Sri Gur Panth Prakash:
Its Text, Context, and Significance

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The received wisdom dates the completion of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* in 1841 and declares it to be one of the most significant sources of early Sikh history. In this essay, I argue for the text for having been written in the early 1810s and then examine the implications of this shift in its origin for interpreting the information it contains. I end with a brief reflection on the current state of Sikh scholarship.

Sri Gur Panth Prakash ("The Rise of the Honorable Guru Panth/Sikh Community") authored by Rattan Singh Bhangu (d. 1846) offers a poetic rendering of Sikh history in 163 episodes (sakhis).[1] It opens with the origin (*utapati*) of the Panth under the guidance of Baba Nanak (1469-1539; ss. 1-10), refers to its growth under his eight successors (ss. 11-12), and presents its expansion (*pasara*) during the period of Guru Gobind Singh (Guru 1675-1708), the tenth and the last in line of Sikh personal Gurus (ss. 14-29). Built on this foundation, the second part of the narrative traces the accomplishments of the Panth from 1708 to the establishment of Sikh political supremacy in the Punjab under Ranjit Singh at the turn of the nineteenth century (ss. 30-163).

Emanating from a strand in early Sikh literature that dealt with issues such as what it meant to be a Sikh, the nature of a Sikh congregation (*sangat*), the amalgamation of these *sangats* under the banner of the Sikh Panth, and the activities of the leading Sikhs of their times, *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* pioneered a genre of writing that focused on the status and mission of the Panth in the post-Guru period.[2] The tradition of exegesis of the text in a public setting, which started soon after it was committed to writing, continues to date within some groups of the Panth, and four of its printed editions are presently in circulation.[3] Subsequent authors borrowed the title of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* for their texts, and many later scholars have used it to construct their narratives of eighteenth-century Sikh history, examine concepts such as Sikh sovereignty and martyrdom, and have analyzed its contents to establish its significance within Sikh literature (see Bibliography).[4]

It is fair to claim that *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* has attracted more extensive attention both among *taksali* scholars (educated in the *taksals*, indigenous Sikh schools of education in the Punjab) as well as university-based academics in the past century than any other early Sikh historical document, and it seems reasonable to assume that the information pertaining to its text, the milieu of its making, and its place within Sikh literature would be firmly established.[5] An examination of these issues could then offer a useful case study in which one could assemble basic facts about an authoritative Sikh text, scrutinize the nature of wisdom that has gathered around it, assess the way its contents have been incorporated within current scholarship, and reflect on the implications of these details for the overall field of Sikh studies.

Working along these lines, this essay is divided into three sections. I begin by shoring up the important details of the prevailing wisdom about *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*. In the second section, I briefly comment on four issues: the accuracy of its printed text; its assigned date of compilation; its author's credentials; and its use in Sikh scholarship. In the last section, I attempt to flesh out the significance of the text as a source of Sikh history. In a brief conclusion, I assess the light that the above discussion sheds on the state of the field of Sikh studies at the turn of the twenty-first century. The select bibliography at the end lists ten manuscripts of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (two new ones and eight others that have been referred to in existing scholarly writings), and a bibliography of the editions and scholarly writings available on the text, respectively.

The Received Wisdom

Vir Singh (1872-1957), a major literary figure of his times, was instrumental in defining the parameters of scholarly discussion on *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*. His edition, first published in 1914 and then revised in 1939, was replicated in the ones released in 1984 and 2000. The recent edition appearing in 2004, however, has a larger base that includes Vir Singh's text and information from two manuscripts presently available at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (MS 276) and Panjab University, Chandigarh (MS 797), respectively. In the process, Balwant Singh Dhillon, its editor, also added an extensive apparatus with meanings of difficult words, explanations of people, places, and mythological allusions. The result is an extremely helpful and reader-friendly text.

