

THE CONNECTEDNESS OF BHAI GURDAS: INTERTEXTUALITY IN THE EXEGESES
OF BHAI GURDAS' *VĀRĀṆ*

by

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THE CONNECTEDNESS OF BHAI GURDAS: INTERTEXTUALITY IN THE EXEGESES
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in Asian Studies

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Abstract

This thesis sheds light on the *Vārāṇ*, a collection of works written by the scribe of the first version of the Sikh canon, the *Kartarpuri Bīr* (scripture; 1604 CE), Bhai Gurdas. Even though the *Varan* hold the title of being the “key” (*kuṇjī*) to the Sikh scriptures, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the *Varan* are not now commonly studied both in western scholarship and within Sikh spaces, in particular, Gurdwaras. Overall, however, the *Varan* have through the years greatly shaped the formation of a Sikh. The goal of the thesis is to move beyond Bhai Gurdas’ text to try and understand how it has been interpreted and understood within the Sikh intellectual community. The thesis looks at the reception history of the *Varan* with Bhai Vir Singh (1882-1957), who wrote an exegesis on the *Varan* in the early twentieth century, and Sant Gurbachan Singh (1902-1961), whose *kathā* (sermon) audio was recorded in the 1950s. Both are well-respected scholars and practitioners of the Sikh faith. These two thinkers, Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh, provide insight into how Bhai Gurdas’ works were understood, received, and promulgated. As seen through their respective exegeses, the *Varan* must be understood through intertextual linkages, both to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh canon, and a wide range of other traditional Sikh texts.

Lay Summary

The goal of this thesis is to explore an important Sikh text, Bhai Gurdas' *Ballads (Varan)*, to understand its importance within the Sikh tradition, and the intertextual linkages that shape its reception. This text is today often neglected, even though it was given the title of being the “key” to the Sikh canon. After discussing the relationship between the Varan and the Sikh canon, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the interpretation of the text by two influential Sikh scholars is explored. The two exegeses produced by these scholars articulate a layer of connections to other historical texts as well as the Sikh canon, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The interconnectedness of these texts demonstrates the intertextual nature of not only the *Varan* but also other texts within the Sikh tradition.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work of the author, Sukhwinder Singh Gill.

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ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ
ਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਗੁਰ ਤਿਸ ਬਿਨਾ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ।
ਕਰ ਡੰਡਉਤ ਪਦ ਕਵਲ ਤਿਨ ਸਦ ਨਮਸਕਾਰ ਹਮ ਸੋਇ॥

In the Sikh tradition, one opens one's work with an invocation, which honors the two foremost energies, God and Gurū. I feel it is important to open my thesis in the same way as, without my Guru, this work would not have been possible. The two lines following are an invocation that I offer to my Guru.

There is nothing without Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.

I fall and latch onto your lotus feet (that will carry me across); I eternally bow my head to you.

My family has played an incredible part in supporting me through all aspects of my life. I am forever grateful for their efforts in pushing and shaping me into the person I have become today. My mother, Sukhdeep Kaur, who has sacrificed and gone through so much through her life but finds ways to do more still. My maternal grandparents- Gurdev Singh and Mohinder Kaur, who strived to help us every day of their lives and raised me, teaching me valuable lessons along the way. My sisters- Mandeep and Amandeep, their endless showering of love and support through not only the master's program but also in life. Lastly, and certainly not least, my wife, Manjot Kaur. She has been by my side during my highs and my lows, and she exudes love and support regardless of what I aspire to do.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The *Vārāṇ* or verse ballads of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (ca. 1551-1636), written in approximately 1574-1636, are generally accepted to be *kunjī* or key of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (hereafter, SGGS), the Sikh canonical scripture. This indicates that the *Varan* constitute a way of understanding the compositions of the Sikh Gurus. They act as a commentary, and they are a way of reading. Ultimately, in their connection to the SGGS, they also show the Sikhs what it means to be a Sikh. Although the works of Bhai Gurdas are not now often performed in Sikh Gurdwaras—the Sikh congregational site, also known as the Guru’s “court” (*darbār*)—they are an honoured part of the Sikh intellectual tradition. Indeed, Bhai Gurdas’ writings, along with those by another poet, Bhai Nand Lal (1633-1713), are the only works permitted to be read, sung, or explained in the Gurdwara, aside from the Sikh scripture.¹

Due to their status as a “key” to the SGGS, Bhai Gurdas’ *Varan* have been subject to study by many scholars and knowledge-seekers (*vidvān*) in the Sikh tradition, who have undertaken exegeses, sermons (*kathā*) and studies of both the *Varan* and the *Kabit Savaaiye*, another collection of short poems by Bhai Gurdas. These commentaries and exegeses on the works of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (hereafter, Bhai Gurdas)² provide us a sense of how Bhai Gurdas’ text “lives” in a textual community, how they are understood, and how they are integrated into Sikh intellectual traditions, much as Philip Lutgendorf (1991) demonstrates is the case for the Ramcharitmanas. Lutgendorf discusses how the text is performed and how it lives through performers, and through commentary. In the case of Bhai Gurdas, the text lives in a deeply embedded body of literature in Sikh intellectual spaces. This thesis will explore the reception history of Bhai Gurdas’ texts in the works of two important thinkers and practitioners of the twentieth century intellectual tradition—Bhai Vir Singh (1882-1957) and Sant Gurbachan Singh Bhindranwale³ (1902-1961)—and how that history reveals the continuity and connection

¹ *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1978).

² Bhai is a term of respect which means, brother. Bhalla was Bhai Gurdas’ family name.

³ The name Bhindranwale is typically tied to another important, although controversial, figure in modern Sikh history, Sant Jarnail Singh; this name, however, has existed before (and continues to exist after) him. The name

between both of Bhai Gurdas' text's messages and the messages of the Sikh canonical scripture, the SGGS, and the connections of both of these texts to later texts that comprise the Sikh historical and intellectual tradition. Moreover, I argue that not only are the thinkers examined drawing these connections between the SGGS, but they are also arguing that Bhai Gurdas also saw and drew these connections. At the same time, they in turn constructed a web of interconnected textual linkages to a range of other Sikh texts. This is what comprises Sikh traditional exegesis. Taken together, these two aspects—the relationship between the Varan and the SGGS, and the relationship of these texts to a range of other texts through the work of commentators—provides a sense of what Bhai Gurdas' works have meant in the ongoing history of the Sikh intellectual and religious tradition.

1.1 Bhai Gurdas and his works

Bhai Gurdas was the son of Isherdas,⁴ a brother of the third Guru, Guru Amardas. Guru Amardas's familial connection to the Gurus was through his niece-in-law, Bibi Amro, who was the daughter of the second Guru, Guru Angad Dev. Guru Amardas's daughter was also married to the fourth Guru, Guru Ramdas. This all means Bhai Gurdas had close blood ties to several of the Sikh Gurus.

Bhai Gurdas' biography generally comes from two sources, the *Suraj Parkash* (19th.c) and the *Gurblias Patshahi Chevin* (late 18th c./early 19th c.), which are both examples of later historiographical traditions that will be discussed below. According to these two texts, Bhai Gurdas was a poet, scholar, scribe and an exemplary Sikh. Bhai Gurdas is said to have been born in Goindval in the year 1546 and was educated in Goindval and Sultanpur Lodhi. Bhai Gurdas learned to read Gurmukhi and Devanagari texts (in Sanskrit and Brajbhāshā, an early modern literary language often referred to as "Classical Hindi" but which is grammatically quite distinct

derives from the name of a village called Bhindar Kalan, where one of the early leaders of the Damdami Taksal—an important educational institution founded in the eighteenth century—Sant Sundar Singh, was born.

⁴ Even though it is generally accepted that Bhai Gurdas was the son of Isherdas, it is contested within the Sikh traditional realm. According to Kesar Singh Chhibar in Mehma Prakash, the Guru Amardas' father, Tej Bhan, had four sons, the first being Guru Amardas, the second, Datar Chand, the third Isherdas and the fourth's name is unknown. Bhai Gurdas according to Mehma Prakash is the son of Isherdas. On the other hand, Bhai Vir Singh says, that Bhai Gurdas was the son of Datar Chand; however, for this thesis we will accept Bhai Gurdas to be the son of Isherdas.

from modern Hindi), as well as Farsi and other languages as well. He then met Guru Amardas and, under the Guru's guidance, was sent on missions to preach across South Asia.⁵ When Guru Amardas passed, Bhai Gurdas came back to Goindval to see the Guru one last time. As a later historiographical text, the *Suraj Parkash* (mid. 19th century; discussed below), details, Bhai Gurdas received blessings and teachings from the fourth Guru, Guru Ramdas, and was then instructed to continue with his preaching missions to Agra.⁶ In time, Bhai Gurdas heard news of a new Guru being given the seat of Guruship and made his way from Agra to Amritsar. Bhai Gurdas knew the Guru, Guru Arjun, even though he had not met him yet, because he was his maternal uncle, as is described in the late eighteenth century historiographical text the *Bansavalinama* by Kesar Singh Chhibar (also in brief discussed below). According to this text, when Bhai Gurdas began to make his way towards the Guru, there were many obstacles in his path. Bhai Gurdas is said to have thought to himself that if the Guru could explain why he took the steps he had taken on his travels, he would then firmly believe Guru Arjun to be the True Guru. Upon arrival, the Guru is said to have explained to Bhai Gurdas verbatim what exactly was going through his head.⁷ In this account we see description of the important relationship between these two figures, which deepened in time.

Even though Bhai Gurdas is the maternal uncle of Guru Arjun, he reveres him. In stanza nineteen in *var* twenty-four, Bhai Gurdas writes,

He is the storehouse of *Gurbānī* and is absorbed in *kīrtan* (singing of praises) and *katha* (sermon).⁸

ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਭੰਡਾਰੁ ਭਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਕਥਾ ਰਹੈ ਰੰਗ ਰਤਾ ।

This line is important because we understand Bhai Gurdas is talking about the Guru being absorbed in both *kirtan* and *katha* currently, which as the thesis will argue is an ideal that Bhai Gurdas is influenced by.

⁵ Kabir Svaye Bhai Gurdas, 24.

⁶ Bhai Gurdas is said to have said, “ਮੋਕਉ ਸਿਖੀ ਦੇਹੁ ਮਹਾਨੀ” Please bless me with this great Sikhi. The Guru responded, ਸਿਮਰਹੁ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਸਤਿਨਾਮ॥ ਜਾਂਤੇ ਪਾਵਹੁ ਸੁਖ ਬਿਸਰਾਮ॥ ਅਬ ਤੁਮ ਆਗੇ ਮਾਂਹਿ ਸਿਧਾਵਹੁ । Meditate the True Name of Vahiguru and then you will obtain the ultimate goal. Now go to Agra and teach this.” Kavi Santokh Singh, *Suraj Prakash*,

⁷ This sakhi (story), will be shared in detail in Chapter three as SGS goes through this in his introduction.

⁸ Bhai Gurdas. *Var* 24, Verse 19. Self translation.

Bhai Gurdas is particularly known for inscribing the first version of the Sikh scripture for the fifth Guru, as well as for composing works of his own. Bhai Gurdas composed over 1500 stanzas of poetry which include *Bhai Gurdas Dīān Vārān* (the Ballads of Bhai Gurdas) which are written in Punjabi and comprise one of the earliest texts in Sikh tradition in the Punjabi language, and the *Kabit Savaaiye Bhai Gurdas* (Quatrains of Bhai Gurdas), written in Brajbhāshā, hereafter respectively referred to as the *Varan* and *Kabitt*. The *Varan* consist of 41⁹ individual *Vārs* or ballads, which contain a range of numerous long poems. The *Kabitts* consists of 675 Brajbhasha stanzas; however, it must be noted that this number was smaller up until Bhai Vir Singh found over 100, previously unknown, *Kabitts* in manuscripts. In the 1940's, Bhai Vir Singh published these works and they have since been widely accepted as Bhai Gurdas' own works.¹⁰ Though it is difficult to precisely suggest one theme for the *Varan*, there are a few that run through the text. The *Varan* provide a description of the Sikh community in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a sense of its historical context, and attested to the authority of the Guruship for the community. For example, Bhai Gurdas expresses his devotion to the Gurus, especially when Guru Hargobind is proclaimed the new Guru of the Sikhs.

Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* and *Kabit Savaaiye* have a weaker and later manuscript tradition compared to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which has a strong manuscript tradition that is dated and authenticated to the time of the 5th Sikh Guru, Guru Arjun. The original manuscript of the SGGS, also known as the Kartārpur Pothī, is still in existence at Kartarpur in Punjab. The text is reliably dated to 1604 (Singh 2000, 44). As the *Varan* and *Kabitts* do not have a strong manuscript tradition, it is difficult to precisely say when the texts were written. Most scholars, however, have accepted dates ranging between the late 1500's to about 1630's (the time of Bhai Gurdas' death). Bhai Gurdas' own writings point toward a wide range of dates because numerous *Vārs* seem to have been written before Guru Arjun's *Shahīdī* (martyrdom), a dating that, as will be discussed, one contemporary scholar has argued against. As will be discussed in detail later in the introduction, some of Bhai Gurdas' own writings point to some of the *Vars* being written before the martyrdom of Guru Arjun. His devotion to Guru Arjun in some of the *Vars* suggests

⁹ Bhai Gurdas composed 40 *Vars* and the 41st *Var* was composed by Bhai Gurdas Singh who was a Sikh during the time of Guru Gobind Singh. The 41st *Var* is accepted to be a part of the *Vars* by the Sikh community.

¹⁰ Bhalla, *Kabitt Bhai Gurdas: Dusra Skand Saṭīk*.

that those Vars were in fact written at the time of Guru Arjun, rather than after, because it is a common practice to show one's devotion towards the living Guru. The contemporary scholar, Rahuldeep Singh Gill, argues that based on the manuscripts of the *Varan*, they are written post the martyrdom of Guru Arjun. This is because the earliest available manuscripts order Vars 4-37 first before what we know as Vars 1, 2, 3, 38, 39 and 40 (according to the numbering of the Vars as they are presented in modern print editions). Gill's dating is based on the orthography of the manuscripts and so he concludes that one of the earliest known manuscript begins with the fourth Var. Therefore, Gill argues the importance of the fourth Var and he reads it through the lens of Guru Arjun's martyrdom. Again, as will be discussed further into the introduction, Gill's translations of the *Varan* are questionable at best; I would argue the fourth Var is not about the martyrdom of the Guru, but rather about core Sikh teachings through examples in the natural world. For this reason, one cannot definitively argue when the *Varan* were written solely based on the manuscript evidence, rather one must look towards the content of the *Varan*, along with other texts, as this thesis seeks to do.

As has been mentioned, the *Varan* are considered to be the key (*kunḡī*) to the SGGS by many, a title said to have been given to the writings by the fifth Guru, Sri Guru Arjun Dev.¹¹ The idea of *kunji* (key) first appears in Gurbilas Patshahi 6th, which can be dated to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh also make this historical claim using the mid-nineteenth century historiographical text, the Suraj Prakash, showing how the *panthic* historiography influences exegesis, and how the relationship between the *Varan* and the SGGS is articulated within both. As cited through traditional oral Sikh histories and texts post-dating Bhai Gurdas, it is said that Bhai Gurdas was urged by Guru Arjun to bring his own writings so that they can be written into the first version of the Sikh canon. Later that night, in Bhai Gurdas' dream he sees his boat sinking in the middle of a treacherous ocean. When Bhai Gurdas would recite his own writings, the boat would continue sinking; however, when he began reciting the Guru's *Bani*, the boat would begin to float. He tried this multiple times and came to the realization that his writings cannot save a person from drowning, and for that reason he could have his writings inscribed alongside the Guru's *Bani*. The next morning the Guru asked Bhai Gurdas to bring his writings forward and Bhai Gurdas humbly declined. The Guru asked three

¹¹ The first written sources to refer to this are Gurbilas *Patshahi* 6 and Suraj Parkash Granth.

times and Bhai Gurdas humbly declined all three times. Guru Arjun is then said to have blessed Bhai Gurdas' writing, saying that his works will forever bring Sikhs closer to Sikhi because they will be the *kunji* to the SGGS.¹² As we will see below, this status of the *kunji* has been challenged in recent scholarship; but I present evidence in support of this status. Not only were the *Varan* written, in part, before the martyrdom of Bhai Gurdas and concerned with Sikh practice and ideas broadly, as I will argue in this thesis, I will further argue that this status was accepted broadly in the Sikh community, and led to considerable interest in the work of Bhai Gurdas by later scholars. These scholars saw a close relationship between the Vārs and the SGGS, and also related both of those texts to a wider historiographical tradition.

1.2 Interpreters of Bhai Gurdas: Bhai Vir Singh (1882-1957) and Sant Gurbachan Singh (1902-1961)

The two scholars, Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh, under examination here are particularly known for their interpretation of Bhai Gurdas. Bhai Vir Singh was a well-known exegete and scholar of Sikh scriptures and literature, historian and reformist. Bhai Vir Singh recognized the value of the press and publication in order to convey messages to the Sikh *panth* (community).¹³ He along with Wazir Singh set up the Wazir-i-Hind Press in Amritsar and in 1899 he began the newspaper *Khalsa Samachar*.¹⁴ He published widely, and his works were and still are accessible to many Punjabis, as they are written in contemporary Punjabi. His publications included critical editions of what I describe below as "*panthik* historiography"—texts that are utilized in religious education—and a great many exegeses or commentaries on Sikh literature.

Bhai Vir Singh was born into a family of scholars. His father, Dr. Charan Singh was a medical practitioner and scholar who translated Kalidasa's *Shakuntalā* into Braj. Bhai Vir Singh's maternal grandfather, Giani Hazara Singh, was a scholar of Sanskrit and Persian; he

¹² That is, "asikhān nūn sikhī prāpat hovegī." Singh, Kabitt Savaiyye Bhai Gurdas Ji Satīk, 8.

¹³ The term Panth encompasses a lot and is difficult to define with one singular word. The panth can be defined as the Sikh community, the Sikh nation and more. The Panth as a whole holds authority which was given to it by Guru Gobind Singh. The two reigning authorities in Sikh are the Guru-Granth (SGGS) and the Guru-Panth (the Guru embodied Panth).

¹⁴ Anne Murphy and Anshu Malhotra, Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957): Rethinking Literary Modernity in Colonial Punjab, Unpublished, 2.

wrote the *Gurū Granth Kosh*, which is a dictionary for the SGGS. Giani Hazara Singh also wrote an exegesis or commentary on Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* which Bhai Vir Singh published after his grandfather's passing.¹⁵ Bhai Vir Singh himself studied Persian, Sanskrit Braj and Punjabi. Bhai Vir Singh understood the importance of Punjabi to the Sikh identity, and by extension, to the Singh Sabha politics at the time.¹⁶ Bhai Vir Singh was able to use this to his advantage and shape the formations not only of modern Sikh theology and identity, but also the modern formation of the Punjabi Language in India.¹⁷ Bhai Vir Singh wrote several influential historical novels (including *Sundarī* (1898), *Bijay Singh* (1899), and more.) and scholarly annotations, editions and exegeses. For example, he produced a critical fourteen-volume edition of Kavi Santokh Singh's *Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth*, Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Prāchīn Pañth Prakāsh*, and the *Purātan Janamsākhī*.¹⁸ Bhai Vir Singh is particularly well known for his work on Bhai Gurdas' Kabits Savaaiye, as he discovered a number of stanzas missing from earlier printed editions. His exegesis on the *Varan* is also particularly important because it is often referenced by preachers and by those that aspire to understand the *Varan*; for that reason, Bhai Vir Singh's exegesis is a focus of discussion here.

Sant Gurbachan Singh grew up in a rural village; however, although relatively isolated, he had the opportunity to learn Gurmukhi from a young age. He joined the Damdami Taksal, an important educational establishment in the southwest of Indian Punjab, in 1920 and there he learned Sanskrit, classical Hindu and Vedic texts. He is said to be extremely knowledgeable in a great many texts and for this reason (and others) he was promoted to be the leader of the Taksal in 1930. He is known for having done full *katha* of the SGGS twenty-six times. For this reason, his recordings are referenced even in the present day as an authoritative source. His *kathas* that were recorded in the 1950's is in part the basis of this analysis.

¹⁵ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas' *Varan Tīkā*, 1997, New Delhi. Preface.

¹⁶ Anne Murphy and Anshu Malhotra, Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957): Rethinking Literary Modernity in Colonial Punjab, Unpublished, 3.

¹⁷ Shackle, Christopher, "A Sikh Spiritual Classic: Vīr Singh's Rāpā Sūrat Singh" in *Classics of Modern South Asian Literature*. Edited by Rupert Snell and I. M. P. Raeside (1998), 183-209.

¹⁸ Simran Jeet Singh has done interesting work on the Puratan Janamsakhi, refer to Simran Jeet Singh, "The Life of the Purātan Janamsākhī: Tracing the Earliest Memories of Gurū Nānak." PhD diss, (Columbia University, 2016).

Bhai Vir Singh's and Sant Gurbachan Singh's respective exegeses help one understand Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* as being interlaid with intertextual connections with the SGGS. This reflects these thinkers' acceptance of the *kunji* status of Bhai Gurdas' text: they see it as integrally related to the SGGS, and that the interpretation of the Vārs can only proceed from the SGGS. These exegeses also reveal a layer of connections these thinkers make between the *Varan* and *panthic* historiographies, which I will describe below. These connections comprise the foundational intellectual project of Sikh traditional scholarship.

1.3 Traditional Sikh Schools of Thought

Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh are modern torchbearers of traditional Sikh schools of thought that have played an important role in the development of Sikh intellectual and spiritual traditions. Such Sikh traditional scholars are responsible for Sikh learned ideologies. The term "traditional scholars" among the Sikhs refers to individuals, from the time of the Gurus to the present day, that have made a conscious effort to preach the Guru's word. Most of these individuals are members of groups that claim a heritage dating back to the Gurus' period.¹⁹ The five groups that are commonly referred to as the "traditional schools" are the Udāsīs, Nirmalās, Nihāṅgs, Sevāpanthīs and the Damdami Taksal. These schools are loosely configured, with distinct lineages and appointed leaders, but with some overlap between them. For this thesis, we will look at the four groups that have been central in the education and training of scholars and preachers, which are the Udasis, Nirmalas, Nihangs and the Damdami Taksal (hereafter, Taksal). The Sevapanthis can be understood as a group of philanthropists (or practitioners of "*sevā*" or "service") that have ties to a *Gursikh*²⁰ named Bhai Kanhaiya.^{21 22} An influential colonial-period reform movement, the Singh Sabha movement (a colonial-period reformist movement that began

¹⁹ This idea of claiming heritage plays an important role in giving legitimacy to their respective claims. I will not look at the legitimacy of these claims or the ties themselves in this thesis, as that could very well be a thesis of its own.

²⁰ Gursikh and Sikh are quite often used interchangeably; however, there is arguably a difference between the two. A Sikh encompasses a wide range of individuals. Whereas, a Gursikh implies one that is a Sikh of the Guru and in extension implies an individual that has been baptized into the Khalsa. To note: there were different forms of baptism- *charnpaul* (baptism through the Guru's feet)- before Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 and so this definition still holds true even before the birth of the Khalsa in 1699.

²¹ Kavi Santokh Singh. Suraj Parkash Granth. Battle of Anandpur 1704. Rut 6, Chapter 18.

²² Bhai Kanhaiya was a Sikh during the time of Guru Gobind Singh.

in the 1870s), is also important for our understanding, as it has shaped modern practices and intellectual traditions within the Sikh community. I will return to this modern movement later in the introduction.

The Udasi *samṇpardā* (order) is said to be tied to the eldest son of Guru Nanak, Bābā Sri Chand, who lived from 1494-1630.²³ Udasis claim to not reject the Sikh Gurus but place a greater importance on the thought and practices of Sri Chand. The word Udasi comes from a Sanskrit word “Udasin” which translates to “detached.” This definition comes to life when one looks at the life of Sri Chand, who similarly to his father travelled and spread the message of *Gurbani* (Guru’s words); however, the Udasis tend to understand and teaching the message of the SGGS in Vedantic teachings. The Udasis are also different from the *Khalsa* (those that have been initiated with the “immortal nectar” or Amrit) regarding their *maryādā* (code of conduct) and dress.²⁴ The Udasi garb changes quite dramatically even from Udasi to Udasi: some wear white, some saffron, while others wear matted hair and apply ashes to their bodies. The Udasis had an important role in preserving Sikhi²⁵ and Gurdwaras after the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, passed. They were respected and supported by Maharaja Ranjit Singh by being given land grants and made responsible for many Gurdwaras.²⁶ Generally speaking, this group has been pushed to the fringes since the Singh Sabha Movement; however, as Piara Singh Padam has said, “history has shown that the Udasis and Nirmalas preached *gurmat* (the Guru’s understanding) and that can never be forgotten.”²⁷

The Nirmala *samparda* is said to have been started by Guru Gobind Singh in the late 17th century. The Nirmalas were early missionaries who, like the Udasis, travelled and spread the message of the Guru; however, because of their background, the Nirmalas interpreted and

²³ Piara Singh Padam, *Sikh Sampardavli*, 17

²⁴ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 78–80.

