Bulletin of SOAS, **71**, 2 (2008), 255–277. © School of Oriental and African Studies.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X08000530 Printed in the United Kingdom.

Repackaging the ineffable: changing styles of Sikh scriptural commentary

Christopher Shackle
School of Oriental and African Studies
cs2@soas.ac.uk

Abstract

The special importance of the Ādi Granth as the defining scripture of the Sikhs has encouraged the production of commentaries whose language and approach reflect changing understandings of the Gurus' teachings over the last four centuries. The oral style of the earlier commentaries which typically demonstrate a catholic inclusiveness towards the wider Indic tradition came largely to be replaced in the twentieth century by the more exclusive approach of Sikh reformist commentators, in part aroused by the dismissive attitudes of the first English translation by Trumpp. Continuing to shape most modern understandings of the scripture, these highly organized commentaries composed in the new idiom of Modern Standard Panjabi are only now beginning to be challenged by new styles of exegesis being pioneered in the Sikh diaspora.

The simplistic notion of Sikhism as the historic product of a syncretism between Hinduism and Islam has become rightly discredited, since the religion's essential formation, including that of its scripture, is unquestionably Indic in character. In terms of comparative typology, however, the defining significance accorded to scripture within the Sikh tradition rather suggests its classification alongside the great scripturally oriented religions of Middle Eastern origin followed by the several "peoples of the book", notably of course Islam itself (Smith 1993: 196–7). After a brief characterization of the Sikh scripture, this article[1] attempts a characterization of the main types of commentary which have been written upon it over the past four centuries.

In keeping with the general theme of this collection, a principal focus of our discussion will be upon the contrasts between older styles of exegesis and the more modern types of commentary which continue to dominate most contemporary Sikh understandings of the scripture, and thus most Western understandings of the Sikh religion. Since our interest is as much in the form as in the content of both the scripture and the commentaries, the discussion regularly gives some prominence to linguistic matters, in an attempt to show how changes in language and style reflect changes in approach and content.

1 It is offered as a small tribute to John Wansbrough, whom I much valued as a SOAS colleague. In its preparation I have been most grateful to Marina Chellini of the British Library for her kind assistance.

The Sikh scripture

The essential character of the Sikh scripture is well captured in the concluding stanza of a frequently recited hymn by the third Sikh Gurū Amar Dās:

> *dūkha roga santāpa utare suṇī sacī bāṇī* /
> *santa sājana bhae sarase pūre gura te jāṇī* /
> *suṇate punīta kahate pavitu satiguru rahiā bharapūre* /
> *binavanti nānaku gura caraṇa lāge vāje anahada tūre* / (AN40, AG 922)[2]
> I suffer no more since I heard the true Word.
> On learning the Word from the guru, the saints are delighted.
> Those who hear and who sing are made pure by the guru.
> For those at his feet, Nanak says, let the trumpets play music unheard
> (Shackle and Mandair 2005: 101).

The key term here is the Word (*bāṇī*), the divine message of truth transmitted by the true guru (*satiguru)* which alone affords the possibility of blissful salvation from the cycles of birth and suffering. This understanding of a triple relationship between the true guru, the Word (also frequently termed *sabadu*) and those fortunate "saints" (*santa*), who through their loving contemplation of the divine Name (*nāmu*) are able to apprehend the guru's Word (*gurabāṇī*), lies at the very heart of the message of salvation taught by the founder of the Sikh tradition, the first Gurū Nānak (1469–1539).[3] The dynamics of this triangle of forces thus relate to the internal process of transformation effected by the mysterious entry of the divine into the human psyche, hence the frequent allusion to the ineffable Word as being beyond physical apprehension (*anahadu*). Simultaneously, however, this metaphysical model is mirrored by its physical expression in human language through the hymns (also typically termed *sabadu*, modern Panjabi *shabad*) which were composed by Gurū Nānak and his successors as the chosen medium for the expression of their teaching, and which were designed to be sung in the congregational worship (*kīratan*) which has from the beginning been the central institution of Sikh communal religious life. Just as the divine guru is embodied in the human Gurū and as the holy community of saints (*satasangati*) is physically realized in the regular congregational worship of a Sikh community, so too is the guru's Word enshrined in the Gurūs' hymns.

2 Scriptural references use the system of abbreviations set out in Shackle 1995: xxxi–iii, 279, followed by the standard page numbers of the Ādi Granth. Scriptural quotations are transliterated from the Gurmukhī script according to the system set out in Shackle 1995: xxi–v. The transliteration employed below for modern standard Panjabi and other languages written in the Gurmukhī script used in the commentaries differs chiefly in the omission of the inherent *-a* in word-final position. It should be noted that Gurmukhī has only *sh* (written with dotted *sassā*) without the Nāgarī distinction between *ś* and *ṣ*.

3 The best systematic account in English of Gurū Nānak's teachings remains McLeod 1968: 148–226.

The term *gurabāṇī* "Gurū's word" in Sikh usage therefore carries many of the same connotations of sacredness as the term "scripture" possesses for many Protestant Christians (who also date the origins of their community to the early sixteenth century). The contrast between the conceptions of an oral *gurabāṇī* and of a written scripture which at the same time characterizes these two religious groups of sixteenth-century origin of course goes back much further, to the well-known emphasis on the primacy of Speech (*vāc*) in the Vedas and the subsequent deprecation of writing in Hindu tradition, versus the contrasting notion of a divine Book which is central to the great religions of the Middle East. The neatness of this dichotomy is however upset by the early appearance within Sikhism, perhaps in part influenced by the Islamic example then culturally dominant in north India, of a written volume of scripture as the increasingly authoritative vehicle of the *gurabāṇī*.

The progressive collection of the *gurabāṇī* in written form first achieved canonical form with the fifth Gurū Arjan (1581–1604), himself by far the most prolific of all the Gurūs, who skilfully edited and arranged the hymns of the first five Sikh Gurūs and others[4] to create a large scripture written in the Gurmukhī script,[5] which itself has a special significance to the Sikhs. While the precise nature of its original redaction has recently become the subject of often spirited debate,[6] it is here sufficient to emphasize only the supreme importance of this "Primal Book", the Ādi Granth (AG).

The AG may be characterized as a vast collection of some 6,000 compositions in which lyrical and didactic modes predominate to the virtual exclusion of narrative or of legislative prescription, those two prominent features of many other scriptures which have proved such fertile areas on which generations of exegetes might exercise their creative skills. Written in a now archaic mixture of Old Panjabi and Old Hindi which may be labelled the "Sacred Language of the Sikhs (SLS)" (Shackle 1983), the Gurūs' hymns are thus primarily engaged in capturing hearts rather than minds. This is not to say that they do not contain puzzles. Gurū Nānak's style, in particular, often favours extreme conciseness of poetic syntax, and the precise meaning of some of its archaisms is a matter of ongoing investigation (cf. Shackle 1995: xiii).

The authoritative status of the scripture came to be further enhanced by the tenth and last Gurū Gobind Singh (1666–1708) who undertook a final

4 These include those by Kabīr and other *nirguṇa bhakti* poets (collectively known as the *bhagat-bāṇī*), on which see Pashaura Singh 2003, besides some in praise of the Gurūs by their bards.

5 The traditional explanation of the name as being "issued from the mouth of the Gurū" accompanies a belief that it was invented by the second Gurū Angad. But it should rather be understood as denoting the script "special to those guided by the guru (*guramukh*)". Although superficially similar in many of its letter-shapes to the Devanāgarī script used for writing Sanskrit and Hindi, the Gurmukhī script is actually more similar in organization to the original Brāhmī from which all modern Indic scripts ultimately derive (see further Shackle 2006).

6 The accounts offered in Pashaura Singh 2000 and Mann 2001 should be read in the light of Deol 2001, while the contrary fundamentalist position is set out in Dhillon 1999.

redaction which added the hymns of his father. Gobind Singh also undertook a complex restructuring of Sikh institutions, centred upon the foundation of his Khālsā, the militant order whose male members came to be marked by the unshorn hair and beard and other well-known symbols of Sikhism like the name "Singh". After his death without living male issue, the divine guru's authority was transferred to the sacramental community led by the Khālsā, the Gurū Panth, and to the sacred scripture containing the guru's Word, which acquired the honorific title of Gurū Granth Sāhib.

