

# ***The History and Compilation of the Dasm Granth (Part 3)***

*(Originally published in The Sikh Review in 1955)*

**Dr. Trilochan Singh**

## **PART III-THE BACHITER NATAK GRANTH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction to the Bachiter Natak Granth gives Guru Gobind Singh's personal faith and philosophy.

The opening lines state in the most vigorous and clear words Guru Gobind Singh's conception of God as the sword of *dharmā*. Not only the sword but every weapon became an attributive symbol of God. He loved God and saluted Him through the attributive names coined by the Guru from the weapons of *dharmā*. The opening line is, "*Namaskar sri khadag kao*-Salutations to the glorious sword supreme." And then he sings the glory of this sword of *dharmā* and explains it in one remarkable verse which Dr. Gokal Chand Narang calls the finest verse in all the world literature:

*khag khand bihandan khal dal khandan at ran mandan barbandan, bhuj dand akhandan tej  
parcandan jot amahdan bhan prabhan, Sukh santa karnann durmat darnah kilbikh harnan as  
sarnan, jai jai jag-karan, srist ubaran mam pritparan, jai tegan. The sword it is that cuts a] evil,  
branch and root; The sword it is that destroys all satanic troops; Its sway over evil makes life's  
battle impressive and grand; I t is the indestructible symbol of justice in His hands. Shining in  
splendour and ablaze with such a glow That its radiance dims even the light of Apollo, Saviour of  
the saints, Destroyer of wicked minds, Dispeller of sins, I take refuge in Thee of supreme sword.  
Glory, glory unto Thee, O Creator and first cause, Glory, glory unto Thee, Saviour of this earthly  
globe. Thou art my protector and my sustainer; Glory, glory junto Thee, O supreme sword.*

Here is Guru Gobind Singh's complete conception of the sword. This was the sword, 'the spirit of dharma,' which Guru Gobind Singh received from Guru Nanak after it had been handled by the other Gurus. This was the sword Guru Gobind Singh gave to the Khalsa. Before writing the Bachiter Natak Granth, Guru Gobind Singh wanted to clarify two points, two conceptions which were new to the Indian masses. One was his conception of the sword and the other was his conception of the avatars and prophets in comparison with the infinite God.

*kite Khrisn se kit kot banae kite ram se met dare upae mahadin kete prithi manjh hue, samai apni  
apni ant mue.*

*He has created millions of insects like Krishna; Innumerable Ramas He created and has destroyed them; Innumerable Mohammads have come and gone on the earth; They were great for the time they existed and ultimately they died.*

Guru Gobind Singh called the prophets and avatars mere kit-worms or insects-in comparison to God. He called even himself a mere kit, a worm or insect. The object of writing the Bachiter Natak, he said, was "to describe the wonderful drama of some of His manifestations as it is impossible to describe the absolute greatness and glory of God. From the great deeds of the manifestations one learns about the greatness of God." [1]

### ***APNI HATHA (AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF GURU GOBIND SINGH)***

This forms the first part of the Bachiter Natak Granth. The autobiography was written with a definite purpose. The purpose was to tell in the clearest words, without obscuring them in mystic illusions, Guru Gobind Singh's personal relation with God, his mission on earth and his determination to fulfill that mission on earth.

The autobiography does not give the life of the Guru in detail but only describes the causes that gave rise to the battles and the victory of dharma over evil powers and wicked aggressors. But the autobiography is unique from one point in that Guru Gobind Singh gave a detailed account of his previous birth. In his previous birth he said that he was meditating on the Almighty on the Sapat Sring Mountain which is situated near Hemkunt.

*ab main apni katha bakhano; tap sad-hat jeh bidh mohe ano. hemkunt parbat hai jahan, sapat sring sobhat hai taha, sapat sring tah nam kahava pand raj jah jog kamava. tah ham adhik tapasya sadhi*

*Now I will tell my own story, How from a life of austere contemplation I came here. Where there is the Hemkunt Mountain, There is a place called Sapat Sring. Sapat Sring is the name of the place Where Pandu (the father of the Pandavas) went to practice yoga.*

In this place I meditated deeply on God. Bhai Vir Singh, our saintly and most learned scholar, following the explanation given by Kavi Santokh Singh, has explained it the other way round. Their interpretation is that Guru Gobind Singh meditated at Hemkunt near *Sapat Sring*, which means seven peaks. This seems to be an error. Some scholars explain the word Pandu as Pandavas. This also is wrong. The Pandavas never went to these mountains for meditation but towards the end of their lives they are said to have gone to the Himalayas for the end of their earthly existence. It was the father of the Pandavas, Pandu Raj, who went to *Sapat Sring* to do penance to expiate some serious sin he had committed.