²⁵ The reason to call it Sikhi over Sikhism is because ism attempts to define and box in what Sikhs are. Sikhs have been fluid and unique (within Sikhi itself); there are often quite different approaches to Sikhi. For this reason, throughout the thesis, I will use the term Sikhi over Sikhism.

²⁶ Pashaura Singh; Louis E. Fenech, *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 375–377.

²⁷ Piara Singh Padam, *Sikh Sampardavli*, 31.

explained Sikh literature in Vedantic terms.²⁸ It is said to have begun when a group of five Sikhs: Ram Singh, Bir Singh, Karm Singh, Gandha Singh and Saina Singh, were sent to Varanasi to learn Sanskrit, Hindu religious and Vedic texts (a small list of these texts will be shared later) with pandits there.²⁹ Once these five Sikhs completed their education with the pandits, they came back to the Guru at Anandpur Sahib. There, they began teaching those Hindu and Vedic texts to students. The Nirmalas are well respected for their deep knowledge of not only the SGGS but also various other texts; their influence is seen across many Sikh spheres. For example, one particularly influential exegesis prepared by the Nirmalas is called the Faridkot *Ṭīkā* or commentary. Some notable traditional scholars that have been produced by the Nirmala *samparda* are Hardev Singh (author of *Narayan Hari Updesh*), Pandit Gurdev Singh (*Gurmat Sidhant*, *Vedant Sidhant*, et al.), Giani Gian Singh (*Panth Parkash*, *Tvarikh Guru Khalsa*, etc.), Pandit Gulab Singh (*Bavrasamrit Granth*, *Mokh Panth*, *Prabodh Chandar Natak*, *Vairagshatak Tika*, et al.), Harbans Singh Nirmal (*Adhaytam Parkash*) and many more.³⁰ They have also influenced scholars from different schools of thought. The Nirmala *maryada* and dress is also distinct from that of the Khalsa, as they often wear saffron coloured clothes and some Nirmalas would not take *khañde kī pauhul* (Khalsa baptism) and wear the five K's associated with the Khalsa initiation.³¹ It must be noted, however, that there are some Nirmalas who adhere more closely to Vedantic understandings, and others that use the lens of Gurbani to understand Vedantic teachings.³² On the other hand, Giani Balwant Singh Kotha Guru, in his history of the Nirmala tradition, describes how some Nirmalas even began wearing the five K's and becoming *amritdhārī* (a term used for someone who has taken Khalsa initiation).³³ The Nirmalas, like the Udasis, were pushed to the margins of Sikhi during the Singh Sabha Movement (see below);³⁴

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 221.

³⁰ Piara Singh Padam. *Sikh Sampradavali*. 69-70.

³¹ Kes (uncut hair), Kanga (wooden comb), Kirpan (dagger), Kara (metal bracelet) and Keshera (undergarment).

³² Kotha Guru, Giani Balwant Singh Nirmal *Panth di Gaurav Gatha*. (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2009).

³³ Balwant Singh, *Nirmal Panth dī Guarav Gāthā*, p 15

³⁴ W. H. McLeod, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*. (New York; New Delhi;: Oxford University Press, 2002) 148–149.

however, in the present day there is more of an acceptance of the Nirmalas within Sikh circles and Gurdwaras.

The Nihangs are known for being a *samparda* of warriors. Nihang is the Persian word for *magarmash* (crocodile). Another name for the Nihangs is the *Akalis* (the timeless ones). Some argue that the *samparda* was started during the time of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, while others argue that it was started at the time of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.³⁵ Typically, the Nihangs are known for their fierceness in battle and keeping the traditions of the Guru's army alive; however, for this thesis, I argue that the Nihangs have also contributed not only to *shaster vidyā* (knowledge of arms) but also to *dharmic vidya* (religious knowledge) as well.^{36 37} Many Nihang leaders and preachers, such as Akali Kaur Singh, Santa Singh, Giani Inderjit Singh Raqbewale, Giani Sher Singh, to name a few, have all contributed to Sikh literature and sermons (*kathas*).

The Damdami Taksal is often called a “travelling university” that has birthed a great many scholars and *kathāvaciks* (deliverer of katha). It is said that when Guru Gobind Singh camped at Damdama Sahib, the Guru had the final version of the SGGS written by the first leader of the Damdami Taksal after Guru Gobind Singh, Baba Deep Singh. Deep Singh, along with forty-eight other Sikhs, are said to have learned the correct pronunciations and meanings of the SGGS.³⁸ Two of the fifty-two, Baba Deep Singh and Bhai Mani Singh were tasked with passing on this knowledge, which is said to continue today. The Taksal has played an important role in the *panth* in educating the common folk. Traditionally, this is why the Taksal has put an effort towards doing *katha* and teaching in rural villages.

The Singh Sabha movement was a colonial-period reformist movement that began in the 1870s and aimed to restore Sikh values while rejecting beliefs and values from other religions. Arvind Mandair has argued that Bhai Vir Singh, along with other scholars, contributed to

³⁵ Piara Singh Padam. Sikh Sampradavli. 99-100.

³⁶ The Nihangs have an extremely rich history which has been detailed by Piara Singh Padam in his book Sikh Sampradavali.

³⁷ There is more information available on the Nihangs through: Davinder Toor, In Pursuit of Empire : Treasures from the Toor Collection of Sikh Art (London: Kashi House, 2018). However, the book was not available to me at this time because of Covid-19.

³⁸ <https://www.damdamtaksal.com/history/leaders>; also knowledge that has been shared by students of the Taksal.

creating and spreading a “monopolizing interpretation of Sikh tradition”³⁹ and helped in establishing a new and distinct way of presenting the core teaching of the SGGS.⁴⁰ As Mandair suggests, this has been seen as a homogenizing force, whereby some groups have been pushed to the fringes and nuanced approaches to Sikhi have been marginalized or lost.⁴¹ At the same time, multiple identities did proliferate in the period, as Anne Murphy has noted (2012: 128-9). The movement allowed for a more uniform approach to *parchar* (preaching) and an awareness about what it meant to be a Sikh within a highly polemical field in colonial India, in which religion was politicized.

The abovementioned traditional schools of thought played a pivotal role in shaping who Sant Gurbachan Singh and Bhai Vir Singh were. These schools not only gave them a traditional education but they both were also deeply involved in these schools. Bhai Vir Singh is said to have spent time with the Nirmalas and this comes through in his exegesis of the *Varan*, which will be explored in detail in chapter one. He was also particularly influential in the Singh Sabha movement and is considered by many to be its leading figure. Sant Gurbachan Singh not only spent nearly his entire life with the Taksal, but he became one of the most influential *Jathedārs* (leaders) of the Taksal. His interpretations and methodologies in Katha are quite representative of the ideal that most current Taksal students try to achieve. Moreover, both Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh move beyond just their one school of thought. Not only did they create a web of connections among texts, but also among schools of thought and practice. As will be explored in the individual chapters, both Sant Gurbachan Singh and Bhai Vir Singh are heavily influenced by Vedantic thought; however, they move beyond this and tie it into *gurmat*. All of the above helps one understand Bhai Vir Singh’s and Sant Gurbachan Singh’s approaches to their exegeses because their goal in providing an explanation of the *Varan* was to make the text accessible to the *panth* and understand its connections to the SGGS (see more on this connection below).

³⁹ Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 647.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 648

⁴¹ This is a view one sees in the work of Oberoi (1994) and McLeod (1989)

1.4 Panthic Historiography

Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh do not only connect Bhai Gurdas to the SGGS. They also rely upon a range of what I call "*panthik* historiography" to create the intellectual and traditional framework for understanding Bhai Gurdas' compositions. For this thesis, the term "*panthik* historiography" indicates a body of literature that has been widely accepted by Sikh traditional scholars as credible. This is not to argue whether or not these are in fact reliable and credible historical sources; rather, it is to understand that these texts serve as "sources of authority" for, and referred to frequently by, *kathāvachiks*—those who speak in Gurdwaras and provide exegesis of the Gurus' compositions. Understanding the texts that are being used by the *kathāvachiks* will help in understanding the texts that are influencing how concepts, philosophies, and histories are understood within and by the Sikh community. Some of these texts are said to be early eighteenth-century productions, while some of them are mid to late twentieth-century productions.

Contemporary *kathavachiks*, such as Giani Pinderpal Singh,⁴² divide Sikh *panthic* historiographies into four categories: ["histories spoken by the Gurus"] *ākhī*, ["hagiographies "] *sākhī*, ["plays of the Gurus"] *bilās*, and ["poetic life stories of the Gurus"] *prakāsh*. *Akhi* is history that has been recited by the Gurus' themselves and appear as part of *Gurbani*. For example, the *Bābur Bānī* as recited by Guru Nanak, is a body of verses that detail Guru Nanak's conversation with Mughal Emperor Babur. The move from *akhi* to the latter three can be explained through Anne Murphy's understanding of the development of historical literature in Sikh tradition, where she states, "that the construction of history... is linked to the transition of the Sikh community at the death of the last living Guru whereby authority was invested in the canonical text (*granth*) and community (*panth*)."⁴³

Sākhī, literally translates to "story" and are a group of hagiographies. According to tradition, this body of texts is linked to a companion of Guru Nanak named Bhai Bālā, and describe the life of Guru Nanak in prose. This group of texts consist of *Bhai Bala's*

⁴² Giani Pinderpal Singh is a *kathavachik*, often said to be the modern-day Bhai Vir Singh, due to his profound impact on the global Sikh community.

⁴³ Murphy, Anne. *The Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

Janamsakhi's (1525), *Meharbān's Janamsakhi* (before 1630), *Shahīd Bhai Mani Singh's Janamsakhi* (1644-1738), and *Puratan Janamsākhi* (1588) which was published by Bhai Vir Singh through Khalsa Samāchār in 1926. These texts cover the life of Guru Nanak through the eyes of his companions, Bhai Bala and Bhai Mardana. This group of texts are best defined as hagiographies.⁴⁴ Most often the *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi* is referred to by *kathāvachiks* when referencing details of Guru Nanak.⁴⁵

Bilās, translates to "play" or "sport."⁴⁶ In particular, *bilas* refers mainly to two verse texts: the *Gurblias Patshahi Chevīn* (Six; anonymous author, 1718) and *Gurblias Patshahi Dasvīn* (Ten, Kuir Singh, 1751). These two texts cover the lives of the sixth and tenth Gurus, Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh, respectively. They describe the Guru in history, and the community around the Guru, within time and space.⁴⁷ *Bilas* literature also extends beyond these two texts. For example, *Gursobha* by *Kavi* (poet) Sainapati (1701-1708), *Sevarām Udasi's* *parche* (notes), *Sao Sākhi* by Baba Ram Kaur Ji (1724), *Mehma Parkash Granth* by Baba Kripal Das Bhalla (1741), and *Baṁsāvlī Nāmā* Kesar Singh Chibbar (mentioned earlier, ca. 1769).

Prakash refers to two texts known as *Sūraj Prakāsh* (mentioned earlier, by Kavi Santokh Singh, 1843) and *Panth Prakāsh* (by Rattan Singh Bhangu, 1809-1841). The *Suraj Prakash* illuminates all ten Gurus' lives in poetic form and gives ample detail about each of one, as well as the community formed around them.⁴⁸ *Panth Prakash* looks to shine a light on the formation of the *panth* or the community after Guru Gobind Singh's passing. There are a few more texts that are included in this genre, which includes: *Gur-Nanak Parkash* and *Suraj Parkash* by *Mahakavi* (great poet) Bhai Santokh Singh, *Panth Parkash*, *Panth Parkash* (Giani Gian Singh, 1880) and *Tavārīkh Guru Khalsa* (Giani Gian Singh, 1861). These texts look to move beyond the last human Guru towards an understanding of the community in the post-living-Guru period, the *granth* (text) and *panth* (community). *Gur-Nanak Prakash* is of interest for this thesis because

⁴⁴ Grewal, Harjeet. "Philosophical Transgression and Self Cultivation in the Purātan Janamsākhi: Bhāi Vīr Singh and Modern Sikh Reading Practices." *Sikh Formations* 16 (2020): 1.

⁴⁵ This is controversial as some believe the Puratan Janamsakhi to be the earliest and most accurate representation of Guru Nanak. To read more on the Janamsakhi tradition one could refer to Simran Jeet Singh's dissertation *The Life of the Puratan Janam sakhi: Tracing the Earliest Memories of Guru Nanak*.

⁴⁶ Anne Murphy *The Materiality of the Past*, chapter 3.

⁴⁷ Murphy, Anne. "History in the Sikh Past." *History and Theory* 46, no. 3 (2007): 352.

⁴⁸ Anne Murphy *The Materiality of the Past*, chapter 4.

both Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh make references to the stories told in both the Gur-Nanak Prakash and the Janamsakhis, as will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

There are many more texts that do not specifically fall into these four categories. These are generally more modern texts that include but are not limited to Bhai Vir Singh's writings such as *Guru Nanak Chamtkār* (1935), *Srī Kalgīdhar Chamtkar* (1925) and Bhai Kahn Singh's *Mahānkosh* (1927) and more.^{49 50} Some of these texts include critical editions of the earlier mentioned texts and some of them are new renditions of history, like the Chamatkar series by Bhai Vir Singh. There was a lot of literature that was produced in the 20th century that reformulated traditional stories for new audiences. The Singh Sabha Movement inspired this activity, as it pushed for a new, more defined way of understanding Sikhi.

Alongside the historical texts mentioned above, students of the traditional schools would then often learn eight *granth*s (texts) that were translated into Punjabi from Sanskrit by the Nirmalas. These *granth*s influenced how one understood concepts within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and other Sikh texts; at the same time, the *granth*s were typically understood through a *gurmat* (Guru's understanding) lens. These texts included, Saruktavali, Chanakya Rajneeti, Bhavrasamrit, Vichar Mala, Parbodh Chandar Natak, Adhyatam Parkash, Vichar Chandrolya, Vichar Sagar and Hanuman Natak. These texts were translated into Punjabi by the Nirmalas and generally espouse Vedantic ideas that help one understand ideas within the SGGS. A central idea that runs through these texts is *Aham Brahm Asmi*, which loosely translates to "I am God" or "I am the cosmos." The rest of the above mentioned *granth*s expand on this idea with more and more details and complexity depending on the level of the *granth*s.

Another category that is often neglected yet is a crucial component of the transference of knowledge is the oral tradition that is deeply embedded in Sikhi. Knowledge or *gian* is passed through *granth*s, *Tikas* and more; however, as I have learned as a student myself in the tradition, more importance is placed on teachings that are not in written form. They come in verbal and unwritten form. The oral tradition is an important part of the Traditional Sikh schools mentioned above, as information is most often transferred verbally. For example, when one is learning the

⁴⁹ Giani Sher Singh, *Crucial literary resources used to understand Sikhi*. 2018.

⁵⁰ This list of books comes from an audio recording by Giani Sher Singh where he shares this list with the *sangat* and also self knowledge of the tradition.

correct pronunciations of *Gurbani* or *sañhiyā*, it is extremely uncommon to see a student take notes. Doing so is even discouraged by most teachers because the students are told to memorize what they have learned so that they are not dependant on their notes.

However, the oral tradition is not a standalone tradition. It often interacts with and depends on the *panthik* literature. Traditional scholars, like Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh cite these oral traditions in their introductions to their exegeses, but also relate their work more broadly to *panthic* historiographies. It is important to understand that a *kathavachik* generally does not directly cite his sources, in oral exegesis. However, texts, and ideas from the texts, are very clearly present. An important part of the oral *katha* tradition is the backstories (*uthanikā*) that are told these are typically drawn from the above-mentioned texts; however, are not limited to them. These stories are said to be the backstory of a particular passage in the SGGS or in this case the *Varan*. In Sant Gurbachan Singh's *katha*, one can hear him reference numerous texts, as will be shown through the examples in Chapter three. However, these connections are being made within the limitations of *katha*. Typically, a *kathavachik* in the oral setting of the Gurdwara is restricted by the *sangat*'s (congregation's) ability to understand the concepts that are being explained. In most instances, the *sangat* consists of village folk who are limited in their understanding of concepts, ideas or stories that are being shared by a *kathavachik*. For this reason, the concepts, ideas or *sakhis* need to be explained to the *sangat* in simple and digestible terms. Because of this, a *kathavachik* cannot delve into extensive details. The goal for a *katha* is for the ideas to be understandable and practical, something the congregation can implement in their lives. The other limiting factor is that typically a *kathavachik* only has at most about an hour per session of *katha*.⁵¹

All of these texts and traditions, I will argue here, have been used to understand, explain, and analyze the compositions of Bhai Gurdas. Texts, like the Janamsakhis and Gurblias literature create an opportunity to understand who Bhai Gurdas was and also a way to understand, at times, the stories that Bhai Gurdas may be referring to. Oral traditions within the various schools of

⁵¹ This was and still is, at times, the norm, but of course, one will see *katha* sessions that are either as short as 30 minutes or even as long as two or even three hours long. those are typically places where there is also *keertan* happening alongside the *katha*, which is an entire genre of its own and we will simply not have the time research and explain this within this thesis.

thought look to explain and analyze Bhai Gurdas' works. All of these constitute a way of understanding Bhai Gurdas' work as holding the title of the 'key to the SGGS'.

1.5 Rethinking the “*Kunji*” status of Bhai Gurdas' *Vārāṇ*

The status of Bhai Gurdas' work as the *kunji* to the SGGS has been challenged in recent scholarship. Rahuldeep Singh Gill, in his 2016 book, *Drinking From Love's Cup: Surrender and Sacrifice in the Vars of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla*, has recently argued that the *Varan* cannot hold the title of the “key to the treasure chest” because all *Varan* and *Kabits* were written after the *shahīdī* of Guru Arjun. Gill argues that the *Varan* are therefore all underlaid with the idea of *shahīdī* or sacrifice and are not fundamentally nor centrally “about” the SGGS. Gill’s argument is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, Gill’s translations are problematic because he takes liberty in extending the meanings of both words and entire lines in the *Varan* to accord with his view of what their subject matter *should* be. Secondly, the message of the *Varan* is entirely consistent with that of the SGGS overall, not just with the idea of martyrdom. So, in content, the *Varan* are more strongly tied to the content of the SGGS than Gill’s argument allows. Lastly, as I will argue below, Bhai Gurdas was in the process of writing the *Varan* well before the *shahīdī*. We can see this in the way some of the *Varan* and *Kabit Savaaiye* have arguably been written in front of the Guru, which can be understood through reading both the texts.

Firstly, Gill often takes liberty in extending the meaning of vars to fit his frame of interpretation; some examples of this phenomenon are given below. His word to word translations are deeply problematic. For example, he translates the word *gāḍī rāh* as “royal road”⁵² a word that typically refers to a “path that has been carved out by passing horses attached with carriages” or carriage road. There is no indication that this word is tied to something “royal.” There are other and worse mistranslations that need mention. In one example, Rahuldeep Singh translates *par darbai*, which means “another’s wealth,” as “another’s wife”⁵³ (*var* 12: *paudi* 4), entirely distorting the meaning of the original line. Rahuldeep Singh translates this verse as, “I take all ill for him who covets not another’s wife.”⁵⁴ Whereas, the Bhai Gurdas

⁵² Rahuldeep Singh Gill, *Drinking from Love's Cup*, 88.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 113.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 113.

line should read as, “I am a sacrifice to one that does not touch another’s wealth.” There are countless other examples where Rahuldeep Singh has taken liberty in extending the meanings of words past what they should be defined as.

A larger issue, however, is how he forcefully introduces the idea of *shahidī* into Bhai Gurdas’ vars. This is done in conjunction with the changing of the meaning of words along with reading into the entire *paudi* through his own perspective. In the following example, I will first share Rahuldeep Singh’s translation of part of *Vār* 30, a *vār* referring to each collection of ballads with the *Varan* containing 41 collections. Following this, I present my own corrected translation, made with reference to Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh’s exegeses, and include the original text following that. Rahuldeep Singh translates Bhai Gurdas as follows:

To die in battle for his master means a soldier is worth his salt.

Slicing heads in battle makes him a warrior amongst warriors.

The woman he leaves behind has powers to grant boons and to curse.

Generations revere him and his whole clan benefits. The one who dies

In the heat of battle is like the one who sings the shabad at the ambrosial dawn.

Entering the saints’ society, he kills selfishness and dies to himself.

To die in battle and to be a martyr [satī] is the way of the perfect Gurmukh path!

By True faith one finds the true Guru. (30.14)⁵⁵

The reader can see that Gill’s translation implies the passage is suggesting literal martyrdom (*shahidī*). Bhai Gurdas, however, is not discussing an actual warrior but comparing “one’s true self,” the form of the One, to a dedicated warrior. Including the lead line makes this clear and gives the passage a different sense. I translate the same passage as follows:

Truth, the true Sikh, the true Guru:

True is the one who, [like a warrior] true to the salt of his master,⁵⁶ dies fighting on the battlefield.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 245.

⁵⁶ This idiom is a reference to loyalty as opposed to being worthy, as Gill has suggested.

One who beheads great warriors with one's weapon, [the true one] is recognized as the greatest warrior among warriors.

The widowed woman that is left behind, is capable of granting boons and curses.

Sons and grandsons are praised, the whole family is honored.

One who dies fighting in time of need, is like the time of the ambrosial hours when one sings the praises.⁵⁷

Going to the holy congregation and killing one's ego and eradicating the self.

Dying while fighting and becoming a sacrifice (*satī*), the path of the *gurmukh* [Guru-centered; one facing the Guru] is glorious.⁵⁸

Through true faith one can recognize the True saint. 14.

ਸੱਚ, ਸੱਚਾ ਸਿੱਖ, ਸੱਚਾ ਗੁਰੂ
ਲੂਣੁ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਖਾਇਕੈ ਰਣ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਲੜਿ ਮਰੈ ਸੁ ਜਾਪੈ।
ਸਿਰ ਵਢੈ ਹਥੀਆਰੁ ਕਰਿ ਵਰੀਆਮਾ ਵਰੀਆਮੁ ਸਿਵਾਪੈ।
ਤਿਸੁ ਪਿਛੈ ਜੋ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਥਪਿ ਬੇਈ ਦੇ ਵਰੈ ਸਰਾਪੈ।
ਪੋਤੈ ਪੁਤ ਵਡੀਰੀਅਨਿ ਪਰਵਾਰੈ ਸਾਧਾਰੁ ਪਰਾਪੈ।
ਵਖਤੈ ਉਪਰਿ ਲੜਿ ਮਰੈ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੈ ਸਬਦੁ ਅਲਾਪੈ।
ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਜਾਇਕੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਮਾਰਿ ਮਰੈ ਆਪੁ ਆਪੈ।
ਲੜਿ ਮਰਣਾ ਤੈ ਸਤੀ ਹੋਣੁ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪੰਥੁ ਪੂਰਣੁ ਪਰਤਾਪੈ।
ਸਚਿ ਸਿਦਕ ਸਚ ਪੀਰੁ ਪਛਾਪੈ ॥੧੪॥

Bhai Gurdas is talking about the *gurmukh* (one facing the Guru) arming herself with the sword of humility and eradicating the self. Bhai Gurdas is evidently speaking to the glory of those that follow the path of the Guru and can recognise the One. This is emphasized by Bhai Gurdas' arrangement of the lines, in which typically the takeaway message of the passage is placed at the end. As seen through this passage, the central idea here is *pachānanā* ਪਚਨਾਨਾ, the ability to recognize, which comes through true faith while facing the Guru. Gill takes liberty in changing the definition of *satī* as martyr. Though these two words can in extension be understood as these, they should not be translated as such. By taking the liberty of extending the meaning of these

⁵⁷ Another way of understanding this line is that a warrior who dies in the early hours of the day fighting against laziness or the 5 vices (lust, anger, greed, attachment, ego) while singing praises, (in extension) is a great warrior.

