

particularly patronized by wealthy Sikhs of the Delhi area and possessions in consequence an impressive group of buildings with the actual gurdwara at the centre. The second of Delhi's gurdwaras is Gurdwara Sis-ganj on Chandni Chowk, near the Old Delhi railway station. This marks the spot where Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded by order of Aurangzeb. After the execution the headless body was carried away by a man called Lakkhi Shah to his house in the village of Rakab-ganj (or Rikab-ganj), very near the Houses of Parliament in modern New Delhi. To avoid detection of having taken the body, Lakkhi Shah's whole house, with the body inside, was burnt.

A gurdwara was built on the spot in 1790 by Baghel Singh, one of the raiding chieftains who had briefly taken Delhi, and this was known as Gurdwara Rakab-ganj. In 1913, during the construction of New Delhi, its outer wall was demolished by the government in order to provide a straight road to the Viceregal Lodge. This produced the Rakab-ganj incident in which the government eventually had to give way in response to the widespread protest it raised. The wall was rebuilt in its original position and the road has a permanent bend in it. A handsome modern gurdwara occupies the premises.

The final gurdwara to be described is Kesgarh Sahib in Anandpur, second only in prominence to Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar. It was here, on the edge of the Shivalik hills and overlooking the plains, that Guru Gobind Singh inaugurated the Khalsa. Kesgarh Sahib ranks as one of the five *takhts* of the Sikhs. Each year it is host to the Hola Mahalla festival, marked by simulated battles and a large procession. It too has numerous subordinate gurdwaras surrounding it.

It should be repeated that this survey covers only seven gurdwaras and that there are many more which might be mentioned. There are, for example, the gurdwaras that house the remaining three *takhts*, one each in Patna, Damdama and Nander. There are also numerous gurdwaras in the countries to which Sikhs have migrated. Wherever Sikhs go they will endeavour to open a gurdwara as a place where they can gather with others who speak the same language and share the same traditions. The buildings may not be pretentious, but where there are a few Sikhs there one will almost certainly find a gurdwara.

SACRED WRITINGS OF THE SIKHS

We have come to a point where we must proceed with particular caution. When the field of study is Religion there is always abundant reason for treading carefully. When it includes a sacred scripture that is profoundly revered, the need becomes pressing. And when that scripture is absolutely central to the belief system in question, the need becomes altogether compelling. Sikhism falls within this latter category. With this caution in mind, the religion of the Sikhs should still be studied and described, though with every care taken to avoid giving needless offence. Every effort must be made to persuade the faithful Sikh that the study is being undertaken with respect, and that even when the results of that research may conflict with the traditional view, those results will be expressed with sensitivity. It is this tone and this intention which must lie behind any examination of the Sikh scriptures.

This caution is particularly necessary in the case of an outsider, though the issue is one that has produced attempts to silence Sikh scholars as well. In recent years charges have been brought against certain Sikhs who have applied the techniques of textual criticism to the Adi Granth and have led to their arraignment before Akal Takhat, the 'Supreme Court' of the Panth. Two who agreed to appear before it were declared *tanakhtāhitz* and were required to undertake the performance of penances. Clearly the field is a very dangerous one in which to work, for Sikhs as well as for others.

The primary issue confronting such a survey is the question of what constitutes a Sikh religious scripture. Everyone agrees that the Adi Granth qualifies handsomely for the title. Substantially compiled by Guru Arjan in 1603-4, the Adi Granth occupies for all Sikhs the absolute centre of their faith, believed to represent the eternal Guru for all time and for that reason known today as the Guru Granth

Sahib (the Granth which is Guru). The Adi Granth can accordingly be accepted as scripture.

So too must the Dasam Granth, although in this case a distinct note of hesitation may be detected. The Dasam Granth was compiled in the early eighteenth century, and although it is traditionally believed to comprise the writings of the tenth Guru, some doubts have obviously made themselves felt. Some of the Dasam Granth seems plainly to be the work of Guru Gobind Singh, but was he responsible for the whole collection? This does not prevent the volume from being scripture and undoubtedly it was accepted in precisely these terms during the eighteenth century. Today, however, it does not rank with the Adi Granth, although the works the Panth universally attributes to Guru Gobind Singh are selectively promoted to this level. The other works in the Dasam Granth are little read and the greater part of the work is largely ignored. It may be scriptural, or it may not be. When pressed for a decision, a Sikh scholar will normally answer that the whole of the Dasam Granth should indeed be regarded as a sacred scripture, yet one has an impression of distinct uneasiness.

At this point we must ask ourselves if we are not creating an unnecessary problem by seeking to fit Sikh writings into a distinctively Western category of scripture. Perhaps the term 'scripture' does not really belong to their religious literature and we are manufacturing a false difficulty by seeking to make it correspond to what is, after all, a Western category. This problem needs only to be raised in order to be set aside. A scripture is a book which is held to be sacred by a particular religion, and if the Adi Granth at least is not held sacred by the Sikhs, the word sacred has no meaning.

The problem is not whether the Sikhs have a scripture or a canon but what deserves to be included in that category. Is it the Adi Granth only, or the Adi Granth plus the works attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, or the addition of the whole of the Dasam Granth? Are the works of Bhai Gurdas and Nand Lal Goya to be included, and if they are, what about the janam-sakhis? And if the janam-sakhis deserve a place, why should the *gur-bilās* literature not find mention? And then there are the *rahit-nāmās*, which deal with that revered subject of religious symbolism, the marks and insignia of the true Khalsa. There is indeed a problem, but it is not one of whether or not the Sikhs have a scripture.