The central significance of the scripture as the core determinant of a distinctive Sikh identity lies at the heart of the modern definition of orthodoxy, which recommends the need for constant individual study and meditation as well as prescribing its central place in temple ritual, where it supplies the material both for congregational singing (*kīratan*) and for sermonizing exposition (*kathā*).[7] Even though the AG itself is, like most scriptures, frequently critical of the supposed learning of religious specialists,[8] the supreme reverence accorded to it might suggest an exceptional development of Sikh commentary (*ṭīkā*) or exegesis (*viākhiā*) fully comparable to those of such earlier religious traditions as Brahminical Hinduism or Islam. Historically, however, this hardly proved to be the case, thanks in part to the strongly rural orientation of the majority of Sikhs who were drawn from the unlettered Jat peasantry. Rural Panjab, particularly in that long unsettled period down to the early nineteenth century of the wars between the the Sikhs and the Mughals and their Afghan successors, thus hardly proved fertile soil for the emergence of a Śaṅkara or a Rashi.[9]

The challenge from the West

This became sharply evident when serious interest from non-Sikhs was first aroused. After the British conquest of the Sikh kingdom of Lahore in the 1840s, British officials came to see the importance of understanding the contents of the scripture of the strategically situated community now under their rule. In 1869 the task of translating the AG was accordingly given by the India Office, with what were to be unexpectedly significant consequences, to Dr Ernst ("Ernest") Trumpp (1828–85). Earlier resident

7 For an English version of the relevant paragraphs of the standard *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* (1950), see McLeod 2003: 377–401.

8 Thus the only AG occurrence of *ṭīkā* as "commentary" occurs in *mukhate paṛatā ṭīkā sahita / hiradai rāmu nahī pūrana rahata* / "Reciting from the mouth along with the commentary, but not with God being present in the heart", the first verse of a hymn by Gurū Arjan whose refrain is "Pandit, meditate on the Vedas, Pandit, banish anger from your heart" (Ra(M5)17.1, AG 887).

9 It is therefore hardly surprising that the secondary literature on Sikh exegesis is also scanty. The current emphases of scriptural studies in the universities of the Panjab itself are on other topics, as is for instance reflected in the papers included in Darshan Singh 2004, while the indefatigable and wide-ranging productivity over some four decades of the leading Western scholar of Sikhism, W. H. McLeod, has accorded the subject only passing mention. To this general neglect there is fortunately a notable exception in Tāran Singh's finely assembled *Gurabāṇī dīāṅ Viākhīā Praṇālīāṅ* (1999), frequently referred to below as GVP.

in India, between 1854 and 1860, he was a German scholar with impressive linguistic credentials shortly to be evidenced by the publication of his pioneering comparative grammars of Sindhi (1872) and of Pashto (1873). When his equally pioneering partial translation of the AG appeared in 1877, these strengths were evidenced in the general accuracy of his prose rendering. Although Trumpp had little feel for the lyric and little sympathy for the didactic components of the AG, his version is therefore still of some scholarly interest, as are the notes on language and prosody which conclude his lengthy introduction, where he draws particular attention to the archaic grammatical features of the language of the AG (Trumpp 1877: cxxii–xxxviii).

There is a telling contrast between Trumpp's self-deprecating apologies to British readers for the rustiness of his English since his return to Germany (ibid.: viii) and his dismissive report on the inability of local religious specialists to meet his requirements:

> But after I had succeeded in engaging two Sikh Granthīs at Lahore, I was not a little surprised, when they declared to me, that the Granth could not be translated in the literal grammatical way I desired. I soon convinced myself that, though they professed to understand the Granth, they had no knowledge either of the old grammatical forms or of the obsolete words; they could only give me traditional explanations, which frequently proved wrong … Finally I gave up all hope of finding what I wanted, as I clearly saw, that the Sikhs, in consequence of their former warlike manner of life and the troublous times, had lost all learning … Thus I was again thrown upon my own resources, and to find out the way through the labyrinth myself (ibid.: ii–iii).

In the next paragraph he reports on his search for written commentaries, which are not individually named,[10] but which are awarded some grudging acknowledgement:

> I inquired therefore carefully after commentaries on the Granth. At first I was positively told that there was no such thing in existence; but in progress of time I succeeded in detecting three commentaries, two of which explained in a rough way a number of obsolete Hinduī and dēshī (provincial) words, and the other a number of Arabic and Persian words, which were received into the Granth in a very mutilated form. These commentaries, though very deficient, proved very useful to me, and I therefore got them copied, as their owners would not part with them (ibid.: iii).

In keeping with his narrow disciplinary understanding of the task he had been assigned, Trumpp's own approach largely stays away from explicit

10 Several of the notes to Trumpp's translation of the *Japjī* do, however, refer to the Manī Singh commentary illustrated below.

commentary. His numerous footnotes are largely limited to linguistic matters, often advancing useful etymological insights.[11]

These virtues have, however, been completely overshadowed in Sikh eyes by the offensively unsympathetic terms Trumpp uses in his assessment of the scripture and its contents. Deliberately foregrounded in his preface, their harshness is remarkable even by the standards of late nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship.[12] It was therefore natural that they should have outraged the Sikh intellectuals of the late nineteenth century, but for their effective rebuttal the character of earlier Sikh commentaries hardly provided very effective tools.

Traditional commentaries

In his introduction, Trumpp chose to devote only a rather short section to a sketch of the religious ideas of the AG (ibid.: xcvii–cxii), preferring instead to begin with lengthy translations of two of the traditional hagiographies of Gurū Nānak known as *janam-sākhī* ("birth-witness") (ibid.: i–lxxvi). Originating in sixteenth-century oral tradition, these extra-scriptural hagiographies came to form what has ever since been seen as an essential narrative complement to the atemporal message of the scripture. While the characteristic structure of a *janam-sākhī* is a series of simple prose episodes (*sākhī* "witness") testifying to the miraculous greatness of the Gurū, they are themselves also filled with scriptural and apocryphal quotations. Sometimes these furnish the basis of the story, while at others they appear to have been tacked on to the narrative almost at random (cf. McLeod 1980: 73–9).

In the so-called *Purātan Janam-sākhī* first translated by Trumpp, for instance, Gurū Nānak is represented as meeting Shaikh Birāham (i.e. Ibrāhīm), the descendant of Bābā Farīd Shakarganj, the great Chishtī saint whose shrine at Pakpatan is a major focus of popular Muslim devotion in the Panjab. The two debate through verses (*shalok*), including some attributed in the AG to Farīd himself, to Gurū Nānak, or to other Sikh Gurūs, besides others absent from the scriptural text. The Shaikh asks Nānak to let him hear a ballad (*vār*), in response to which Nānak recites him the opening stanzas of his famous ballad in Rāg Āsā, popularly known as *Āsā dī Vār* (Ashok 1969: 109–13, cf. Trumpp 1877: xvii–ix).[13]

11 Although he is not infrequently led by pride in his etymological skills into offering perverse interpretations, e.g. for the half-verse *miṭī musalamāna kī* AsV6.2, AG 466, where he rejects the transparent meaning "the Muslim's clay", explaining "We divide the words: *musala māna kī,* as the reading *musalamāna* would not give any sense. *Māna* is still used in the sense of 'clay' in Marāthī (*s.f.*), though obsolete in Hindī. This signification will best suit the context. From the Sikh Granthīs I could get no explanation whatever" (Trumpp 1877: 639, n. 4).

12 "The Sikh Granth is a very big volume, but as I have noted on p. cxxi, l. 3, and on p. cxxii, l. 4, incoherent and shallow in the extreme, and couched at the same time in dark and perplexing language, in order to cover these defects. It is for us Occidentals a most painful and almost stupefying task, to read only a single Rāg …" (ibid.: vii).

13 The episode is discussed in McLeod 1980: 131–5. As often in *janam-sākhī* mythology, it has a doublet in the anecdote of the Gurū's encounter with Farīd himself in the mythical land of Āsā (ibid.: 72).