⁵⁸ *Satī* in this line is not referring to the practice of *satī* rather it is a gesture towards sacrifice of the self.

words, Gill is able to extrapolate that Bhai Gurdas is directly referring to Guru Arjun's *shahidī*. However, I would suggest that *satī* be translated either becoming the truth (*sat*) or as a reference to the *satī* tradition. Bhai Gurdas is not condoning the act, rather he is referring to the state of mind one must be in to become a *satī*—eradicating the idea of the self. Bhai Gurdas brings this to the forefront when he mentions a warrior dying in battle being equivalent to one waking up in the early morning- both of which require sacrifice of the self. The seventh line stands apart in Gill's translation where he translates *satī* as "martyr," rather than keeping with the general tone of the var of recognizing the Guru and sacrificing the metaphysical self.

Here it is important to consider my second point: that the content of the Vars is consistent with the content for the SGGS *overall*, not just with the idea of martyrdom. For example, Bhai Gurdas incorporates the teachings of the Gurus directly into his compositions. He mentions, for example, key Sikh practices numerous times: waking up before sunrise, bathing and sitting in remembrance of the one. Bhai Gurdas shows that not only did he receive this teaching but that he understood it. Just to give a few examples of this, Bhai Gurdas writes in 6:3,

Getting up at the ambrosial hour of morning the Sikhs bathe in the river.

By putting their mind in the unfathomable God through deep concentration, they remember Guru, the God by reciting Japu (Ji).

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੇ ਉਠਿ ਕੈ ਜਾਇ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਦਰੀਆਇ ਨੁਵੰਦੇ ।

ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਧਿ ਅਗਾਧਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਇਕ ਮਨਿ ਹੋਇ ਗੁਰ ਜਾਪੁ ਜਪੰਦੇ ।

Then Bhai Gurdas also writes in the twelfth Var and in the second verse,

I am a sacrifice unto those *Gursikhs* who get up in the last quarter of night.

I am a sacrifice unto those *Gursikhs* who get up in the ambrosial hours, and bathe in the holy tank.

I am a sacrifice unto those *Gursikhs* who remember the Lord with single devotion.

I am sacrifice unto those *Gursikhs* also who go to the holy congregation and sit there

ਕੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਤਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਪਿਛਲ ਰਾਤੀ ਉਠਿ ਬਹੰਦੇ

ਕੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਤਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੈ ਸਰਿ ਨਾਵੰਦੇ ।

ਕੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਤਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਹੋਇ ਇਕ ਮਨਿ ਗੁਰ ਜਾਪੁ ਜਪੰਦੇ ।

ਕੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਤਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਚਲਿ ਜਾਇ ਜੁੜਦੇ ।

Then finally, Bhai Gurdas in *Vār* 12.16, writes,

(the Guru) affirmed, the Name, charitable giving, bathing and that the One is met through the congregation on the path⁵⁹ during the ambrosial hours.

ਨਾਮ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲਾ ।

One can see countless examples of Bhai Gurdas' own writings reflecting the ideas, tropes and analogies of the Guru, linking his text directly to the ideas, practices and compositions of the Gurus. Bhai Gurdas' work, from its content, can therefore not be understood but in relation to that of the Gurus. In the earlier passage where Bhai Gurdas compares the efforts and achievements of a warrior who dies in battle to a devoted practitioner who performs daily morning practice and one who gathers with the community to praise and reflect on the One; just as the warrior is praised, so should the devoted practitioner be praised.

Lastly, Bhai Gurdas was in the process of writing the *Varan* well before the *shahidi* of Guru Arjun. We can see this in the way some of the *Varan* and *Kabit Savaaiye* quite clearly have been written in front of the Guru, which can be understood through reading both the texts. Gill does not account for the Vars that are very clearly not about the *Shahidi* of Guru Arjun. For example, the first Var talks entirely about the creation of the world, the world before Guru Nanak, and about Guru Nanak himself. This demonstrates that not all the Vars are only about the martyrdom of Guru Arjun. Moreover, to suggest that Bhai Gurdas wrote all his writings in the last thirty years of his life and suddenly found a passion to write after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun is a stretch. It can be argued that in the last thirty years of Bhai Gurdas' life he would have been consumed by the martyrdom of Guru Arjun, Guru Hargobind ascending to the throne and continuing to preach. With that in mind, it seems a near impossible task for Bhai Gurdas to have recited all his verses prior to the martyrdom.

There are also many verses in the *Varan* where it is evident that Bhai Gurdas is speaking and writing as if Guru Arjun is present. He does not use the past tense and there is no reference to the martyrdom in *Vār* 24.19, that is dedicated to Guru Arjun. Bhai Gurdas writes:

⁵⁹ Typically, ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ is translated as holy congregation; however, looking at the first half of that word, *sādh*, it can be best translated as those that are correcting themselves.

He is the storehouse of *gurbani* and remains absorbed in musical praises and sermon (of the Lord).

He allows the fountain of unstruck melody to flow and remains immersed in the nectar of perfect love.

ਧੁਨਿ ਅਨਹਦਿ ਨਿਝਰੁ ਝਰੈ ਪੂਰਨ ਪ੍ਰੇਮਿ ਅਮਿਓ ਰਸ ਮਤਾ ।

ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਭਾ ਰਤਨ ਪਦਾਰਥ ਵਣਜ ਸਹਤਾ ।

It is evident through these lines that Bhai Gurdas is writing as if Guru Arjun is present. If these lines were written after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun, Bhai Gurdas very well could have written that the Guru was absorbed or that he allowed; however, Bhai Gurdas writes in the present tense.

The connections between Bhai Gurdas' text and other texts become clear through both the exegeses examined here. When one understands that these connections are being through the constraints of orality and literary genre, the connections in Bhai Gurdas' work become apparent. As one listens to Sant Gurbachan Singh's *katha* and reads Bhai Vir Singh's *Tika* and sees the connections, it becomes clear that both Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh are arguing through their works that Bhai Gurdas also saw and drew these connections.

1.6 Conclusion

Bhai Vir Singh's and Sant Gurbachan Singh's *kathas*, and the connections they draw among texts, rely upon the perception of the connection between Bhai Gurdas' text and that of the SGGS. By arguing that Bhai Gurdas' own text, the *Varan*, are simply a result of the *shahīdī* or martyrdom of the 5th Guru, Rahuldeep Singh Gill ignores these complex intertextual connections. Bhai Gurdas' work should not and cannot be limited to a limited, decontextualized reading, as Rahuldeep Gill has suggested. Just because Bhai Gurdas' work at times focuses on *shahidi* in some of his vars, it does not mean that it is not linked to the SGGS and arguably *shahidi* is not the sole focus of those vars. Also, one must consider that the vast majority of vars do not focus on the *shahidi*. An interpretation of the *Varan* only in relation to *shahidi* is a disservice to not only Bhai Gurdas but also the interpretations (*Tikas* and *kathas*) that have looked to interpret, understand and explain the *Varan*, of which Bhai Vir Singh's and Sant Gurbachan Singh's works represent important examples.

In the early twentieth century, there was a resurgence in interest in Bhai Gurdas and work to translate, explain and teach both the *Varan* and *Kabit Saayavie*. These readings and teachings were influenced by what traditional scholars were being taught and then preaching to the Sikh *sangat*, and Bhai Gurdas' two texts were taught with attention to both *santhiyā* (that is, correct pronunciation) and their *arth* (meanings) within the various traditional schools of thought. As one can see from the writings of Bhai Vir Singh and the oral *kathā* of Sant Gurbachan Singh, this resurgence has had a last impact on the Sikh community, as both the writings and *kathas* are extremely popular among the *sangat*.

The remainder of this thesis, in the following two chapters, will look at how Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh stake out the claims and relationships among the *Varan*, SGGS and other texts. Chapter one will look at Bhai Vir Singh's commentary of the *Varan* in detail and Chapter two will look at Sant Baba Gurbachan Singh Khalsa's recorded *kathā*. The thesis concludes with consideration of the significance of this work. The importance and meaning of the two scholars will be discussed in each of the two central chapters and the argument will be made that these interpreters have seen Bhai Gurdas as the key to the treasure chest by understanding Bhai Gurdas' message as a continuation of the SGGS. This continuity is understood through the explanations given through Bhai Vir Singh's *Stīks* (translations), and Sant Baba Gurbachan Singh Khalsa's recorded *kathā* or sermon. This allows us to understand how exactly the *kathāvachiks* (preachers) convey the message of the Guru, through a web of texts that comprise the historical tradition of the Sikh panth, which, as Anne Murphy has shown, has been a vital and primary articulation point for Sikh intellectual tradition.⁶⁰

The goal of the thesis is to move beyond Bhai Gurdas' text itself, and to understand how it has been interpreted and understood in the Sikh intellectual community. These two thinkers, Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh Bhindranwale, allow us to understand, in preliminary terms, how Bhai Gurdas' works were understood, received and promulgated. In a sense, meaning how did Bhai Gurdas' works impact the formation of a Sikh. This, in turn, allows us to understand *gurmat*, and what it entails, both in the eyes of Bhai Gurdas, and his interpreters. This is really the only way to understand how and why Bhai Gurdas' works act as the "key" to the

⁶⁰ Anne Murphy *The Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Gurus' words and ideas. Even though the works of Bhai Gurdas, the *Varan* and *Kabit Savaaiye Bhai Gurdas*, are no longer widely performed and understood within Sikh homes, Gurdwaras and even schools, Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* and *Kabit Savaaiye* have historically played an integral role in the formation of Sikh education and intellectual life. In order to understand how the texts were performed and practiced, and to understand the texts themselves more fully, it is important to look at them in the context of the larger tradition that they comprise, within the larger tradition of *parchār* (preaching). If these texts *were* the "key" to the Gurus' words and ideas, then it is crucial that we understand how they acted in this fashion over time in the construction of the Sikh tradition.

Chapter 2: Bhai Vir Singh's Written Exegesis

The relationship between texts is best thought of not as an exchange or a unidirectional line, but instead as an intricate web that joins multiple texts, in conversation. This is exactly how Bhai Vir Singh's commentary (*tika*) relates to Bhai Gurdas Ji's *Varan* because not only does Bhai Vir Singh draw connections between the *Varan* and the SGGS but he also forms connections between his commentary and other panthic historiographies. The same can be said about the relationship among the passages within the *Varan*, with the Sri Guru Granth Sāhib. Further, exploration of Bhai Vir Singh's exegesis shows that the connections among texts are even more complex than stated above. For example, there is a connection between the interpretations of the *Varan*, the *Varan* themselves, the SGGS, and many other spiritual texts (Dharmik Atai Atmik Granth, ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਅਤੇ ਆਤਮਿਕ ਗਰੰਥ)⁶¹. These numerous intertextual connections impact not only how such text are not only written but also how they are read.

As briefly introduced earlier, Bhai Vir Singh's exegesis of the *Varan* was a project that was undertaken by his maternal grandfather, Giani Hazara Singh (1828-1908) As will be seen in Chapter One, Bhai Vir Singh credits his grandfather with the exegesis, even though Bhai Vir Singh had it published later, after Hazara Singh's death in 1911. To clarify, according to the preface written in the *Varan* by Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Vir Singh and his grandfather (Giani Hazara Singh) co-authored the exegesis. I speculate that this exegesis is likely largely a product of his own work because as Anne Murphy has noted, Bhai Vir Singh was known as an active editor who made emendations in the works he edited.⁶² BSV understood the *Varan* to be the key to the SGGS and his commentary (*tika*), established those connections. His commentary functions in some ways as a kind of translation, but also as more than that, as a *Tika* draws additional parallels and is generally for an educated audience. A *tikīkākār* (writer of a *Tika*) has the opportunity to go into more detail on connections and references, when compared to an oral

⁶¹ Meaning texts that help one on the spiritual path and others that enlighten one about the soul. For example, *Sārkutāvlī* is a spiritual or religious text and *Adhiyātmak Parkāsh* is a text about the soul.

⁶² Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past History and Representation in the Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 122.

exegesis. There are fewer limitations or restraints, whether that is in terms of time, space or even in the reader's ability to understand, and the written format allows one to explicitly reference other texts.

Bhai Vir Singh first opens the *tika* (exegesis) with a preface where he writes a plea (*bentī*):

Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* have been given an esteemed title within the Sikhs and older Sikhs recognized this key to SGGS Ji. This *bānī* is written in the vernacular but because of time some of it is becoming old (difficult), for this reason, many teachings are being lost. Secondly, this *bani* contains understandings about *Gursikhi*⁶³ which (open up) a treasure chest of knowledge for the soul and from that one gains knowledge to understand Gurbani.⁶⁴ So, it was important to open those understandings through layperson Punjabi while also giving some word-to-word definitions and understandings of the material. For this reason, Giani Hazara Singh, Pandit Ji, who was a great scholar and an esteemed *Samṇpardāik Giānī*,⁶⁵ his last service was to prepare and complete. Even though he completed the exegesis he bestowed the service of proofreading the exegesis. After completing that, they had it printed on behalf of my name. Some parts they printed themselves but unfortunately, they were not able to see the final printed edition.

Amritsar,

August 1, 1911

ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਵਾਰਾਂ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਣੀਕ ਬਾਣੀ ਦੀ ਪਦਵੀ ਰੱਖਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਸਨਾਤਨ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਕੁੰਜੀ ਆਖਿਆ ਕਰਦੇ ਸਨ। ਇਸ ਬਾਣੀ ਦੀ ਬੋਲੀ ਠੇਠ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਸਮੇਂ ਦੇ ਵਟੀਣ ਕਰਕੇ ਕੁਝ ਪੁਰਾਣੀ ਹੋ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ, ਇਸ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਨੇਕ ਪਦਾਂ ਦੇ ਅਰਥ ਗੁੰਮ ਹੋ ਰਹੇ ਸਨ, ਦੂਸਰੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦੇ ਉਹ ਭੇਤ ਹਨ ਕਿ ਆਤਮ ਵਿਦਯਾ ਦਾ ਭਾਰੀ ਖਜ਼ਾਨਾ ਹਨ। ਤੇ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਮਿਲਦੀ ਹੈ। ਸੋ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਭੇਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਠੇਠ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਖੋਲ੍ਹ ਕੇ ਦੱਸਣਾ ਵੀ ਪਦ ਪਦਾਰਥਾਂ ਦੀ ਗਯਾਤ ਕਰਾਉਣ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਸੀ। ਇਸ ਕਰਕੇ ਗਯਾਨੀ ਹਜ਼ਾਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਪੰਡਤ ਜੀ ਨੇ, ਜੋ ਬੜੇ ਲਾਇਕ ਵਿਦਵਾਨ ਸਨ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਸਿੱਧ ਮੁੱਖ ਸੰਪ੍ਰਦਾਈ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਸਨ। ਆਪਣੇ ਜੀਵਨ ਦੀ ਆਖਰੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਵਜੋਂ ਇਹ ਟੀਕਾ ਤਿਆਰ ਕੀਤਾ। ਜੋ ਸਮਾਪਤ ਕਰਕੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਭਾਵਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਅਰ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਦੀ ਕੁਝ ਪੜਤਾਲ ਦਾਸ ਦੇ ਸਪੁਰਦ ਕਰਕੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਜੀਉਂਦੇ ਜੀ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਸਪੁਰਨ ਕਰਕੇ ਛਪਣੇ ਨਮਿੱਤ ਪ੍ਰੈਸ ਨੂੰ ਦੇ ਦਿਤਾ। ਕੁਛ ਫਰਮੇ ਛਪੇ ਆਪ ਨੇ ਵੇਖੇ ਸਨ, ਪਰ ਸ਼ੋਕ! ਕਿ ਸਾਰੀ ਛਪੀ ਦਾ ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰ ਸਕੇ।

⁶³ The Guru's path, in other words how one should live their life in accordance to what the Guru has said.

⁶⁴ Note the difference between Bani and Gurbani, Bhai Vir Singh understands that the work of Bhai Gurdas is held in high regard but it is not given the same title as Gurbani- The Guru's word.

⁶⁵ *Samṇpardā* means as given to by your elders, one passes on and *Giānī* means one who has knowledge

In this preface, Bhai Vir Singh explains his approach to exegesis. Firstly, one can understand that even in the time of Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Ji's *Varan* were given the title of being the "key" or *kuñjī* to understanding the SGGS. This is important to see, given that Rahuldeep Singh Gill argued that the text does should not be given this title: Bhai Vir Singh's acceptance of this title demonstrates that it has played an essential role in how the *Varan* is understood in the Sikh realm. Bhai Vir Singh deemed it important to write an exegesis of Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*; clearly, he saw the importance of the text. What elevates this text to an even higher status is that Bhai Vir Singh also did exegeses of a handful of *gurbānīān* (plural of *gurbānī*; the Guru's utterances) such as: Japjī Sāhib (an important liturgical prayer), *nitnem* (daily prayers),⁶⁶ *aṇāṇt bānīā* (a list of prayers that are fairly commonly read; literally translating to countless prayers), as well as Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*. This gives an elevated status to the *Varan*. Bhai Vir Singh also points out in the text cited above that texts like the *Varan* are being lost, due to lack of understanding and exposure. Secondly, Bhai Vir Singh's approach to the exegesis was meant to give the *panth* the tools necessary to understand the *Varan* and at the same time his teacher's (Giani Hazara Singh) and his understandings of the *Varan*.

Bhai Vir Singh's approach to translating Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* is transparent and systematic. Bhai Vir Singh begins with laying out the Var in the centre of the page and then provides a word-by-word translation of, for example, words that are either difficult to understand or that he wants to bring attention to. As for the translations themselves, Bhai Vir Singh is reasonably straightforward and seems to stick as close to the text as possible. This line-by-line translation is numbered and listed as *arth* (meaning). Words that are not in the text and are words he thinks are implied, he inserts into the translation using brackets. He then gives his commentary, which is listed *bhav-arth* (sense). Where necessary, Bhai Vir Singh introduces relatable lines from the SGGS. He also uses footnotes, where more information that is not directly related to the translations is included. Lastly, at the end of each translation, Bhai Vir

⁶⁶ Such as the 5 that are read in the morning- Japjī Sahib, Jaap Sahib, Tvaparsad Savaīay, Chaupai Sahib, Anand Sahib- Shabad Hazare, Rehrās Sāhib, Kīrtan Sohilā and Ardās

Singh ties in the current *paudi* (literally meaning “step,” but can be understood as stanza), to the next and how it may relate to the next one as well.

In this chapter, where applicable, I will begin with an English translation of the Bhai Gurdas line done by myself followed by a translation of the Bhai Vir Singh Punjabi commentary into English done by myself. This will be followed by writing Bhai Gurdas Ji’s *banī* in Punjabi, followed by Bhai Vir Singh commentary written in Punjabi.

2.1 Bhai Vir Singh's Commentary

It is evident through Bhai Vir Singh’s commentary (*tika*) that he is very well educated on many levels. For example, as explained through his preface, he understands the need for his commentary to be understandable in everyday language but also understands the need to dive deeper where needed—again, examples will be given below. It is abundantly clear that Bhai Vir Singh understands *Vedant* (understanding of the Vedas), a body of knowledge prevalent in the Nirmala *sampardāi*. As mentioned in the introduction, the influence of the Nirmala school of thought is clear in his work, through his education.

Looking at the beginning of the text, Bhai Vir Singh opens with a *maṅgalcharan* (invocation) directed to his Guru—it is worth noting this means both Guru Nānak and Gianī Hazārā Singh. This is a long-standing tradition not only within the Sikhs but also more broadly in South Asia. Guru Nanak, for example, opens with an invocation through the Mūl Maṅtar⁶⁷ (Root Mantra) and so too does Bhai Gurdas in the *Varan*.

Bhai Vir Singh explains that an invocation ties the text together in an organic whole, comparing it to the way that water, poured on the roots of a tree, can reach the rest of the tree because all of it is tied to the root. In this way, Bhai (Gurdas) Sahib Ji accepting the *SatGuru*⁶⁸ (True Guru) recites Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji as ਗੁਰਦੇਵ (Human form of the True Being)⁶⁹ while bowing to Guru Nanak. So, the *tika* begins:

⁶⁷ From Ik Oankar Satnām Karta Purkh all the way to Nanak Hosi Bhī Sach

⁶⁸ A reference to the primal one

⁶⁹ Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Mahankosh, online database: Gurdev (in Punjabi), March 6, 2020, <https://www.searchgurbani.com/mahan-kosh/view>

I bow before the Guru (Guru Nanak Dev) who recited the Satnam mantra (for the world).

Getting (the creatures) across the world ocean, He raptly merged them in liberation.

[Bhai Vir Singh's commentary:]

(I) bow to the illuminated form- Guru Nanak Dev- the one that allowed (us) to hear the Satnām Mantar.

(All should understand the benefit of this, in that it will) take one out of the world ocean (where one can be lost) and merge (with the one) while being a living liberated one

ਨਮਸਕਾਰੁ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਕੇ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਜਿਸੁ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ।

ਭਵਜਲ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਕਢਿ ਕੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਪਦਾਰਥਿ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਇਆ।

ਗੁਰਦੇਵ- ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ- (ਮੇਰੀ) ਨਮਸਕਾਰ ਹੋਵੇ 'ਸਤਿਨਾਮ ਦਾ ਜਿਸ ਨੇ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ ਹੈ।

(ਇਸ ਦਾ ਫਲ ਇਹ ਕਿ ਮੰਨਣ ਹਾਰਿਆ ਨੂੰ) ਸੰਸਾਰ ਸਮੁੰਦਰ (ਵਿਖੇ ਰੁੜੇ ਜਾਣ) ਤੋਂ ਕੱਢਕੇ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਪਦਾਰਥ (ਕਹੀਏ, ਜੀਵਨ ਮੁਕਤੀ) ਵਿਚ ਸਮਾ ਦਿਤਾ।

In the first two lines written by Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Vir Singh conveys that Guru Nanak is the illuminated form, that saves and liberates a being. As we will see through the examples, Bhai Vir Singh emphasizes the idea of recognizing the true Guru- as he does in the second line. This is central, as he seems to come back to this idea multiple time, suggesting that one must be able to distinguish between truth and falseness. Bhai Vir Singh then moves through the rest of Bhai Gurdas' lines explaining each line in simple terms.

The fear of birth and death is destroyed and the sickness of delusion the sickness of doubt and separation.

The world is only illusion which carried with it much of birth, death and sufferings.

The fear of the death's stick is not dispelled and the fallen ones have wasted their lives

[Bhai Vir Singh's commentary:]

The fear of birth and death is eradicated; the illusion of disease and separation is also erased.

This world is the very form of illusion and birth, death and other pains are within this world.

The pain of the messengers of death cannot be escaped; in this way, the fallen ones⁷⁰ or impure beings have wasted the treasure (*padārth*) [that is their lives].

ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਭਉ ਕਟਿਆ ਸੰਸਾਰੋਗੁ ਵਿਯੋਗੁ ਮਿਟਾਇਆ।

ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਇਹੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਹੈ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਨ ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਖੁ ਸਬਾਇਆ।

ਜਮਦੰਡੁ ਸਿਰੋਂ ਨ ਉਤਰੈ ਸਾਕਤਿ ਦੁਰਜਨ ਜਨਮੁ ਗਵਾਇਆ।

[ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਨੇ]

ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਦਾ ਡਰ ਦੂਰ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ, ਰੋਗ ਤੇ ਵਿਯੋਗ ਦਾ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਬੀ ਪੱਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ।

ਇਹ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਸੰਸੇ ਦਾ ਰੂਪ ਹੈ, ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਆਦਿ ਸਾਰੇ ਦੁੱਖ (ਇਸੇ) ਵਿਚ ਹਨ।

Bhai Vir Singh very briefly gestures towards ideas in *panthik* literature, such as impure beings; however, he quickly moves on from those without much detail and explanation. For example, the mentioning of *sakats* and then impure beings (*durjans*),⁷¹ is a reference to other Nirmala literature, such as the *Sārkuṭāvlī* written by Pandi Hardial, which explores this idea of impure beings in chapter 13 quite extensively.⁷² However, in keeping with Bhai Vir Singh's primary objective of making this text accessible for Sikhs, he has not gone into details into these terms. Bhai Vir Singh then moves through the translations with a focus on the Guru.

Those who have held onto the feet of the highest Guru have been liberated through the True Word.

(Those beings) do dedicated worship, celebrate *gurprubs* (anniversaries of the Gurus), meditate on the One, give charity, take cleansing bathes and instill these in others as well.

Whatever one sows, so one reaps.1.

⁷⁰ ਸਾਕਤ is a reference to the followers of Durga or the fallen ones.

⁷¹ ਦੁਰਜਨ, can be best understood if the word is split into two. Dur means enacting badness or wrong and jan is person. So a durjan is a person that enacts the wrong. Meaning, one that faces away from the Guru and the Guru's message.

⁷² Pandit Hardial, *Sārkuṭāvlī Satīk*. Ed. Giani Bhagwan Singh. (Amritsar: Chatar Singh Jeevan Singh, 2015), 66.

