

A historical analysis of the combined recensions of the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth.

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The *banis* (compositions) of the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth have played an important part in Sikh ceremonies and the development of the Khalsa. The use of these compositions in Sikh rituals and the Khalsa ceremonies has come down from the Gurus themselves. They have played a part in the inception of the Sikh religion from the start. In the early formation of the *Pothi Sahib*ⁱ, each composition was given a role and status. Japji Sahib was seen as a composition for recital in the mornings. The *Pothi Sahib* was then given the status of the Guru under the patronage by the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh Ji.

When the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs created his compositions these again played a part in the giving the Sikhs a distinct use of these compositions. It was at the Amrit Sanchar (Sikh baptism) ceremony in 1699 where the *Sant Ras* of the Guru Granth Sahib and the *Bir Ras* of the Sri Dasam Granth was combined to give the Sikhs the Sant Siphai form and appearance. It was only the recitation and combination of compositions from both Granth that could make a Sikh into a Singh or Khalsa.

This pivotal moment in Sikh history had a legacy in that the banis from both Granths were also to be used in the Sikh Nitnem i.e the daily liturgy. This was again significant in that a Sikh was not complete and ready for the world until the *bhakti* and *shakti* of both Granths was recited. However this was not the only time when the compositions from both Granths were to be repeated as when the day reached the point of evening the *Rehras* bani was to be recited. The *Rehras* contains the compositions from the Guru Granth Sahib and Sri Dasam Granth.

So the rituals of the Sikhs in terms of the recitation of the daily liturgy and the evening prayers are based on both Granths. In this process the transmission of compositions was not just an oral experience in that the banis were recited by the *Granthis* (reader of Sikh scriptures). It would also take the form of the Granths and the *pothis* which were copied and then sent to various sangats (congregations) across the Sub continent.

It was from the 17th century that we start seeing recensions of the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth becoming available. However in the 18th century presumably with the creation of the *Taksals* (lit.mints or centres of learning)) at Damdama and Amritsar we see pothis containing the banis from both Granths. It was the historic bir attributed to Bhai Mani Singh which is still available todayⁱⁱ which combined the banis of both Granth for the first time. This bir can be placed around the 1720'sⁱⁱⁱ. It was a restructuring exercise which ensured that the banis of both Granths could be put in some context. The educational importance of combining both Granths was a fundamental part of students learning the Sikh scriptures. Even now the learning of Gurbani takes place with the *Santhyia* (correct pronunciation) of Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth at the *Taksals* of the Damdami Taksal and in the Akali Nihang Dals.



Japji Sahib



Bachitra Natak

Images of the Bhai Mani Singh bir with compositions from both Granths.

Another bir from the 18th century which contains the banis of both Granth is named the Sangrur bir which follows the traditional pattern of the Guru Granth Sahib followed by the Sri Dasam Granth^{iv}.

As the transmission of both Granths started taking precedence, this led to the development of *Pothis* and *Gutkas* also combining these compositions. A rare *pothi* dated 1736 which contains some compositions from both Granths is highly significant as the compositions are of a different format from the *Nitnem*^v. This *pothi* shows that after the Bhai Mani Singh bir these pothis become widespread.

The development of these *Hathlikat* (handwritten) Granths continued well into the end of the 19th century but these were then superseded by block printing in the Punjab, leading to the development of the printing press.

In my research on manuscripts I have seen and documented over 30 different manuscripts which contain the *banis* of Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth^{vi}. These manuscripts are available in well known Universities in India and abroad including the British Library in the UK.

A recent story has emerged with the development of a printed saroop which contains the compositions from the Guru Granth Sahib and then the Sri Dasam Granth^{vii}. According to the report the saroop is a modern creation and is intended to confuse the Sikh masses with the inclusion of the Sri Dasam Granth to the Guru Granth Sahib^{viii}.



Printed bir at Anandpur Sahib

The bir was printed by Munshi Gulab and Sons a publishing group which was formed in the late 1800's in Lahore. This publishing group was responsible for creating the fonts for Gurmukhi scripts^{ix}. In the recent report the Jathedar of the Akal Takht Giani Gurbachan Singh stated that the Saroop was over 100 years old. This is a correct assertion especially when we look at the development of these printed combined birs of the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth.

So what we see is that certain individuals and fringe groups failing miserably in their attempts to claim that a combined recension of the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth is a modern phenomena. In reality from the *Taskals* the combined birs of the Guru Granth Sahib and the Sri Dasam Granth have been part of Sikh history. The daily banis that are recited by the Sikhs are to be found in the *Amrit Sanchar* and the *Nitnem*.

The study of Sikh manuscripts whilst not a new field is hindered by the certain problems related to the Granths being kept in private collections or not being available for study. This lack of information has led to incorrect conclusions being made on the type of manuscripts that are available. These *birs* including the Bhai Mani Singh recension are certainly not anti panthic moreover they tell us that they have always been part of Sikh history.

In light of any new discoveries of early and new birs of Gurbani we need to look at these positively and see how they fit in the study of other manuscripts. This can only be undertaken if we ensure that we have a balanced view of what the different Granths were intended for.

ⁱ The original name of the Guru Granth Sahib. The *Pothi Sahib* contained the compositions of the Gurus and other saints approved by the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjun Dev.

ⁱⁱ The Bhai Mani Singh *bir* is in the house of Raja Gulab Singh Sethi, New Delhi.

ⁱⁱⁱ This bir also contains *Khas patras* or handwritten pages by Guru Gobind Singh of the Sri Dasam Granth.

^{iv} This bir is no longer available. The *tatkara* showed the banis from both Granths. This Granth was maliciously separated maybe by fanatical elements unable to envisage the meaning behind adding the Sri Dasam Granth to the Guru Granth Sahib.

^v For more information on this particular manuscript and other manuscripts of the Sri Dasam Granth, see my presentation “300 years of the Sri Dasam Granth “delivered at the International Seminar on the Sri Dasam Granth, USA, March 2008. Visit www.sridasamgranth.com for the video.

^{vi} See my forthcoming book which looks at a number of key Sri Dasam Granth manuscripts. A number of these combined recensions are documented in the catalogues of these Universities and Libraries.

^{vii} This story appeared in the Spokesman Newspaper.

^{viii} This saroop is now at Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib when the Granthis received it from individuals from Himachal Pradesh.

^{ix} This was created by the help of a muslim named Munshi Noordin.

Bhai Mani Singh Bir photos courtesy of Sant Siphai Panthic magazine.

Forthcoming: New book on the Sri Dasam Granth

The new book on the Sri Dasam Granth by *Gurinder Singh Mann* looks at how Sri Dasam Granth manuscripts were created and transmitted. The book will also give historical accounts of how the Sri Dasam Granth has been part of Sikh history since its creation. Many of the myths associated with the writings of Guru Gobind Singh are dismissed in this long awaited book from the Sikh historian.