In more elaborate treatments, artless narratives of this kind give way to sustained commentary. Indeed, the first real commentary upon the scripture to have been preserved occurs in the one *janam-sākhī* which is itself the work of a Gurū, albeit an heretical one. This is the *Pothī Sachkhaṇḍ* (''The Book of the Realm of Truth'') by Manohar Dās Miharbān (1581–1640), the Gurū of the Mīṇā sect founded by his father, Arjan's elder brother and unsuccessful rival. While the prolonged hostility of the mainstream Sikh community to the Mīṇās caused their considerable literature (Deol 1998) to remain in obscurity until recently, the publication of this substantial ''*Miharbān Janam-sākhī*'' (Miharbān 1962, 1969, cf. GVP 51–89) showed that it consisted mainly of scriptural exposition. Termed *gosaṭi* (*goshṭi*, ''disputation, discourse'') rather than *sākhī*,[14] most episodes are largely devoted to solid passages of prose commentary (called *paramārathu*, loosely ''true meaning'') rather than the often sketchy frame-narrative.

The style may be exemplified by an extract from the meeting with Shaikh Birāham, which includes a commentary on the opening stanza of *Āsā dī Vār* (AsV1, AG 463).

[1] [15] *āpīnhai āpu sājio, āpīnhai racio nāu /*
[2] *duyī kudarati sājīai, kari āsaṇu ḍiṭho cāu /*
[3] *dātā karatā āpi tūṁ, tusi devahi karahi pasāu /*
[4] *tūm jāṇoī sabhasai, de laisahi jindu kavāu /*
[5] *kari āsaṇu ḍiṭho cāu /*

A wonderful example of Gurū Nānak's highly condensed and dynamic style, in which each of the nine syntactic units here indicated by the commas consists of only three or four words, usually including a finite verb, this stanza defies any perfect translation (not least because of the uncertain meaning of unusual items like the rhyme-words *pasāu, kavāu*[16]), but the following version at least attempts to suggest the metrical structure:

[1] Alone You made Yourself, alone You made Your name
[2] You made creation next, You sit to watch its play.
[3] Both Giver and Creator, as You please You give.
[4] All-knower who grants and takes the body and the soul,
[5] You sit to watch its play (Shackle and Mandair 2005: 34).

The sharp conciseness of this description of the original process of creation becomes much diffuse in Miharbān's Panjabi prose. Freely switching tenses, this is composed in a loose paratactic style, close to those of the oral

14 Cf. McLeod 1969 for the relationship between these terms. As an historian, McLeod's invaluable studies of the *janam-sākhīs* focus primarily upon them as narrative rather than as direct derivatives from the scripture.
15 Square brackets in original and translated passages mark my own insertions.
16 The pair also occurs in *kītā pasāu eko kavāu* JP 16, AG 3. Cf. Shackle 1995: 76, 176 for the rival interpretations of *pasāu* as (a) ''grace'' (< *prasāda*-), (b) ''expansion'', and of *kavāu* as (a) ''call, command'', (b) ''robe, i.e. the body'' (< Ar. *qabā*).

exposition of a sermon (*kathā*).[17] It expands greatly upon the opening two lines, including a section put into the Creator's mouth, followed by a digression commenting on another verse (*shalok*) from *Āsā dī Vār*, and another on good and evil, before concluding with a rapid gloss on the remainder of the stanza (Miharbān 1962: 496–7):

> Then Shaikh Birāham said, "O Gurū Bābā Nānak Jī, I have another request if you will grant me permission to make it?" Then Gurū Bābā Nānak said, "Yes, Shaikh Jī, say what is in your heart". Then Shaikh Birāham said, "Bābā Jī, we would be delighted if there was a ballad to the Name of the One Lord. Let us sing a ballad to the Lord, please recite us a ballad to the Lord". Possessing the power of granting wishes, Gurū Nānak fulfils whatever anyone wishes and asks for. Then Gurū Nānak utters a ballad to the Lord. – What is it that he says? – Then Gurū Nānak uttered a ballad to the Lord in Rāg Āsā [whose first stanza is quoted before the following commentary].
>
> *tisu kā paramārathu.*
> *taba gurū bābe nānaka jī kahiā ji. e sekha jī. hiku sāhiba sā pahilā so sunnu sā nā pāpu nā punnu. taba karate purakha ehu akāru kīā ji haṁü āpaṇī kudarati paidā karī, tisu thī ehi jīa jahānu paidā hovai. khaṇḍa brahamaṇḍa dīpa loa pātāli jimīṁ asamānu paüṇu pāṇī paidā hovai sāsatra beda kateba paidā hovai …*
>
> Its true meaning:
>
> Then Gurū Bābā Nānak said: "O Shaikh Jī, [1–2] there was the one Lord first there was the void, no sin nor virtue. Then the Creator Being made this form, saying 'Let me create my Creation [*kudarati* "divine creative force" < Pers. *qudrat*], from it let these creatures and the world be created. Let realms, universes, worlds, climes, underworld, earth, sky, air, water be created. Let Shāstras and Vedas and scriptures (*kateb*) be created. Let good and evil be created. Let heaven and hell be created. Let me create them as my Creation.' First from the void He created His Name as Creator Being. First this Name, the void and the Creator Being came into being. The meaning of 'Creator' is that He began to exercise His Creation, hence Creator Being. Hence next His Creation, through it all creatures and the world were created." – What sort of things were created? Then Gurū Nānak fashioned a verse on the production of Creation:
>
> [Here follows the 9-line *shalok* found later in *Āsā dī Vār*, beginning *kudarati disai kudarati suṇīai kudarati bhaü sukha sāru* "Creation it is

17 It may be noted that the language of the commentary is quite neutral in dialectal colouring, as opposed to the speech of the Shaikh in the first paragraph which abounds in distinctively localized "South-Western" features (e.g. *eku biā bhī araju hai je hukamu thīvai tāṁ ākhāṁ he*), cf. Shackle 1977, 1978.

seen, Creation is heard, Creation is fear and the essence of joy'' (AsV3.2, AG 464)].

Its true meaning:

O Shaikh Jī, all this that happened and which is seen, it all happened through Creation and the invisible too happened through Creation. As for fear, it all happens through Creation, and joy too happens through Creation. And what will happen will all happen through Creation. Whatever is created is all created through the Creation of the Lord. And Creation belongs to the Creator Being, not to anyone else. All that happens happens through Creation.

[The commentary then reverts to the stanza.] In that Creation He created the two, good and evil, creating them for creatures and men, in evil He punishes man and in good He favours man. The spectacle of creatures is watched by the Creator Being. He has created and given good and evil. He Himself watches His spectacle and having made His Creation makes the three worlds His seat. Having made His seat then He Himself started to watch the spectacle. [3] You Yourself are the Giver, You Yourself are the Creator. When You are merciful and give, I reach out.[18] [4] It is only You who are the knower of all creatures. To whatever creature it is given it will be taken again. [5] Having created the world You watch the spectacle.

A different approach characterizes what seems to be the first regular commentary on *Āsā dī vār*, that composed by Ānandghan in 1825, which is now available in a modern edition (Ānandghan 1990, cf. GVP 93–112). Ānandghan belonged to the Udāsī order (*sampradāy*) of celibate ascetics, whose outward appearance is that of a Hindu *sādhū* while their affiliation goes back to Gurū Nānak through his son Srī Cand.[19] Like most of the early exegetes, he was therefore not a member of the dominant Khālsā.

After a short introduction Ānandghan's commentary deals first with the three opening *shaloks* added to the original *vār* in the AG (AsV1.1–3),[20]

18 Here the 1 sing. of Miharbān's *haṁü pasāu karī* goes against the 2 sing. of AG *karahi pasāu*.

19 Most other early commentators were members of the Nirmalā order (*sampradāya*) originating in the time of Gurū Gobind Singh, which while closer to Sikh practice and costume than the Udāsīs was similarly oriented towards the Indic learned traditions embodied in Sanskrit religious literature (cf. Prītam Singh 1981: 275–318). The most prominent Nirmalā exegetes were Santokh Singh (1788–1843), now best known for his massive hagiography of the Gurūs in Braj Bhāṣā verse, and ''Paṇḍit'' Tārā Singh Narotam (GVP 119–52). The former composed his *Garab Ganjanī Tīkā* (''The Pride-Humbling Commentary'') in explicit rebuttal of Ānandghan's commentary on *Japjī* though detailed counter-interpretations appear to be sparse therein (GVP 121, note 1).

