

The Historical Identity of Dasam Granth

- Jagjit Singh

The first and foremost prerequisite for the historical study of a document is to verify its identity and veracity; for, otherwise, if the foundation becomes questionable, the superstructure built upon it automatically loses its validity. So, let us begin with the history of the origin of the earliest *birs* (original manuscripts) of 'Dasam Granth'.

1. HISTORY OF THE BIRS

Gyani Gyan Singh has given in his '*Panth Parkash*' (published by Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, 1970) recognition to four *birs* (pp. 321- 322), and Mahan Kosh, out of these four, to two (p. 616). These four *birs* are: First one associated with the name of Bhai Mani Singh, second deposited at present in Gurdwara Moti Bagh, Patiala, third deposited in the Dewan Khana, Sangrur, and the fourth deposited in Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Patna.

Dr Ratan Singh Jaggi is the only scholar who claims to have examined these four *birs* from the point of view of probing their history and origin. He has examined many other *birs*, besides these four, but he does not consider them to be very old. (*Dasam Granth Da Karitartav*, p. 91). Hence, we will confine our examination to the four *birs* listed above.

The first *bir*, associated with the name of Bhai Mani Singh, was in the custody of Raja Gulab Singh Sethi (Hanuman Road, New Delhi), when Dr Jaggi interviewed him on 5. 12. 1959. According to Raja Gulab Singh, some armyman (*sainik*) happened to get this *bir* in the loot, when Multan was conquered by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1818 A.D. Afterwards, this *sainik* was one of the contingents of 800 men the Maharaja sent to Hyderabad (Deccan), and the *sainik* took the *bir* along with him. He and his descendants came to settle permanently at Hazur Sahib (Deccan), and the *bir* remained with them till Raja Gulab Singh bought it from these descendants in 1944-45 (*Karitartav*, p. 92).

The original source of the second *bir* (i.e., of Gurdwara Moti Bagh) is traced by Gyani Gyan Singh to Bhai Sukha Singh, *granthi* of Gurdwara Patna. According to his *Panth Parkash* (pp. 321-322), Bhai Sukha Singh composed, or compiled, or created (*rachi*) this *bir* in Samat 1832 (1775 A.D.). Afterwards, his son Charat Singh added five leaves to it, imitating the hand-writing of Guru Gobind Singh. He claimed these leaves to be in the Guru's own handwriting just for the sake of monetary considerations. From Charat Singh this amended *bir* passed on to Baba Hakim Singh and from Hakim Singh to Gurdwara Moti Bagh. One 85 year old Bedi Natha Singh, who claimed to be a descendant of Baba Hakim Singh, and was a resident of village Raghu Majra (Patiala), told Dr Jaggi in October 1959 that it was in fact Nahar Singh who got the *bir* from Charat Singh, and presented it to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh got the *bir* installed in his private gurdwara, and put Nahar Singh in charge of it. On the death of the Maharaja, Nahar Singh brought the *bir* to his home, from where it passed on to Baba Hakim Singh, who was the son-in-law of Nahar Singh's grandson. Baba Hakim Singh presented the *bir* to Maharaja Mahinder Singh of Patiala (1862-1876 A.D.), and the Maharaja got the *bir* installed in Gurdwara Moti Bagh (*Karitartav*, p. 94). The story has no corroboration whatsoever.

All the information Dr Jaggi could get about the third important *bir*, which is in the custody of Gurdwara Dewan Khana, Sangrur, was from *granthi* Bhai Nandan Singh. He told Dr Jaggi that

this bir was presented to Maharaja Sarup Singh of Jind (1837-1864 A.D.) by a Pathan at Delhi in 1857, when the Maharaja went there to help the British in the mutiny (*Karitartav*, p. 95). The bir has no earlier history.

The fourth important bir is stored, along with some other *birs*, in the store-house attached to Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Patna (Bihar). Nobody was able to give any information regarding the history of this or other *birs* there (*Karitartav*, p. 97).

These stories about the history of the four *birs* are just cock and bull stories. How did a valuable document, such as the *bir* associated with the name of Bhai Mani Singh, come to be in Multan in 1818 A.D., when this place was, at that time, far away from the centres of Sikh culture or political power? Similarly, how did the *bir*, at present at Sangrur, come to be in the possession of a Pathan (and not a Sikh) in far off Delhi in 1857 A.D.? Apart from this, these stories about the history of the four *birs* can by no means be regarded as reliable historical evidence.

What is very significant is what these stories, relating to the history of the two important *birs*, begin with, in the case of the first one, with the conquest of Multan in 1818 A.D., and in the case of the third *bir*, with the Mutiny of 1857 A.D. As Bhai Mani Singh was martyred in 1734 A.D., the supposed compilation of Dasam Granth by him could not have been completed later than that period. This leaves a time-gap of at least 81 years and 120 years between the time of the sudden discovery at odd places, of the first and third *birs*, respectively, and the period of Bhai Mani Singh. How is it that these documents, which the Sikh society should have valued, had they been genuine, remained unknown and unnoticed for so long? In any case, there is no historical evidence available to trace the 'missing link'.