Regarding the information on the composition of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, the text contains details about the author as well as the time of its composition.[6] The Bhangu family story begins with Maihtab Singh of Mirankot, who assassinated

Massa Ranghar, a Hindu Rajput administrator working for the Mughals, for defiling Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, in 1740 (s. 92). Maihtab Singh was eventually captured and executed in Lahore. His son, Rai Singh (d. 1810), overcame the Mughal pressure on the family and eventually emerged as a leader in his own right, married the daughter of Sham Singh (d. 1739), the founder of the Sikh detachment that later came to be known as the Karor Singhia Misal, and the couple had four sons, among whom Rattan was the third in line (s. 156).[7] Bhangu's year of birth is placed around 1785, and we know that he died in 1846.[8]

Sri Gur Panth Prakash also offers information about the impetus for its own creation (ss. 1-2). It reports that during one of his trips to Ludhiana from his four-village estate centered at Bharhi some twenty-five miles away, Bhangu heard that Bute Shah, a local scholar cum scribe (*munshi*), was commissioned by the East India Company officials to write Sikh history. He was dismayed to consider how someone who had no direct access to sources of information for writing Sikh history and might not even have the requisite sympathy for the subject could accomplish this task. He shared his concerns with Captain William Murray (1791-1831), who was the public face of the local army chief, Colonel David Ochterlony (1758-1825; *jarnail ahe tha mali kaptan, jih janat hai bahut jahan*, s. 2:10). Murray agreed to listen to Bhangu's version of Sikh history, and it seems that the two had several sittings discussing this subject beginning around 1809.

Despite this information on the context and the time of composition of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, Vir Singh went on to propose that Bhangu had kept on working on his creation for thirty some years and had brought it to its completion in 1841. He based his identification of this specific year on a verse that supposedly appears in the concluding section of the text and reads: *bikram basu grahi ahi sasi bitat bhai su sal* (s. 163:13). Vir Singh explained the opening segment (*basu grahi ahi sasi*) in terms of eight gods (*basu*), nine planets (*grahi*), eight precious stones (*ahi*), and one moon (*sasi*). He then reversed the sequence of 8981 to generate 1898, and declared this to be the Samat (Indian lunar year corresponding to 1841 CE) of the completion of the text. This cryptic way of recording the date does appear in the colophons of few eighteenth-century manuscripts, but is certainly not a routine feature of dating early Sikh manuscripts.[9] In any case, Vir Singh's interpretation of this verse was accepted as the authoritative judgment, and the year of the completion of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* was fixed as 1841. This came two years after the death of Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), the most powerful leader to appear in Sikh history, and provided the context for the interpretation of its message.

Vir Singh also considered *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* to be an indispensible source of Sikh history, and those who followed him endorsed his judgment whole-

heartedly. Its contents have been put to effective use to construct the period of the rise and fall of Banda Singh's leadership (d. 1716), the emergence of Sikh detachments (*misals*) in the mid-eighteenth century, and for commenting on the concerns of the Panth following the death of Ranjit Singh. Santa Singh (1928-2008), a *taksali* scholar and a political leader of considerable weight, thought the text important enough to call for the creation of an audio-commentary for circulation within the Panth, and Surjit Singh Hans, a university-based Sikh historian, registered his admiration for the text and its writer by declaring Bhangu to be a "great historian," in whose hands "Sikh historiography" reached a "ripe maturity."[10]

Revisiting This Wisdom

Vir Singh's revised edition of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* is presently in its eighth reprint and continues to be the most popular text. In his doctoral thesis completed in 1990, Harinder Singh examined Vir Singh's method of establishing the printed text. Being the only scholarly writing to have dealt with an issue of such fundamental importance, his work deserves attention. His thesis is divided in two parts. The first section (1) traces sociocultural developments in the Punjab around 1900, (2) introduces Vir Singh's contribution to Sikh literature, and (3) details his process of editing *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*. The second section on editing brings into focus the differences between the versions of the text appearing in its manuscripts and their reincarnation in print form. Harinder Singh points to both stylistic and substantive variations between the two. The latter category includes deletion of the passages that were related to "Hindu gods and goddesses," sanitization of the mythological associations with the Gurus, and the replacement of the term "Hindu" with "Sikh." He connects these changes to Vir Singh's belief that "Sikhs" were a community distinct from the "Hindus," which he argues was not prevalent in Bhangu's times but had developed only in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.[11]

The second section of the thesis contains a reproduction of Vir Singh's text along with extensive footnotes cataloguing his deletions, additions, and modifications of the original text. This extensive apparatus is culled from the information available in three manuscripts of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*: MS 276, MS 797, and one in the private custody of the Rarewala family (see Bibliography). The changes shown here are presented as evidence to support the author's contention that Vir Singh harmonized the text with Sikh thinking of 1900.