20 While the orthodox Sikh Gurūs left no recorded commentaries, Gurū Arjan's massive redaction might be regarded itself as quite often involving the primary type of commentary, regarded as ideal in most religious traditions, of getting scripture to explicate itself. A notable example of this would be the interpolation before each of

before proceeding to the first stanza. While the script is Gurmukhī, the language here, although containing some Panjabi features, is a the Hindi-based *sādhū-bhāṣā* which was the religious lingua franca of North India. The crabbed exposition involves the frequent citation of lists and synonyms, introduced by such oral formulae as *kiā kahīe* "that is to say". The supposition of doubt in the auditor is a traditional feature of classical Hindu commentary (cf. e.g. Warrier 1983). Equally traditional is the creative use of symbolic etymology, as is here invoked to explain the word *kavāu* in the fourth line in keeping with the Hindu concept of the three divine forces (Ānandghan 1990: 50–2):

guro kī mahimā kahī. ab pramesavar kī mahimā ko kahite hai. jaise mandar caṛanai kā mārag paüṛīāṁ hotīā taise jo pramesavar rūpī jo mandar hai, tis kī prāpati kā mārag ih paüṛīāṁ hai …

He has uttered praise of the Gurūs. Now he utters praise of the Lord. Just as stairs are the way to go up to a temple, so too for the temple which represents the Lord – the way to attain it get there is these stanzas. If one acts on what is written in these stanzas the Lord will be attained. The Lord is infinite in form. First he utters the praise of the Lord in His self-existent form:

[1] Lord, With You Yourself doing it You fashioned Yourself. And there is no one else to tell You. And You Yourself also fashioned Your Name. The spirit without form or action, supreme and pure divine spirit, without desire or blemish, immortal indestructible Brahma, from this he has uttered the praise of the Lord in His self-existent form. Now he utters the praise of the Lord in His form as Creator:

[2] "Second creation", that is to say (*kiā kahīe*), the great material world You also created. "Posture", that is to say, focusing Your attention You Yourself beheld Your delight. What delight was seen? This arouses uncertainty in the listener. So we resolve it. When You fashioned the universe that the universe created desire for You. That the one form should become many, this was the desire that was then created. Then Your One became the three forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. When You made Your three forms, then the universe made its three Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva forms. These six together fashioned the creation, preservation and destruction of the world. This was the desire in Your mind, so You watched. He writes that

---

the stanzas *(pauṛī*, also meaning "step, stair") of the various *vārs* of more or less directly relevant-seeming verses *(shalok*) of originally independent inspiration. Thus the AG text of Gurū Nānak's *Āsā dī Vār*, for instance, includes besides 44 verses by Gurū Nānak, also 15 by the second Gurū Angad variously placed before its 24 stanzas (cf. Shackle and Mandair 2005: 33–40). Only in modern commentaries, however, is the issue of multiple authorship and subsequent redaction explained (e.g. Sāhib Singh 1962–4: 3, 604–6). Just as for the ordinary believer today *Āsā dī Vār* is an inspired unity made familiar through continual hearing, so too is the composition treated as a whole by earlier exegetes.

You fashioned the universe. And in the Vedas and Shastras it is written that the universe is the shadow of the Lord. One with form has a shadow, how can there be a shadow in the Formless? So the meaning of shadow is the act of desire here, thus preserving the meaning of His being without blemish.

[3] Lord, it is You who are the giver and creator of the world. It is You too who have created karma in the world. It is You too who are the giver of the reward of karma. For whomsoever[21] You give the reward of karma, You perform *pasāu*, that is You grant extension (*pasārā*). The extension is of three [*sic*] kinds. The cooperative who worship You, You extend through wealth, children, etc. And those who are without devotion or are devoted to other things, You extend through the cycle of birth and death, etc.

[4] Lord, You are the Creator of the whole world. As for the soul, its raiment [*kavāu*], that is to say, its clothing is the body, and that too it is given by You. And You are the one who will take it. In the Shastra called *Yadvāk*, it is said that *ka* is the name of Brahma, *vā* is the name of Vishnu, and *u* is the name of Shiva. You are *kavāu,* that is to say, Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva. Creating in Your form as Brahma, You fashion the world.

[5] As Your first delight You fashioned creation. As Your second delight, creatures receive the endless reward of joy and sorrow, etc. according to their karma. This was Your mind's delight, so You watched it.

Earlier printed commentaries

The significant establishment from the 1860s onwards of a printing industry in the Panjab, mainly in Lahore and Amritsar, opened the way for the widespread dissemination of all kinds of religious literature. Books in all scripts were first generally printed by lithography, before moveable type came to be adopted for printing in Gurmukhī. A regularized pagination for the AG itself came to be agreed by the publishers, whose standardized format of 1,430 pages greatly facilitated the location of individual verses in the massive scripture. From the period before the full ascendancy of the reformists in the 1920s there are also preserved many printed commentaries on parts of the Sikh scripture, especially on its primal text, Gurū Nānak's *Japu* (AG 1–8), popularly called *Japjī*, which is prescribed for daily individual recitation. Some idea of the exuberant variety of approaches may be gained from a brief examination of some commentaries upon lines from one stanza of the *Japjī* (JP5, AG 2):

[1] *thāpiā na jāi kītā na hoi* / *āpe āpi niranjanu soi* /
[2] *jini seviā tini pāiā mānu* / *nānaka gāvīai guṇī nidhānu* /
[3] *gāvīai suṇīai mani rakhīai bhāu* / *dukhu parahari sukhu ghari lai jāi* /

21 As noted by the editor, the commentary here follows the reading *jisa* "whom" for AG *tusi* "pleased".

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X08000530 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In English verse translation, the sense is:

> [1] He cannot be established, nor can He be made,
> Of Himself He exists, quite free from all stain.
> [2] Through serving him truly, great honour is found,
> O Nanak, sing praise of the store of all virtue.
> [3] Sing praises and listen, feel love in your heart,
> Let sorrow be banished and joy take its place (Shackle and Mandair 2005: 5).

The semantic shifts imposed by the target language upon all such English translations[22] can be less apparent than the more explicit recastings of the original which are involved in prose commentary. But they clearly emerge in the renderings of *Japjī* into Urdu, the official language of education and administration throughout early twentieth-century Panjab. The most noteworthy of these[23] is the *mathnawī*-style metrical translation in a careful *ramal* which was published under the title *Virdi-i Ḥaq* by one Master Lāl Singh Ānand "Khāliṣ", former head of the Khalsa School, Peshawar. In this quite free version Gurū Nānak's originally tight expression is converted into the loosely Sufistic mode which is so intimately linked to the Perso-Arabic norms of Urdu poetic language (Khāliṣ 1936: 21).

> [1] *lā-taʿayyun kā bhī ho saktā taʿayyun hai kahīṅ*
> *khāliṣ-i kaun-o makān makhlūq ho saktā nahīṅ*
> [2] *qā'im apnī z̲āt hī meṅ hai shah-i dunyā-o dīn*
> *pāk kul ālāyishoṅ se hai vo rabbu'l-ʿālamīn*
> [3] *ho gayā ḥāṣil sharaf us ko jo us kā ho gayā*
> *makhzan-i auṣāf kī āo kareṇ ham bhī s̲anā*
>
> Can the Unbounded ever be determined?
> No creature can be purified of being and existence.
> The King of both worlds is established in His essence,
> The Lord of the worlds is free from all stains.
> Honour is gained by whoever becomes His:
> Come, let us too praise the Treasury of qualities.