[Bhai Vir Singh glosses]

(Those that have) taken the sanctuary of the illuminated one, (they have) received the true *shabad* (and its understanding) and have been liberated.

(Those beings that) have solidified dedicated loving worship, the Guru's coming (*Gurpurb*), the name, charity and ablutions, (now give these teachings to others).

Whatever is planted (by whomever), that is what they reap.⁷³

ਚਰਨ ਗਹੇ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਦੇ ਸਤਿ ਸਬਦ ਦੇ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਕਰਾਇਆ।

ਭਾਉ ਭਗਤਿ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬਿ ਕਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਇਆ।

ਜੇਹਾ ਬੀਉ ਤੇਹਾ ਫਲੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥੧॥

ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਨੇ

(ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ) ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਣ ਲੀਤੀ ਹੈ, (ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ) ਸੱਚੇ ਸ਼ਬਦ (ਦ ਉਪਦੇਸ਼) ਦੇਕੇ ਮੁਕਤ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੈ।

(ਓਹ ਲੋਕ) ਪ੍ਰੇਮਾ ਭਗਤੀ, ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ, ਨਾਮ, ਦਾਨ ਅਤੇ ਇਸਨਾਨ (ਆਪ) ਦ੍ਰਿੜ ਕਰਕੇ (ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਉਪਦੇਸ਼ ਦਿੰਦੇ ਹਨ)।

ਜਿਹਾਂ ਬੀਜ (ਕੋਈ ਬੀਜ) ਤਿਹਾ ਫਲ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ।

Bhai Vir Singh here opens by giving the word for word translation. He translates *mukat padarath* as ਜੀਵਨ ਮੁਕਤੀ (*Jīvan muktī*) "liberated while alive," *subhāia* as ਸਾਰੇ (*Sāre*) "everyone," *bhao bhagāt* as ਪ੍ਰੇਮਾ ਭਗਤੀ (*Premā bhagatī*) "dedicated loving worship" and *gurdev* as ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ ਸਰੂਪ (*Prakāsh srūp*) "illuminated form."

Bhai Vir Singh's word for word translations are interesting to look at because he translates *gurdev* as the illuminated form, which is different from how it is typically translated, as God-like teacher or honorific Guru. The central difference between *Gurdev* and Guru is that *gurdev* holds the connotation of being the highest understanding of Guru and is a respectful and honorific title. Even though it does not change the overall meaning of the line (*pangti*) it is

⁷³ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas' Varan Tīkā, 6-7.

nonetheless a difference in translation.⁷⁴ This is also seen through other interpretations Bhai Vir Singh has done.

Bhai Vir Singh puts an effort into revolving his translations around *gurbani* and recognizing the similarity in the messages of Bhai Gurdas and the SGGS. However, Bhai Vir Singh in these lines is not taking the liberty of extending the meanings to fit his mold, instead in the immediate lines following Bhai Gurdas' text Bhai Vir Singh tends to be straightforward with his translations. At times, however, he extends past these meanings following where he clearly writes out what he thinks (ਭਾਵੇਂ).

Bhai Vir Singh then moves onto the meaning that he believes can be derived from the verse, writings two lines of his poetry:

Those that are said to do good deeds, chant the name, give charity and with the help of the Gurus, remember and celebrate the coming of the Gurus, they will receive great rewards. If not, one's life will pass like a night's sleep as a *manmukh*⁷⁵ (self-centered; facing the mind)

[Bhai Vir Singh then provides a *pangti* from the SGGS]

This world is an illusion; people pass their life-nights sleeping.⁷⁶

This means, Bhai Vir Singh argues, that the world is an illusion and this life passes as a night's sleep. Bhai Vir Singh infers, in his own words:

Those that do not allow this life to pass as a night's sleep, the faces of Gurmukhs and their faces will forever be illuminated. Thereby, in both worlds their faces will stay forever red,⁷⁷ in that way-

⁷⁴ By pushing the translation further out than what it says exactly, Bhai Vir Singh is able to drive further meanings out of the pangtian. For example, by translating *gurdev* as the illuminated form, Bhai Vir Singh is able to presume the elevated status of the Guru that Bhai Gurdas is referring to. However, looking at the entire line, this is by no means a stretch because Bhai Gurdas writes in the same line that those that hold onto the Guru's feet have been liberated through the True word. This would mean that the Guru has the ability to liberate, which is no different than the illuminated form. What Bhai Vir Singh may be attempting here is a move away from giving other humans the title of guru. The title of guru is typically used for a studied teacher, in any field, by a student of that guru and Bhai Vir Singh because of his background in the Singh Sabha movement may understand the detriment of using this term loosely as it leads to Sikhs moving away from the SGGS. Bhai Vir Singh in this way is able to tie a close relationship between the Varan and the SGGS.

⁷⁵ Bhai Vir Singh, *Bhai Gurdas' Varan Tikā*. 6-7.

⁷⁶ Guru Amardas, SGGS, *ang* 36. Self-translation

⁷⁷ Redness implies a sense of liveliness

[Bhai Vir Singh then quotes the SGGS]

By Guru's Grace your face shall be radiant. Chanting the Naam you shall receive the benefits of giving charity and taking cleansing baths.⁷⁸

In summary, by the Guru's grace and by meditating on the One, giving charity and taking cleansing baths, one's face will radiate.⁷⁹ Bhai Vir Singh then adds a line connected to this idea, introducing the teachings of his mentor, integrating Bhai Gurdas' text, his own interpretation of it, and his teacher's ideas:

[Bhai Vir Singh then writes two lines of poetry reflecting this]

The Kaner tree⁸⁰ will never produce a date, whatever is planted, that is the only thing one should keep hope for- as taught by Giani Hazara Singh (his teacher)

Bhai Vir Singh then moves to notes four adjuncts or connections (ਅਨੁਬੰਧ) of the text:

1. The text's topic is knowledge of the one non-dualistic soul through the true name's mantra.
2. The purpose of the text is for obtaining *Gursikhi* through loving dedicated worship (ਭਾਓ ਭਗਤੀ).
3. One that has desire for the Guru's Sikhi and possess naam and charity while being a devotee is deserving of this text.
4. The relationship between the first three, which according to the text is that *bānī* describes *Braham Gian* (ultimate knowledge, realizing the one) to the reader.

[ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਨੇ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਵਾਰ ਤੋਂ ਇਹ ਸਮਝ ਮਿਲਦੀ ਹੈ]

ਜੇਹੜੇ ਉਕਤ ਸ਼ੁਭ ਕਰਮ ਨਾਮ, ਦਾਨਾਦਿ ਅਰ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਂ ਦੇ ਉਪਕਾਰ ਯਾਦ ਕਰਕੇ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ। ਫਲ ਭੀ ਸ਼ੁਭ ਹੀ ਲੈਣਗੇ, ਨਹੀਂ ਤਾਂ ਐਵੇਂ ਮਨਮੁਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੁੱਤਿਆਂ ਹੀ ਉਮਰ ਦੀ ਰਾਤ ਗੁਜ਼ਰ ਜਾਊ। ਜਿਹਾ ਕਿ-

ਸੰਸਾ ਇਹੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਹੈ ਸੁਤਿਆ ਰੈਣਿ ਵਿਹਾਇ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਮੁਖ ਉੱਜਲੇ ਹੋਣਗੇ, ਅਰਥਾਤ ਦੁਹਾਂ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਵਿਖੇ ਸੁਰਖਰੂ ਰਹਿਣਗੇ। ਜਿਹਾਂ

⁷⁸ Guru Arjun, SGGS, ang 46. Self-translation.

⁷⁹ Quite often in *Gurbani*, a radiating or red face refers to one that is full of life- meaning one who meditates on the One because after all, that is true living, while not remembering the One, a person's life is wasted.

⁸⁰ Known as Nerium oleander is a toxic tree in all its parts- one of a kind.

ਗੁਰਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਮੁਖੁ ਉਜਲਾ ਜਪਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ॥

[ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਫਿਰ ਆਪ ਇਕ ਕਵਿਤਾ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਨੇ]

ਲਗਤ ਛੁਹਾਰਾ ਕਹੋ ਕਬ, ਲਕਰੀ ਸੰਗ ਕਨੇਰ। ਰਖ ਮਨ ਆਸ ‘ਹਜ਼ੂਰ ਹਰਿ ਦੈਰੈਂ ਬੀਜ ਜੁ ਕੇਰ॥੧॥

[ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਫਿਰ ਚਾਰ ਅਨਬੰਧ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਨੇ]

੧. ਸਤਿਨਾਮ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਇਕ ਅਦੁਤੀ ਆਤਮਾ ਦਾ ਗਯਾਨ ਇਸ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਦਾ ਵਿਸ਼ਾ ਹੈ।
੨. ਭਾਉ ਭਗਤੀ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤੀ ਰੂਪ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਜਨ ਹੈ।
੩. ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਦੀ ਇੱਛਾ ਵਾਲਾ, ਨਾਮ ਦਾਨ ਸੰਪੰਨ ਸੋ ਸ਼ਰਧਾਲੂ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਦਾ ਅਧਿਕਾਰੀ ਹੈ।
੪. ਵਿਖੜ ਅਰ ਬਾਣੀ ਦਾ ਜੋ ਪਰਸਪਰ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਾਦਕ ਅਰ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਾਦਕ ਭਾਵ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਦਾ ਸੰਬੰਧ ਸੂਚਨ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ।

Bhai Vir Singh does not seem to interject with his own words aside from glossing and defining the *Varan* anywhere else in his exegeses of the *Varan*, which suggests the significance of the last line of the first Var. Bhai Vir Singh then draws in examples from the SGGS that he believes tie in strictly to the *Varan*. Bhai Vir Singh then gives four notes on the text, where he makes clear that the *tika* aims not simply to provide information, instead it is to bring one closer to the Guru's wisdom. This, again, supports the claim that Bhai Vir Singh, along with other scholars believe the *Varan* are the *kunji* to the SGGS. Bhai Vir Singh states that through the exegesis one will obtain *Gursikhi* through the True Mantra, which in extension is explained in the *Varan*.

Moving forward into Guru Nanak coming into the world, Bhai Vir Singh has a unique way of translating some of the words which give an insight into the *Varan* that is not commonly explored. For example, Bhai Vir Singh (and later even Sant Gurbachan Singh) bring forward the idea of seasonal teachings and this is typical of the Sikh Scripture- which will be explored in depth after the Var. In the following Var, Bhai Gurdas uses the same paradigm drawing a clear connection to the SGGS. Bhai Gurdas in Var 1, *paudī* 27, writes:⁸¹

[Bhai Gurdas begins the Var by giving it a title]

Guru Nanak the great warrior

⁸¹ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas' *Varan Tīkā*, 22.

With the emergence of the true Guru Nanak, the mist cleared and the light scattered all around.

Just as the sun rises and the stars disappear, the darkness is dispelled.

With the roar of the lion in the forest, the flocks of escaping deer now cannot endure (the roar).

Wherever Baba put his feet, a religious place is established and worthy of worship.

All the sidh⁸²-places now have been renamed on the name of Nanak.

[Bhai Vir Singh then comments]

(When) Satgur Nanak Dev Ji, came to light, the fog (of ignorance) was dispelled.

Just as the sun rises and the stars disappear, and darkness is eradicated.

Just as the lion roars, the deer run in fear and they are not able to come to peace (in the same way, sins are running in fear as well).

Wherever the ‘Baba’⁸³ places his feet, that place is established and worthy of praise/worship.

All the esteemed places in the world have been re-established as the Guru’s (meaning, some places that were the sidh’s are now known as Nanak Mata and has become the place of the Guru. There have been Gurdwaras made in place after place.)

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਨੇ]

ਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੂਰਯੋਦਯ

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਆ ਮਿਟੀ ਧੁੰਧੁ ਜਗਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਆ।

ਜਿਉ ਕਰਿ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਨਿਕਲਿਆ ਤਾਰੇ ਛਪਿ ਅੰਧੇਰੁ ਪਲੋਆ।

ਸਿੰਘੁ ਬੁਕੇ ਮਿਰਗਾਵਲੀ ਭੰਨੀ ਜਾਇ ਨ ਧੀਰਿ ਧਰੋਆ।

ਜਿਥੇ ਬਾਬਾ ਪੈਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਪੂਜਾ ਆਸਣੁ ਥਾਪਣਿ ਸੋਆ।

ਸਿਧਾਸਣਿ ਸਭਿ ਜਗਤਿ ਦੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਆਦਿ ਮਤੇ ਜੇ ਕੋਆ।

[ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਨੇ]

⁸² Sidhs refers to a group of people who attempt to master physical and spiritual perfection. Typically, it is tied to the Hindu tradition- though one must understand that “Hindu” is an umbrella term that contains a wide range of beliefs and practices.

⁸³ Literally meaning old/wise man but is a reference to Gurū Nanak Dev Ji.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ (ਜਦ) ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹੋਏ ਗੁਬਾਰ (ਅਗਯਾਨ ਦਾ) ਦੂਰ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ ਤੇ (ਗਿਆਨ ਦਾ) ਚਾਨਣ
ਹੋ ਗਿਆ।

ਜਿੱਕੁਰ ਸੂਰਜ ਦੇ ਚੜ੍ਹਿਆਂ ਤਾਰੇ ਛਪਦੇ ਤੇ ਹਨੇਰਾ ਨੱਸਦਾ ਹੈ।

ਸ਼ੇਰ ਦੇ ਭਬਕਿਆਂ ਹਰਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਡਾਰ ਭੱਜਦੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਧੀਰਜ ਨਹੀਂ ਧਰਦੀ (ਇਉਂ ਪਾਪਾਂ ਨੂੰ
ਭਾਜੜ ਪੈ ਗਈ)।

ਜਿਥੇ ਬਾਬਾ ਚਰਨ ਰਖਦਾ ਸੀ ਓਥੇ ਪੂਜਾ ਦੇ ਆਸਣ ਦੀ (ਥਾਪਨਾ) ਗੱਦੀ ਜੋ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਸੀ।

ਜਗਤ ਦੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਸਿੱਧ ਆਸਣ (ਅਸਥਾਨ) ਜੇਹੜੇ ਕੋਈ ਸਨ, ਸਭ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਤੇ (ਗੁਰੂ ਆਸਣ

ਪ੍ਰਸਿੱਧ ਹੋ ਗਏ। ਭਾਵ ਜਿੱਕੁਰ ਸਿਧਾਂ ਦੇ ਥਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਖੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਤਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਾ ਥਾਂ ਬਣ ਗਿਆ, ਇੱਕੁਰ

ਥਾਂ ਥਾਂ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ)

This line by Bhai Gurdas contains a story of Guru Nanak where Guru Nanak talks to the Sidhs; however, Bhai Vir Singh does not go into the details of these stories in the immediate translations of these lines. He tends to either put these into the footnotes or follow the line-by-line commentary. For example, there is a story that is quite often told with the lines about the Sidhs but Bhai Vir Singh has avoided telling the story in the translation. He simply alludes to it and if the reader knows the story he is referring to then the reader may read more about it through other texts either written by him (such as *Gur Nanak Chamtkar*) or other *panthic* historiographies (such as the *Janamsakhis* or *Suraj Prakash*)- this story and what it does for the reader will be shared in detail, in Chapter two. Bhai Gurdas then writes in the same *Var*.

Every home has become a place of *dharma* where singing.

Baba liberated all four directions and nine divisions of earth.

Gurmukh (Guru Nanak) has emerged in this *kaliyug*, the dark age.

[Bhai Vir Singh then writes in his commentary]

Each and every home has become a place of *dharm* (righteous path),
where *keertan* (singing praises) happens and *Vaisakhi* is forever present.

The *Baba* liberated all four directions and the nine divisions⁸⁴ have
merged with the truth.

⁸⁴ This can also mean realm but here this lines seems to be in parallel with a line from the SGGS . Where Guru Arjun writes in Raag Gaurī, on *ang* 265: ਨਉ ਖੰਡ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਫਿਰੈ ਚਿਰੁ ਜੀਵੈ ॥ One may roam the nine divisions of the world and live a very long life. In that regards, this line by Bhai Gurdas is similar to that of Sri Guru Arjun Dev Ji.

In the age of Kaljug, the most Supreme Guru has come to light.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਨੇ]

ਘਰਿ ਘਰਿ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਧਰਮਸਾਲ ਹੋਵੈ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਸੋਆ।

ਬਾਬੇ ਤਾਰੇ ਚਾਰਿ ਚਕਿ ਨਉ ਖੰਡਿ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਸਚਾ ਢੋਆ।

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕਲਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਆ ॥੨੭॥

[ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਨੇ]

ਘਰ ਘਰ ਵਿਖੇ ਧਰਮਸਾਲਾਂ ਹੋਈਆਂ ਅਰ ਕੀਰਤਨ ਹੋਣ ਲੱਗਾ (ਮਾਨੋ) ਸਦਾ ਵਿਸਾਖੀ ਰਹਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ।

ਭਾਬੇ ਨੇ ਚਾਰੇ ਦਿਸ਼ਾ ਤਾਰ ਦਿੱਤੀਆਂ, ਨੌਖੰਡਾਂ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਵੀ ਵਿਖੇ ਸੱਚ ਦਾ ਮੇਲ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ।

ਖਲਿਜੁਗ ਵਿਖੇ ਸਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹੋ ਪਿਆ।

As mentioned earlier, it is uncommon to see *visoa* translated as *Vaisakhi*. It is commonly translated as "to inhabit." With this, Bhai Vir Singh establishes a relationship with the SGGS through his discussion and interpretation of *visoa*. There are many ideas tied to the season of *Vaisakh*. One that emerges through both the writings of Guru Nanak and Guru Arjun is the idea of blossoming and forgetting the root, the One, which leads to pain. Bhai Vir Singh suggests that with each and every being that walks on the path, the tree of Sikhi flourishes. All the while, pain caused by illusion is avoided. Some of these come through the writing of Guru Nanak in Raag Tukhari on *ang* 1108

Vaisākh is pleasant, the branches (of a tree) blossom with new beautiful leaves.

O Filler of Life, I, the soul-bride look towards your door, please take pity and come (into my home).

Please come home, my Beloved, please carry me across this treacherous world-ocean, without you, I am not worth even half a shell.⁸⁵

If it pleases you, you allow me to see you, and you see the One, who can even put price on my worth?

I understand you not being far and being within, I should realize this as all (inside and out) as the house of the Filler of Life.

⁸⁵ Shell here is a reference to monetary value.

O Nanak, the one's consciousness that is imbued and accustomed to the *Shabad*, she is able to obtain the Lord.⁸⁶

ਵੈਸਾਖੁ ਭਲਾ ਸਾਖਾ ਵੇਸ ਕਰੇ ॥
ਧਨ ਦੇਖੈ ਹਰਿ ਦੁਆਰਿ ਆਵਹੁ ਦਇਆ ਕਰੇ ॥
ਘਰਿ ਆਉ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਦੁਤਰ ਤਾਰੇ ਤੁਧੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਅਢੁ ਨ ਮੋਲੇ ॥
ਕੀਮਤਿ ਕਉਣ ਕਰੇ ਤੁਧੁ ਭਾਵਾਂ ਦੇਖਿ ਦਿਖਾਵੈ ਢੋਲੇ ॥
ਦੂਰਿ ਨ ਜਾਨਾ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਮਾਨਾ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਮਹਲੁ ਪਛਾਨਾ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਵੈਸਾਖੀ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਪਾਵੈ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨਾ ॥੬॥

Guru Arjun had also recited a *shabad* (hymn) which gives teachings based on the months. The *uthanika* (backstory) of Guru Arjun reciting another version of the Barhamaha is that the Sikh *sangat* (congregation) did a supplication to the Guru and asked if the Guru could give them all a teaching for the month. The Guru responded with there is already one recited by Guru Nanak. The *sangat* pleaded again and stated that the one recited by the first Guru is difficult to understand. Something worthy of noting is that when the new month comes about, most folks will recite the version written by Guru Arjun and sermons (*kathas*) and praises are sung (*kirtan*) of *shabad* recited by Guru Arjun which is written in Rāg Majh, on *ang* 134. This connection between the word *visoa* and *Vaisakh* that Bhai Vir Singh suggests can be understood through these verses that the Guru has written. They help in understanding why Bhai Vir Singh and even later, Sant Gurbachan Singh indicates a connection between the word *visoa* and spring and the new year.

[Guru Arjun writes]

In the month of *Vaisakh*, how can she be at ease when she is separated from her beloved?

She has forgotten the filler of life⁸⁷ and attached herself to the wave of illusion.

Neither son, spouse, nor wealth will go with you, only the Eternal one will.

⁸⁶ A beautiful second translation that is worth mentioning, which comes out of the Farīdkot Tīka (1883) is that this line in other words means, one who's mind becomes accustomed to praising and contemplating the One, that being is able to connect to the One through the beauty of the One's creation- in specific, the world surrounding us. The Faridkot Tika is a commentary that was written by the Nirmalas on the SGGS. Self-translation.

⁸⁷ ਹਰਿ- translates to green by Extension the One that makes things green.

Entangled in the false tasks the world is suffocating and dying.

Without the Name of the One filler of life, even before death their good deeds are ripped out of their hands.

Forgetting the Merciful One, one is ruined because there is no one other than the One.

Those that attach themselves to the feet of the Beloved, they are beautifully praised (in this world and the after world).

Nanak makes their supplication to the Beloved, please, come and unite me with yourself.

The month of *Vaisakh* is beautiful and pleasant, when the saints cause me to meet the filler of life.

ਵੈਸਾਖਿ ਧੀਰਨਿ ਕਿਉ ਵਾਢੀਆ ਜਿਨਾ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਬਿਛੋਹੁ ॥
ਹਰਿ ਸਾਜਨੁ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਵਿਸਾਰਿ ਕੈ ਲਗੀ ਮਾਇਆ ਧੋਹੁ ॥
ਪੁਤ੍ਰ ਕਲਤ੍ਰ ਨ ਸੰਗਿ ਧਨਾ ਹਰਿ ਅਵਿਨਾਸੀ ਓਹੁ ॥
ਪਲਚਿ ਪਲਚਿ ਸਗਲੀ ਮੁਈ ਝੂਠੈ ਧੰਧੈ ਮੋਹੁ ॥
ਇਕਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨੁ ਅਗੈ ਲਈਅਹਿ ਖੋਹਿ ॥
ਦਯੁ ਵਿਸਾਰਿ ਵਿਗੁਚਣਾ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਬਿਨੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥
ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਚਰਣੀ ਜੋ ਲਗੇ ਤਿਨ ਕੀ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਸੋਇ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਕੀ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਮਿਲਹੁ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਵੈਸਾਖੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਤਾਂ ਲਗੈ ਜਾ ਸੰਤੁ ਭੇਟੈ ਹਰਿ ਸੋਇ ॥੩॥

As seen through both *shabads* written by Guru Nanak and Guru Arjun, the choice of using the term *Harī*, seems to be very deliberate, as *Hari* can be understood to be the one that enlivens the creation. Like the spring season, which has just passed (according to the Lunar calendar) and the fruits and vegetables have ripened in time for the month of Vaisākh where the crops are harvested. Bhai Vir Singh is suggesting *visoā* be translated as Vaisākhī because he sees the connection between blossoming and growth of Sikhi in the homes of Sikhs. Meaning that Sikhi is spreading amongst the people but it is also growing stronger in those houses where Sikhi already exists. This reaffirms that Bhai Vir Singh sees a connection between Bhai Gurdas and the SGGS.

Bhai Vir Singh makes very clear and distinct connections between the *Varan* and the SGGS, and other texts and literature. As already mentioned above, some connections can be inferred; however, Bhai Vir Singh has also very directly connected the *Varan* to the SGGS. As already seen through some of the examples above, Bhai Vir Singh makes direct connections between Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* and the SGGS. Moreover, he makes references to other texts and ideas as well, as seen through his four notes to the reader of the commentary. In Bhai Vir Singh's explanation of what one take away from the first Var, he relies heavily on quoting the SGGS. Instead of giving an explanation himself of what can understand from the var, Bhai Vir Singh opts to use *bani* from the SGGS to relay the message. This suggests that Bhai Vir Singh sees a very clear connection between the *Varan* and the SGGS, such as he shows on page 26 where he references the *Sidh Ghost*⁸⁸ written by Guru Nanak. As seen through the examples, Bhai Vir Singh will also indirectly reference ideas in the SGGS. For example, in the fourth note, he states that the *tika*'s aim is to help one understand *brahamgian*, ultimate knowledge of the One, and the commentary is of the *Varan* and not the SGGS. Bhai Vir Singh assigns the *Varan* a power normally reserved for the SGGS. Therefore, one could extrapolate that Bhai Vir Singh is suggesting that even the *Varan* provide the ultimate knowledge or ultimate realization. We can see some examples of how he represents the SGGS in his text, in relation to the *Varan*, in what follows.⁸⁹

[Bhai Vir Singh quotes these lines directly from the SGGS in his exegesis]⁹⁰

As per: One who works for what he eats and gives some of what he has. O Nanak, he knows the Path.^{91 92}

⁸⁸ Sidh Ghost is a *bani* written by Guru Nanak in which Guru Nanak has a conversation with the Sidhs. This *bani* has been translated by Dr. Kamla Nayar's book *The Socially Involved Renunciate*.