The author's argument that Bhangu and the Sikhs of his time saw the Panth as part of the Hindu fold and his broader understanding of Sikh history around 1900 are questionable, but that is not our primary concern.[12] For us, the real value of

Harinder Singh's work lies in the light it sheds on Vir Singh's understanding of his editorial entitlements and, even more important, the fact that this edition of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, which is the basis of all subsequent printed versions, does not follow the original and thus cannot serve as a dependable source for scholars interested in a close reading of this document.

Dhillon's edition of 2004 incorporates Harinder Singh's editorial apparatus and comes up with a conflated text containing numerous additions and modifications to Vir Singh's text. Although a seemingly complete and thus more impressive text than the earlier editions, it does not adhere to the basic criterion of textual scholarship in which one establishes the original text on the basis of the earliest available manuscript and then notes the variants developed in subsequent versions to help the reader understand the later changes. It is thus fair to claim that all the existing editions of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* are helpful in their own specific ways, but none of them follows strictly what one could consider the textual approach expected of a critical edition.

Let me illustrate this with reference to the opening and closing sakhis of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* as they appear in the above editions. The details of the opening section with 32 verses are as follows.

Editor	Title	First Sakhi
Vir Singh	*Prachin Panth Prakash*	*khalse ji ki adi utapati ki sakhi*
J.S.Sital	*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*	*khalse ji ki adi utapati ki sakhi*
Santa Singh	*Prachin Panth Prakash*	*khalse ji ki adi utapati ki sakhi*
H. Singh	*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*	*khalse ji ki adi utapati ki sakhi*
B.S. Dhillon	*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*	*sakhi sri khalse ki utopati ki*

*Prachin Panth Prakash appears on the title pages, but both these texts open with "*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*." The word "*utapati*" also appears as "*utopati*."

In the extant manuscripts (for MS1 and MS2 introduced here, see Bibliography) these details appear as follows:

MS	Title	First Sakhi	Verses
MS 1	*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*	*sri khalse ki utpati ki uthanko ka prasang turio*	34

MS 2	*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*	*sri khalse ki utpati ki*	
		uthanko ka prasang turio	34
MS 797	*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*	*sri khalse ki utpati ki*	
		uthanko ka prasang turio	34
MS 276	*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*	*sri khalse ki utopati ki*	
		uthanko ka prasang turio	32

Three observations are in order. First, the entries above confirm the title of the text to be *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*. The significance of "Sri" in the eighteenth-century texts is yet to be fleshed out, but here it may suffice to emphasize that this title appears consistently in the manuscripts and the text cannot be arbitrarily entitled *Prachin Panth Prakash* or *Gur Panth Prakash*, as many others have done in their writings.[13]

Second, the substitution for the "Section on the origin of the Khalsa begins" (*sri khalse ki utpati ki uthanko ka prasang turio*) with the "Story of the origin of the Khalsa" (*khalse ji ki adi utopati ki sakhi*) misses the distinction between a sakhi (story or episode) and a *parsang* (section), which seems to have implications for establishing breaks within the text. Dhillon counts the total number of sakhis in his text as 163, Sital as 170, and Vir Singh as 199; the other two do not include a table of contents or number the sakhis providing their understanding of this issue. The "100" at the closing in the earliest extant manuscript seem to mark the original numbering of total sakhis (see below MS 1).
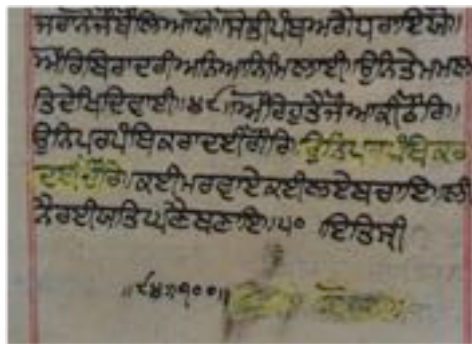
MS 1, f. 414

A look at the contents of the opening section also offers interesting results. Following Harinder Singh's text, Dhillon's edition replaces the first verse available in Vir Singh's edition with the one that appears in the manuscripts, but the rest of the text is reproduced without any change. The table below shows that the situation

in the manuscripts goes beyond the variant reading at the opening verse. Instead of thirty-two verses available in all the printed texts, this sakhi in the three manuscript versions contains the numbering of thirty-four verses.