Although much is often made of the supposed spiritual affinity between the message of the Gurūs and those of the great Sufis, the fundamental

22 For the translation strategy involved in the above rendering, see Shackle 2005 and Shackle and Mandair 2005: xlvii–l.

23 Less ambitious Urdu prose versions located in the British Library include the *Sat Dharam Prakāsh*, stated to have been done into easy Urdu for his friends by Master Sānvan Rām (Lahore, 1913); the *Ḥaqā'iq al-Maʿānī* or *Hādī-yi ʿIrfān* by Gandā Singh (Lahore, 1919); and the *Shrī Jap Jī Ṣāḥib: Urdū Sharaḥ* composed as an act of thanksgiving for recovery from illness by Arjan Singh, "Pensioner Ziladar Laltu Kalan, District Ludhiana" (Laltu Kalan, 1936).

differences have been sufficient to prevent this easy rhetorical equation from being realized in serious commentary.[24]

In sharp contrast, Paramahans Udāsī's lengthy commentary on *Japjī*, which is extended by an abundance of Sanskrit verses, is firmly sited outside familiar Sikh-Panjabi territory with its dry step-by-step exposition and its abundance of high-flown *tatsama* vocabulary (Udāsī 1929: 89):

> [1] *thāpiā na jāi: parameśvar kisī dūsare se sthāpit nahīṃ kiyā huā hai. jo vastu utpattivālī aur kālādi paricchhedavālī hotī hai vahī dūsare se sthāpit kī jātī hai …*
>
> [1] *thāpiā na jāi*. God is not established through any one else. It is a thing characterized by creation or by separation through death which is established by some one else. God is without creation or separation through death, etc. So He is not established through any one else. *kītā na jāi.*[25] That thing which first did not exist and later exists is made, i.e. fashioned. God is not like that … .

Clearly intended for a sophisticated readership, the carefully typeset appearance of this large and handsome Hindi volume, published by the major Lucknow firm of Naval Kishor in 1929, contrasts with that of several earlier lithographed commentaries published in Lahore which are also the work of Hindu authors,[26] or the large-print Gurmukhī of what was probably the most popular Panjabi commentary on Panjabi. This doubtless gained currency from its attribution to the charismatic authority figure of Bhāī Manī Singh (cf. GVP 191–204), the leading follower of Gurū Gobind Singh who died in 1734, but from its language alone it is clearly to be dated to this much later period. Just like Miharbān's setting of *Āsā dī Vār*, the *Japjī* is similarly located *in illo tempore,* in the mythical world of the *janam-sākhīs*. The narrative frame is here Gurū Nānak's disputation with the Siddhas on Mount Sumeru[27] (Manī Singh 1901: 1), which is taken up at the beginning of the commentary on each stanza, e.g. "Then the Siddhas asked, 'Who established God, who fashioned Him and how is His service to be conducted?' Then the Gurū Bābā said, 'He cannot be established, nor can He be made …'". A popular version of the question-and-answer format (*praśnottara*) used as an

24 Historically, Muslims have predictably shown little interest in seriously comprehending a Sikh "scripture" while for the regular inclusion of Sufi parallels in Sikh commentary Tāran Singh's extensive survey briefly cites only Brij-Ballabh Singh's 1932 commentary on *Japjī* (GVP 391–3).

25 For AG *kītā na hoi*.

26 E.g. *Srī Jap Jī Saṭīk* by Paṇḍit Sālagrām Dās (Lahore, 1877) which contains an illustration of Gurū Nānak in disputation with the Siddhas (p. 5), and *Jap Paramārath* by Vihārī Lāl (Lahore, 1876). The first is in Gurmukhī-script Hindi, the second in Panjabi.

27 As with the Farīd/Birāham encounters, the *janam-sākhīs* have more than one version of the Gurū's disputations with the Siddhas (McLeod 1980: 144–57). In this case, however, the relationship between hagiography and scripture is more complex, since the AG itself contains a versified description of their disputation, the *Sidha Gosaṭi* (AG 938–46, cf. Shackle and Mandair 2005: 51–73), always taken to be the work of Gurū Nānak himself although markedly different in style from his other major compositions.

expository device in even the most sophisticated Hindu commentaries (cf. e.g. Warrier 1983), this formulaic style continues to the end of the brief commentary on each stanza, which concludes with a description of the effect of its recitation according to prescribed rules, e.g. "The whole of this stanza is to be recited one thousand times for 37 days starting on a Monday to cause an enemy to come into one's power" (ibid.: 15–7).[28]

Besides popular commentaries of this kind and others by Nirmalā scholars,[29] there are more exuberant treatments of the *Japjī,* the longest of all, at 447 pages, being the remarkable *Ripu Daman Khālsā* (Mangal Singh 1909). Inspired by the desire to restore the faith of the Khālsā through the neglected discipline of inner recitation of the Word (*shabad surati sati nirata ajape jāp*), this intersperses commentary with immense lists of words and superficially meaningless syllables for repetitive meditation.

Equally notable in its way, if somewhat later in date, is the record of the teaching of Sant Amīr Singh of Amritsar (1870–1954) which was collected and published by his disciple Kripāl Singh as *Srī Amīr Bhaṇḍār Saṭīk* (GVP 222–43). The following excerpt from his commentary on the *Japjī* verse illustrates the oral style historically used exclusively in the training centres (*ṭaksāl*, lit. "mint") for the temple readers (*granthī*) and preachers (*kathākār*) who constitute the clerisy of Sikhism. After a quite lengthy explanation of the opening half-verses as a response by the Gurū to a set of questions by the Siddhas, the rest of the passage is explained as a set of answers to hypothetical questions, in which the often quite free explanations of the Gurū's scriptural responses are expanded by repetitions and citations of parallel passages from elsewhere in the AG (GVP 228–9):

> Then the Siddhas said, "To whom should we sing?"
>
> A. [2] *nānaka gāvīai guṇī nidhānu.* The Gurū is saying, "God is the treasury of good qualities, let one sing of His virtues because the man who sings of virtues himself becomes a store, i.e. treasury of virtues".
>
> Q. Should he just keep singing or should he listen too?
>
> A. [3] *gāvīai suṇīai*. If one encounters the great souls who sing he should sit down before them and listen, if a pious Sikh listener draws near then he should sing to him of the virtues of God. Compare [Kabīr, Go(K)1.1, AG 890]: "Encountering the good, one should listen and say something; encountering the wicked, one should remain silent".

28 Exactly the same formula is found in Sādarangānī 1920, a Sindhi version in Gurmukhī script of the Manī Singh commentary. The quite considerable Sikh literature published in Sindhi (in Gurmukhī or in Sindhi script) before 1947 awaits investigation, although much of it seems likely to be closely based on Panjabi originals and to involve fewer original touches than are to be found in the modern English derivatives of the Panjabi exegetical tradition.

29 E.g. the *Japu Pradīp* by Sant Devā Singh Nirmalā published in 1904 (cf. GVP 158–60).

Q. If one has sung much of the virtues of God but has found no peace, how can peace be found?

A. *mani rakhīai bhāu*. If we sing of His virtues having placed love in our heart then there is peace. *dukhu parahari sukhu ghari lai jāi*. And banishing, i.e. removing all sorrows, he takes joys into the home of the heart. Compare [Gurū Arjan, Go(M5)12.1, AG 865]: "Conflict and sorrow are removed by God's Name, grief is erased and gives place to joy".

Then the Siddhas say, "Are the virtues of God to be sung and heard through oneself or through someone?"

A. *gāvīai suṇīai mani rakhīai bhāu. gāvīai:* those who sing, who are the Gurūs, listening to their teachings. *mani:* let him believe. *rakhīai:* let him store, then – *bhāu*: there is knowledge of God (*braham giān*). The reward of knowledge is explained in the previous half-verse: *dukhu parahari sukhu ghari lai jāi*. God who is beyond sorrows and is the home of joys, He takes him into it and he becomes merged, that is united with Him. Compare: [Gurū Arjan SM11, AG 278]: "Just as water is mingled with water, so is light blended with light".

Reformist commentaries

While the bibliographic record thus demonstrates the lively variety of several different styles of Sikh exegesis, they were to become marginalized by the articulate young leaders of the Tat Khālsā ("the Real Khālsā") who first emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century as the dominant group within the Singh Sabhā reform movement (cf. Grewal 1998: 144–50). Over the course of formidably productive lives of often remarkable length, these reformists, many of whom were educated in the new schools and colleges of Victorian India, established new styles of scriptural interpretation as a key part of their conception of Sikhism as a distinctive monotheism associated with the highest ethical ideals, and of the Sikhs as a distinct *qaum,* that fatally ambiguous term which embraces the senses of "people", "community", and "nation".