⁸⁹ Bhai Vir Singh provides many lines directly from the SGGS, but It would be nearly impossible to show them all, as there are simply too many.

⁹⁰ Note: I will not delve into how Bhai Vir Singh has used these references to the SGGS in the *Varan*, as this would move further away from the argument.

⁹¹ Guru Nanak, SGGS, *ang* 22. Self Translation.

⁹² Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas *Varan Tika*, 4.

Meaning: O Nanak, only one thing is of any account: everything else is useless babbling and idle talk in ego.1.^{93 94}

Kabeer, those who only preach to others - sand falls into their mouths. They keep their eyes on the property of others, while their own farm is being eaten up.^{95 96}

One who sees himself as lowly. Will be accounted as the highest of all.^{97 98}

O my mother, Maya is so misleading and deceptive. Without meditating on the Lord of the Universe, it is like straw on fire, or the shadow of a cloud, or the running of the flood-waters. .Pause.^{99 100}

The Lord abides upon the tongues of Saints.^{101 102}

ਯਥਾ: ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ॥

ਭਾਵ- “ਨਾਨਕ ਲੇਖੈ ਇਕ ਗਲ ਹੋਰੁ ਹਉਮੈ ਝਖਣਾ ਝਾਖ॥”

ਕਬੀਰ ਅਵਰਹ ਕਉ ਉਪਦੇਸਤੇ ਮੁਖ ਮੈ ਪਰਿ ਹੈ ਰੇਤੁ॥ ਰਾਸਿ ਬਿਰਾਨੀ ਰਾਖਤੇ ਖਾਯਾ ਘਰ ਕਾ ਖੇਤ॥

ਆਪਸ ਕਉ ਜੋ ਜਾਣੈ ਨੀਚਾ॥ ਸੋਊ ਗਨੀਐ ਸਭ ਤੇ ਉਚਾ॥

⁹³ Guru Nanak, SGGS, *ang* 467. Self-translation.

⁹⁴ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Tika Varan, 17.

⁹⁵ Bhagat Kabir, SGGS, *ang* 1369. Self-translation.

⁹⁶ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Tika Varan, 22.

⁹⁷ Guru Arjun, SGGS, *ang* 226. Self-translation.

⁹⁸ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Tika Varan, 23.

⁹⁹ Guru Arjun, SGGS, *ang* 717. Self-translation.

¹⁰⁰ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Tika Varan, 36.

¹⁰¹ Guru Arjun, SGGS, *ang* 263. Self-translation.

¹⁰² Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Tika Varan, 40.

ਮਾਈ ਮਾਇਆ ਛਲੁ ॥ ਤ੍ਰਿਣ ਕੀ ਅਗਨਿ ਮੇਘ ਕੀ ਛਾਇਆ ਗੋਬਿਦ ਭਜਨ ਬਿਨੁ ਹੜ ਕਾ ਜਲੁ ॥
ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜੀ ਬਸਹਿ ਸਾਧ ਕੀ ਰਸਨਾ ॥

These are only a few examples from the First Var where Bhai Vir Singh as quoted directly from the SGGS.

As discussed in the introduction, Rahuldeep Singh (2016) claims that the *Varan* is to be read through the lens of martyrdom because they are written after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun. Rahuldeep Singh also argues that the vars “would have functioned in their time to give voice to the community’s suffering after the execution of their leader.”¹⁰³ It is true that Bhai Gurdas includes metaphors and the imagery of martyrdom (*shahidi*) in the *Varan*; there are very clearly some *Varan* that it can be argued refer to the Guru Arjun's *Shahidi*. By claiming that *all* the *Varan* are about *Shahidi*, however, Rahuldeep Singh removes the connections and disconnects them from not only the SGGS but also other texts and literature. As Bhai Vir Singh shows, there is a strong relationship of the Vars to the SGGS. So, while it is true that Bhai Gurdas, in specific verses, does explicitly refer to or use the word *shahidi*, when the verse is understood in context, it is not about martyrdom, rather it is on what it means to be a true follower. However, it becomes evident a literal translation of the lines gives us an understanding of what it means to be dead and for one to give their head. In the verses that follow, Bhai Gurdas will use the language of sacrifice, *shahidi*, and slavery to describe not literal death or servitude, but as spiritual metaphors for the ideal follower of the Sikh tradition. Bhai Gurdas in *Vār 3, paudī 18* writes and Bhai Vir Singh translates it as:

18: Follower

Only by becoming dead in life can become a true disciple, not by talking.

A content and truly sacrificial being is one that abstains from delusions and fears.

The true disciple is a purchased slave who is ever busy in the service of the Master.

He forgets hunger, sleep, food and rest.

¹⁰³ Rahuldeep Singh Gill, *Drinking from Love’s Cup*, 67.

He grinds fresh flour (for free kitchen) and serves by fetching water.

He fans (the congregation) and washes nicely the feet of the Guru.

The servant always remains disciplined and has nothing to do with wailing and laughing.

This way he becomes dervish at the door of the Lord and gets drenched in the delights of the rains of love.

He will be seen as the first moon of Id day, and only he will come out as a perfect man.

[Bhai Vir Singh then explains]

One becomes a follower by dying [in the eyes of the world], not by talking.

(By being), content, a true *shahīd*, far from doubt and fear.

A true follower is a slave who is (at all times) in service.

(She does not care for her own) sleep, hunger, food nor rest.

She grinds fresh flour and brings fresh water.

She with care washes the feet and fans the Guru.

The servant is disciplined, nor does she laugh or cry (meaning, accepts the Guru's command),

[Bhai Vir Singh then quotes the SGGS in the middle of his translation]

Even if the Guru scolds me, even those words are sweet and if (the Guru) forgives me, then that is the Guru's greatness.¹⁰⁴

[Bhai Vir Singh then continues his commentary]

In this way, if one goes to the Guru's door in this way, then she is drenched in love.

She will then be seen as the first moon of Īd day and will be complete.

At the end of his line by line translations, Bhai Vir Singh then goes on to write that a follower is one that remains dead and does not recognize himself (as the one that does).

¹⁰⁴ Guru Ramdas, SGGS, *ang* 785. Self-translation

[Bhai Vir Singh then quotes numerous lines from the SGGS]

Ever since, the Guru bought me, I have become your slave's slave and for this reason I am called fortunate. ¹⁰⁵

In this same way,

[Bhai Vir Singh then shares another line from the SGGS],

Place your head (ego) on the palm of your hand and walk on my path. ¹⁰⁶

[Bhai Vir Singh goes on to further support this with *Gurbānī* by citing another line],

Cutting off my head I give it to the servant¹⁰⁷ to sit upon, without my head I will serve. ¹⁰⁸

ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਨੇ:

ੴ : ਮੁਰੀਦ

ਮੁਰਦਾ ਹੋਇ ਮੁਰੀਦ ਨ ਗਲੀ ਹੋਵਣਾ ।

ਸਾਬਰੁ ਸਿਦਕਿ ਸਹੀਦੁ ਭਰਮ ਭਉ ਖੋਵਣਾ ।

ਗੋਲਾ ਮੁਲ ਖਰੀਦੁ ਕਾਰੇ ਜੋਵਣਾ ।

ਨਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਭੁਖ ਨ ਨੀਦ ਨ ਖਾਣਾ ਸੋਵਣਾ ।

ਪੀਹਣਿ ਹੋਇ ਜਦੀਦ* ਪਾਣੀ ਢੋਵਣਾ ।

ਪਖੇ ਦੀ ਤਾਗੀਦ ਪਗ ਮਲਿ ਧੋਵਣਾ ।

ਸੇਵਕ ਹੋਇ ਸੰਜੀਦੁ ਨ ਹਸਣ ਰੋਵਣਾ ।

ਦਰ ਦਰਵੇਸ ਰਸੀਦੁ ਪਿਰਮ ਰਸ ਭੋਵਣਾ ।

ਚੰਦ ਮੁਮਾਰਖ ਈਦ ਪੁਗ ਖਲੋਵਣਾ ॥੧੮॥

¹⁰⁵ Guru Nanak, SGGS, *ang* 991. Self-translation.

¹⁰⁶ Guru Nanak. SGGS, *ang* 1412. Self-translation.

¹⁰⁷ This is driven from the previous line that Bhai Vir Singh does not quote where Guru Nanak says ਤੈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੀ ਬਾਤ ਜਿ ਆਖੈ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਆ ਦੀਜੇ ॥ Thai Saahib Kee Baath J Aakhai Kahu Naanak Kiaa Dheejai ॥ One who brings me a message from my Lord and Master - says Nanak, what shall I give to Her?

¹⁰⁸ Guru Nanak, SGGS, *ang* 558. Self-translation.

ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਇਹ ਅਰਥ ਕਰਦੇ ਨੇ:
 ਚੇਲਾ (ਸੰਸਾਰ ਤੋਂ) ਮਰਕੇ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ, ਗੱਲਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੁੰਦਾ।
 ਸੰਤੋਖੀ, ਸੱਚ ਪੁਰ ਸ਼ਹੀਦ, ਭਰਮ ਤੇ ਡਰ ਨੂੰ ਦੂਰ ਕਰਕੇ (ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ)।
 ਮੁੱਲ ਖਰੀਦੀ ਗੁਲਾਮ ਹੋਵੇ (ਹਰ ਵੇਲੇ) ਟਹਿਲ ਵਿਖੇ ਜੁੜਿਆ ਰਹੇ।
 (ਆਪਣੇ ਸਰੀਰ ਦੀ) ਉਹ ਨਾਂ ਭੁੱਖ ਤੇ ਨਾਂ ਨੀਂਦ ਦੀ (ਪਰਵਾਹ ਕਰੇ) ਤੇ ਨਾਂ ਸੌਣ ਤੇ ਖਾਣ ਦੀ।
 ਤਾਜ਼ਾ ਆਟਾ ਪੀਹੇ, ਪਾਣੀ ਢੋਵੇ। (ਗੁਰੂ ਦੇ) ਤਾਕੀਦ ਨਾਲ ਚਰਨ ਮਲਕੇ ਧੋਵੇ ਤੇ ਪੱਖਾ ਝੱਲੇ।
 (ਗੁਰੂ ਦੇ) ਤਾਕੀਦ ਨਾਲ ਚਰਨ ਮਲਕੇ ਧੋਵੇ ਤੇ ਪੱਖਾ ਝੱਲੇ।
 ਸੇਵਕ ਗੰਭੀਰ ਹੋਵੇ, ਨਾ ਹੱਸੇ ਨ ਰੋਵੇ (ਭਾਵ ਗੁਰੂ ਦਾ ਭਾਣਾ ਮੰਨੇ-
 (ਫਿਰ ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਦੀ ਪੰਗਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਨੇ:)
 ਜੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਝਿੜਕੇ ਤ ਮੀਠਾ ਲਾਗੈ ਜੇ ਬਖਸੇ ਤ ਗੁਰ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥੨੫॥
 (ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ) ਜੇ ਦਰ ਦਾ ਦਰਵੇਸ਼ ਹੋਕੇ ਪਹੁੰਚੇ (ਉਹ) ਪਿਰੀ ਦੇ (ਰਸ=) ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਵਿਖੇ
 ਭਿੱਜੇਗਾ।
 ਈਦ ਦੇ ਚੰਦ ਵਾਂਙੂ ਵਧਾਈਆਂ ਮਿਲਨਗੀਆਂ ਕੇ (ਪੁੰਨਯਾ ਦੇ ਚੰਦ ਵਾਂਙੂ) ਪੁੱਗ ਖਲੋਊ (ਭਾਵ
 ਪੂਰਨ ਹੋ ਜਾਊ)।

ਇਸ ਪਰਕਾਰ ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਹੋਰ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਉਦਾਹਰਣਾਂ ਦਿੰਦੇ ਹਨ:

ਮੁਲ ਖਰੀਦੀ ਲਾਲਾ ਗੋਲਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਨਾਉ ਸਭਾਗਾ ॥
 ਅਤੇ
 ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥
 ਅਤੇ
 ਸੀਸੁ ਵਢੇ ਕਰਿ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਵਿਣੁ ਸਿਰ ਸੇਵ ਕਰੀਜੈ॥

All of this points towards removing oneself from attaching to this body and seeing it for what it truly is,¹⁰⁹ a vessel for the One. It is evident that Bhai Vir Singh understands that Bhai Gurdas is

¹⁰⁹ There are numerous quotes from *Gurbānī* that can be inserted here; however, being cognisant of the not wanting this thesis to simply be translations of the Varan and SGGS, I will elect to not quote here and even further into the thesis where ample supporting evidence has already been provided.

using his words to help listeners and readers of his *bani* understand what the Guru is saying in *Gurbani*. The claim that the *Varan* are strictly about *shahidi* does not allow an embedded, intertextual approach, and the connection to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is lost. One must remember that the Guru and even the Guru's congregation were not so easily accessible at that time, as they might be for some the modern world today where the Guru is at every Gurdwara Sahib. Now, there are numerous Gurdwaras not in just one city but around the globe. Bhai Gurdas' compositions played a crucial role in delivering the Guru's word and also guiding the followers on how to meet the Guru metaphysically, when physical meetings weren't possible. Bhai Gurdas' text provides teachings to Sikhs about what a Murid, or follower, should do, and what makes a successful Sikh, about how a *Gursikh* is to behave and become a follower of the Guru.

Bhai Vir Singh understands the approach that Bhai Gurdas has taken to the *Varan* but also has very clearly a deep knowledge of not only Gurbani but also other *granth*s (texts). He demonstrates this in his discussion of the different ways offspring are created and also the different stages of *Simran* (meditation), such as we see here:

[Bhai Vir Singh writes]

There are five elements and past deeds (from which you came), by combining these the body is made. (Meaning, fire, water, dirt, which were like lion and sheep were combined). (Four) [types of] offspring [are formed from] (egg, placental, moisture/heat, seedling and four) [types of] meditations (with sound, with tongue, but no sound, with mind, with each and every pour) through these the coming and going [of beings] has been shown.

ਪੰਚ ਤੱਤ ਤੇ ਪੰਝੀ ਪ੍ਰਕ੍ਰਿਤਾਂ (ਜਿਹੜੇ ਆਪੋ ਵਿਚ, ਸਤ੍ਰੂ (ਸਨ), ਮੇਲ ਕੇ ਮਿਤ ਬਣਾਕੇ ਦੇਹ ਬਣਾ ਦਿਤੀ।
(ਭਾਵ ਅੱਗ, ਪਾਣੀ, ਮਿਟੀ, ਜਿਹੜਾ ਆਪੋ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ੀਹ ਬਕਰੀ ਵਾਂਗੂ ਸਨ ਕੱਠੇ ਕਰ ਦਿਤੇ)। (ਚਾਰ)
ਖਾਣੀਆਂ (ਅੰਡਜ, ਜੇਰਜ, ਸੇਤਜ, ਉਤਭੁਜ, ਤੇ ਚਾਰ) ਬਾਣੀਆਂ (ਪਰਾ, ਪਸੰਤੀ, ਮੱਧਮਾ, ਬੈਖਰੀ,
ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ) ਚਲਾਉ ਕਰਕੇ ਆਵਾਗੋਣ ਦਾ ਚਰਿਤ੍ਰ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ।

In this example, one must understand that there is no list of the different ways offspring are created in the SGGS; however, other texts do have references to this. One must truly and deeply understand the SGGS and a range of other texts to make the connections Bhai Gurdas has made. Bhai Vir Singh outlines them time and time again, along with the different stages of meditation, which are not referenced directly from any one text. In *Gurnanak Prakash*, Kavi Santokh Singh

talks about the importance and greatness of *nam* (the Name) and he alludes to the different stages; this is one source. This reference to the various stages of *Simran* (remembrance) also refers to a deep oral tradition. For example, Bhai Vir Singh mentions the different stages of *nam* (the sacred name) as: *prā, psantī, madham, baikhrī*, which can loosely be defined as doing it out loud, with one's tongue but no sound, mind and then "*rom rom*" – from every pore.¹¹⁰ Though descriptions of these stages do not come from a specific text, they are common in the Sikh oral tradition. This demonstrates how these texts reflect a complicated intertextuality and dialogue across multiple planes. Both Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Vir Singh are always in dialogue with the SGGS, other *granth*s and the oral tradition.

2.2 Conclusions

It is clear Bhai Gurdas not only had a deep understanding of Sikh philosophies but also of other faiths and paths. Bhai Gurdas brings in texts from other religions into his writing and evidently has a knowledge of them because he seems to refer to them quite often. As just one example, Bhai Gurdas is aware of the different Vedas and Shastras. Even Bhai Vir Singh comments on these and gives insight.

[Bhai Vir Singh translates a line written by Bhai Gurdas as]

After discourse on the four Vedas and correcting the six Shastras, the sages utter them.

ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਨੇ:

ਚਹੁ ਬੇਦਾਂ ਕੇ ਧਰਮ ਮਥਿ ਖਟਿ ਸਾਸਤ੍ਰ ਕਥਿ ਰਿਖਿ ਸੁਣਾਵੈ।

ਭਾਈ ਵੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਨੇ:

ਚਾਰ ਬੇਦਾਂ ਦੇ ਧਰਮਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਚਾਰਕੇ ਤੇ ਛੇ ਸ਼ਾਸਤ੍ਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ (ਮਥਿ=) ਸੋਧਕੇ (ਬਿਆਸ ਆਦਿ ਛੇ) ਰਿਖੀ ਸੁਣਾਂਵਦੇ ਹਨ।¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Rom can be understood as doing *nam* or meditation with each and every pour. This is something that is explored in the SGGS and is an elevated spiritual stage one can achieve.

¹¹¹ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Tika Varan, 7.

Bhai Vir Singh makes many references to numerous texts and scholars in his work. To name a few he outright lists the *Suraj Parkash*, *Gur-Nanak Parkash*, *Gian Ratnavli*, the Japji Sahib commentary by Sri Shankar Dayal Ji, Giani Sahib Singh Ji Dhamdan Sahib,¹¹² Pandit Tara Singh Ji Narotam, Pandit Kartar Singh Dhaka, and Bhai Hajara Singh. These are just a few of the texts and scholars that have been mentioned in the commentary. Some of these references are deliberate and clearly noted, while others are only hinted towards as mentioned earlier in the chapter. We can see this done in the following example:

[Bhai Vir Singh in his *tika* quotes directly from Gur-Nanak Prakash and writes]

In Sri Guru Nanak Prakash the full: Chapter sixty-three, page thirty-nine, forty and forty-one say:

Gorakh Nath gave (Guru Nanak) a skull and said, o child! Look at that lake, bring the water from there and you will be free of pains forever.

Guru Nanak took the skull and went near the lake and saw that there were uncountable gems in it. After looking at the entire lake, Guru Nanak stood at the edge of the water.

There were many jewels and gems glistening there. Gorakh understood it quite literally and came back to Guru Nanak.

He came and said, there is no water there, take care of your skull and then Guru Nanak came and sat beside Gorakh Nath.¹¹³

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਪੂਰ: ਧਿਆ ਏ੩ ਅੰਕ ੩੯, ੪੦, ੪੧ ਵਿਚ ਐਉਂ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਹੈ:-
 ਖੱਪਰ ਦਿਤਾ ਨਾਥ ਨੇ, ਬਾਲੇ ਤਾਲ ਬਿਲੋਕ! ਪਾਨੀ ਆਨਹੁ ਤਹਾਂ ਤੇ ਹੁਜੇ ਸਦਾ ਅਸ਼ੋਕ।
 ਲੋਕਰ ਗਮਨੇ ਤਾਲ ਢਿਗ ਮਾਣਿਕ ਲਾਲ ਬਿਸਾਲ। ਪੂਰਨ ਸਰ ਅਵਲੋਕ ਕੈ ਠਾਂਢੈ ਰਹ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲ।
 ਜਗਮਗ ਕਰਤ ਹੈਂ ਤਹਾਂ ਜਵਾਹਰ ਭੁਰ। ਗੋਰਖ ਕੋ ਛਲ ਜਾਨ ਕੋ ਹਟਿ ਆਏ ਜਗ ਮੂਰ।
 ਕਹਯੋ ਆਨ:- ਤਹਿ ਨੀਰ ਨਹਿ, ਖੱਪਰ ਲਹੁ ਸੰਭਾਲ। ਬੈਠੇ ਬਹੁਰ ਸਮੀਪ ਹੈ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਦੀਨ ਦਯਾਲ।

This is just one example of how one of the above-mentioned texts is referenced by Bhai Vir Singh; there are numerous more that he references. Bhai Vir Singh not only alludes to the web of connections present in Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* but also engages with the *panthik* literature himself as well.

¹¹² Unsure which writing Bhai Vir Singh is referring to here.

¹¹³ Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Gurdas Tika Varan, 26. Self-translation.

All in all, Bhai Vir Singh's approach to translating the *Varan* is straight forward but at the same time it is nuanced. He glosses each line, providing synonyms and a paraphrase, but also engages in intertextuality, alluding to multiple texts. This shows that there is not only a connection between the SGGS and the *Varan* but also the *Varan* and the commentary, and the commentary and the SGGS, as well as between the commentary and other texts that have been mentioned. This nuanced approach that Bhai Vir Singh takes shows the complexity of the *Varan*, which themselves reveal a complex relationship with the SGGS. They simply cannot be understood to have a single, monolithic approach to explaining, teaching and understanding Sikhi.

Chapter 3: Sant Gurbachan Singh's Oral Commentary

3.1 Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* in oral *Katha*.

Sant Gurbachan Singh (1902-1961) acted as a catalyst in solidifying the organization and infrastructure of the Damdami Taksal school, in terms of establishing schools. Sant Gurbachan Singh also improved the training provided by the school, which led to the birthing of many great scholars. Indeed, the influence of the Taksal world-wide is often credited to Sant Gurbachan Singh. He was not only a preacher of the Taksal, but he also expanded the Taksal itself, intellectually and spiritually, developing concrete connections among texts that are heard throughout his *katha*. His students would have been exposed through these connections to a wider *panthik* literature. As the examples below will show, his understandings were not limited to one specific text; instead, he commonly incorporated other texts such as the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the *Gurbilas* literature, *Sūraj Parkāsh*, and other spiritual writings.

Intellectually, Gurbachan Singh encouraged his students to learn other languages (Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian, Hindi and more) and asked them to engage and learn from older Nirmala school texts, as outlined in the introduction. In terms of religious practice, he made it a requirement for his students to be strong in their daily prayers (*Nitnem*), meditation (*Simran*), and correct pronunciation of *Gurbani* (*Saṁthiya*). It is said by his students, that if these were not at the level that was required, they would not move forward in their lessons.¹¹⁴ His student's viewed Sant Gurbachan Singh as someone who truly understood what the Guru taught: that a person's ultimate goal is to merge with the One through remembrance of the one (*Simran*).¹¹⁵ Sant Gurbachan Singh's understanding of this plays a vital role in how he approaches preaching (*katha*) because he, at times, implies and even directly suggests the practical implementation of the Guru's teachings. As we will see in what follows, Sant Gurbachan Singh ties the Guru's teachings to Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*, explaining how one should implement the lessons in one's spiritual practice. He refers to other texts as well, but not to the texts as such; his emphasis is on

¹¹⁴ Baba Surjit Singh "Sodhi Ji", Giani Gurdev Singh, and Bhagat Jaswant Singh "Bhagat Ji," personal conversations, August 2018.

¹¹⁵ Meditation is a simpler way of understanding this term; however, I would argue that it is not to be understood the way that meditation is understood in the west.

teachings and practice. For this reason, it is quite common for Gurbachan Singh not to make direct references to other texts.