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Editions   1-32
MS 1       1-34    1-16, blank left for 17, 18-19, blank left for 20, 21-34
MS 2       1-34    1-16, 17 *(addition 1), 18-19, 20 **(addition 2), 21-34
MS 797     1-34    1-16, blank left for 17, 18-19, blank left for 20, 21-34
MS 276     1-32    Blank spaces are collapsed and their numbers deleted
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*1: *so britant sunahu tum sabh man lai, jaki mahima amu vadiai* /17/
**2 reads: *aisi rit Gura ne dhari Turkan ki jar Guru ukhari* /20/
These details although limited in scope help us understand the problems of precision in the existing printed text as well as the history of the early manuscripts.

For instance, the internal evidence within the text of MS 1 raises the possibility of its being the original manuscript that could have been created by the author himself (see the detailed note in Bibliography).
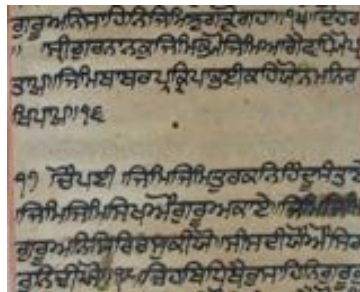
MS 1, f. 2

And there is basis to assume that two distinct lines emerged from it. MS 797 and MS 276 constituted the first, and MS 2 belonged to the second. The scribe of MS 797 followed the original text, left the blank spaces intact, but the scribe of MS 276, copying directly from MS1 or MS 797 or some other source at his disposal collapsed the gaps, recorded the thirty-two available verses, and numbered them accordingly.

MS 797, f. 2

MS 276, f. 2

The scribe of MS 2, however, filled these blanks and completed the sequence of thirty-four verses. It is hard to know whether he was more enterprising than the others and dug out these verses from some other source and inserted them in the blank spaces, or he followed a different line of manuscripts of the text that already carried the complete text.

MS 2, f. 2

The fact stands that by 1842 the opening sakhi of the text carried thirty-four verses in one of the lines of its manuscripts, and for some inexplicable reason, these two

verses are not available in any of the printed editions. Though scanty, the information above provides us a window into the genealogy of manuscripts of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*.[14]

A brief look at the concluding section, entitled "The Revising [of the Text] in a House [in the Precinct of the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar]" (*bunge sudhare ka prasang*), further adds to this type of textual variants between the manuscripts as well as between the manuscripts and the printed editions. In the editions of Vir Singh and Dhillon, this section contains nineteen and fourteen verses, respectively. The opening sequence of fourteen verses common to both these editions appears in the extant manuscripts as follows:

MS 1   The section is absent
MS 2   10 verses (1 to 7 are present; 8 to 11 are absent; and 12 to 14
                          are recorded and numbered as 8 to 10, f. 380)
MS 797   10 verses (1 to 7 are present; 8 to 11 are absent; and 12 to 14
                          are recorded and numbered as 8 to 10, f. 247)
MS 276   10 verses (1 to 7 are present but 8 to 14 are absent, f. 331).
                          Its last folio is lost, so no clear assessment
                          can be made.

The absence of this section in MS 1 points toward its being appended to the original text later. In MS 2 and MS 797 above, it is composed of ten verses, which expanded further in the sources that served as the sources for the printed editions carrying fourteen and nineteen verses.

The verse on which Vir Singh based his dating of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* in 1841 is numbered 9 in the manuscripts above and 13 in the printed versions. This provides us the opportunity to examine the dating of the text. One can begin this discussion by reiterating the fact that this sakhi and, as a result, the verse in question does not appear in MS 1. A close look at the verse presents interesting results. As it stands, it is rather inexplicable. The author made a great effort to generate this cryptic way of recording the year of completion of the text but did not see the need to give details of the month and the day, which is a routine part of this type of notation. A later colophon that follows this verse in Vir Singh's edition announces that the copying was completed on "the evening of Tuesday, Chet 2, Samat 1915" (1858 CE).[15]

When subjected to close scrutiny, Vir Singh's interpretation shows further cracks. Translated literally, the words do not generate the date he assigned to them. Taken in its entirety, the verse literally means that "1898 good years have passed"