One indicator of what would be regarded as scriptural is perhaps given by the portions of their literature that devout Sikhs learn and recite by heart. This applies to any part of the Adi Granth, though there are some portions which command particular affection in this respect. All Sikhs should, of course, know the *Japī Sahib* with which the Adi Granth begins and which is required for early-morning devotions. Not all Sikhs do know it, of course, but a considerable number have learnt it and regularly recite it first thing in the morning after bathing. This they do sitting quietly, preparing breakfast, or on their way to work. A smaller but still considerable number will also know the other passages appointed for devotional purposes, whether for the early-evening prayer (*Sodar Rahitās*) or for the prayer before retiring for the night (*Kīrtan Sohilā*).¹ The devout will also know two lengthy works, *Āsā kā Vār*, which is mainly by Guru Nanak, and Guru Arjan's *Sukhmanī Sāhib*. Beyond these they will know a selection of shorter works, possibly extending to a substantial quantity of the Adi Granth. Clearly the whole of the Adi Granth is regarded as scriptural.

Some of the passages set down for personal devotions, however, come not from the Adi Granth but from the Dasam Granth, all of them works attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. The early-morning order includes his *Jap Sāhib* and *Ten Savayās*; and the early-evening order specifies his *Benātī Chaupāī* with *Savayā* and *Doharā*.² This seems to indicate that these works would also be regarded as scriptural. All are from the portions of the Dasam Granth which Sikh opinion generally regards as the work of Guru Gobind Singh, and they are consequently treated as *gurbānī* ('compositions of the Guru'). As such they are regarded as scripture, and the same also applies to the other works in the Dasam Granth which are regarded by the overwhelming majority of Sikhs as compositions of Guru Gobind Singh. They are, in other words, those portions of the Dasam Granth which are selectively promoted to equality with the Adi Granth. The remainder of the Dasam Granth is, however, a cause of uncertainty, some affirming that it should definitely be regarded as sacred writ and others adopting a more cautious attitude.

Portions of the Dasam Granth must therefore be regarded with guarded doubt and the same applies even more firmly to the poetic works of Bhai Gurdas and Nand Lal. They may be designated as

works suitable for recitation in gurdwaras, but most Sikhs (if confronted with the question of whether or not they are canonical) would feel obliged to answer in the negative. With the janam-sakhis this answer becomes a certainty. The janam-sakhis are hagiographic anecdotes concerning the life of Nanak, and although they are believed to be uplifting, they cannot be classified as scripture. The same applies to the *gur-bilas* works, equally hagiographic in their approach but concentrating on the heroic deeds of the sixth and particularly the tenth Guru. Also outside the boundaries of scripture are the *rahit-nāmās*.

The Adi Granth

The first of the examples to be considered is the *Adi Granth*, and this, as we have seen, can firmly and without question be designated a scripture. The primary scripture of the Sikhs is variously referred to as the *Granth Sahib*, the *Adi Granth*, the *Guru Granth*, the *Guru Granth Sahib* or *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. These terms reflect varying attitudes towards the scripture, or at least they do when they are used responsibly. Calling it the *Granth Sahib* is a term of respect, as the honorific 'Sahib' suggests. 'Sahib' is also attached to important places in Sikh tradition (Amritsar Sahib and Anandpur Sahib, as indeed the locations of all the five *takhts*) and likewise to gurdwaras of particular sanctity, of which the leading example is Harimandir Sahib or the Golden Temple.

Granth Sahib is therefore a respectful term, but it is not the equivalent of *Guru Granth Sahib*. The tenth Guru, as we have seen, is believed to have designated the *Granth* as *Guru* as well as the *Panth*, and after his death it was to be the receptacle of the *Guru*. In calling it the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh respectfully acknowledges this status and expresses his belief in an important doctrine of the *Panth*. It is the 'manifest body of the *Guru*', the incarnation of the actual presence of the *Guru*. As such it is treated with the most profound respect.

When, however, the scripture is studied by students rather than by devotees, the title *Adi Granth* may be preferred. A useful distinction may be invoked here. Whereas *Guru Granth Sahib* implies (as we

have seen) a confession of faith, *Adi Granth* is a neutral title. *Ādi* means 'first' or 'original' and is used in order to distinguish the volume compiled by *Guru Arjan* from the later *Dasam Granth*. The term *Adi Granth* does not generally appear in common usage by Sikhs. It does, however, appear more frequently as a part of the title by which the printed versions of the scripture are known. The standard title for such versions is the form *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

For historians, philologists and theologians the *Adi Granth* is a treasure-house which has yet to yield the full store of its riches. In the areas that concern the scholars of these disciplines its resources have been little tapped, a neglect which can be attributed to a variety of reasons. To some extent it may be an ignorance of the richness of its contents. It may also derive from an exaggerated fear of the difficulties which will be encountered, or perhaps from an inadequate recognition of the *Panth's* importance. There are indeed some major difficulties associated with the text of the *Adi Granth*, but they are certainly not problems that should inhibit attempts to analyse its language or trace the doctrinal developments it presents.

According to tradition, the *Adi Granth* was compiled by *Guru Arjan* during the years 1603–4 CE. To this extent the tradition appears to be well founded. A manuscript bearing the latter date is still in existence and there is no sufficient reason to doubt its authenticity. Tradition also provides an explanation for *Guru Arjan's* decision to compile this collection of hymns. It is said that his enemies (notably the followers of his eldest brother, *Prithi Chand*, known as *Minas*) were circulating spurious works bearing the name of *Nanak* in order to seduce the Sikhs from their loyalty to the legitimate succession. A group of concerned Sikhs is said to have approached *Guru Arjan* with this problem, and in order to combat this threat to his authority the *Guru* decided to prepare an authorized text.