Sant Gurbachan Singh's approach to preaching (*katha*) has become the standard for members of the Taksal school. He is known for staying as close to Gurbani as possible;¹¹⁶ however, where needed, he also provides an *uthānikā* (background story), usually from *panthik* historiography: such as the *Janamsakhis*, *Bansavali Nama*, *Gurbilas* literature, or *Suraj Parkash*. As is common in the oral preaching tradition, sources are not always directly referenced. As will be seen in the examples below, some references come with a clear citation of specific texts, while at other times, there is no explicit reference. An implicit trust exists between the listener and speaker that the speaker has done their research and is utilizing a credible source. Another reason one may not reference their sources during the *katha* is that this can be seen as inflaming one's ego, a kind of parading of one's own knowledge. This idea is understood as unfavorable through the very first *dharmik granth*, *Sarkutavli* (1833) that is taught to students in the traditional education system. It is, therefore, a new, and still uncommon, phenomenon where a *kathavachik* (deliverer of *katha*) lists out their sources during *kathā*.

Sant Gurbachan Singh's *katha* of the *Varan* features numerous references to the *panthik* historiographical literature, demonstrating his placement of the *Varan* within a complex, intertextual web. Preachers (*kathāvachiks*) point out these connections that are seen to exist between the texts, directly or indirectly. I argue that not only are Sant Gurbachan Singh and Bhai Vir Singh drawing these connections but that through their analysis and representation of the meaning of the work of Bhai Gurdas, they are arguing that Bhai Gurdas himself also saw and drew these connections to the SGGS.

The connections between Bhai Gurdas' text and other texts become apparent when one understands that in a written format, like Bhai Vir Singh's commentary (*ṭīkā*), one is able to reference another text explicitly. A *ṭīkākar* (writer of a *ṭīkā* or commentary) has the opportunity to go into much more detail than a *kathāvachik*, because there are fewer limitations or constraints. There are some restraints, such as time, space or even in the ability of the reader to

¹¹⁶ Baba Surjit Singh "Sodhi Ji", Giani Gurdev Singh, and Bhagat Jaswant Singh "Bhagat Ji," personal conversations, August 2018.

understand, as well as in terms of length and format. This is because most exegeses of this type are written for a more educated audience. On the other hand, an oral *kathāvachik* generally does not directly cite his sources, leaving citations unsaid. However, references and ideas from other texts are still very clearly present to the trained listener. As will be shown through the examples given below, one can hear references to numerous texts in Sant Gurbachan Singh's *kathā*. However, these connections are made within the limitations of the *kathā* genre.

Sant Gurbachan Singh's *kathas* were audio-recorded by a student of Sant Gurbachan Singh, Bhagat Jaswant Singh in the 1960's.¹¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, one of the roles of the Taksal [school/order] was and still is to preach from village to village. Sant Gurbachan Singh completed *katha* of the SGGS twenty-seven times alongside *katha* of Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*. While the audio recordings of his *kathā* are missing some sections, they are largely intact and available online.¹¹⁸ Sant Gurbachan Singh and the Taksal [school/order] that continues his tradition both claim to stick closely to the *bani* and provide an *uthānikā* (backstory) only where necessary.

The goal of this chapter is to explicate Sant Gurbachan Singh's *kathā* and draw out how it establishes connections between the works of Bhai Gurdas and a more comprehensive range of literature, including the SGGS. The following section will look at *kathā* done by Sant Gurbachan Singh on Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*. It will be argued that Sant Gurbachan Singh draws on Bhai Gurdas' words and compositions in his framing of the connection to the SGGS, suggesting a direct and clear relationship between Bhai Gurdas and the Guru - whether that is physically or intellectually. He also extends past this textual relationship to address a range of later works.

The format of this chapter will be as follows. The English translation of Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* will be provided first followed by an English translation of Sant Gurbachan Singh's *katha* translation in English. Then Bhai Gurdas' *Var* will be provided in Punjabi followed by Sant Gurbachan Singh's *katha* in Punjabi. From time to time, Sant Gurbachan Singh does quote *Gurbani* in the middle of the *katha*. So for the sake of clarity, this will be provided at the end of that line and it will be indented further in, and like earlier the English will be provided first

¹¹⁷ <http://gursevak.com/about/>

¹¹⁸ Sant Gurbachan Singh, *Bhai Gurdas Dian Varan*. Gurmatveechar.com, accessed January 20, 2019.
http://www.gurmatveechar.com/audio.php?q=f&f=%2FKatha%2F01_Puratan_Katha%2FSant_Gurbachan_Singh_%28Bhindran_wale%29%2FBhai_Gurdas_Dian_Varan

followed by Punjabi. The translation of the Gurbani will be done by me because, typically, the *Gurbani* that is being quoted could be easily understood by the listener as it directly relates to what was being explained and typically will be a line of Gurbani that is in understandable Punjabi. Lastly, I will provide an analysis of Sant Gurbachan Singh's translations directly after each line without any indentation. These will also be clearly marked in the examples which will indicate who is speaking.

3.2 Examples from the *Katha*

In this first example, Sant Gurbachan Singh provides a backstory about Bhai Gurdas and how he begins his learning from the Gurus, which Sant Gurbachan Singh suggests may explain how and why Bhai Gurdas' text so vividly reflects the Guru's own teachings. Sant Gurbachan Singh opens up with the following *uthānikā* or "back story":

O holy congregation, Bhai Gurdas, a great being, is from Guru Amardas' lineage. Guru Amardas Ji's eldest brother was Isherdas, and his son was Bhai Gurdas. When Guru Amardas [held the] Guru's throne (*Gurtagadi*), during that time, they were born in their presence, but because they were in their childhood, they did not spend much time with them. During the time of Guru Ramdas when Amritsar was made in 1727 bikarmi,¹¹⁹ those that became swans by bathing at Amritsar (inaudible). Bhai Gurdas came into the presence of the Guru and obtained *gurmat*. One of the teachings that Bhai Gurdas received was the shabad:

[Here Sant Gurbachan Singh quotes SGGS and provides a section of text from the SGGS]

One who calls herself a Sikh of the Guru the True Guru shall rise in the early morning hours and meditate on the Lord's Name.

Upon arising early in the morning, he is to bathe, and cleanse himself in the pool of nectar.¹²⁰

ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤ ਜੀ, ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ, ਮਾਹਾਪੁਰਖ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਮਰਦਾਸ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਬੰਸ
ਵਿਚੋਂ ਸਾਹਿਬਜ਼ਾਦਾ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਮਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਵੱਡੇ ਭਰਾਤਾ ਦੇ

¹¹⁹ This is based on the lunar calendar.

¹²⁰ Guru Ram Das, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, *ang* 306. Self-translation.

ਸਨ। ਉਹਨਾਂ ‘ਚੋਂ ਇਕ ਭਾਈ ਈਸ਼ਰਦਾਸ ਸਨ, ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਪੁਤਰ, ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਸਨ। ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਅਮਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਜਦੋਂ ਗੁਰਤਾਗਦੀ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਸੀ। ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਜਨਮ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਹਜ਼ੂਰੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੀ ਹੋਇਆ, ਪਰ ਬਾਲਕ ਅਵਸਤਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਨ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਮਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਕੌਤਕ ਜਿਹੜੇ ਸੀ ਬਾਲਕ ਲੀਲਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੁੰਦਿਆਂ ਹੋਇਆ। ਇਹਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਥੋੜੇ ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਕੀਤੇ ਸਨ, ਪਰ ਜਦੋਂ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਬਣਿਆ ਹੈ, ੧੭੨੭ ਬਿਕਰਮੀ ਨੂੰ। ਜਿਹੜੇ ਹੰਸ ਇਸ਼ਨਾਨ ਕਰਕੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ (ਇਥੇ ਰਿਕੋਰਡਿੰਗ ਸਾਫ਼ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ) ਹੁੰਦੇ ਸਨ। ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਆਏ ਸਨ। ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ, ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਆ ਕੇ, ਗੁਰਮਤ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕੀਤੀ ਸੀ। ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਤਾਂਈਂ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਨੇ, ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤ ਜੀਉ, ਮਹਲਾ ਆਉਂਦਾ ਹੈ:

ਗੁਰ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਜੋ ਸਿਖੁ ਅਖਾਏ ਸੁ ਭਲਕੇ ਉਠਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ॥

ਉਦਮੁ ਕਰੇ ਭਲਕੇ ਪਰਭਾਤੀ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਕਰੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰਿ ਨਾਵੈ॥

Sant Gurbachan's sermon here presents background knowledge of Bhai Gurdas Ji. Some of this information is available through Bhai Gurdas' own writings, such as being from Bhalla lineage. However, other information, such as the dates when he met the Guru, is available from the post-Bhai Gurdas *panthik* literature, as mentioned in the introduction. These conclusions are also drawn from oral histories. Some of these oral histories do interact with the *panthik* literature. Traditional scholars and *parchāriks* (preachers) both cite these texts, showing how these scholars make historical claims through their *kathā* concerning the *panthik* literature.

The story told by Sant Gurbachan Singh in his *kathā* sets up Bhai Gurdas as learning directly from the Guru. This is presented as a fact. One could argue that it is difficult to definitively prove that this teaching was given directly to Bhai Gurdas from the Guru, but it is presented as a fact by Sant Gurbachan Singh. What justifies this statement of fact? Sant Gurbachan Singh may conclude that Bhai Gurdas did learn directly from the Gurus' because Bhai Gurdas conveyed messages reflecting the Guru's ideas, analogies and tropes numerous times through his *Varan*. This suggests the close relationship between Bhai Gurdas and the Gurus. However, I would argue that even more important than whether Bhai Gurdas received these teachings directly from the Guru or not, is that Bhai Gurdas incorporates many teachings into his work. As shared in the introduction, he very clearly reiterates the idea of waking up early in the ambrosial hours, bathing and sitting in remembrance of the One into his writings numerous times. These are core practices from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the writings of the Gurus that are contained within it.

Sant Gurbachan Singh draws on this connection, suggesting a close relationship between the *Varan* and the SGGS. As will be seen through the examples, Sant Gurbachan Singh suggests this by reciting a *pangti* (line) from the SGGS while translating Bhai Gurdas' *pangti*. In this way, he establishes a direct connection between the SGGS and the composition of Bhai Gurdas. Here, Sant Gurbachan Singh explains how Bhai Gurdas came into the sanctuary of the Guru, drawing out this textual connection:

This was blessed upon Bhai Gurdas and became a *pūran* (complete) *vidvān* (scholar) and attained knowledge of the ultimate (*brahamgiani*), Weapons (shasters), etc. there was not anything that they were not well-versed in. Even as far as languages. They were then sent to Agra to do *parchar* by the 4th guru. [when Guru Arjun became the 5th Guru, Bhai Gurdas] left Agra with *sangat* and came to Goindwal sahib first. As they were crossing a raging river, Bhai Gurdas overheard a Sikh in the congregation reciting:

[Here Sant Gurbachan Singh quotes the SGGS and provides a section of text that the Sikh was reciting]

The Guru's Word abides with my soul. ¹²¹

It does not sink in water; thieves cannot steal it, and fire cannot burn it.

||1||Pause||

ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਦਾ ਉਪਦੇਸ਼ ਪਿਹਲਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਹੋਇਆ। ਇਸ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਨੂੰ ਪਾ ਕੇ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਡੇ ਵਿਦਵਾਨ, ਕਮਾਈ ਵਾਲੇ, ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਗਿਆਨੀ ਹੋਏ, ਅਤੇ ਵਿਦਿਆ ਸ਼ਾਸਤਰ ਦੇ ਸਾਰੀ ਆਪ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਹਥ ਵੱਲ ਸੀ। ਕੋਈ ਐਸੀ ਵਿਦਿਆ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ, ਜੀਹਦੇ ਨਾ ਜਾਣ ਹੋਣ। ਪਰ ਬਸੇ ਦੀ ਬੋਲੀ ਨੂੰ ਆਦਰ ਦਿਤਾ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਗੁਰਮਤ ਪਾ ਕੇ ਆਗਰੇ ਸਿਖੀ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਗਏ ਸਨ। ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਜੋਤੀ ਜੋਤ ਸਮਾਏ ਸੁਣੇ, ਉਦੋਂ ਆਗਰੇ ਦੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਨ। ਆਗਰੇ ਤੋਂ ਸੰਗਤ ਨੂੰ ਨਾਲ ਲਿਆਕੇ, ਇਥੇ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤ ਜੀ ਗੋਇੰਦਵਾਲ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪੁਜੇ। ਗੋਇੰਦਵਾਲ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਿਨ ਛਿਪ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ, ਬਦੀਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਮੁਲਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਨ। ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਦੇਵ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਸੁਣਿਆ ਸੀ। ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ:

ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਬਚਨੁ ਬਸੈ ਜੀਅ ਨਾਲੇ॥

ਜਲਿ ਨਹੀ ਡੂਬੈ ਤਸਕਰੁ ਨਹੀ ਲੇਵੈ ਭਾਹਿ ਨ ਸਾਕੈ ਜਾਲੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥

Sant Gurbachan Singh, through this story, asserts that Bhai Gurdas had contact with the Gurus, thus, he would reiterate the messages of the Gurus through his own writings to preach

¹²¹ Guru Arjun Dev, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. *ang* 679. Self- Translation.

that teaching. Sant Gurbachan Singh connects Bhai Gurdas' work directly with the SGGS by giving explicit examples; this in turn, solidifies the understanding of Bhai Gurdas as the *kunji* or "key" to the SGGS because understanding the messages of Bhai Gurdas can be seen as also understanding the messages of the SGGS. Beyond this, the story also shows that Sant Gurbachan Singh understood Bhai Gurdas as blessed and respected in the *panth*. It conveys Bhai Gurdas as an exemplary *Gursikh*, who was tested numerous times. There is thus a historical connection being made, as well as a general example being presented. Sant Gurbachan Singh shows the *sangat* what they could practically apply to their lives and take as teachings. In this instance, his teaching emphasizes that every *Gursikh* will be tested and may even fail; however, this does not mean that one does not continue remembrance of the One, just as Bhai Gurdas continued his struggle towards gaining the *nadar* (benevolent glance) of the Guru. This was just one of the numerous tests Bhai Gurdas would receive to see if he truly understood what the Guru is saying.

Sant Gurbachan Singh continues with the story of Bhai Gurdas, making his way to Guru Arjun. The story encompasses foreshadowing, according to Sant Gurbachan Singh, where Bhai Gurdas receives a boon from the Guru. This test of being out in the terrifying open waters is one that is repeated and this is the first instance where it arises

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then continues narrating the story of Bhai Gurdas]

When Bhai Gurdas heard this, he said that we must follow the command(*hukam*) of the Guru. Through this, he gave faith to the congregation and, with Bhai Gurdas leading them reciting the Waheguru mantra, they began crossing the river. At first it looked extremely deep, but the water was only up to their knees; through the support of the Guru they were able to cross the river and reach Goindwal Sahib.

When they came to Goindwal Sahib, Bhai Gurdas saw children playing and he heard one of the children say that if it pleases the guru then it can happen. Hearing this he fell to the feet of the children and the congregation eventually left for Amritsar and came into the court (*darbar*) of Guru Arjun. On his way to Amritsar, Bhai Gurdas had thought to himself that if this being is able to understand my inner thoughts, then I will see him as the same light as Guru Ramdas. When Bhai Gurdas came to the *sharan* (sanctuary; literally translating to feet) of the 5th guru, Guru Arjun. The Guru asked, what are you thinking about Bhai Gurdas? What was the reason to fall at the feet of the children? The Guru's was acting through the children, that is why you fell at their feet. The Guru then said, Bhai Gurdas, the

same way you and the congregation (*sangat*) crossed the river with the support of the Name (*Nam*), you will be able to cross this deep and treacherous world-ocean.

। ਫਿਰ ਸੰਤ ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਸਨਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ॥

ਉਸ ਬਚਣਾ ‘ਤੇ ਨਿਸਚਾ ਕਰਕੇ, ਸਾਰੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਨੂੰ ਜਿਹੜੇ ਆਗਰੇ ਤੋਂ ਆਏ ਸੀ ਨਾਲ, ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਹਾ: ਮਾਹਾਪੁਰਖਾਂ ਨੇ ਇਥੇ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਦਾਆਰਾ ਫਿਰ ਉਚਾਰਿਆ। ਆਪਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਬਚਣਾ ਨੂੰ ਕਮਾਉ। ਇਹ ਸੁਣ ਕਰ ਕੇ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤ ਜੀ, ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਨਿਸਚਾ ਕੀਤਾ। ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਅਗੇ ਹੋ ਗਏ, ਤੇ ਸਾਰੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਮਗਰ। ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਦਾ ਸਿਮਰਨ ਕਰਦੇ ਹੋਏ, ਗੋਡੇ ਗੋਡੇ ਪਾਣੀ ਸਾਰੀ ਬੈਸਾ ਦਾ ਆਇਆ ਜੋ ਬਡੀ ਡੂੰਗੀ ਨਦੀ ਸੀ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ। ਹੁਣ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਪਾਣੀ ਘਟ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਇਹਦੇ ਵਿੱਚੇ। ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਰਾਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ ਦਿੰਦੀ ਨਦੀ। ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨਿਸਚਾ ਕਰਕੇ, ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਦੇ ਆਸਰੇ, ਗੋਇੰਦਵਾਲ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਾਰੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਸਮੇਤ ਆ ਗਏ।

ਇਥੇ ਜਦੋਂ ਆਏ ਗੋਇੰਦਵਾਲ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੜਣ ਲਗੇ, ਉਥੇ ਬਚੇ ਆਪੋ’ਚ ਖੇਲ ਦੇ ਸਨ। ਬਚਿਆਂ ਖੇਲਦਿਆਂ ਬਚਨ ਕੀਤਾ ਕਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ। ਇਹ ਸੁਣਕੇ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਬਚਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਪੈਰੀ ਪਏ। ਗੋਇੰਦਵਾਲ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਰਾਤ ਕਟ ਕੇ, ਹੋਲੀ ਹੋਲੀ, ਫਿਰ ਇਹ ਅੰਮਿਤਸਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪੁਜੇ ਸਨ। ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਦੇਵ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਰਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਏ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸੱਚੇ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਉਣਾ ਕਰਕੇ। ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਆ ਗਏ। ਦਿਲ’ਚ ਸੰਕਲਪ ਕੀਤਾ, ਜਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਮੇਰੇ ਦਿਲ ਦੀ ਹਾਲ ਨੂੰ ਬੁਝ ਲੈਣ ‘ਤੇ ਮੈਂ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਸਰੂਪ ਜਾਣੂੰ। ਇਹ ਭਾਵਣਾ ਕਰ ਕੇ ਜਦੋਂ ਆਏ ਅੰਮਿਤਸਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਚੌਜੀ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਜੀ ਕਹਿਣ ਲਗੇ, ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੀ ਚਿਤਵਨੀ ਕਰਦੇ ਹੋ? ਬਚਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਪੈਰੀ ਪਏ ਸੀ, ਕੀ ਕਾਰਨ ਸੀ? ਉਹ ਬਚਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਭਾਣਾ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਸੀ। ਇਸ ਕਰਕੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਪੈਰੀ ਪਏ ਸੀ। ਸੁਣਕੇ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਤੇ ਨਾਮ ਦੇ ਆਸਰੇ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਨਦੀ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਰ ਸੰਗਤ ਨੂੰ ਕਰਕੇ ਲਿਆਏ, ਇਵੇਂ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਸਮੁੰਦਰ ਤੋਂ ਪਾਰ ਹੋ ਜਾਵੋਗੇ।

Here, Sant Gurbachan Singh is arguably using the story about the Guru offering this blessing to Bhai Gurdas as a tool to show that Bhai Gurdas will help Sikhs cross the world-ocean through his text. Sant Gurbachan Singh also points towards many concepts that are present in the SGGS and are repeated by *kathānvachiks*. Through this section of Sant Gurbachan Singh’s *kathā* one sees core ideals articulated in the SGGS: falling at the feet of those that remember the one, whole-heartedly acceptance of the Guru’s words, and the Guru is all-knowing,

Sant Gurbachan Singh then continues with the backstory, to ground this exploration of core ideas from the SGGS in the life history of Bhai Gurdas and the connection between Bhai Gurdas and the Gurus:

[Sant Gurbachan Singh continues his *katha*]

When the Guru uttered all of this, Bhai Gurdas was affirmed that this truly is the same light as Guru Ramdas. Bhai Gurdas stayed with the Guru and was given the task of learning, teaching, and writing. In this way, Bhai Gurdas had a great number

of responsibilities, none no bigger than when he was tasked with the duty of writing the very first form of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Bhai Gurdas would then pen the Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Kartarpur. The 6th Guru had them write *Dhuns*. At that time, the 6th Guru to test their Sikhi, as Bhai Gurdas was uttering bani:

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then Quotes from the *Varan*]

If the Guru performs a sham, the Sikh should not give up his forbearance.¹²²

[Sant Gurbachan Singh continues his *katha*]

At that time, the 6th guru sent Bhai Gurdas to buy horses from Kabul. When instead of gold coins, they see dirt coins. Bhai Gurdas ran to Kanshi and turned the King into a Sikh; debated and won against 700 pandits and regained the respect. Then the 6th Guru called him to their court and came with Bhai Bidhi Chand and Bhai Jetha came along with Bhai Gurdas who was wearing (inaudible) The Guru said, now say that line, [Bhai Gurdas replies with:]

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then Quotes from the *Varan*]

Similarly, if the Guru deludes a Sikh through a sham, what a poor Sikh could do.¹²³

and

In such a feat only, he passes the test who is helped by the Guru.¹²⁴

[Sant Gurbachan Singh continues his *katha*]

Hearing this Guru Sahib Smirks and says you left and brought back 700 pandits who are now Sikhs with you. Bhai Gurdas did a lot of preaching in Kanshi and there are the other verses that they have written while there.

When Guru Arjun having the Bhagat bani written [during the writing process of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib], Bhai Gurdas had a thought cross their mind that the Guru is having me write the Bhagat's bani but they are not giving me their darshan (to see). The Guru understanding his thought, said Bhai Gurdas come to me in the morning tomorrow. The next morning when they went to write again, they saw all of the bhagats. All the bhagats did namaskaar (bowed) to Bhai Gurdas and vice-versa. Then

¹²² Bhai Gurdas, *Varan*, 35.20.

¹²³ Ibid, *Var* 35, Paudi 22

¹²⁴ Ibid, 35.23

they all greeted and told their names to Bhai Gurdas and he was affirmed that the bani was written newly once they recited it to the Guru. Again, understanding their inner thoughts, Guru Arjun said, we will have your bani written down tomorrow, bring it with you tomorrow. Bhai Gurdas agreed; however, at night when Bhai Gurdas had a dream that he was in the middle of an ocean, what he witnesses is that when he recites his own bani he begins to drown, but when he would recite Satguru Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's bani he would begin to float as if he was on a boat. He was shocked and realized that his writings could not be equated to the Guru's bani. In the morning, the guru said, bring your writings let us write it in. Bhai Gurdas said, no, I cannot equate my bani to yours. It sure is recited, but I cannot equate it to Gurbani. The Guru asked Bhai Gurdas three times, but he stayed humble and respectfully declined. The Guru said ok, you are going to recite 40 Vars. It comes in *Gurbilas*:

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then quotes directly from *Gurbilas*]

Guru Arjun gave permission this way.