(*bikram basu grahi ahi sasi, bitat bhai so sal*, s. 163:13), which implies that Samat 1899 (April 1842-March 1843) is underway when the text was completed. And this date does not jibe with the colophon present in MS 2, which records the text was prepared between February 26 and March 26, 1842 (*Dial Singh ne likhi pothi. Phagan chi pothi likhi si sial vich sampuran hoi hai ji* 1898).
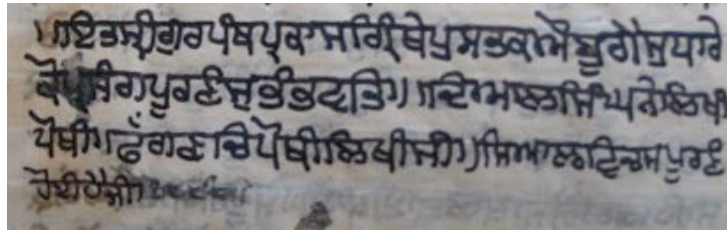

MS2, f. 380

The writing of MS 2 thus precedes to the date of the original text as deciphered by Vir Singh (April 1842-March 1843). Furthermore, no matter what year we cull from the words under discussion here, the number here does not connect with the verse that follows: "reciting there [the text] daily [we] were ecstatic" (*path krote nit tahan rahe nihal nihal*).

The only option left for us, then, is to have a careful look at this verse in MS 2 (f. 381) and MS 797 (f. 247). This effort brings forth interesting results. In both these texts, the verse reads: *bikram baras grahi ahis s[h]i bitat bhai su sal*, which would translate into "many years passed this way at the home [of the author]," which then smoothly runs into the next verse that reports of "having great fun with its daily recitations there" (*path krote nit tahan rahe nihal nihal*).[16]
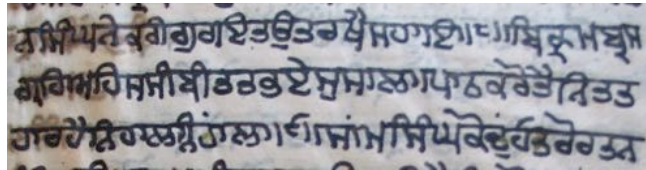
MS 2, f. 380
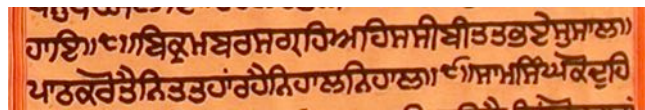
MS 797, f. 248

There is thus no basis in the existing manuscripts for a conclusion of 1841 as the date of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*'s compilation, and I suggest that we abandon this century-old wisdom. It is, however, hard to avoid the historiographical question: why has no scholar to date felt the need to look into Vir Singh's dating? Even Harinder Singh, who is extremely critical of Vir Singh's editing, did not notice this detail and its implications. Was it the stature of Vir Singh in the field that stopped others to question his judgment? Answer to the question is necessary.

In any case, the key issue of the date of compilation of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* needs to be addressed. With the earliest extant dated manuscripts compiled in early 1842, the documentary evidence at our disposal confirms that it was written before that year. The availability of ten manuscripts (see Bibliography), however, point to a period of some length for their copying. We know that the activity of manuscript creation had largely come to a close with the printing press taking over the production of texts from the late 1860s onward, and it would be unusual for a text completed in the early 1840s to generate a large corpus of manuscripts in the next two decades or so, of which ten were extant until mid-twentieth century, and five are presently accessible.

The information provided by Bhangu about the text's creation is significant (s. 1, *parsang* 2). As mentioned earlier, he reports that he narrated the original version of this account to Captain Murray, who worked for Colonel Ochterlony, the chief overseer of the military affairs related to the Punjab from January 1809 to October 1814.[17] He also mentions being shown some version of Bute Shah's writing before starting on his own project (*uska likia hame dikhiao*, s. 2:6). This explanation of the context of the composition of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* fits with the Company officials' effort to gather information about the beliefs and aspirations of the powerful regional groups from the mid-1760s onward.[18]

The creation of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* thus occurred within the same setting that gave rise to Bakhat Mal's *Khalsanama* (1807), Bute Shah's *Tvarikhe Punjab* (1809), Khushwaqt Rai's *Tarikhe-i Ahwal-i Sikhan* (1811), and Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* (1812).[19] It is fair to assume that Bhangu created his work after Bute Shah's opening section (*daftar*) was completed, and it came to closure before Colonel Ochterlony's departure from the Punjab in late 1814. This period would explain his reference to the incursion of the Khalsa army (*fauj*) under Ranjit Singh into the cis-Satluj area in 1807, as well as a complete absence of any mention of his activities afterward. [20]