First notably expressed in the pamphlet *Ham Hindū Nahīṁ* (We are not Hindus) published in 1898 by the leading reformist Kāhn Singh Nābhā (1861–1938), these ideas involved both a sharpened distinction from all other Indian religious texts and traditions of the *gurabāṇī* as the Sikhs' unique scriptural authority, and an emphasis upon a newly systematized Modern Standard Panjabi in Gurmukhi script as the chief marker of the Sikhs' cultural distinctiveness (Brass 1974; Shackle 1988). As so often in India in the later colonial period and ever since, religious and linguistic issues were to become deliberately linked.

In the colonial situation, the internal mobilization of opinion had to be accompanied by efforts to gain the sympathy of the imperial power, for which English was the necessary instrument. Here the obvious need was to marginalize Trumpp's pioneering version of the AG, an object of particular aversion to the new English-reading Sikh intellectuals. Fortunately, M.A.

Macauliffe (1841–1913), a former ICS officer extremely sympathetic to the Sikhs, proved well suited to produce an authoritatively sympathetic account of the Gurūs and the scripture in his six-volume treatment (Macauliffe 1909). This ingeniously combines simply told narrative, largely based on the *Purātan Janam-sākhī* for Gurū Nānak, along with prose translations of extensive scriptural selections done in the semi-archaizing style of the Revised Version, accompanied by brief explanatory notes where necessary. The result is successfully to establish in the minds of English readers the sense of a distinctive sacred history fully inspired by a morally elevated scripture.

It was, though, Panjabi which was the reformists' favoured medium for their voluminous writings on Sikhism and for their scriptural scholarship in particular, and here their agenda necessarily implied somewhat different emphases. The programme for the reform of Sikh institutions, as notably signalled by the Akālī campaign in the 1920s for the return of the great gurdwaras to community administration and control, was underpinned by a typical view of Sikh history which implied a progressive falling away from the pristine ideals of the time of Gurūs to which reform promised a fresh return. This in turn implied a rejection of much of the earlier hagiographic tradition as being the product of later fabrication, somewhat ironically in the case of Gurū Nānak in favour of a preference for the relatively restrained narrative of the *Purātan Janam-sākhī* first prominently brought to modern notice by Trumpp.[30]

Earlier exegetical traditions too were seen to be in need of radical overhaul. The strict separation of Sikh from Hindu naturally ruled out the sort of frequent reference to traditional Hindu beliefs and to Sanskrit sacred texts which was characteristic of most earlier commentators, so their work had to be put aside as a deviation from proper understanding of the *gurabāṇī*. The Gurūs' Word was now to be understood as autonomous utterance, not requiring supposed encounters with Siddhas or Shaikhs for its proper understanding, still less the kind of popular superstition evident in the Manī Singh commentary on *Japjī*.[31] Even more recent works of impeccably Sikh provenance might be marginalized by their language, as was to some extent the case with the pioneering complete scriptural commentary compiled in the late nineteenth century under the patronage of the Sikh Maharaja of Faridkot by a team of scholars led by Giānī Badan Singh and published from 1904 onwards (CVP 205–21). Usually referred to as the *Farīdkoṭ vālā Ṭīkā* (Ādi Granth 1992), this was written not in Panjabi but in Gurmukhī-script Hindi.[32]

30 The later reaction in many Sikh circles to the sober critique of the *janam-sākhī* tradition by W.H. McLeod, first undertaken as part of a SOAS PhD (McLeod 1968), foreshadows the reception of Wansbrough's more radical if more carefully masked readings of early Islamic history.

31 A notable early example of a leading reformist's attempt to provide a new style of popular commentary in Panjabi is provided by the *Ṭīkā Japujī Sāhib* by the long-lived Jodh Singh (1882–1981) (Jodh Singh 1911, cf. GVP 249–60).

32 E.g. the opening of the commentary on AsV1 (Ādi Granth 1992: 950): *he akāl purakh (āpīnhai āpa) āp se āp arathāt sutantra panj tatoṁ ko raciā hai aur āp hī taine nām rūp ātamak jagat racā* hai. "O God, *āpīnhai āpa* by Yourself that is independently You have created the five elements and Yourself You have created the spiritual world in the form of the Name".

The rejection of tradition in favour of a return to the scriptural text also drew the reformists to a much closer look at its linguistic structures. Here too Trumpp's work had not been done in vain, as the traditional style of approach to the general sense of the *gurabāṇī* gave way to a new emphasis upon looking at the details of the language employed by the Gurūs as a prime means of trying to determine the precise meaning of their utterances. On the one hand, this stimulated a new interest in lexicography.[33] On the other, it involved the development for the first time of an understanding of the grammar of the by now archaic language of the Gurūs, in particular of the significance of morphological terminations, including the important distinctions between final short vowels which are no longer pronounced and thus liable to be disregarded by most untrained readers. A pioneering essay by the great reformist Tejā Singh (1894–1958), first issued in 1922 (Tejā Singh 1932a) provides a handy set of rules for understanding the significance of these markers (cf. Shapiro 1996), e.g. locative *ghari* (locative) "in the house" as opposed to direct singular *gharu* "house", plural *ghara* "houses",[34] with an introduction explaining their importance for understanding the history of "our language" (Tejā Singh 1932a: 7). This understanding of the composite language of the Gurūs as the historic forebear of modern Panjabi is of course aided by the common use of the Gurmukhi script.[35]

The same keen eye for linguistic detail underpins Tejā Singh's numerous works of scriptural interpretation (GVP 323–48). Since he was one of the few reformists with an excellent active command of English, these include an annotated English translation of *Japjī* first issued in 1920 (Tejā Singh 1930) and a notably clear Panjabi commentary on the same text first published in 1925 (Tejā Singh 1932b). It also characterizes the anonymous *Shabadārath Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib Jī* published under the auspices of the Gur Sevak Sabhā in four volumes between 1936 and 1941, to which he was the leading contributor. Far transcending the modest "Glossary" of its title, this work follows the standard pagination of the AG, with keyed glosses, notes, and brief commentaries printed to face each page of the scriptural text.

Tejā Singh's linguistic work was taken further by Sāhib Singh (1892–1977) whose grammar of the scriptural language was first published in 1932 (Sāhib Singh 1951), and who then worked on the production of a massive commentary on the entire AG in ten volumes comprising over 9,000 pages (Sāhib Singh 1962–4, cf. GVP 349–67). Professor Sāhib Singh's unrivalled

33 Thus, while Kāhn Singh did not produce a commentary of his own, he is rightly remembered for his great encyclopaedic dictionary *Mahān Kosh* (Nābhā 1960), now being translated into English.

34 Gurmukhī has no equivalent to the Nāgarī *halant* to distinguish an unvowelled consonant from one with inherent *–a*, so the romanization conventions of modern Sikh scholarly usage rather awkwardly reproduce these distinctions as *ghar(i), ghar(u)* versus *ghar.*

35 The close connection between the new style of commentary and the new emphasis upon correct modern Panjabi usage is well symbolized by the advertisement for Master Karam Singh Dhamiāl's *Navīn Panjābī Viākaraṇ* ("this grammar is agreed to be the best in all schools at the present time") seen on the back cover of the BL copy of Mahitāb Singh (ed.), *Āsā dī Vār dā Ṭīkā* (Amritsar: Darbar Book Depot, 1926).

one-man achievement in many ways stands at the opposite pole to the traditional style of commentary exemplified in the passage from Sant Amīr Singh's commentary on *Japjī* quoted above. An open-ended exploration of possibilities loosely conducted verse by verse or phrase by phrase is replaced by a grammarian's approach where the careful analysis of the semantic structure of each composition as a whole is designed to show their thematic unity and where detailed glossing of individual words with particular attention to their morphology is intended to show that there is normally one and only one possible meaning to any given verse. Sāhib Singh himself dates his rejection of the traditional approach to the impression made on him as a young man by the taunt of a missionary of the Hindu reformist Ārya Samāj (Sāhib Singh 1962–4: 3, 829):

> Then the preacher said, "You Sikhs proudly proclaim that only you have a scripture in your own language. But you think it a mark of learning to get a dozen meanings out of a single verse. Is this learning or stupidity?"
>
> That was it! His jibe cut me to the quick and I awoke from the sleep of polysemantic learning (*bahu-arathak vidavatā*). I realized that conjecturing various meanings because of not understanding the language of five centuries ago is not a mark of learning. From that day onwards I ceased to get a thrill from the discipline of extracting variant meanings.