Recite forty peace giving Vars.¹²⁵

। ਫਿਰ ਸੰਤ ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਸਨਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ॥

ਇਹ ਜਦੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਬਚਨ ਕੀਤੇ, ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜਾਂਦੀਆਂ ਚੋ ਪਰਖ ਹੋ ਗਈ, ਕੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜੁਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਗੁਰਿਆਈ ਦਤੀਆ। (ਰਿਕਾਰਡਿੰਗ ਸਾਫ ਨਹੀ) ਜੋ ਮਾਨ ਕਰਦੇ ਸੀ, ਉਹ ਜੋਗ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ। ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜੁਨ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਹੀ ਰਹਿ ਪਾਏ, ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜੁਨ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਨਾ ਨੇ ਫੇਰ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ, ਆਪਣੀ ਹਜ਼ੂਰੀ ਵਿਚ ਹੀ, ਲਿਖਣ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਦੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈ ਲਓਲਓ, ਭਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਵੀ ਬਹਿਜੇ ਸਨ।

ਇਓ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਹਜ਼ੂਰੀ ਰਹਿੰਦੇ ਰਹੇ, ਵੱਡੀ ਭਾਰੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੇ। ਜਦੋਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਰਚੇ, ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਲਿਖਾਈ ਦੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਹੱਥਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਪਵਿੱਤਰ ਕੀਤਾ। (ਸੰਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਦਾ ਫੁਰਮਾਨ ਦਿਤਾ: ਲਿਖਤੀ ਕੁਲ ਤਾਰਿਆ ਜੀਓ। ਸੋ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਲਿਖਾਈ, ਉਸ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਦ ਕਈ ਲਿਖਾਰੀ ਲਿਖੇ ਹਨ (ਰਿਕਾਰਡਿੰਗ ਸਾਫ ਨਹੀ- ਕੀ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਕੇ ਹੋਰ ਨੇ ਲਿਖਿਆ)। ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਪਹਿਲਾ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਕਲਮ ਪਵਿੱਤਰ ਹੋਇਆ। ਤੇ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੇ ਨੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ, ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੋ ਕਰਤਾਰਪੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੋ ਨਿਵਾਸ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ, ਉਹ ਬੀੜ ਦੀ ਲਿਖਾਈ ਕੀਤੀ। ਧੁਨਾਂ ਛੇਵੇਂ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਨੇ ਲਿਖੀਆਂ ਓਹਨਾ ਦੇ ਪਾਸੇ, ਅਤੇ ਛੇਵੇਂ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਨੇ ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤ ਜੀ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦੇ ਪਰਖਣ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਇਕ ਦਿਨ ਬਚਨ ਕਰਦੇ ਸੁਣੇ:

¹²⁵ Sant Gurbachan Singh quotes the lines without telling listeners what chapter it comes from, but it comes *Gurbilas Patshahi 6, Chapter 17*.

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਇਥੇ ਵਾਰ ਦੀ ਤੁਕ ਦਸਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਸਾਂਗਿ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਸਿਖੁ ਸਿਦਕੁ ਨ ਹਾਰੇ ॥੨੦॥

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਨਿਰੰਤਰ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਛੇਵੇਂ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ (ਰਿਕਾਰਡਿੰਗ ਸਾਫ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ) ਓਥੇ ਸਾਖੀ ਸੁਣਾਵੇ ਜਾਵੇ ਗਈ. ਸਿਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਹਨ ਨੂੰ ਕਾਬਲ ਭੇਜਿਆ ਘੋੜੇ ਖਰੀਦਣ, ਜਦੋਂ ਮੋਰਾਂ ਠੀਕਰੀਆਂ ਹੋਈਆਂ ਦੇਖੀਆਂ, ਤਾਂ ਤੰਬੂ ਪਾੜ ਕੇ ਚਲਕੇ ਸੀ ਕਾਂਸੀ ਵਿਚ. ਕਾਂਸੀ ਵਿਚ ਆ ਕੇ, ਰਾਜੇ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖ ਬਨਾਲਿਆ, ੭੦੦ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਚਰਚਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਜਿੱਤ ਲਿਆ. ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ, ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅੰਦਰ ਪਾਇਆ, ਫੇਰ ਛੇਵੇਂ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਬੋਲਿਆ ਜਦੋਂ ਭਾਈ ਜਿੱਥੇ ਤੇ ਭਾਈ ਬਿਦੀਏ ਨਾਲ ਆ ਕੇ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਮੁਸ਼ਟਾਂ ਬਣਾਕੇ ਹਾਜਰ ਹੋਏ. ਫੇਰ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੇ ਕਿਹਾ ਹੋਣ ਕਹੋ:

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਇਥੇ ਵਾਰ ਦੀ ਤੁਕ ਦਸਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਸਾਂਗਿ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਸਿਖੁ ਸਿਦਕੁ ਨ ਹਾਰੇ ॥੨੦॥

ਤੇ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੇ ਕੇਹਾ ਸਚੇ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ:

ਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਭਰਮਾਏ ਸਾਂਗੁ ਕਰਿ ਕਿਆ ਸਿਖੁ ਵਿਚਾਰਾ ॥੨੨॥

ਅਤੇ

ਸਾਂਗੈ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਾਬਤਾ ਜਿਸੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਹਾਏ ॥੨੩॥੩੫॥

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਨਿਰੰਤਰ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਇਹ ਸੁਣਕੇ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਰਾਏ, ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਇਕ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ ੭੦੦ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਨਾਲ ਲਿਆਂ। ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਬਣੇ। ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੇ ਕਾਂਸੀ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਵੱਡਾ ਭਾਰੀ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ। ਉਹ ਕਾਂਸੀ ਵਿਚ ਹ ਨ ਦੇ ਕਬਿਤ ਸ੍ਰਯੇ ਆਉਣਗੇ।

ਤੇ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੇ, ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜਦੋਂ ਭਗਤ ਬਾਣੀ ਲਾਖੋ ਲੱਗਿਆ, ਉਸ ਵਕਤ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਸੰਕਲਪ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ। ਕੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਭਗਤਾਂ ਦੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਉਚਾਰ ਦੀ ਅਤੇ ਲਾਖਾਉਂਦਿਆਂ, ਮੈਨੂੰ ਭਗਤ ਦੇ ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਾਰੋਂਦੇ। ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੇ ਕਿਹਾ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਾਲੂੰ ਸਵੇਰੇ ਆਇਓ। ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਲਿਖਾਈ ਤੋ ਪਹਿਲਾ ਜਦੋਂ ਰਾਮਸਰ ਤੰਬੂ'ਚ ਗਏ, ਤੇ ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਭਗਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਦਿਤੇ। ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਭਗਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਨਮਸਕਾਰ ਕੀਤੀ, ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਭਗਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਨਮਸਕਾਰ ਕੀਤੀ। ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਭਗਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਨਾ ਦਸੇ। ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਨਿਸਚਾ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ, ਕੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਹਨ ਭਗਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਮੀਪ ਕਰਕੇ, ਫੇਰ ਇਹ ਲੇਖਾਂਦੇ ਨਵੀ ਬਾਣੀ। ਇਓ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਸੰਕਲਪ ਸੀ, ਇਹਦੀ ਅੰਦਰਲੀ ਬੁਝ ਲਈ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੇ ਕਿਹਾ, ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਾਲੂੰ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਲਿਖਾਵਾਂਗੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਕਾਲੂੰ ਲਿਆਇਓ। ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਹਿਣਾ ਲਗੇ, ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਹਿਣ ਲਗੇ, ਸਤਿ ਬਚਨ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ। ਜਦੋਂ ਰਾਤ ਨੂੰ ਬਿਰਾਜੇ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸੁਪਨਾ ਇੰਜ ਆਇਆ ਜਾਣੀ ਸਮੁੰਦਰ ਵਿਚ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਵਿਚਰ ਰਹੇਆ। ਕੀ ਵੇਖਦੇਆ, ਜਦੋਂ ਆਵਦੀ ਰਚਨਾ ਪੜ੍ਹਦੇਆ ਓਦੋਂ ਗੋਟੇ ਖਾਣ ਲੱਗ ਜਾਂਦੇਆ। ਜਦੋਂ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਪੜਨ ਲੱਗਦੇ ਓਦੋਂ ਤਰਨ ਲੱਗ ਜਾਨ ਜਿਵੇਂ ਜਹਾਜ ਤੇ ਬੈਠਿਆ। ਹੈਰਾਨ ਹੋਗਿਆ, ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਦੇ ਬਰਾਬਰ ਮੇਰ ਬਾਣੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋ ਸਕਦੀ। ਸਵੇਰੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਨੇ, ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਲਿਆ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਚੜਾਈਏ। ਕਹਿਣ ਲਗਾ ਨਾਹੀ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ। ਕਹਿਣ ਲਗੇ ਨਹੀਂ

ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਮੈਂ ਆਪਦੇ ਬਾਣੀ ਅਤੁਲ ਮੈਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰ ਸਕਦਾ। ਮੇਰੇ ਬਾਣੀ ਜਿਹੜੀਏ, ਇਹ ਬਾਣੀ ਜਰੂਰ ਹੈ ਪਰ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਮੈਂ ਨੀ ਬਰਾਬਰੀ ਕਰਨੀ, ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਚ ਮੈਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਬਾਣੀ ਚਾੜਾਉਣੀਂ ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਨੇ ੩ ਵਾਰੀ ਕਿਹਾ। ਇਹਨੇ ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਨਿਮਰਤਾ ਹੀ ਰਾਖੀ।
ਅਸ਼ਾ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਬਚਨ ਕੀਤਾ , ਚੰਗਾ ਭਾਣੀ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ੪੦ ਵਾਰਾਂ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਰਚਣੀਆਂ, ਇਹ ਗੁਰਬਿਲਾਸ ਵਿਚ ਆਉਦਾ:

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਇਥੇ ਗੁਰਬਿਲਾਸ ਦੀ ਤੁਕ ਦਸਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਗੁਰ ਅਰਜਨ ਮਮ ਆਗਿਆ ਕਰੀ।

ਵਾਰ ਚਾਲੀਸ ਰਚੋ ਸੁਖ ਭਾਰੀ।

It must be noted that if one does not already have knowledge about the *Gurbilas* literature, one will not pick up on what exactly Sant Gurbachan is saying when he says, “it comes in *Gurbilas*.” For some this may be a problem as he does not properly cite his source; this reflects common practice in oral *katha*, as has been discussed. At the same time, it is part of the understood rules of the genre of oral *kathā* that the speaker is well versed in the appropriate texts, and the listener accepts that knowledge without attestation. This story that Sant Gurbachan Singh shares is also relevant because it is one of the foundations for the argument that Bhai Gurdas’ *Varan* are the *kunji* or “key” to the SGGS. Sant Gurbachan Singh is suggesting this through the notion that the Bhagats, whose writings are included in the SGGS, bowed to Bhai Gurdas. A show of respect by the Bhagats, which Sant Gurbachan Singh extends to Bhai Gurdas’ writings as well.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then explains the importance of the *Varan*]

By understanding, they will be able to understand Sikhi and SGGS is a treasure chest and a Sikh that is not able to understand the SGGS will be able to unlock the understanding and will be like a key. This is the blessing that Guru Arjun gave. Bhai sahib recited 40 *Varan* and the 41st *Var* was recited by a poet during the time of the 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh. In this way there is now 41 *Vars* and there are 356 kabits that were written in Kansi and recited during the time of the 6th guru and now the *Varan* begin:

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਨਿਰੰਤਰ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਪਾਕੇ, ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦੀ ਮਤ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋਇਆ ਕਰੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਖਜਾਨਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਜਿਹੜਾ ਭੇਦ ਨਾ ਖੁਲਿਆ ਕਰੁ ਬਾਣੀ ਪੜ੍ਹਿਆ ਕਰਕੇ। ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਪੜ੍ਹਨਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਭੇਦ ਖੁਲ ਜਿਆ ਕਰੁ। ਕੁੰਜੀ ਦੀ ਨਿਆਈ ਹੋਵੇ ਗਈ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ। ਇਹ ਬਚਨ, ਵਰ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ

ਜੀ ਨੇ ਦਿਤਾ। ੪੦ ਵਾਰਾਂ ਰਚੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ੪੧ ਵਾਰ... ਇਹ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਨ
(ਰਾਚੀਆਂ ਗਈਆਂ) ਸੀ ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ। ਹੁਣ ੪੧ ਵਾਰਾਂ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ੩੫੬ ਕਬਿ ਹਨ ਜਿਹੜੇ ਕੇ
ਕਾਂਸੀ ਵਿਚ ਰਚੇਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਹਰਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਨ 'ਚ ਰਚੇ ਸੀ। ਇਥੇ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤ ਜੀ
ਵਾਰਾਂ ਆਰੰਭ ਹੁੰਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ।

To finish the introduction to Bhai Gurdas and the *Varan*, Sant Gurbachan Singh reaffirms that the *Varan* are, in fact, the key to the SGGS, which allows the common people to understand that if they can understand the *Varan*, they will have an easier time understanding the SGGS. Sant Gurbachan Singh then begins with the discourse after the reader, reads the first Var and first verse by Bhai Gurdas:

The One non-dualistic, the one that gives light to all and through their blessings is obtained

I bow before the Guru (Guru Nanak Dev), who recited the Satnam mantra (for the world).

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then comments on the line]

Bhai Gurdas Ji bows to Guru Nanak, Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji, Guru Amardas Sahib Ji, Satguru Ramdas Sahib Ji, Satguru Arjun Sahib Ji, Satguru Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji. This is a Kadhakatna Mangal, just as one grabs the handles of a pot, the entire pot is lifted. In this way, by using the word Gurdev, Bhai Sahib Ji is doing *mangal* of all six *patsha*'s (literally translating to "king," a reference to the Gurus'). I bow my head from Guru Nanak to Guru Hargobind. Who is the Gurdev? It is Satguru Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, that brought and recited the Mool mantar from *Sachkand* (Literally translating to the True Realm; a reference to place of eternity)¹²⁶ to the Sikhs to save the entire world.

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ

ਨਮਸਕਾਰ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਕੋ ਸਤਿਨਾਮ ਜਿਸ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ ।

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਅਰਥ ਦਸਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜੋ, ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਅੰਗਦ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ, ਗੁਰੂ ਅਮਰਦਾਸ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ

ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਹਨ। ਇਹ ਕਵੱਕਣਾ ਮੰਗਲ ਹੈ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕੜਾਹੇ ਦੇ ਕੁੰਡੇ

¹²⁶ It can be argued that *Sachkand* is both a physical space but also a mental and spiritual elevation. There is a deep philosophical explanation to this; however, it simply cannot be explained in a few sentences.

ਪਕਰੇਲੀਏ ਤੇ ਸਾਰਾ ਕਾਢ ਚੱਕਿਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ। ਇਓ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਕਹਿਣ ਨਾਲ ਛਿਆਂ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਮੰਗਲ ਕਰ ਰਹਿਆ। ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਤੋਂ ਲੈਕੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਹਰਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਤਕ ਸਾਡੀ ਨਮਸਕਾਰ ਹੈ। ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਕੌਣ? ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ, ਜੇਨਾ ਨੇ ਸਤਨਾਮ, ਮੂਲ ਮੰਤਰ, ਸਾਰੇ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਕਲਿਆਣ ਕਾਰਨ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਤਾਈਂ ਸਰਵਣ ਕਰਵਾਉਣਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ। ਸੱਖੰਡ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਲਿਆਏ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੇ।

In the first line of the first Var, Sant Gurbachan Singh goes beyond explaining the literal translation of the line written by Bhai Gurdas. He suggests that this is a specific kind of invocation (*mangal*).¹²⁷ Moreover, there is also a reference to *Gur Nanak Parkash*, written by Santokh Singh, in chapters twenty-eight and twenty-nine, which we read about the experience of the revelation of the first Guru, who is said to have entered into the river Ravi for several days and returned with the *Mool Mantar* (root mantra), with which the SGGS opens. This story also comes in the Janamsakhis, which again shows the intertextuality occurring not only in Sant Gurbachan Singh's *katha* but also Bhai Gurdas' text as well.

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

Getting (the creatures) across the world ocean He raptly merged them in liberation.

[The reader then continues to read the second verse of Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*]

The drowning Sikhs were pulled out of this world that is like an ocean, Satguru Sahib Ji gives liberation in the form of treasures, which are *Dharm, Arth, Kam, Mokh*. In the liberations of *Jeevan Mukti, Bidhay Mukti, and Kaival Mukti* one is merged.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਭਵਜਲ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਕਢਿ ਕੇ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਪਦਾਰਥ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਇਆ ।

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜਿਹੜਾ ਸਮੁੰਦਰ ਹੈ, ਇਹਨਾਂ ਚੋਂ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਭੁਬਦਿਆਂ ਹੋਇਆ ਨੂੰ ਕੱਢਕੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਜੋ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਰੂਪ ਪਦਾਰਥ ਹਨ, ਧਰਮ, ਅਰਥ, ਕਾਮ, ਮੋਖ, ਇਹ ਪਦਾਰਥ ਹਨ ਜੋ, ਇਹ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਰੂਪੀ ਪਦਾਰਥ ਜੀਵਨ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਵਿਚ, ਬਿਧੇ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਵਿਚ, ਕੈਵਲ ਮੋਖ, ਸਮਾਇਆ, ਮਿਲਣ ਕੀਤਾ।

¹²⁷ I have not come across this specific Mangal type. However, there is a deep history of the different kinds of invocations. So this may be one that I have not learned or come across yet.

The line written by Bhai Gurdas speaks to the One saving and liberating creation. Sant Gurbachan Singh then mentions the different kinds of liberations that one can attain while in this world, and he says the different types of treasures and pleasure in the world. Both of these are extensively written about in the Nirmala text known as *Adhyatam Parkash*. *Adhyatam Parkash* is a book that claims to enlighten a being on what the soul is, as a reflection of *Brahm* (the One). [Then in the recording, the reader then continues to read and then hear about the third line of Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*]

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

He destroyed the fear of transmigration and decimated the sickness of doubt and separation.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then comments on this line]

The Sikhs fear of birth and death has been erased by the Guru, and illusions of disease and separation [have been erased]. The disease of ignorance and ego along with the pain of the 8.4 million life cycle and separation has been erased as well.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਭਉ ਕਟਿਆ ਸੰਸਾਰੋਗ ਵਿਯੋਗ ਮਿਟਾਇਆ ।

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦਾ ਜਨਮ ਦਾ ਭੈ ਸੀ, ਮਾਰਨ ਦਾ ਭੈ ਸੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਮੇਟ ਦਿਤਾ ।

Again, Sant Gurbachan Singh goes beyond explaining the direct translations of the line and describes the types of “true” pain that people are experiencing. In his argument, the sufferings of this world are temporary; however, the pain of separation and being stuck in the 8.4 million life cycle is pain that permanent. The reader then continues to read the fourth and fifth lines of Bhai Gurdas' first *Varan*:

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

The world is only illusion which carried with it much of birth, death and sufferings.

The fear of the messenger of death is not dissipated and the fallen ones, have lost their lives in vain.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then explains this line]

As long as the understanding of the world as illusion remains, so too does the world; this being is stuck in coming and going (birth and death) and is in a lot of pain.

The pains of the messenger of death doesn't go away such as the different kinds of pains- *lok pipil dev, rāj*- the ones that seek power are two faced, do *sangat* (keep company) of the lowest kind, they have lost their lives in this way.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਸੰਸਾ ਇਹੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਹੈ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਖ ਸਬਾਇਆ।

ਜਮ ਦੰਡ ਸਿਰੋਂ ਨਾ ਉਤਰੈ ਸਾਕਤ ਦੁਰਜਨ ਜਨਮੁ ਗਵਾਇਆ।

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜਿਹੜਾ ਸੰਸਾ ਸੀ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤ ਜੀ, ਪ੍ਰਮਾਣ, ਪਰਿਮੇਖ, ਵਪਰਜੇ ਅਦਕ। ਇਹ ਵੀ ਮੇਟ ਦਿਤਾ ਸੰਸਾ।
ਹਉਮੈ ਦਾ ਰੋਗ ਮੇਟ ਦਿਤਾ।

ਜੰਮਾਂ ਦਾ ਡੰਡ ਦੂਰ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੁੰਦਾ, ਤਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਡੰਡ, ਲੋਕ, ਪਿਪਲ ਦੇਵ, ਰਾਜ ਜੋ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ ਦਾ ਉਪਾਸ਼ਕ
ਹੈ, ਦੁਰਜਨ ਹਨ, ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਜਨਮ ਗਵਾ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ।

Here Sant Gurbachan Singh again refers to the text *Sarkutavli*, where it talks about an individual that is of the lowest kind.¹²⁸ From my own learning of *Sarkutavli*, this is not a reference to economic, cultural, or caste status; rather, this is a reference to those people that do acts that can be deemed low or individuals that act on the five sensory organs. In other words, these are *manmukhs* (beings whose attention is on their mind, those who indulge their minds) or ones that stray away from the path of merging with the One. The idea of the lowest individual or one that indulges in the five sensory organs is explored in *Sarkutavli* in Chapter 13. To understand these lines, one must put together the lines in pairs of two, as understanding one line on its own will not make sense. Pandit Hardial writes about the different kinds of animals that die because of one sensory organ and so what will be the state of a being that is indulging in all five. Pandit Hardial in *Sarkutavli* writes,

¹²⁸ Sant Gurbachan Singh does not make this explicit. Through my own readings of these granths, I am able to recognize that Sant Gurbachan Singh is referencing *Sarkutavli* in his explanation of this *pangti* by Bhai Gurdas.

The elephant because of sexual desire (touch), the fish because of meat (taste), the deer because of sound, the moth because of light (sight)

The bee because of smell, in this way they find death because of just one single sensory pleasure.

Sounds, touch, taste, sight, smell; are the five reasons of destruction.

That person that is controlled by the five, what story can be told of them.¹²⁹

ਕਰੀ ਕਾਮ ਅਮਿਖ ਮਤਸ ਮ੍ਰਿਗ ਸਰ ਰੂਪ ਪਤੰਗ।

ਅਲਿ ਸੁਗੰਧ ਇਤਿਯਾਦ ਹਤ ਇਕ ਇਕ ਇੰਦ੍ਰਯ ਸੰਗ॥੨॥

ਸੂਰ ਸਪਰਸ਼ ਰਸ ਰੂਪ ਗੰਧ ਪਾਂਚੋਂ ਕਾਰਣ ਨਾਸ।

ਜੋ ਜਨ ਪਾਂਚੋਂ ਵਸ ਭਏ ਕਥਾ ਕਹੇ ਕੋ ਤਾਸ॥੩॥

Pandit Hardial explains here that a being that indulges in the five senses will waste his life. In the same chapter, Pandit Hardial then goes on to explain other characteristics of a “low” being. Sant Gurbachan Singh only hints towards this in his Katha; however, with a knowledge of the Sarkutavli *granth*, one understands that this is what he is referencing when referring to the lowest kind. [The reader then continues to read the sixth, seventh and eighth lines of Bhai Gurdas’ *Varan*:]

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

Those who have caught hold of the feet of the Guru have been liberated through the true Word.

Now being full of loving devotion they celebrate the *gurprubs* (anniversaries of the Gurus) and their acts of remembrance of God, charity and holy ablutions, inspire others also.

Whatever one sows, one reaps.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then explains this line]

I latch onto the feet of *Satguru* Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who has given the beings the true name and liberated them.

Maharaj made this path that one should engage in loving devotion, celebrate *gurpurb*’s (days when the Gurus came down, when they became the Guru and when they left the world). The Guru has also established

¹²⁹ Pandit Hardial, Sarkutavli, 65.

meditating on the One, working hard and donation one's earnings along with waking up in the early hours and bathing.