At this time, Ranjit Singh was "The Raja of Lahore," the title that appears on the treaty he signed with the Company officials in 1809, and was beginning to climb

toward the pinnacles of glory that he ascended in the decades that followed.[21] Bhangu associates him with Gurbaksh Singh, who had fought and died to protect the sanctity of the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar; he envisions his emergence as the leader of the Panth and expects him to fulfill the dream of establishing Sikh sovereignty over the Punjab. [22]

It is also interesting that Bhangu narrates how Nadir Shah took the Mughal throne and the Kohinoor (*takhat-i-tausi nou kota joau . . . ik hira tha pandavan vala*, s. 89:25), two symbols of Mughal sovereignty, to Iran. He had no doubt that the loss of the Mughals' political power was part of the divine retribution for their unjust rule. Yet, he makes no reference to the arrival of Kohinoor in the treasury of Ranjit Singh in June 1813. It is difficult to believe that Bhangu did not know about this unique Sikh acquisition, or that he knew but did not see the need to mention it in his narrative.[23] Given the tenor of Bhangu's thinking, one cannot help but argue that he would have seen the arrival of Kohinoor in the Khalsa Darbar at Lahore as a divine sign confirming Sikh legitimacy as heirs of the Mughals.

In the absence of any dated manuscript of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* prior to 1842, however, it is hard to fix the time of completion of the text with absolute certainty, but the period between the years 1810 and 1813 seems to make the most sense for the text's creation, which would also explain the multiplication of its copies in the subsequent half century or so. In addition, this dating would offer a reasonable explanation for Bhangu's silence on the rise of the Khalsa Raj under the leadership of Ranjit Singh.

As for the life of the author of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, in 1984 Jit Singh Sital proposed the year of his birth in the mid-1780s, and this date became the authoritative judgment on this important issue. However, there are three basic problems with this dating. First and most important, Sital provides us no source for this information. Second, it is hard to envision Bhangu writing the type of text he did while in his mid- to late twenties. Finally, this date does not jibe with the few details we have of his family. For instance, we know the years of death of his paternal and maternal grandfathers Maihtab Singh (1745) and Sham Singh (1739), which implies that his parents were born in the 1730s, if not earlier. If that is so, it is strange to imagine the birth of their third child in the mid-1780s, and one more following him afterward. Given this context, it seems more appropriate to fix Rattan Singh's birth in the middle years of the third quarter of the eighteenth century.[24]

The text of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* makes it clear that its author was a person of considerable learning with access to wide range of Sikh sources, which included the Guru Granth and historical documents ranging from the *Puratan Janam Sakhi* (1580s), Gurdas Bhalla's *Vars* (pre-1630), Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha* (pre-1710),

and Sukha Singh's *Sri Gur Bilas* (1797).[25] He also refers to his access to non-Sikh documents, some of which were written in "Sanskrit, Bhakha, and Farsi."[26]

He mentions various groups of people that provided him the required information before or during preparation of his text (ss. 68:25; 75:2; 98:1; 100:24). These included "the old and wise people," who had "firsthand" experience of the happenings they narrated, and others who had only heard about the details of the events that they shared with him. He also refers to his parents as his source of information,[27] and his own intuition or experience (*anubhav*) shaping his understanding of the developments presented in *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*.

Bhangu's concerns regarding Bute Shah's limitation in accessing sources of Sikh history as well as the absence of sympathy on his part in dealing with the subject, his awareness of Murray's interest in historical chronology (*raj malayo Singhan jim sabh bhanti likhao sal*, s. 2:22), his interest in the context (*kaun sal au kali kaun desh aur thai*, s. 4:1) and in the fact that the readers or the listeners would use their own judiciousness in sifting the truth in his narrative (*sach jhuth kar lahu niara*, s. 2:20) put him far ahead of his times on the issue of how history could and should be written.[28]

The text under discussion thus is the creation of a substantial figure with a considerable family and cultural capital, who had acquired the best that the late eighteenth-century education in the Punjab had to offer, and who felt obligated to inform the East India Company officials of an accurate account of the history of the Panth.[29] As a self-appointed spokesperson of the Panth, he discussed these issues with Captain Murray and then committed them to writing (*jihi bidhi kahi Angrezani sangi, rakhon uthanaka soi prasang*, s. 1:3) for the use of fellow Sikhs.[30] The title *Sri Guru Panth*, the divisions of the narrative into the sakhis, the medium of poetry with the use of *dohras* and *chaupis*—all are firmly rooted in the Sikh religious and literary ethos.[31] Its public recitation started in his lifetime (*path krote niti tahan rahe nihal nihal*, s. 163:13) and continues until today.