In his commentary on AsV1 (Sāhib Singh 1962–4: 3, 616), therefore, all significant words are as usual each first listed and glossed (*pad arath*). Then comes the explanation of the meaning of the whole verse (*arath*). This involves the copious suppletion of bracketed phrases but is nevertheless quite concisely stated with an exceptionally clear provision of commas. Here the oral mode of traditional commentary is very definitely replaced by a style which makes sense only when seen on the page: (ibid.: 3, 616):

> [1] *akāl purakh ne āp hī āpaṇe āp nūṅ sājiā, ate āp hī āpaṇā nāmaṇā baṇāiā.*
>
> [2] *phir, us ne kudarat racī (ate us vic) āsaṇ jamā ke, (bhāv, kudarat vic viāpak ho ke, is jagat dā) āp tamāshā vekhaṇ lagg piā hai.*
>
> [1] The Immortal Being Himself fashioned Himself, and Himself made His Glory. [2] Then, he fashioned His creation (and in it) having taken up His seat (i.e. having become immanent in creation) He has Himself started to watch the spectacle (of this world).

In spite of its admirable strengths, however, Sāhib Singh's commentary is somewhat limited in terms of imaginative reach. It is in some ways a reduced version of the reformist commentary at its most ambitious achieved by Vīr Singh (1872–1957), a great exegete as well as the greatest Panjabi writer of the last century (cf. Shackle 1998). Vīr Singh compiled an

influential commentary on several of the major scriptural hymns, including *Japjī* and *Āsā dī Vār* (Vīr Singh 1950) and a larger incomplete one on the first half of the AG (Vīr Singh 1958–62). Some idea of the scale of his expansive treatment, which draws traditional elements into a newly organized frame, may be gained from his commentary on the same passage, which is again filled with explanatory parentheses. As in Sāhib Singh's commentary, the 2 sing. of the original is replaced by the more objective 3 sing. (Vīr Singh 1950: 393–4):

> *āp hī (niraguṇ nirākār paramātamā) ne āp nūṁ (saraguṇ rūpatā vic) upāiā te āp hī (us) ne nām raciā (te āp hī us ne) dūjī (shai) kudarat racī, (ih apaṇe toṁ bhinn racī par phir is vic) āsaṇ lāke bahi giā (= vyāpak ho giā te iuṁ is toṁ bhinn abhinn hoke is nūm) dekhaṇ te khush hoṇ lagā.*
>
> [1] Himself (the Lord without qualities or form) created Himself (in his state of being with form) and Himself (He) fashioned the Name [2] (and Himself He) fashioned the second (thing) Creation, (He fashioned this as separate from Himself but then in it) He assumed His posture and sat down (= he became immanent and thus having become both separate and non-separate from it) He began to watch and be happy.

Each verse is accompanied by extended notes,[36] as here on the Name where the anonymous citation of the Gospel of John is inserted between citations from the later Gurūs and reference to the *Purātan Janam-sākhī* as the commentator strives to bring out the meaning of Gurū Nānak's teaching on creation:

> The word "Name" is used in the sense of "the Word", cf. "Through the support of the Name heavens and lower worlds" ([Gurū Arjan] SM16.5 [AG 284]), and "It is from the Name that everything has come into being, the Name is not apparent without the true guru" ([Gurū Amar Dās] Su(M3)A1.1 [AG 753]). The Mosaists (Jews), Christians, Muslims, etc. are called Semitic. In one of their religious books it is written: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with the Lord, the Word was the Lord". The Gurū is telling Shaikh Braham: "In the beginning there is not even the Word, nor anything independent of the Formless One. In the beginning there is the Formless God (*niraguṇ braham*), He Himself creates his aspect as Formed (*saraguṇ rūp*). He creates the Word and then He also fashions creations "Formedness" and "Word" are things in the ambience of the One (*eke de maṇḍal dīāṁ cīzāṁ*). So they are not said to be "second" (*dūjī*) in terms of number. Creation is called "second" because it was created separate from Himself. He is its beholder, but

36 In the larger work these are arranged in somewhat expanded form as a following exegesis (*vyākhyā*), followed in turn by notes on the meaning of individual words (*nirukt*) (Vīr Singh 1962: 2838–41).

as beholder He is not distinct from it, He is seated right within it and delights in watching His creation. As beholder there is the appearance of distinctness, as immanent within it He is indistinguishable, so while being distinct He is also not distinct.

Conclusion

The creation of Modern Standard Panjabi as an instrument for the Sikh reformist message perhaps achieved its peak of scholarly sophistication in the work of Vīr Singh and his contemporaries, before the success of the nationalist movement to which the Sikh cause was long tied resulted in later Panjabi academic writing becoming increasingly heavily Sanskritized on the Hindi model in the post-Independence era. Since the passing of the heroic age of the great reformist exegetes, it seems to have proved easier to give their achievements a continued life through putting their commentaries on the internet[37] rather than by producing new volumes of significant exegesis in Panjabi.

Some of the energy which went into the creation of the great Panjabi commentaries has certainly been transferred into the production of scriptural exegesis in English, a language of increasing importance in written Sikh discourse, whether in India or in the increasingly significant diaspora in North America and Britain. Many of these English versions are clearly derivative from Vīr Singh, as in the treatment of *Āsā dī Vār* by Sohan Singh, called *The Ballad of God and Man*. Like many of the newer productions this has quite a lot to say about history, i.e. the way in which some of the verses are supposed to reflect the Gurū's war on the social injustices of sixteenth-century Mughal Panjab, but it does not have much to add to Vīr Singh's understanding of the core divine theology. Stylistically, this awkward English version again involves the use of explanatory glosses, printed in italics (Sohan Singh 1982: 13–4):

> [1] *Lord*, You are Self-created *in your two-fold aspect:* You are self-created as *Nām*. [2] *And,* having yourself created nature, Your second aspect, you installed Yourself *as Nām in this nature* and surveyed it in delight. [3] You Yourself being the Giver, *that is to say*, the Creator *of nature,* You *continuously* give Your self out in delight *as nature* spreading out *in space and time.* [4]/ You are All-cognizant, as You *Yourself* give and take away the life and form (of every created being). / *That is why I say that* You install yourself *in nature* and survey it in delight.

The following four-page commentary seeks *inter alia* to demonstrate the harmony of Gurū Nānak's cosmology with the understandings of modern science (ibid.: 16):

37 E.g. http://www.gurbanifiles.org, which along with other very large items contains both Nābhā 1960 and Sāhib Singh 1962–4.

> We must add here that for Guru Nānak, as for all men of religious vision, being is life … Thus, life being a universal quality of existence, that is to say, an attribute applicable to all finite beings, that part of the fourth line of the *paurī* of this stanza which says that "you give and take away the life and form of all creatures" must be understood as saying that You create and destroy according to your laws all things in nature, from sub-atomic particles to man".

Such attempts to bring scripture up to date by twentieth-century exegetes, of whatever religious tradition, already have a very dated feel. New styles of repackaging the ineffable *gurabāṇī* in English which hope to be better in tune with the new millennium are certainly starting to emerge. While it would be premature to attempt a characterization of these here,[38] it seems likely that this increased use of the international language will mark a significant further stage in the complex evolution of relationships between languages and styles of commentary which have been touched upon during this historical survey.

Bibliography

Ādi Granth. 1992. *Ādi Gurū Granth Sāhib jī Saṭīk (Farīdkoṭ vālā Ṭīkā)*. 4 vols. repr. Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag.