This story may or may not be true. It did not need the intervention of enemies to account for faulty texts (the *janam-sakhis* abundantly demonstrate this), and if singing the sacred *bānī* (hymns) was an important activity for the *Nanak-panth* (as it certainly was), the *Guru* who came fifth or thereabouts in the succession would naturally seek to fix the text for his followers to sing. The penalty of failing to do so would be increasing confusion among the ever-widening circle of the

Guru's Sikhs. Arjan was, moreover, bringing an existing collection up to date and substantially increasing it. This collection had been made at the instance of the third Guru, Amar Das, and was contained in the four volumes known as the *Goindval* or *Mohan pothis* ('volumes' or 'tomes'). The story of how the Minas were spreading spurious works is possible, but it does not make the most convincing explanation for Arjan's decision to compile a scripture.

For whatever reason, Guru Arjan decided upon a new collection. A first draft was prepared during the years from 1595 onwards, still extant as manuscript 1245 in the Guru Nanak Dev University library. Tradition records that he then established a camp in Ramdaspur (the later Amritsar) in 1603, and to enhance the spiritual peace of the location directed that a pool should be dug. Upon completion it was named Ramsar and beside this pool he supervised the compilation of his authorized version. Just what procedure was followed is not known, but it is evident that the main scribe was the poet and faithful disciple Bhai Gurdas. Hymns included in the *Goindval* Pothis, together with those of his father and himself, were duly recorded and the bulky manuscript was finally completed in the late summer of 1604. Given the size of the volume (974 large folios), this was no mean task, and one can only assume that the faithful Bhai Gurdas must have been labouring hard. Following its completion, the scripture was then installed in Harimandir, the principal gurdwara of Ramdaspur.

Arjan's principal source was, as we have already seen, a similar collection that tradition ascribes to the third Guru, Amar Das. Although the two extant *Goindval* Pothis include only the works of the first and third Gurus, it seems reasonable to assume that the compositions of the second Guru were recorded in the missing volume or volumes. This missing portion included the metres in which Guru Angad composed. Also in the extant volumes are the works of other Saints (or, to give them the name by which the *Adi Granth* knows them, the Bhagats), and it thus provided a substantial nucleus.

The actual copying of the volumes had been done by Amar Das's grandson, Sahans Ram, and at the time when Arjan decided to prepare a second collection they were in the possession of Baba Mohan, the elder son of Amar Das and the father of Sahans Ram. Mohan had, according to tradition, not approved of his father's choice of Ram Das

as fourth Guru, and so Arjan, the son of Guru Ram Das, had some difficulty in persuading him to part with the manuscript. His objections were overcome only when Arjan went in person to *Goindval* and sang a hymn in praise of Mohan outside his window. There is indeed a hymn in the *Adi Granth* which refers to Mohan, but the context indicates that Akal Purakh is meant.³ In some way, however, Guru Arjan obtained the manuscript.

This collection, the *Goindval* Pothis, evidently served as the basis for the new compilation. To these Arjan added his father's works and his own substantial group of compositions. Of the two extant volumes, one is with the family of the late Dalip Chand in Jalandhar City and the other with the family of the late Bhagat Singh in Pinjore (between Chandigarh and Shimla). Both families are Bhallas, the sub-caste to which Guru Amar Das belonged. The text of the Kartarpur version (the version prepared in 1603-4) is very close to that of the *Goindval* Pothis, particularly the works of the first three Gurus. Arjan is said to have added the works of contemporary Bhagats, although this must have been a very small part of the collection. Almost all of the *Adi Granth's bhagat bānī* (hymns of the Bhagats), together with some that are not in the *Adi Granth*, has been included in the *Goindval* volumes.

The history of the *Adi Granth* is reasonably clear as far as its origins are concerned, but unclear with regard to the subsequent history of the original manuscript. During most of the seventeenth and all of the eighteenth centuries the actual location and treatment of the manuscript is obscure. Tradition maintains that it was stolen by Dhir Mal, the grandson of Guru Hargobind and a disappointed candidate for the succession when it went to his brother, Guru Har Rai. Guru Gobind Singh subsequently asked for it to be returned, and when the request was refused he is said to have produced his own copy by dictating the entire contents from memory. To the original text he added compositions by his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur.

If the tradition is to be believed, it means that the later recension containing the works of the ninth Guru was thus created by Guru Gobind Singh. The original version is known as the Kartarpur *bānī* (the Kartarpur 'volume' or recension), so-called because Dhir Mal and his successors lived in the small town of Kartarpur near Jalandhar (not

the village of Guru Nanak). The version attributed to Guru Gobind Singh is called the Damdama *bhī*. A third version is called the Banno *bhī*, or rather there exists a version which is traditionally traced to a *bhī* called after a person named Banno or Bhai Banno. Tradition also locates it chronologically between the Kartarpur and Damdama *bhīs*. And tradition stoutly upholds the claims of the concordant Kartarpur and Damdama versions, rejecting Banno with equal firmness. Because of its deviant reputation Banno is also known as the *khārī* ('brackish') *bhī*. An alternative explanation derives the name from Khara, the village from which Bhai Banno is said to have come.