Two of his wives accompanied him and one of them died there. In the *ad-purb*, chapter 119, slokas 47 to 50 of the Mahabharat, is written:

The Kaurava Rajkumar Pandu, living on fruits and roots as his diet, went with both his wives to Nagshat Mountain. There they stayed for some days. Then he crossed the Chatarth, Kalkut and arrived at Gandhmadan. The siddhas and maharisis of this mountain attended on him. From here they reached Indar-Danum Sarovar. A little beyond Hanskut (later called Hemkunt) Mahaiaja Pandu arrived at *Sapat Sring* where he performed great tapasya. This proves that it was Sapat Sring where Guru Sahib meditated and this place is close to Hemkunt.

Principal Teja Singh in his recent interpretation misinterprets Pandu as meaning the Pandavas and he makes an even greater mistake in dragging Hemkunt to a place near Patna. There is no *Sapat Sring* there and there is no evidence that Pandu ever performed any tapasya there. Principal Teja Singh also takes this statement to be either false or a figurative form of speech. He says that when Guru Gobind Singh saw this place he psychologically imagined himself to have done tapasya there in his past birth.

However, Guru Gobind Singh's autobiography covers more than half his life on this earth and there is not a single statement which may be considered imaginary. Therefore we must assume this explanation to be not only wrong but also baseless.

Another unique feature of this autobiography is Guru Gobind Singh's discourse with God when he was not quite willing to leave His lotus feet, but to fulfill His will and purpose he had to go. "I send you/' said God," as My own son to create a Panth with a new spiritual consciousness. Wherever you go, lead people to the path of righteousness and prevent them from indulging in evil."

*"But," said Guru Gobind Singh, "I humbly stood before the Lord with folded hands and with my head lowered I said, 'The new Panth will flourish only if Thou helpst me, O Lord.'" He added, "For this purpose God sent me to this world. Whoever calls me God will be doomed to perdition. Know me to be but a servant of the supreme Being". Whatever God said to me I will declare. I will not fear anyone. Stones I will not worship. Hypocrisy I will not let come near me. I will but sing the name of the Infinite."*

Unfortunately the autobiography ends at a very early period. Had it included the story of the creation of the Khalsa it might have been a greater document. Anyway the battles which are described could never have been depicted by other writers the way Guru Gobind Singh has depicted them, even if he had used available contemporary accounts.

Towards the end of the autobiography is given the plan of Bachiter Natak that was yet to be completed He said, "I will write about the life story' of the avatars as Thou revealest to me, O

God. I first wrote a Chandi Charitar. It was a short version. Now I wish to give a more detailed version."

### **AVATARS OF VISHNU**

In this section of the Bachiter Natak Granth follows the lives of the 24 avatars of Vishnu. In a brief introduction Guru Gobind Singh said that out of these 24 alleged avatars he acknowledged only 10 of them as real manifestations of the light of God. Others were merely mythological conceptions. He acknowledged only the following: Machh, Kachh, Vehrah Narsingh, Bavan, Paras Ram, Rama Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. [2]

The lives of all the avatars are very brief, but are completely detached from the mythological and cosmological complexities of the Puranas. The descriptions of these avatars is in line with the references to them in the Guru Granth. In the brief introduction he once more pointedly said, "Both the Hindus and the Muslims are particularizing God and quarrelling with each other with narrow sectarian views. God is one for all and the primary aim of the religion of man is to realize Him. If a person rises above these narrow views and realizes God in his heart he can rise above both the Hindus and the Muslims." "Alas," he said, "the yogis and the sanyasis the Jains and the Muslim faqirs are all looting the world with various types of hypocrisy and display of religious fervour. The true saint, the lover of God, can never remain hidden. The true love of God is always rewarded and the evil doers are ultimately punished."

Most of the lives are cut short because Guru Gobind Singh feared that the Bachiter Natak Granth might become unusually big. He frequently wrote at the end of the composition:

*hirdai granth ke badhbe te daraun. (Chavi Avtar)*

*katha bridh te mai daraun. tante kahi na rudra kahani, granth badhan ki cint pachani. granth badhan te at dar paun sun lai ban sancheh yar. (Triya Charitar)*

The major compositions of this section are Ram Avatar, Krishna Avatar and Kalki Avatar. Although they come in the volume in the order mentioned they were not written in this order. Krishna Avatar was written in the early years when Guru Sahib was at Paunta in Bikraml 1745 (1688 A.D.) while Rama Avatar, which comes first, was written in 1755 Bikraml (1698), exactly 10 years later. This shows that the major works were written first and then the minor works and sometime in 1701 the whole Bachiter Natak Granth was arranged and compiled in the present order.

