotional phase of Ramakrishna Paramhansa.

The two slim volumes (in Punjabi) have been published as her tribute to late Prof.

Harnam Das. The first embodies - the quintessential message of Bhagwat Gita, in chaste Punjabi, all the 18 chapters of the ancient classic that spells the divine message of Sri Krishna imparted to - and through – Arjuna. Sri Krishna's life is a living legend, while his teachings are the daily lore for millions of Hindus. His clarion declaration: "I am the Lord and Master, the Refugee, the Creator, Destroyer, Everlasting" [Ch. IX, st.18] finds an echo in the Biblical saying of Jesus: I am the Resurrection and the life ..."

The book on morality (*Sadachar – da - Marag*) dwells intensively on Naam Simran, and pulsates with stories from Guru Nanak's life and travels. There is a lesson on every aspect of life: of purity, the qualities of head and heart, secret of inner happiness, service of mankind and sheer joy of truthful living and chivalry. Throughout, her mellifluous Punjabi prose is the soul of simplicity.

Amrit's Labour of Love deserves a place in every library and home.