There are two accounts available of how the Banno *bhī* was produced. One is that Bhai Banno sought permission to take the original scripture to his home village and was granted leave only on condition that he kept it there for only one night. Banno circumvented this provision by stopping frequently on the way to and from his village, making a complete copy, to which he added his extra verses. The other story says that he was commissioned to take the manuscript to Lahore to supervise its binding and did the copying at that time.

Damdama agrees with Kartarpur in all respects, adding only the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur and perhaps a couplet that is traditionally regarded as the work of Guru Gobind Singh. As such it is accepted as the 'authorized' version and printed editions reproduce its received text. Banno, diverging from the other two, incorporates a small amount of additional material which the other two versions lack.

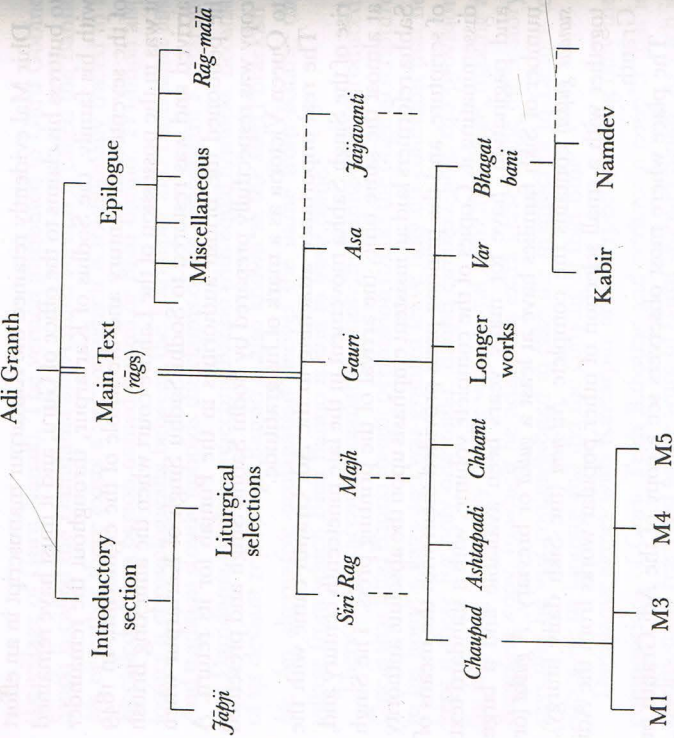
The original Damdama version has since been lost, leaving the Kartarpur and Banno versions in disagreement on a few key points. The most important of these led to a lengthy controversy that was only recently settled. A hymn attributed to Guru Arjan appears in full in the Banno version, with only the introductory couplet recorded in the Kartarpur manuscript. In this hymn the author describes the performance of puberty rites for the future Guru Hargobind, and in the course of it he describes the manner in which the child's head was shaved. This challenged a fundamental belief of the strict Khalsa and it was scarcely surprising that the issue should have generated considerable controversy. A careful analysis of the wording and content of the hymn, however, has conclusively demonstrated that it could not have been the work of Guru Arjan and must have been recorded later.⁴

Dhir Mal evidently retained the Kartarpur manuscript in an effort to buttress his claims to the office of Guru, and it must have remained with his family, the Sodhis of Kartarpur, throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century and the whole of the eighteenth. In 1849 it was in the possession of the Lahore court when the annexing British arrived and was restored to Sodhi Sadhu Singh of Kartarpur when he petitioned the British authorities in the Punjab for its return. A copy was respectfully prepared by Sodhi Sadhu Singh and presented to Queen Victoria as a mark of his gratitude.⁵

The real importance attaching to the Adi Granth came with the rise of the Singh Sabha movement in the late nineteenth century and, at almost the same time, the arrival of the printing press. The Singh Sabha reformers laid an insistent emphasis upon the absolute authority of scripture, and the printing press provided them with the means of disseminating it. Copies of the complete volume, with a standard text and pagination, have for many years been available and a large number of Sikh families have at least a *gukā* or breviary. A *gukā* (or *sundar gukā*) contains the complete *Nit-nem* (the Sikh daily liturgy), together with a small selection of other popular works from the Adi Granth.

The place where most observers see a copy of the Adi Granth or the Guru Granth Sahib is in a gurdwara or, to be more precise, in a public gurdwara. When not in use the book is always draped (normally in an expensive *rumālā* or cloth) and lies beneath a canopy. Whenever it is moved it should be carried on the head, and if it is being transported along a road some form of advance warning should be given to ensure that the people who witness its passing may show proper respect. On festival days a copy, mounted on a truck or a bus and properly protected, will figure prominently in the customary procession. The ceremony bears obvious resemblances to the Hindu practice of conducting a procession, the obvious difference being that the Guru Granth Sahib has replaced the Hindu image.

The Adi Granth consists of religious hymns, some of which are classified as *shabads* and others as *shaloks*. The *shabads* are hymns of varying length, a common one being the *chaupad* or hymn of four verses and a refrain. Others have six verses and yet others run to eight. The *shaloks* are normally couplets, but may run to greater length.



9. The structure of the Adi Granth

Commonly they occur within the *vārs*, which are collections of *paūrīs* ('steps') or verses (normally by one Guru), each one of which is preceded by two or more *śhaloks*. This covers the greater part of the contents of the Adi Granth, though there are variations on this theme. Only one portion of the entire scripture does not qualify as a hymn, and that is Guru Nanak's chant known as *Jāpī* with which the volume begins.