However, one has earned the Guru's word and has planted the seed, that is the kind of reward one sows. As the *Gursikhs* have planted the seed of *Gursikhi*, they have enjoyed the fruit of eternal bliss of the One Ultimate cosmic energy. As those that have done deeds with a desire in mind enjoy the fruits of the heavens. If one plants good seeds, then they enjoy the fruits of heaven; however, if one plants bad seeds, they are put in lesser than life cycles. whatever one has planted that's what they get. The *Gursikhs* have planted the seed of the Name and because of this they enjoy the pleasure of the One. This is the invocation that Bhai [Gurdas] has done in the first verse.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਚਰਨ ਗਹੇ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਦੇ ਸਤਿ ਸਬਦ ਦੇ ਮੁਕਤ ਕਰਾਇਆ।

ਭਾਇ^{੧੩੦} ਭਗਤਿ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਕਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਦਾਨ ਇਸਨਾਨ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਇਆ।

ਜੇਹਾ ਬੀਉ ਤੇਹਾ ਫਲੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥੧॥

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਸਾਚੇ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਚਰਨ ਕਮਲ ਪਕੜੇ ਹਨ। ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਸਤਿ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਦੇ ਕੇ, ਜੀਆ ਦੇ ਤਾਈਂ ਕਲਿਆਣ ਕਰਾ ਦਿਤਾ ਹੈ।

ਇਹ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਬਣਾ ਦਿਤੀ ਪ੍ਰੇਮਾ ਭਗਤੀ ਕਰਿਆ ਕਰੋ, ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਨਾਇਆ ਕਰੋ, ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਜੋ ਮਹਾਤਮਾ ਹਨ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਅਵਤਾਰ ਧਾਰਨ ਦੇ, ਗੁਰਤਾਗਧੀ ਬਿਰਾਜਮਾਨ ਹਾਉਣ ਤੇ ਜੋਤਿ ਜੋਤ ਸਮੇਨ ਦੇ। ਇਹਨਾ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਨਿਆ ਕਰੋ। ਇਹ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੇ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਬਣਾ ਦਿਤੀ। ਨਾਮ ਜਪਿਆ ਕਰੋ, ਧਰਮ ਦੀ ਕਿਰਤ ਕਰਕੇ, ਵੰਡ ਕੇ ਖਾਇਆ ਕਰੋ, ਦਾਨ ਕਰਿਆ ਕਰੋ, ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੇ ਇਸ਼ਨਾਨ ਕਰਿਆ ਕਰੋ। ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਿੜ ਕਰਾ ਦਿਤਾ ਸਾਚੇਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਤਾਈਂ ।

ਜੇਹਿਜਾ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਉਪਦੇਸ਼ ਨੂੰ ਕਾਮ ਕੇ ਬੀਜ ਬੀਜਿਆ ਹੈ, ਓਹਜਾ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਦੀ ਬੀਜ ਨੂੰ ਬੀਜ ਲਿਆ ਹਿਰਦੇ'ਚ। ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਓਹਜਾ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਰੂਪੀ ਫਲ ਖਲਾਇਆ ਹੈ। ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ ਸਿਕਮ ਰੂਪੀ ਬੀ ਬੀਜਿਆ ਹੈ ਹੁਣ ਨੂੰ ਸਵਰਗ ਅਦਕ ਸੁੱਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਫੁੱਲ ਨੂੰ ਪਿਆ ਹੈ। ਜਿਹਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਨਿੱਖਦ ਰੂਪੀ ਕਰਮ ਬੀਜਿਆ ਹੈ। ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮ ਨੂੰ ਬੀਜਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ

¹³⁰ The *pāthī* (reader), reads this as written instead of the commonly seen *bhau*

ਕਰਕੇ ਓਹਨਾ ਨੇ ਸੁਖ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਬਰੁਮਾ ਰੂਪ ਫਲ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਮੰਗਲ ਭਾਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਪੌੜੀ ਦਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ।

In the first line of the first Var, Sant Gurbachan Singh shows the listener to understand what exactly is being said - which is how the Guru wants one to live. His goal is not to overwhelm laypeople. So, he mentions some details in passing to give time and space to his own students, who are more than likely sitting with the sangat and listening to the *katha* and taking notes. If they do decide to take a more in-depth look into the textual connections he is making, they can. As has been noted, Sant Gurbachan Singh draws on a large number of *granth*s or texts, such as *Sarkutavli*, *Adhyatam Parkash*, *Suraj Parkash*, *Janamsakhis* and more. Even though these are not footnoted in the *kathā*, they are deeply present throughout it. Sant Gurbachan Singh brings in examples from both the *Janamsakhiks* and *Suraj Praksah* as he points towards the *sākhī* or biography of Guru Nanak going into the river and coming back with the *Mool Mantar*. He then goes on to reference the different kinds of invocations, the different types of liberations. Finally, He ends in explaining the result of different kinds of desires that are described in *Nirmala* literature. Arguably, the most important component of this *kathā* is that Sant Gurbachan Singh is the reference to various texts for the more learned listener, alongside the practical techniques that can be implemented by novice listeners.

We can see the dynamic exchange between Bhai Gurdas' text and that of the SGGS, as presented by Sant Gurbachan Singh, in the next example. Sant Gurbachan Singh begins with the discourse of the twenty-seventh verse in the first Var by Bhai Gurdas:

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

Rise of Guru Nanak

Satguru (True Guru) Nanak Dev Ji came to light and the fog was erased and light spread through the world.

In the same way the sun rises, and the stars disappeared, and the darkness dispelled.

With the roar of the lion in the forest the flocks of escaping deer now cannot have endurance.

Wherever Baba put his feet, a religious place was erected and became worthy of worship.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then explains this line]

The fog of sin and ignorance was lifted and through the Guru's *kirpa* light of knowledge spread throughout the world.

In the way that the sun rises and the stars and the darkness of righteousness living disappeared, faded, went away- so to did hypocrisy, etc.

Just as a lion roars, the deer in the jungle that were grouped together, they run away and do not stay steadfast because of the lion's roar. In this way, with Guru Nanak's roar, the hypocrites existed but just as the deer, none of them stayed steadfast.

Wherever Guru Nanak placed their feet, worship of the Guru began in those places, everyone began praising them (Guru Nanak). In those places was worship of the Nam, in those places Gurdwara Sahibs were established, So, in that way:

The Guru's Sikhs find that place and they take the dust and apply it to their faces.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then quotes from the SGGS]

Wherever my True Guru goes and sits, that place is beautiful, O Lord King.

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The Guru's Sikhs find that place and they take the dust and apply it to their faces.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਆ ਮਿਟੀ ਧੁੰਧੁ ਜਗਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਆ ।

ਜਿਉ ਕਰਿ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਨਿਕਲਿਆ ਤਾਰੇ ਛਪਿ ਅੰਧੇਰੁ ਪਲੋਆ ।

ਸਿੰਘ ਬੁਕੇ ਮਿਰਗਾਵਲੀ ਭੰਨੀ ਜਾਇ ਨ ਧੀਰਿ ਧਰੋਆ ।

ਜਿਥੇ ਬਾਬਾ ਪੈਰ ਧਰਿ ਪੂਜਾ ਆਸਣੁ ਥਾਪਣਿ ਸੋਆ ।

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜੋ ਪਾਪ ਦੀ ਧੁੰਧ ਸੀ, ਅਵਿਦਿਆ ਦੀ ਧੁੰਧ ਸੀ, ਜਗਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਗਿਆਨ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਹੋਗਿਆ,

ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ।

¹³¹ Guru Ramdas, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, *ang* 451. Self-translation.

ਜਿਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਸੂਰਜ ਦੇ ਨਿਕਲਿਆਂ ਕਰਕੇ, ਪਖੰਡ ਆਦਿ ਤਾਰੇ ਅਤੇ ਧਰਮ ਦਾ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਪਲੋਗਿਆ,
ਪਲਾਗਿਆ, ਚਲਿਆ ਗਿਆ ।

ਜਿਵੇਂ ਸ਼ੇਰ ਜਦੋਂ ਗੱਜੇ ਬੰਨ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਮਿਰਗਾਂ ਜਿਹੜੀਆਂ ਅਵਦੀਆਂ ਪੰਗਤੀਆਂ, ਉਹ ਭੱਜੀਆਂ
ਜਾਂਦੀਆਂ, ਧੀਰਜ ਨਹੀਂ ਧਰਦੀ ਸ਼ੇਰ ਦੇ ਬੁਕਣ ਤੋਂ; ਆਂਢੇਂ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਗੱਜਣ ਤੋਂ ਜਿਨੇ
ਪਖੰਡੀ ਸੀਗੇ, ਹਿਰਨਾ ਦੀ ਤਾਂਈਂ ਸੱਭ ਭੱਜੇ, ਕਿਸੇ ਨੇ ਧੀਰਜ ਨਾ ਧਰੀ ।

ਜਿਥੇ ਜਿਥੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਪੈਰ ਰੱਖੇ, ਉਹ ਥਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੂਜਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਹੋਣ ਲੱਗੀ,
ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਸਾਰੇ ਸੋਭਾ ਕਰਨ ਲੱਗ ਗਏ । ਉਥੇ ਥਾਵਾਂ'ਚ ਪੂਜਾ ਨਾਮ ਦੀ, ਉਹਨਾਂ ਆਸਨ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ
ਸਾਹਿਬ ਬਣਾਕੇ ਥਾਪਣ ਕੀਤੇ, ਸੋ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਤਾਂਈਂ

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਇਥੇ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਦੀ ਤੁਕ ਲਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜਿਥੈ ਜਾਇ ਬਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸੋ ਥਾਨੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਜੇ॥

ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਸੋ ਥਾਨੁ ਭਾਲਿਆ ਲੈ ਧੂਰਿ ਮੁਖਿ ਲਾਵਾ॥

Sant Gurbachan Singh shows a clear connection between Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* and the SGGS by quoting a line from the SGGS. However, he is also doing more than that. Sant Gurbachan Singh suggests through the use of the SGGS *pangti* that not only is a place where the Guru has been beautiful and worthy of praise but also that a *Gursikh* should quite literally worship that place. Again, Sant Gurbachan Singh pushes for the implementation of these ideas into the daily lives of his listeners.

In the following lines by Bhai Gurdas, Sant Gurbachan Singh shares the backstory of Guru Nanak visiting Nanak Mata (Previously known as Gorakh Mata). The relationship between the Janamsakhis and the *Varan* is present in this line through Bhai Gurdas' work; moreover, Sant Gurbachan Singh brings in Suraj Prakash and the oral tradition as well, which demonstrates deeply imbued nature of panthic literature in the *katha* genre. [The *pathi* then continues to read Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*]

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

All the siddh-places now have been renamed on the name of Nanak.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then gives the backstory of this line and then explains it]

All of the Sidh's places in the world (like) Gorakh *Matā* erased and wrote Nanak Mata. Gorakh Mata was the place of the Sidhs, here the Sidhs had a debate and the Sidhs said this is our place, our land, speak: A hole had been dug and a boy was made to sit in there. They said the land is the Sidh's, and then the boy spoke up. The boy spoke two times and then on third time, Maharaj (Guru Nanak) said, the boy that was able to speak, he has died inside. Then the Sidhs, took him out and they and everyone else saw [that he had died]. This is the story of Nanak Mata, that place still exists today, there is a memorial. At that time, the Sidhs then fell at the feet of [Guru Nanak]. The Guru said, ok and took his sandle and put it on the boy's forehead and he came back to life. In this way, Nanak Mata which was the Sidh's as Gorak Mata, became known as Nanak Mata.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਸਿਧ ਆਸਣਿ ਸਭਿ ਜਗਤ ਦੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਆਦਿ ਮਤੇ ਜੇ ਕੋਆ ।

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਜਿਨੇ ਸਿੱਧ ਆਸਨ ਸੀ ਜੱਗਤ ਸੇ ਅੰਦਰ, ਗੋਰਖ ਮਤਾ ਮਿਟਇਆ ਤੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਤਾ ਲਿਖਿਆ। ਜਿਥੇ ਗੋਰਖ ਮਤਾ ਸੀ, ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਦੀ ਜਗਾ ਸੀ। ਇੱਥੇ ਚਰਚਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਨੇ, ਸਿੱਧ ਕਿਹੰਦੇ ਸਾਡੀ ਜਗਾ ਹੈ, ਧਰਤੀ, ਇਹ ਬੋਲ। ਇਕ ਮੁੰਡਾ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਟੋਆ ਪੱਟਕੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਕਪੜੇ ਦੀ ਸੱਦ ਪਾਕੇ ਬਠਾ ਤਾ ਸੀ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਨੇ। ਕਿਹਣ ਦਰਤੀ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਦੀਆ, ਉਹ ਮੁੰਡਾ ਬੋਲੇ ਵਿਚੋਂ। ਜਦੋਂ ਦੋ ਵੇਰੀ ਬੋਲਿਆ, ਤੀਜੀ ਵਾਰ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਜੋ ਬੋਲਣ ਜੋਗ ਮੁੰਡਾ, ਉਹ ਮੁੰਡਾ ਮਰਗਿਆ ਵਿੱਚ। ਫੇਰ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਨੇ ਕਛਿਆ, ਤੇ ਪਤਾ ਲਗਿਆ, ਤੇ ਸੱਭ ਪਤਾ ਲਗਿਆ। ਇਹ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਤੇ ਗਲ ਹੈ ਉਹ ਜਗਾ ਹਜੇ ਬਣੀ ਹੋਈ ਹੈ, ਹਜੇ ਯਾਦਗਾਰ। ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਫੇਰ ਸਿੱਧ ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਪਏ। ਮਾਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੇ ਆਖਿਆ ਚੰਗਾ, ਇਹ ਖੜਾਵ ਚਰਨ ਦੀ ਲਾਕੇ ਇਹਨੂੰ ਜਿਉਂਦਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਸੀ, ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ, ਨਾਨਕ ਮਤਾ ਆਦਕ ਉਹ ਸਿੱਧਾਂ ਥਾਂ ਸੀ ਗੋਰਖ ਮਤੇ ਤੋਂ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਤਾ ਲਿਖਿਆ।

This story that is shared by Sant Gurbachan Singh, is a story that comes in Chapter 60 of the first volume of written by Santokh Singh. This is a story that is commonly shared by *kathāvachiks*. Sant Gurbachan Singh later notes that “this place still exists today and there is a memorial in this place.” This suggests Sant Gurbachan Singh is urging listeners to go and visit this memorial as it was indicated in the previous line.

The following two lines wrap up the sentiments of Bhai Gurdas' verse, where Guru Nanak emerged in a time of darkness and traveled the world and one comes to the realization

even Guru Nanak was in command of the One. [The *pathi* then continues to read Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*]

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

Baba liberated all four directions and nine divisions of the earth.

Gurmukh (Guru Nanak) has emerged in this *kaliyug*, the dark age.²⁷

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then explains this line]

In this way, [Guru Nanak] liberated in all four directions of the world and gave support to the nine realms as well.

Guru Nanak, who is facing the One, came to light in the dark age.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਬਾਬੇ ਤਾਰੇ ਚਾਰਿ ਚਕਿ ਨਉ ਖੰਡਿ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਸਚਾ ਢੋਆ।

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕਲਿ ਵਿਚ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਆ ॥੨੭॥

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਇਉਂ ਬਾਬਾ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਚੋਹਾਂ ਚੌਂਕਾਂ (ਪੂਰਬ, ਦੱਖਣ, ਪੱਛਮ, ਉਤਰ) ਦੇ ਜੀਆਂ ਕਲਿਆਨ ਕੀਤੀ। ਜਿਵੇਂ ਨੌਂਆਂ ਖੰਡਾਂ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਸਚਾ ਢੋਆ, ਆਸ ਦਿਤੀ।

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਹੋ ਗੁਰੂ ਮੁਖੀ ਹਨ, ਕਲਜਗ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਪਰਗਟ ਹੋਏ।

In this verse, Sant Gurbachan Singh brings forward numerous references to other texts and foregrounds the SGGS. He does this quite explicitly, quoting directly from the SGGS, solidifying the continuity between Bhai Gurdas and the Guru's *bani*. Sant Gurbachan Singh in the following line then goes on to tell a brief *sākhī* about Guru Nanak's travels (*udāsīs*) that Bhai Gurdas mentions in the line. This is story driven from the *Janamsakhis* and *Suraj Prakash*, deepening the web of connections between not only the exegesis tradition and these texts, but between Bhai Gurdas' works with these other texts. He continues to create a web of connections with the other lines as well; however, what struck me in listening to his *kathā* was his translation of the last line. Any person reading Bhai Gurdas' work would have certainly concluded that the previous line is talking about *Gurmukhs* coming into the world because of Guru Nanak. This refers to Guru Nanak's coming to the world-leading in the world in the age of Kaliyug, a time of degradation and loss; however, Sant Gurbachan Singh translates *Gurmukh* as Guru Nanak, positioning Guru Nanak as the *Guru-Mukhi*, the first person who is Guru facing. This suggests

that even Guru Nanak was in command of the One, even as God himself. This is affirmed in the first line, where Bhai Gurdas refers to Guru Nanak as *Satguru*, the True Guru.

3.3 *Katha* and movement across multiple texts

As can be seen through these examples, Sant Gurbachan Singh, directly and indirectly, makes references to many texts. These play a pivotal role in Sant Gurbachan Singh's analysis. Sant Gurbachan Singh, in his *katha* draws on Bhai Gurdas' words and compositions to frame connection to the SGGS but also goes beyond that by referencing a wide range of additional texts, which post-date Bhai Gurdas. Sant Gurbachan Singh thus brings to life a web of textual connections through his *katha*. Sant Gurbachan Singh is not only drawing these connections, but he is also arguing that Bhai Gurdas also saw and drew these connections. His *katha*, therefore, functions to construct a kind of textual lattice that surrounds Bhai Gurdas' *Varan*, situating it in relation to the SGGS, as well as later traditions. There is one section of text that both Sant Gurbachan Singh and Bhai Vir Singh highlight:

[Bhai Gurdas writes]

Every home has become a place of dharma where singing.

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then explains this line as]

In this way, each and every home, and everywhere, in villages, towns religious sites were formed. While settling, praises (kirtan) is happening-

[Sant Gurbachan Singh then quotes something from the oral tradition]

It is always Vaisakhi for the devotee, and it is always the spring season at all hours of the day. It is always Diwali for the devotee, and it is always the spring season at all hours of the day.

[ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਘਰਿ ਘਰਿ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਧਰਮਸਾਲ ਹੋਵੈ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਸੋਆ।

[ਸੰਤ ਜੀ ਕਥਾ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਮਝਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ]

ਇਉਂ ਘਰ ਘਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਥਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ, ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਸ਼ਹਿਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਨਗਰ ਨਗਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਧਾਰਮਕ ਅਸਥਾਨ ਬਣਗੇ। ਸਦਾ ਵਸਾ ਵਸਾ ਕਿ ਕੀਰਤਨ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਵਿਸੋਆ: ਸਦਾ ਵਿਸਾਖੀ ਸਾਧ ਦੀ ਅਠੇ ਪਿਹਰ ਬਸੰਤ। ਸਦਾ ਦਿਵਾਲੀ ਸਾਧ ਦੀ ਅਠੇ ਪਿਹਰ ਬਸੰਤ। ਇਉਂ ਵਿਸਾਖੀ ਦੇ ਜੋੜ ਮੇਲੇ ਵਸਾ ਵਸਾ ਕੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੈ।

Here Sant Gurbachan Singh seems to quote something that he has written, or he is quoting another *granth*. He tells us that it is always *Vaisakhi* for the being that is on the path towards the one and it is the season of *Basant* (known for being the start of spring) during all eight times of the day.¹³² The second line says that it is always Diwali for a being on the path towards the one and it is the season of *Basant* during all eight times of the day. I argue that Sant Gurbachan Singh is arguing that it is essential for a *Gursikh* to consider each day to be worthy of celebration and enjoyment with the Guru, as one would during these celebrations. Moreover, the comparison of *Basant*, suggests that one must always be growing and moving towards the Guru just as a flower moves and expands towards the Sun.

Interestingly enough, both Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh emphasized this line of Bhai Gurdas. As discussed in the last chapter, Bhai Vir Singh explained the root word and here, Sant Gurbachan Singh shared a quote. Both shared the idea of a community coming together and the experience of the season of spring. The importance of this may lie in, as shared in the introduction, that both Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh were active in pushing the agenda of the Singh Sabha movement: the idea of a single, uniform Sikhi. Though this is not entirely negative, there was a push by both exegetes towards coming together as a community and celebrating historical occasions, such as the new year, *Vaisakhi*, and more. Tying in practical suggestions into their exegeses such as the importance of the new year that starts in spring and also *Nagar Keertans* (religious parades).

All in all, Sant Gurbachan Singh's approach to *katha* shows the deep web of connections between not only his work, panthic historiographies and the oral tradition but also in extension, he argues for a deep connection between the SGGS and the *Varan*. The nuanced approach that Sant Gurbachan Singh takes shows the complexity of the *Varan*, which themselves reveal a complex relationship with the SGGS. Sant Gurbachan Singh's breadth of knowledge on the panthic historiographies comes to life in his *katha* and though not always footnoted, the panthic historiographies are present.

¹³² One *pher* is equal to 3 hours in a day. The day is broken up to 8 *phers* as stated in Gurbani.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In conclusion, Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* are a set of texts that play an essential role in not only understanding the Guru's message but also play a crucial role in forming one of the earlier intertextual links in the Sikh tradition. The *Varan* are a complex set of texts that should be understood through multiple perspectives. Not only was Bhai Gurdas providing a description of the Sikh community in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but he was also giving a sense of its historical context, and he attested to the authority of the Guruship for the community.

Some scholars have done exegeses of the *Varan* to understand Bhai Gurdas' work better. These scholars quite often studied in traditional Sikh schools of thought, where these schools not only sought to create a web of connections among texts but also among schools of thought and practice. The two scholars of interest for this thesis, Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh were a product of these schools of thought. For this reason, both Sant Gurbachan Singh and Bhai Vir Singh are heavily influenced by Vedantic thought but move beyond this and ground their ideas in *gurmat*. The commentaries on Bhai Gurdas' work look to liven and integrate them into Sikh intellectual spheres, where traditional schools look to bring in the works of Bhai Gurdas and *panthic* historiographies. For this reason, these traditional schools of thought play an integral role in forming the community's identity and an important role in understanding the literature surrounding the Sikh *panth*. The above helps one understand Bhai Vir Singh's and Sant Gurbachan Singh's approaches to their exegeses because their goal in providing an explanation of the *Varan* was to make the text accessible to the *panth* and understand its connections to the SGGS.

Both Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh have done exegeses on Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* and they act as authoritative interpretations within the Sikh *panth*. The connections both interpreters draw out among texts, relies on the perception of the connection between Bhai Gurdas' text and that of the SGGS. Their commentaries reveal the continuity and connections between both Bhai Gurdas' text's messages and the messages of the SGGS. Moreover, the commentaries reveal the relationship of both these texts to later *panthik* historiographies that encompass the Sikh historical and intellectual tradition. However, these connections are not only limited to these thinkers, but instead, they also argue that Bhai Gurdas saw and drew these

connections in his work. These connections construct a web of interconnected textual links that comprise Sikh traditional exegeses. All of these constitute a way of understanding Bhai Gurdas' work as holding the title of the 'key to the SGGS'.

Bhai Vir Singh's approach to translating and commenting on the *Varan* is forthright; however, Bhai Vir Singh still takes a nuanced approach. As he glosses each word, provides synonyms and paraphrases Bhai Gurdas's messages, Bhai Vir Singh engages in intertextuality while being straightforward with his commentary. Showing a connection between the SGGS and the *Varan* but also between the *Varan* and other *panthic* historiographies. This nuanced approach that Bhai Vir Singh takes shows the complexity of the *Varan*, which themselves reveal a complex relationship with the SGGS

Sant Gurbachan Singh's oral commentary provides an insight into the mind of a preacher within the Sikh tradition. The commentary shows a deep web of connections between his commentary, *panthic* historiographies, the oral tradition, the *Varan* and the SGGS. Sant Gurbachan Singh is not only arguing for a one way connection between the above mentioned, rather and he in extension argues for a deep multilateral connection between all of the above mentioned. Sant Gurbachan Singh's breadth of knowledge on the *panthic* historiographies comes to life during *katha* and though not always footnoted, the *panthic* historiographies are present. Looking at him provides insight into how a Sikh is formed as he would travel from village to village preaching and has produced a number of scholars that are having a profound impact on the formation of the Sikhs.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, Rahuldeep Gill argues indirectly argues that these connections cannot exist as Bhai Gurdas' messaging solely consists of Guru Arjun's martyrdom. However, as seen through the examples Rahuldeep Singh's problematic translations are what allow him to understand the *Varan* through the lens of martyrdom. A corrected translation shows how his argument fails as Bhai Gurdas is not only talking about the martyrdom and also throughout his work, he writes as if Guru Arjun is present and not martyred. Moreover, the deep web of connections shown through the commentaries of Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh debunks Rahuldeep Singh Gill's claim because Bhai Gurdas' work should not and cannot be limited and decontextualized, as Rahuldeep Gill has suggested. Just because Bhai Gurdas' work at times focuses on martyrdom in some of his *Vars*, it does not mean that it is not linked to

the SGGS and arguably, martyrdom is not the sole focus of those *Vars*. Indeed, some of the *Vars* are tied to the martyrdom; however, a vast majority do not because, as seen through the chapters, the deeply embedded continuity of Bhai Gurdas' message with the Guru's is evident.

The goal of this thesis was to move beyond just Bhai Gurdas' text itself and to understand how some scholars have interpreted and understood it within the Sikh intellectual community. This thesis is only the beginning of scholarship on the reception history within the Sikh *panth* as most of the scholarship has been focused on the histories of the people and literature. The two commentators also provide insight in the minds of two prolific scholars that have profoundly impacted the development of the Sikhs and Sikhi. Bhai Vir Singh and Sant Gurbachan Singh allow us to understand how Bhai Gurdas's works were understood, received, and disseminated within the Sikh *panth*. This is really the only way to understand how and why Bhai Gurdas' works act as the "key" to the Gurus' words and ideas. For these reasons, Bhai Gurdas has and will continue to hold the title of the *kunji* to the SGGS because Bhai Gurdas' *Varan* work in conjunction with the Guru's writings. Just as he once preached in conjunction with the Guru.

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