The previous generation of scholars has made use of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* in their writings, but the absence of a critical edition and the dating of the text in 1841 have curtailed their efforts to some degree. Writing in 1975, Hans, a great admirer of the text, translated verses 8 to 11 from the concluding section in Vir Singh's edition, and built on them what he thought to be the primary purpose of Bhangu's writing.
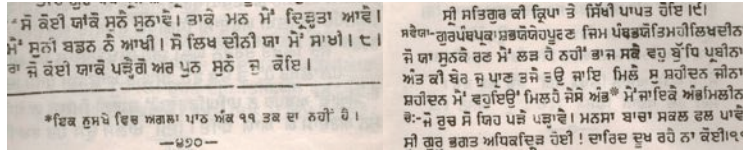
> He who reads and listens to the book
>> will be filled with militant determination
> I have completed the *Panth Parkash* and written of the Panth
>> along the lines it developed
> Having listened to this, any, who fights in the battlefield,
>> will be too enlightened to run away
> He will join the company of martyrs as indistinguishably
>> as a bubble is lost in water

For Hans, Bhangu wanted the Sikhs to believe that "they can get what they like if they stake their heads for the Guru;" they ought to be "in a state of alert for the impending emergency," and as a result the text "is less of a history of the Sikhs and more of an exhortation to make supreme sacrifice with typical Sikh abandon."[32] This interpretation served as the basis for other scholars who wrote on Bhangu.[33]

The fact stands that the verses Hans quotes above are not present in any of the manuscripts of the text mentioned earlier. Vir Singh actually notes that these four verses are not available in "one" of the two manuscripts at his disposal (see the picture above). When and how these verses entered the text of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* is a separate issue, and it should suffice to point out that these are not available in the early manuscripts and at this point in our knowledge there is no evidence to attribute them to Bhangu.[34]

The interpretation of Bhangu's text during the past century was thus based on a text that was problematic, and it was framed within the context of its having been completed in 1841. The assumptions on which most historians worked were twofold: Ranjit Singh's rule helped the Sikh concept of sovereignty to evolve, and the chaotic circumstances that followed his death created a situation in which people like Bhangu evoked the tradition of martyrdom to inspire their fellow Sikhs to defend their right to rule as well as to urge the East India Company officials to leave the affairs of the Sikh court at Lahore alone.

The revised dating of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* calls for an altogether different context of Bhangu's understanding of Sikh sovereignty. In my view, it is not the anxiety of the post-Ranjit Singh years, but the excitement of its opening decades of the nineteenth century with Sikh saffron flags (*nishan/jhanda*) fluttering everywhere

in the region that underlies the author's vision.[35] Bhangu seems to intuitively feel that the time for the realization of the blessing of Baba Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh had come, and his narrative carries a prophetic dimension, the details of which would unfold in Sikh successes under the leadership of Ranjit Singh in subsequent decades.

Looking Ahead

Agreeing with the existing scholarly consensus that *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* is a major source of Sikh history, I believe that it is time for a fresh look at its significance. We can do so in three stages. In the first, we assess Bhangu's treatment of the early Panth, which he presents as having been founded by Baba Nanak, nursed by his eight successors, and assigned a special status and mission by Guru Gobind Singh. In the second, we will comment on his narrative from around 1710-1750, and lastly we would look at his rendering of Sikh history from 1750 to the writing of his text. Unlike his predecessors and contemporaries, Bhangu's focus is on the post-Guru period of the Panth.[36]