These various works are all organized according to a detailed pattern. First, the scripture is divided into three sections of unequal length. This comprises a brief liturgical section at the beginning, followed by a very lengthy main text and concluding with another brief section, the epilogue. The liturgical section contains the works a

devout Sikh will sing or recite on three occasions each day (early morning, sunset and before retiring to bed). These are mingled with works from the Dasam Granth to form *Nī-nem*, the daily discipline Sikhs should observe. Apart from *Jāpī*, all are repeated in their appropriate places in the main text.

The epilogue consists of miscellaneous works which could not be accommodated in the second section, for example a portion labelled '*Śhaloks* left over from the *vārs*'. At the very end comes the puzzling *Rāg-mālā*, which is evidently intended to summarize the various *rāgs* (or ragas), the measures used in the main text. That leaves the great bulk of the scripture and this is subdivided several times. The primary subdivision is into *rāgs* or measures, starting with *Siri Rāg*. This records all the works composed in *Siri Rāg* and then moves on to *Rāg Mājīh*. All the works in *Mājīh* are then recorded and the scripture moves on to *Rāg Gaurī*. After *Gaurī* comes *Āsā* and so on through a total of thirty-one *rāgs*, concluding with *Jājavanī rāg*.

Within each *rāg* there is a secondary subdivision, each being arranged according to the length of composition. First come the *chāupad* hymns (four brief stanzas with refrain), then the *aṣṭapadī* (eight stanzas with refrain), and then the *chhant* (normally of only four or six stanzas, but of appreciably greater length). Next come works by the Gurus that are in the appropriate measure but which by reason of their greater length do not fit the earlier categories. Guru Nanak's *Dakṣaṇī Oaṅkār* and his *Sidhī Gōṣṭ* are examples, both in the *Rāmakālī* measure. Another prominent example is Guru Arjan's *Sukhmanī* in the *Gaurī* measure. Still within the same *rāg* are the *vārs* we have already mentioned. *Āsā kī Vār* is the best known of the *vārs* and is regularly sung in gurdwaras in the early morning. Finally, at the conclusion of each *rāg*, there is recorded the *Bhagat bānī* (works of the Bhagats), the most prolific of whom is of course Kabir.

There then follows a tertiary or third subdivision within each *chāupad*, *aṣṭapadī* and *chhant*. First come the works of Guru Nanak, then Guru Amar Das, then Guru Ram Das, then Guru Arjan, and (if there happen to be any works by him) Guru Tegh Bahadur. This is in the *chāupads*. The same process is then repeated with the *aṣṭapadīs*, and finally with the *chhants*. Guru Angad is not included as all his compositions are *śhaloks*, with no *śhabads* by him. All the Gurus merge their

identity by signing themselves as Nanak, but the actual author is clearly signalled in the heading of each work by the use of the word *mahālā* and an appropriate figure. A work by Guru Nanak is preceded by the form *Mahālā 1*, by Guru Angad it is *Mahālā 2*, and so on. Sometimes this is abbreviated to M₁, M₂, etc.

Very few exceptions to these rules of primary, secondary and tertiary subdivision can be found in the *Adi Granth*. The most famous exception is a verse by Kabir that occurs in a cluster of Guru Arjan's hymns and is headed *Mahālā 5*. This, however, is not really a problem. Guru Arjan is indicating that he agrees with the sentiments of Kabir, who declares that he is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. As such the hymn is placed in Guru Arjan's selection, but its origins are clearly marked by the retention of Kabir's name in the last couplet.⁶

Just as the organization of the scripture is a model of clarity, so too is the message it communicates wholly consistent throughout the entire work. This presumably is a result of the volume having been almost all assembled by one person at one particular time. The message is the familiar religious one, the message of spiritual liberation through meditation on the divine Name. This is repeated in seemingly endless ways and in a wide variety of idiom, but it all comes down to the same thing. The *nām* lies all around us and within us, the gift of Akal Purakh to all who will but see it. Meditate on this and you shall find liberation.

In terms of language, the *Adi Granth* presents an interesting variety, one that predictably covers a range of linguistic usage but which nevertheless sustains a sufficient degree of uniformity to justify what has been called the Sacred Language of the Sikhs, or SLS for short.⁷ Macauliffe, author of *The Sikh Religion*, is doubtless to blame for the widespread view in Western countries that there is a multitude of languages represented in the *Adi Granth*. In reality the pattern is quite simple. With a knowledge of Punjabi and Hindi one can easily proceed to a grasp of Sant Bhasha or the Language of the Sants. This was the language employed all over north India during the time when the *Adi Granth* was composed and compiled, and the person who knows Sant Bhasha and reads the Gurmukhi script should have relatively little difficulty with most of the *Adi Granth*.

The fact that the *Adi Granth* is clearly accepted as the primary scripture of the Sikhs does not mean that there are no problems

associated with it. Three of these have already been noted. One relates to the sources of the *Adi Granth*, notably questions arising from the apparent use of the Goindval Pothis; a second arises from the important differences separating the Kartarpur version from that of Bhai Banno; and the third concerns the actual history of the Kartarpur manuscript prior to its discovery in the Lahore treasury in 1849. Another is the manner in which it came to be transmuted into the *Guru Granth Sahib* in the eighteenth century, a subject that demands particular caution and tact. Yet another concerns issues which derive from the actual text of the *Adi Granth*. Are the words it records the authentic compositions of the various authors to whom they are attributed or have they been changed in the period of oral transmission that preceded their copying? This problem (which concerns the works of the Bhagats) also raises questions that demand the utmost care. Some of the tasks in the wider area are those that require the skill of a historian, others those of the philologist or textual critic. Commonly they will demand both.