AG: abbrev. for Ādi Granth.

Ānandghan. 1990. *Āsā dī Vār dā Ṭīkā*. ed. R.S. Jaggī. Patiala: Punjabi University.

Ashok, S.S. (ed.). 1969. *Purātan Janam Sākhī Shrī Gurū Nānak Dev Jī kī*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Quincentenary Committee.

Brass, P. 1974. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Darshan Singh (ed.). 2004. *Guru Granth Sahib among Scriptures of the World*. Patiala: Punjabi University.

Deol, J.S. 1998. "The Minas and their Literature", *JAOS* 118: 172–84.

———. 2001. "Text and lineage in early Sikh history: issues in the study of the Ādi Granth", *BSOAS* 64/1: 34–58.

Devā Singh. 1904. *Japu Pradīp: Arathāt Japu Sāhib Saṭīk*. Lahore: Munshi Gulab Singh.

Dhillon, B.S. 1999. *Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition: Myth and Reality*. Amritsar: Singh Brothers.

38 Two instances of new styles of approach may be cited. A feminist reading of the scriptures informs the translations in Nikky Singh 1995, which deliberately often go against the use of the masculine for both divine and human reference in the AG; the scriptural foundation for this position largely rests upon the verse AsV19.2 (AG 473) beginning *bhaṇḍi jammīai bhaṇḍi nimmīai* "We're born in a vessel and formed in a vessel", where *bhaṇḍi* "in a vessel" is nowadays universally understood to mean "woman"; but was interpreted by the ascetic Ānandghan as "person of low caste": *bhaṇḍi nām hai nīc kā* (Ānandghan 1990: 114). Another approach, conspicuously inspired by the heavy style of continental philosophy, has been recently been deployed to serious effect in the pages of *BSOAS* in Mandair 2005, cf. also Shackle and Mandair 2005: xvi–xlvii.

GVP: see Tāran Singh 1999.

Grewal, J.S. 1998. *The Sikhs of the Punjab.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jodh Singh. 1911. *Ṭīkā Japujī Sāhib*. Amritsar: Khalsa National Agency.

Khāliṣ, L.S.A. (trans.). 1936. *Vird-e Ḥaq, ya'nī Srī Jap Jī Ṣāḥib kā Tarjuma-yi Manẓūm ba Urdū*. Lahore: The Author.

Macauliffe, M.A. 1909. *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors.* 6 vols in 3. Oxford: Clarendon Press (repr. Delhi, 1963).

Mandair, A.S. 2005. "The emergence of modern Sikh 'theology': reassessing the passage of ideas from Trumpp to Bhāī Vīr Singh", *BSOAS* 68/2: 253–75.

Mangal Singh (ed.). 1909. *Ripu Daman Khālsā*. Hargobindpur, Amritsar: The Author.

Mann, G.S. 2001. *The Making of Sikh Scripture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Manī Singh. 1901. *Japujī Saṭīk*. Lahore: Pandit Krishan Gopal Balram.

McLeod, W.H. 1968. *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

———. 1969. "The Miharban Janam-sakhi: an examination of the *gost* form with special reference to *Pothi Hariji* and *Pothi Chatarbhuj* of the *Miharban Janam-sakhi*", in Miharbān 1969: i–xii.

———. 1980. *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janam-sākhīs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

———. 1998. *Sikhism*. London: Penguin.

———. 2003. *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

———. 2007. *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition, and Society*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Miharbān. 1962. *Janam Sākhī Srī Gurū Nānak Dev Jī*, ed. Kirpal Singh. Amritsar: Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College.

Miharbān. 1969. *Janam Sākhī Srī Gurū Nānak Dev Jī,* vol. 2: *Pothī Harijī te Pothī Chaturbhuj*. Amritsar: Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College.

Nābhā, K.S. 1960. *Gurushabad Ratanākar Mahān Kosh: Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature.* 2nd ed. Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, Panjab.

Nikky (Guninder Kaur) Singh (ed. and trans.). 1995. *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Pashaura Singh. 2000. *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

———. 2003. *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh Self-Definition and the Bhagat-Bani*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Prītam Singh (ed.). 1981. *Niramal Sampradāi*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Research Department, Guru Nanak University.

Sādarangānī, K.V. (trans.). 1920. *Jap jī Pothī.* Hyderabad Sindh: The Author.

Sāhib Singh. 1951. *Gurabāṇī Viākaraṇ.* 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1932). Amritsar: The Author.

Sāhib Singh (ed.). 1962–4. *Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib Darapaṇ.* 10 vols. Jalandhar: Raj Publishers.

Shabadārath. 1936–41. *Shabadārath Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib Jī.* 4 vols. Amritsar: Gur Sevak Sabhā. repr: Amritsar: SGPC, 1959–69.

Shackle, C. 1977. "'South-Western' elements in the language of the Ādi Granth", *BSOAS* 40/1: 36–50.

———. 1978. "The South-Western style in the Guru Granth Sahib", *Journal of Sikh Studies* 5: 137–60.

———. 1983. *An Introduction to the Sacred Language of the Sikhs*. London: SOAS.

———. 1988. "Some observations on the evolution of Modern Standard Punjabi", in J.T. O'Connell et al. (eds), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century,* pp. 101–9. Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for South Asian Studies.

———. 1995. *A Gurū Nānak Glossary.* 2nd ed. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers.

———. 1998. "A Sikh spiritual classic: Vīr Singh's *Rāṇā Sūrat Singh*", in I.M.P. Raeside and R. Snell (eds), *Classics of Modern South Asian Literature,* pp. 183–209. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

———. 2003. "Panjabi", in G. Cardona and D. Jain (eds), *The Indo-Aryan Languages,* pp. 581–621. London and New York: Routledge.

———. 2005. "From gentlemen's outfitters to hyperbazaar: a personal approach to translating the sacred", in L. Long (ed.), *Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable?,* pp. 19–32. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

———. 2006. "South and Southeast Asia: scripts", in K. Brown (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics,* 2nd edn, 11: 544–57. Oxford: Elsevier.

Shackle, C. and A.S. Mandair (ed. and trans.). 2005. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Sikh Scriptures*. London and New York: Routledge.

Shapiro, M.C. 1996. "The theology of the locative case in sacred Sikh scripture (Gurabānī)", in D.N. Lorenzen (ed.), *Bhakti Religion in North India,* pp. 145–59. New Delhi: Manohar.

Smith, W.C. 1993. *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*. London: SCM Press.

Sohan Singh (ed.). 1982. *The Ballad of God and Man*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University.

Tāran Singh. 1997. *Gurbāṇī dīāṁ Viākhiā Praṇālīāṁ* [GVP]. Patiala: Punjabi University.

Tejā Singh (trans.). 1930. *The Japji or Guru Nanak's Meditations.* 2nd ed. Amritsar: The Author.

———. 1932(a). *Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib Jī dīāṁ Shabadāṁtik Laggāṁ Mātrāṁ de Gujjhe Bhed.* 2nd ed. Lahore: Panjab Press.

——— (ed. and trans.). 1932(b). *Japujī Sāhib dā Ṭīkā.* 2nd ed. Amritsar: The Author.

Trumpp, E. 1872. *Grammar of the Sindhi Language: Compared with the Sanskrit-Prakrit and the Cognate Indian Vernaculars*. London: Trübner.

———. 1873. *Grammar of the Paštō or Language of the Afghans: Compared with Īrānian and North-Indian Idioms*. London: Trübner; Tübingen: Heckenhauer.

——— (ed. and trans.). 1877. *The Ādi Granth or the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs, Translated from the Gurmukhī, with Introductory Essays*. London: Allen, Trübner. repr. 1970. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Udāsī, P. (ed.). 1929. *Śrījapyajī Sāhab Saṭīk*. Lucknow: Naval Kishor.

Vīr Singh (ed.). 1950. *Panj Granthī Saṭīk.* 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1940). Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar.

——— (ed.). 1958–62. *Santhyā Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib.* 7 vols. Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar.

Warrier, A.G.K. (trans.). [1983.] *Srīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāsya of Śri Śaṅkarācārya*. Madras: Sri Ramakrishan Math.