Ram Avatar has 864 verses while Krishna Avatar has 2,491 verses; Ram Avatar being a work of maturer age has a much higher literary excellence than Krishna Avatar. Guru Gobind Singh

mentioned in the Krishna Avatar that 1,192 verses were composed at Anandpur before his departure to Paunta Sahib and the rest was written at Paunta. Out of the first 1,192 we have only 983 in the printed recension. He started writing at Paunta on Wednesday in the month of Savan 1744 Bikrami and he completed the whole Krishna Avatar, which he says is the Dasm Sikandh of the Bhagwat on Wednesday, Savan 1745 Bikrami. Within one year from the dates given in the Krishna Avatar it is clear he wrote about 1,509 verses. This comes to about 125 verses a month. He stopped his literary activity for a year exactly one year before the battle of Bhangani.

The arrangement of the verses in a few places have been upset in the later recensions. The following verses should have come either in the middle where Guru Gobind Singh resumed the story on coming to Paunta Sahib or at the end. They give the Guru's personal faith and philosophy and in all other compositions such verses come either at the beginning or the end. The two verses quoted resemble the popular caupals of Guru Gobind Singh so closely that even an ordinary Sikh can at once recognize them to be Guru Gobind Singh's compositions:

*mai na ganeseh pritham manau kisan bisan kabhu na dhyaun, kan sune pahcan na tin son, liv  
lagi mori pag in son, apna jan karo pritpara, tum sahib main kinkar thara das jan dai hath ubaro,  
hamre sabh bairian sangharo*

*I will not commence writing with the invocation of Ganesh Nor will I meditate on Vishnu or  
Krishna. They are just historical figures that I hear of but not the objects of my faith. I am inwardly  
devoted only to Thy feet. O Lord. Considering me to be Thine own, be my protector and saviour,  
O Lord. Thou art the Master, the Lord Supreme; I am but a servant and a slave. Considering me  
Thy humblest servant, inspire me with the grace of Thy saving hand And destroy all my enemies  
from the root.*

In the end Guru Gobind Singh said that he had translated the whole of the Dasm Sikandh with the sole purpose of inspiring the people with the will to be perpetual fighters of the battle of dharma, "Avar basna nah prabh, dharam judh ke cae." The urge in Guru Gobind Singh's poems for his followers to be fighters may give the wrong impression to many (as unfortunately many Sikhs and non-Sikhs have) that Guru Gobind Singh exhorted the Sikhs only to be wielders of the sword and fighters on the earthly plane. Neither was Guru Gobind Singh's conception of the sword the sword of offence, as has been sufficiently proved, nor did his conception of dharam judh mean merely fighting political enemies with the sword. Real dharam judh begins with our determination to conquer our own lower natures with the light of true wisdom. I am giving no doctrine or theory of my own by explaining Guru-ji's words as I conceive them to be. But Guru Gobind Singh with his own pen cleared this misconception exactly at the point where it was likely to arise. In the very next verse, which is the last verse of Krishna Avatar, as an epilogue he said:

*dhan jio teh ko jag mai, mukh te hari, cit mai judh bicarai, deh anit na nit rahai, jas nav cadai bhav  
sagar tarai, dhiraj dham banae ihai tan, budh so dipak jio ujjarai, gyanaih ki badhni mano hath lai  
katarata hutvar buharai. Krishna Avatar 2492*

*Great are those souls in this world, On whose lips is ever the name of God. And who in their  
hearts ever contemplate fighting the battle of life. Their body is a fleeting frame that will not last  
forever. On the boat of His name, the word, they cross the fearful ocean of life. Their intellect is  
aflame with the light of wisdom, Their discriminative mind handles the broomstick of knowledge in  
such a way That with it they sweep all cowardice, all falsehood, out of their inner selves. This is  
the battle of life, and this the dharam judh for which we should always be prepared. Only those  
who have lordly sway over their own battle of life can fight other battles of dharma (dharam judh)  
on the physical and mental plane and win temporal and spiritual glory. Only such a one can  
rightly wear and handle Guru Gobind Singh's sword and be his true saint-soldier, the Ichalsa.  
None else, none else.*

### **AVATAR OF BRAHMA**

While the avatars of Vishnu are all political avatars, saviours with the sword; the avatars of Brahma are scholars. They are saviours with the pen. In the first 20 verses of introduction is the invocation to God:

*bin ek asrai nam; nahi aur kaunai kam; je man hai gurdev, te jan hai anbhev; bin tas avar na jan,  
cit an bhav na an; ik man jai kartar; jit hoe ant udhar;*

*Besides the sustenance of His name, Nothing avails, nothing prevails; Those who accept the  
doctrine of Gurudeva (Guru Nanak). They will realize the infinite Being. Believe no other besides  
Him, Entertain no other faith in thy mind. With single minded devotion sing of the Creator Whowill  
ultimately be thy saviour.*

Then Guru Gobind Singh mentioned that he had just finished the story of the 24 avatars of Vishnu and now he would relate the seven avatars of Brahma. These are: Balmik, Kashyap, Sukra, Baches, Vyas, rsis of the six systems and Kalidas. The stories of these avatars are told very briefly. There are only two verses about Baches. Guru-ji took Kalidas to be a court poet of Vikrimajit and considered him a poet par excellence.