Anyone who is acquainted with the Sikh view of the *Adi Granth* will at once be aware that this exercise involves research of the most extreme delicacy. Of the issues listed above, the inquiries will be attended by risks of generally ascending uneasiness and the danger of grave offence, particularly the latter two. Great tact is required, for at his or her peril the scholar questions the traditional interpretation of how the *Adi Granth* came to be the *Guru Granth Sahib*; and, even more, he or she will create serious disturbance by carelessly broadcasting the view that the text of the *Adi Granth* may be other than the actual words that were uttered by the Bhagat to whom they are attributed. It will be a very brave or a very rash person who will venture on the last of these.

Some traditional Sikh scholars take the view that the *Guru Granth Sahib* is sacrosanct and that any attempt to examine it amounts to blasphemy. For these scholars, textual analysis can elicit only outraged indignation. Nevertheless such questions should be honestly faced, always heading, of course, the obligation to tread exceedingly softly and always communicating one's findings with the utmost courtesy. To leave these subjects inviolable and untouched may be necessary in some parts of the world, but if that is to be our response everywhere, and Sikhs do nothing about it, we necessarily condemn them to

stagnation while the world rushes on. An unquestioning attitude may suit those whose understanding has already been definitively formed, but it certainly will not accommodate a growing generation who will insist on comparing their faith with the world which they find around them. As the world changes, they will find their inherited faith further and yet further out of harmony with it, and that is assuredly a guarantee that many at least will be compelled to relinquish the substance of their belief. Some will remain and lend credence to the voices of those who insist upon no change. They will, however, be a dwindling band.

The Dasam Granth

For the Sikhs of the later eighteenth century there was no problem about the Dasam Granth. When the Granth was invoked it meant that an appeal was made to both the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth. Both were present at meetings of the Khalsa and both received the same reverence. Now, however, it is different. Portions of the Dasam Granth are as familiar as any passages in Sikh literature, but the scripture as a whole raises serious questions. These have been settled by placing the Dasam Granth on one side. Although it still counts as scripture, there is usually only one volume present to signify the Guru, and that volume is the Adi Granth.

The origins of this second scripture of the Sikhs are obscure. The traditional explanation attributes it to the famous Sikh martyr Mani Singh, who, during his tenure in charge of Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar (1721–34), is believed to have compiled a miscellany known as *Dasam Pāṭīshāh kā Granth*, 'The Granth of the Tenth Master'. Following his death in 1734, the Khalsa debated whether it should be preserved as a single volume or whether the works reputed to be by Guru Gobind Singh should be held separately. In 1740 a Sikh called Matab Singh, who was on his way to slay the sacrilegious Massa Ranghar for desecrating Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar, proposed that the volume should be divided if he was killed. If, however, he was successful, it should remain intact. The plan was accepted, Matab Singh returned victorious, and so there survives this substantial collection of heterogeneous works associated with Guru Gobind Singh.

Mani Singh's collection, however, was not the only one. An independent collection is said to have been gathered by the martyr Dip Singh and a third collection is attributed to Sukkha Singh of Patna. The greater part of the three collections is the same, but there were some differences. In 1885 a committee was set up by the Sanatan Sikhs of the Amritsar Singh Sabha and in 1902 it published an authorized version, giving it the name 'Dasam Granth' for the first time. This title, 'The Book of the Tenth [Guru]', evidently served to distinguish it from the Adi ('Original') Granth. An alternative theory (much less likely) is that it means one tenth of a longer collection.

The Tat Khalsa faction was less happy with its publication. Some of the works contained in it seemed obviously to be by Guru Gobind Singh and these certainly met with their warmest support. Many of the ideals incorporated in its other works, however, are plainly Hindu. This means that they can be interpreted as at variance with the Tat Khalsa claim that the Sikhs are not to be regarded as Hindus.

The Dasam Granth presents considerable problems and very little is being done to solve any of them. One reason is apparently this general uneasiness on the part of orthodox scholars at much of the content of the volume. Approximately 80 per cent of the collection comprises largely a retelling of Hindu myths. Given the strong emphasis of Tat Khalsa reformers on the fact that Sikhs are not Hindus, it is scarcely surprising that they should have viewed the contents of a major portion of the Dasam Granth with less than enthusiasm.

A more solid reason is that, whereas the script of the Dasam Granth is Gurmukhi (the script in which Punjabi is written and that virtually all literate Sikhs know), the language is predominantly Braj (which few understand in any detail). Braj is the language which is spoken around Mathura and Brindaban, and was used for the important cycle of Krishna legends. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, its coverage was much wider, taking the Punjab into its sphere of influence. Very few people who know the Braj language well also know the Gurmukhi script. There are accordingly few who possess the linguistic credentials to study the Dasam Granth effectively, and as a result it continues to be largely ignored.

In its approved and published form, the Dasam Granth is a substantial work comprising 1,428 pages. Four varieties of composition may

be distinguished in it. The first group comprises two works normally regarded as autobiographical (or at least as biographical), both attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. These are *Bachitar Nāṭak* ('Wondrous Drama') and *Ẓafar-nāmā* ('Letter of Victory'). The second cluster consists of four devotional works, also attributed to the Guru (*Jāp*, *Ākāl Ustat*, *Gīān Prabodh*, and *Shabad Hazāre*). The third comprises two miscellaneous works (*Savayye* and *Shastar Nām-mālā*). And the fourth is a collection of mythical narratives and popular anecdotes (*Chandī Charitra*, *Chandī kī Vār*, the *Chaubīs Avatār* and the *Trīā Charitra* or *Pakhyān Charitra*).