2. HISTORICITY OF DASAM GRANTH

The historicity of Dasam Granth, is also non-existent. The only source-material relating to Dasam Granth is Sikh literature. And the contemporary and near-contemporary Sikh literature of the period of Guru Gobind Singh (Sri Gur Sobha, Parchian Sewa Das, and Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi Das*) does not mention Dasam Granth or any like literature of the Guru period at all. It is only in the Sikh literature of the post-Guru period that one comes across sketchy references to some compositions of the time of the Tenth Guru.

Bhai Mani Singh's Letter

Chronologically, the so-called letter of Bhai Mani Singh to Mataji is the first document which has been given importance by some scholars for connecting the compilation of Dasam Granth with the name of Bhai Mani Singh. This letter could not have been written earlier than 1716 A.D., as it mentions the rumour of Banda having escaped from custody. For he was arrested and executed in that year. Dr Jaggi has given solid reasons for suspecting this letter to be fake. In all the Gurmukhi prose writings of that period (e.g., the *Hukamnamas* of Guru Gobind Singh and Banda); words constituting a sentence were joined together, without leaving blank spaces between them. And, this method of writing continued to be followed right upto 1867 A.D., as shown by a copy of the newspaper '*Akhbar Sri Darbar Sahib*' published in that year. But the words in the so-called letter of Bhai Mani Singh are not joined together, and are separated by blank spaces.

Also, as Dr Jaggi has discussed in detail, the shape of letters and the liberal use of *bindi* of the Gurmukhi script in the letter are different from the writings of Bhai Mani Singh's period. This clearly shows that the so-called letter of Bhai Mani Singh is forged, and it was so done at a much later period than 1867 A.D. (for details, see *Karitartav* pp. 38-45). Secondly, the letter is a clear fake attempt to associate Bhai Mani Singh's name with Charitro Pakhyan. For, it is unthinkable

that a learned Sikh like Bhai Mani Singh would send Charitro Pakhyan to Mataji, as it is a document which Sikhs are reluctant to read or recite in the presence of a lady or in sangat.

Bansavalinama

The second document of note is '*Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*' written by Kesar Singh Chhibber, who completed his work in 1779 A.D., i.e., 71 years after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and 45 years after the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh (edited by Dr Jaggi, pp. 135-136). Chhibber tells us that Guru Gobind Singh composed, '*Samund Sagar Granth*', and that this granth was consigned to the waters of a rivulet in Samat 1758. '*Samat Saturan Sai Athwanje so granth jee nadi pavaia*'. He further tells that the Guru composed another granth '*Avtar Leela*' and the packets (*sanchian*) of this granth were scattered to the winds due to warfare. '*Khind gaian, judh larai Karke Kidhre Kidhre so gaian*'. He also adds that Bhai Mani Singh got collected the '*Avtar Leela Granth*' in 1782 Samat (1725 A.D.). It is a clear self-contradiction of Chhibber to say that what was completely lost or scattered, Bhai Mani Singh could bring intact again in 1725 A.D. about three decades later, especially when there is historically no trace of it for a century thereafter.

Thus the statements of Chhibber cannot at all be considered historical evidence. Besides, his work-is separated from the period of the Tenth Guru by 71 years; and from that of Bhai Mani Singh by atleast 45 years, if not more. Evidently, his work rests, not on any historical basis, but on hearsay, as he himself admits at several places in his accounts. He writes in the very beginning (p. 1) that his account is based on what he has heard, and, what he remembered. '*Suni Sunai bolke joi rahi hai yad*'. Again "That story I had heard, I have incorporated into my book for my own entertainment". '*Soi Kahani Suni Sunai, apni sauk nal pothi hai banai*'. How can such memory or record be taken to be reliable? He was over 70 years old when he completed his work, and, has, according to authorities, made clear mistakes in the dates he records. (*Karitartav*, pp. 28-29).

However, we will point out an implication which Chhibber's account leads to. He says that the '*Samund Sagar Granth*' which Guru Gobind Singh composed was thrown into a rivulet in his life time, and that the second granth was scattered to different places due to warfare. If that is so, what is the historical evidence to specify as to what the previous literature exactly related to, or, who were its authors? Could it be imagined that had the literature been of any importance to Sikhs, it would have been thrown in a river? Therefore there is no historical validity to link the literature of the period of Guru Gobind Singh with that of the post-Guru period.

Other Documents

The third document we need mention is '*Mehma Parkash*' (1800 A.D.). However, it does not go beyond telling that granth named '*Vidya Sagar*' was compiled at the time of Guru Gobind Singh, and names some of the poets whose compositions were included in it.

Besides these three documents we have noted above, there are '*Guru Partap Suraj*', by Bhai Santokh Singh (1843 A.D.), '*Panth Parkash*', by Gyani Gyan Singh (1930 A.D.) and '*Mahan Kosh*' (1930 A.D.). These need not even be taken into account, as they belong to a very late period, and appear to only reiterate, in one form or other, what had been written earlier.

CONCLUSION

The origin and history of the earliest available *birs* of Dasam Granth besides being unknown is suspect. The history of the compilation of '*Dasam Granth*', as one volume, is equally unknown. As we said in the beginning, if the foundation becomes questionable, the superstructure built upon it automatically loses its validity. There is no historical evidence for linking the Dasam

Granth in its present form, either with the Tenth Master, or with the literature thrown or lost, or with the name of Bhai Mani Singh, or with any known or tangible material existing for over a century before it. The recent story of a granth presented by the Tenth Master and its existence is also of the same brand. For, it has been now introduced three centuries after the alleged event.