Those who may doubt the avatars of Brahma to be parts of the Bachiter Natak will read even in the printed Dasm Granth at the end of Krishna Avatar:

*it sri dasm sikahdh purane, bacitar natak granthe krisna avatar dhyae samiapat mast subh mast.*

Here ends the translation from Dasm Shikand Puran of Krishna Avatar in the Bachiter Natak Granth.

Similarly at the end of every avatar of Brahma and Siva is written:

*it sri bacitar natak granthe brahma avatar saptamo kalidas samapat*

So ends in the Bachiter Natak Granth the seventh avatar of Brahma: Kalidas.

So it is written at the end of every avatar of Rudra (Siva).



**Photostat of a page from Duttatreya in Guru Gobind Singh's own handwriting.**

(Mark the unique style of hand drawings of swords and arrows that make up the border)

### **AVATARS OF RUDRA**

This section is also unfortunately not complete. Guru-ji described all the avatars of Siva from Duttatreya to Gorakh and other naths and siddhas but the story was cut short at the death of Paras Nath. The rest of this section appears to be lost. There are only two major stories, the lives

of Duttatreya and Paras Nath. In the life of Paras Nath comes a detailed reference to Machhindar and a vague reference to Charpat.

The life of Duttatreya is given in all its details and told vigorously. The theory that Guru Gobind Singh was interested in translating the life of only those who handled the sword is disproved by Guru Gobind Singh's interest in these stories. Duttatreya is said to have had 24 gurus. The photostat of the page in Guru Gobind Singh's own handwriting is a page from the life of Duttatreya at the time he adopted the nineteenth guru. Duttatreya has also written the Avdhut Gita which contains 288 couplets and the Jivan-mukti Gita, a small but inspired work of 23 couplets. Guru Gobind Singh gave the whole of Dutta's life and philosophy in progressive evolution. He was the son of the great Rishi Atra and Anusuya. In the life of Paras is an interesting dialogue between Machhindar and Paras Nath. Machhindar Nath tells Paras Nath that by conquering the whole world and not conquering his own mind he is yet a weakling. He would really be great if he conquered the mind; life's inner battle is of much more significance than any other battle. Then Machhindar describes the inner battle. The forces of evil are falsehood, lust, attachment, hatred, anger, envy, vanity, doubt, Kama (the king of passion), ignorance and all the vices and sins come fully clad and armed. Each of these is described as living personified figures. Enmity is described as a prominent warrior of the army of evil who never turns his back on any. Its eyes are red with blood and blood-stained are its weapons. So deeply red is it in appearance that even the colour red dwindles before it in shame. It has conquered the minds of the strongest of the world. Once it comes into the battlefield fully armed no one can check its sweeping advance except sant (peace).

On the side of the good are also innumerable warriors: dharma, tolerance, valour, faith, worship, love, goodness, knowledge, the angerless, the vanityless, humility and innumerable more are on the list. They fight the inner battle that is going on in every being. In those who are spiritually conscious it is goodness and wisdom that have the upper hand.

In those who sink into materialism, evil and ignorance have the upper hand. As this section is about the life of yogis and sanyasis, Guru Gobind Singh gave his own view on yoga:

*jogi jog jatan me nahi, bhram bhram marat, kaha pac pac kar dekh samajh man mahi, jo jan maha tat keh janai param gyan keh pavai, tab yeh ek thaur man rakhai, dar dar bhramat na dhavai.*

*O yogi, yoga lies not in the matted hair. Why are you wasting your life in rambling and roaming in the jungles? Look within and search for Him within thy own mind. He who attains the supreme reality within attains supreme knowledge. The enlightened ones concentrate their minds on the One; They do not prowl about and wander from door to door.*

[1] *kahan budh prabh tuch hamari; barn sakai mehma ju tihari,*

*ham na sakat kar sift tumari; ap leho tum katha sudhari;*

*tumri kriya kaha kou kahai; samjhat bat urjh mat rahai;*

*sucham rup na barna jae; birdh sarupeh kaho banai;*

**Bachiter Natak Granth. Chapter 2, Chaupai 3 and 7**

[2] The Guru Granth and Bhai Gurdas also accept only 10:

*cf: bisan lae avatar das, vair virodh jodh sanghare,*

*mach, kach, varah rup narsing hoe bavan bodhare,*

*parsram, ram, krisan ho, kilk kilanki at ahankare.*

*brahma bisan mahes dev upaya brahme dite bed puja, laya*

*das avatari ram raja aya, daitan mare dhae hukam sabaya.*