Bachitar Nāṭak describes the Guru's pre-birth meditation in his previous incarnation and the early battles of his career in the Shivalik hills. It concludes before the founding of the Khalsa. *Ẓafar-nāmā*, which is in Persian verse, is addressed to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and was composed after the Guru's withdrawal from Anandpur. After detailing infamous deeds by the Mughal, it declares that the Eternal One is just and that justice requires the sword to be drawn when order is threatened. Although the *Ẓafar-nāmā* is now in the Dasam Granth, its inclusion was only fixed towards the end of the nineteenth century. Sikhs generally regard it as unquestionably authentic, which may be correct but is certainly not established. The lengthy period of transmission may well have produced changes both in language and content.⁸

Jāp Sāhib is a poem of 199 short verses containing numerous terse descriptions of Akal Purakh, many only a single word.⁹ *Jāp* should not be confused with Guru Nanak's *Jāpī*. In the unfinished *Ākāl Ustat* ('Praise to the Timeless One') the Timeless One is addressed as *Sarab Loh*, the 'All Steel', and is described in militant terms as absolutely supreme. *Gīān Prabodh* perhaps belongs rather to the fourth group as it consists partly of tales from the Hindu work, the *Mahābhārata*. It also includes, however, salutations to the Eternal One of a kind reminiscent of *Ākāl Ustat*. *Shabad Hazāre* is a series of short compositions covering such subjects as yoga and austerity, designed to elicit a fervent response from the reader or hearer.

The *Savayye* are panegyrics in the metre known as *savāiyā*; and the *Shastar Nām-mālā* is, as its title indicates, 'an inventory of weapons'. Seven weapons are listed and the deeds of some who used them

are related. The seven names are cryptically expressed as puzzles.

Finally and by far the most prolific are the mythical narratives and popular anecdotes. It is this fourth group which constitutes the bulk of the collection, comprising more than 80 per cent of the total. Three of them graphically depict the goddess Durga or Devi (the two lengthy versions of *Chandī Charitra* and *Chandī kī Vār*), and during the eighteenth century virtually every Sikh source makes mention of Guru Gobind Singh's encounter with her. Her appearance in the Dasam Granth, as in these other eighteenth-century sources, created a problem for Tat Khalsa scholars. The question was settled by concluding that in the form of Bhagauti (one of the names taken by Durga, the name she assumes in *Chandī kī Vār*) she symbolizes the Eternal One as the Divine Sword and as such she (or rather it) is addressed in the invocation to *Ardās*.

The *Chaubīs Avatār* are tales of twenty-four incarnations of the god Vishnu. They comprise 4,371 verses, of which 864 concern Ram and 2,492 deal with Krishna. The *Trīā Charitra* are cautionary tales of the wives of women, and in several cases their inclusion in a sacred scripture is somewhat difficult to justify. They were, however, very popular among their originators and occupy 580 pages in the printed edition.

Is the Dasam Granth all the work of the tenth Guru? There are at least four theories concerning its authorship. The traditional and popular view, current among the great majority of the Panth and based largely on ignorance of the contents of the Dasam Granth, is that the entire collection is the work of Guru Gobind Singh. A second theory, this one favoured by a majority of the Panth's scholars, is that only the first three clusters should be attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, with *Chandī kī Vār* also added. The remainder must have been the work of writers who belonged to his retinue. A third theory (a more radical view) maintains that only *Ẓafar-nāmā* can be attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, the entire remainder being by his followers and expressing a reflection of their ideas and attitudes. And an extreme view holds that *Ẓafar-nāmā* is merely based upon the letter dispatched by Guru Gobind Singh and that the first three clusters represent his thought without actually being by him. According to this view, the strict authenticity of *Ẓafar-nāmā* is open to doubt, partly as a result of its late appearance.

These four theories have been given hesitant currency, but it would be quite wrong to suggest that any dramatic controversy has resulted from them. That must await an uncertain future, at a time when scholars with the linguistic and historical credentials are available. In the meantime, those portions of the Dasam Granth which are already well known will continue to give inspiration to devout Sikhs. *Jāp Sahib* and the *Ten Savayyas* are already a part of the regular pattern of daily devotions; *Akal Ustat* offers poetry of rare quality; *Bachitar Nānak* provides a view of the early life of Guru Gobind Singh; and *Zafar-nāmā* portrays his defiance.

Clearly these works will continue to have a significant influence within the Panth, with the greater part of the remainder set aside for the foreseeable future. We must hope, however, that the delay will not be too long. It is a great mystery, yet it is an important source of Sikh history, or could be if its true character were understood. To the Panth of the late nineteenth century, and even more the twentieth, the Dasam Granth has received a much lower status than the Adi Granth, excepting only those works which are generally held to be unquestionably those of Guru Gobind Singh. Only the Nihangs, the blue-garmented steel-bedecked remnant of the eighteenth-century Khalsa, still give it a place of honour in their gurdwaras.¹⁰

The works of Bhai Gurdas and Nand Lal Goya

Gurdas Bhalla was a faithful disciple of several of the Gurus, notably the fifth and the sixth. In his long lifetime, which ended around 1693, he wrote two kinds of poetry (the *kabittā* and the *vār*). The 675 short *kabitts* are in Braj and this (as with the Dasam Granth) explains their chronic neglect. The forty *Vārs* are, however, accessible. Their language is Punjabi, an annotated Punjabi commentary exists, and as 'the key to the Guru Granth Sahib' they occupy a place of considerable importance in Sikh tradition. Although their poetic quality varies, several are of a high order and they include material of considerable interest. Some of them are narrative works that relate episodes from the lives of the earlier Gurus or incidents which occurred during the author's own lifetime. Many more are doctrinal or exegetical.¹¹

Little research has been done on the works of Bhai Gurdas in recent years, and work on the compositions of Nand Lal Goya (1633–1715) is even more restricted. Nand Lal was a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh and for several years held a position in the Guru's retinue. Two of his collections, his *Dvān* (a collection of sixty-one *ghazals* or odes) and the *Ẓindagī-nāmā* (a series of 510 couplets), merit special attention. Like most other Khatri he declined to take initiation into the Khalsa, and his poetry reads more like the devotional works of the early Gurus. Unfortunately it is little heard nowadays and has seldom been heard for a long time, a result of being composed in Persian. Here too facility with the language is nowadays comparatively rare within the Panth, though certainly it is more common than a knowledge of Braj.¹²

The works of Bhai Gurdas and Nand Lal Goya are the only compositions that *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* mentions as suitable for singing in gurdwaras, other than those contained in the sacred scriptures. They do not occupy the same pre-eminent position as the compositions of either the Adi Granth or the Dasam Granth, but they are certainly placed higher than any other composition in Sikh literature. As such they can be treated as within the bounds of canonical writings.

Other traditional writings

The janam-sakhis have already been covered while dealing with the sources for Nanak's life.¹³ The *rahit-nāmās*, or manuals containing the Rahit, have also been considered.¹⁴ Of the traditional writings of the Sikhs, this leaves only the *gur-bilās* literature awaiting description.

Gur-bilās means literally 'pleasure of the Guru' and works composed in this style concentrate on the mighty deeds of two Gurus, Hargobind and particularly Gobind Singh. These were the two Gurus renowned for their deeds of military valour and it is upon these gallant deeds that the *gur-bilās* writers typically concentrate. The piety represented by the *gur-bilās* literature is of a distinctively different quality from that of the janam-sakhis, emphasizing as it does the heroic deeds of the warrior Gurus.

The beginnings can be traced to *Bachitar Nānak*, recorded in the Dasam Granth, and following Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708

comes the first clear example of the style, Sainapati's *Gur Sobhā*. Late in the eighteenth century Sukkha Singh produced his *Gur-bilās Dasvān Paishāhī* (1791) and during the mid nineteenth century there followed *Gur-bilās Paishāhī 10* by Koer Singh and *Gur-bilās Chhetvān Paishāhī* attributed to a poet called Sohan. In the same period Rattan Singh Bhangu completed his *Prachīn Panth Prākāśh* (1841), the climax of the *gur-bilās* style.

In 1844 Santokh Singh issued his *Gur Pralāp Sūray*, popularly known as the *Sūraj Prākāśh*. This marked a reversion to the janam-sakhi style of presentation earlier represented by the author's *Nānak Prākāśh*, a work which is strictly in the janam-sakhi style. The *gur-bilās* mode was still alive, however, and later in the century was present in the works of Gian Singh. In 1880 Gian Singh published his *Panth Prākāśh*, and between 1891 and 1919 he progressively issued the several parts of his substantial *Tawarīkh Gurū Khalsā*. This, like its predecessors, represents the history of the Khalsa in terms that emphasize the heroism of the Gurus.

Unlike the works of Bhai Gurdas and Nand Lal, these three varieties of literature – the janam-sakhis, the *rahit-nāmās*, and works in the *gur-bilās* style – are definitely outside the bounds of canonical scripture. They do not constitute writing that is treated as sacred and accordingly they occupy a lower level in the estimation of the Sikhs. It is, however, a higher level than any modern treatment of the Sikh religion. They deal as primary sources directly with elements of the faith which are viewed by Sikhs as absolutely fundamental and as such they assuredly come within any definition of distinctively Sikh literature.

SIKH SECTS

How does one define a sect? The existence of sects presupposes an orthodox form from which they differ, and accordingly one can only speak of sects when that orthodox form has been identified. As far as this book is concerned, the orthodox form of Sikhism is unquestionably the Khalsa mode. This was not always the case. Prior to the rise of the Singh Sabha, variety was tolerated in the Panth, and during the early years of the Singh Sabhas the Sanatan Sikhs strove to uphold the pattern of diversity. The Khalsa interpretation, however, was firmly established as orthodox by the activities of the Tat Khalsa reformers in the early decades of the twentieth century, and ever since it has dominated the Panth. Sects are sects because they differ from the Khalsa mode as spelt out by the Tat Khalsa.

Is it the right word to use for the different varieties of belief and practice that one finds in the Panth? 'Sect' has a pejorative meaning which, strictly speaking, one is not entitled to attach to Sikh variants from the orthodox. The difficulty is, though, that there is no other word available. If we were using Punjabi or Hindi, the meaning would more accurately conveyed by *sampraday*, a word that carries a similar meaning and can be used for 'sect' but which lacks any derogatory sense. *Sampraday* would indeed be closer than 'sect' to the meaning we seek, but the word is too alien to most eyes and ears. We are left, unfortunately, with 'sect'.

The fact that certain groups are clearly labelled as sects does not mean that in orthodox eyes they are necessarily excluded from the Panth. Most Sikhs would, for example, acknowledge that the Namdharis (otherwise known as Kukas) are truly Sikhs. They may be sadly astray (in the view of the orthodox Sikh) in one or two fundamental points of belief, but this does not block them from panthic membership. The same would be said of the Nirmlas, and (rather more hesitantly) the claims of the tiny remnant of Udasis might perhaps be