   In this framework of thinking, Bhangu's presentation of the Guru period in *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* is brief (ss. 1-30 of the total of 163), and its importance does not lie in what he reports but how he gathers his information. He bases his account on the early Sikh texts and in the process offers useful data about the sources at his disposal. For instance, he refers to Baba Nanak's compositions, takes details about his life from the text we now know as the *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, and even suggests the reader consult this document for additional information if interested (*janam sakhi puratanai dekho jisai hoi chahi*, s. 4:45).[37] Bhangu's presentation of Baba Nanak's life also indicates that he had access to the literary corpus now known as the *Miharban Janam Sakhi* (s. 3) and the *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala* (s. 4).
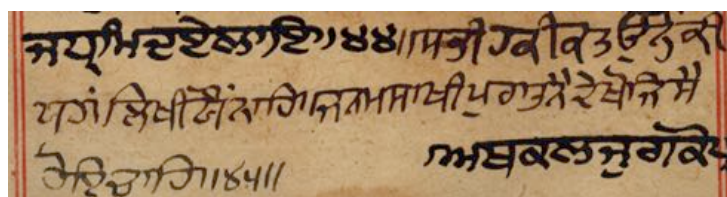
MS 1, f. 14

For the later Gurus, he refers to the writings of Gurdas Bhalla (*Bhai Gurdas tin bachan uchare, Gur sang bratavai Sikh sidaq na hare*, s. 76:12), Guru Gobind Singh's *Japu* (s. 16:16), *Akal Ustat* (s. 16:10), 32 *Svayyie* (ss. 16:9; 88:8-9), *Khial* (s. 14), and *Zafarnama* (s. 58.2: 58-59), and a set of late seventeenth-century compositions, including *Apanhi Katha* (ss. 13 and 16), *Chandi di Var* (s. 16:8*)*, and Sainapati's *Sri Gur Sobha*, completed around 1708 (s. 26:2). His primary source for Guru Gobind Singh's life is Sukha Singh's *Sri Gur Bilas*.[38]

In addition, Bhangu's references to these sources reflect an interesting hierarchy of their use within the Panth around 1800. While he considers the "old" *Janam Sakhi* (*puratanai*) as the authoritative document for Baba Nanak's life, he is aware that the *Miharban Janam Sakhi* and the *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala* were created by groups with whom the mainstream Panth is not to have any interaction (*minhe masandan bartiyo nahi*, ss. 16:13; 58.2: 62; 76:5)*.* He is particularly harsh in condemning Baba Hindal and his followers, who compiled the *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala* (ss. 79:11, 34 and 40). Yet we see the miraculous happenings associated with Baba Nanak in both these schismatic narratives quietly spilling into his own story. The manuscripts at our disposal provide a backdrop to understanding how these stories were melting into each other. Among these, one detects a clear popularity within the Panth for the *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, an increasing acceptance of the *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala*, and a somewhat tenuous survival of the Miharban corpus around 1800.[39]

A different set of issues surfaces in relation to the period of Guru Gobind Singh. Although he directly quotes from the compositions such as *Apanhi Katha*, *Khial*, and *Zafarnama*, he does not mention the text that later emerged as the *Dasven Patishah ka Granth*, and came to be known as the *Dasam Granth* beginning in 1900.[40] His references to the authority of Sukha Singh's *Sri Gur Bilas* parallel those of the *Puratan Janam Sakhi* and Baba Nanak. In current scholarship, the text is believed to have been completed in 1797 at Anandpur, but its prominent appearance in *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* raises questions about the year of its origin.

Three issues are involved in Bhangu's rendering of the tenth Guru's life. First, how does one explain the popularity of Sukha Singh's *Sri Gur Bilas* within the Panth in a decade or so from its creation in 1797? Second, how do we understand the authority Bhangu assigns to this text within the context of his categorical denunciation of the Sodhis of Anandpur under whose auspices it was compiled (s. 71)? Finally, what sense can we make of Bhangu's complete silence about Kuir Singh's *Sri Gur Bilas*, which is presently dated in 1751?[41]

His narrative of the eighteenth century is situated against the backdrop of his belief that Guru Gobind Singh elevated the Sikhs to rule the land of the central

Punjab (*majha*), and no impediment could prevent them from realizing this mission (*hazuron patshahi Khalsai dai*, s. 29:27). For Bhangu, given Guru Gobind Singh's blessings, Banda Singh captured Sirhind and was all set to establish the Khalsa Raj. The unity between Baba Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh that reflected on the legend of the Sikh coins of this period—"Coin struck in both worlds, [under] Nanak's sword's guarantee/ Victory of Gobind Singh, king of kings, [achieved under] the God's grace"—reverberates firmly in Bhangu's narrative.[42] For him, the story of the Panth that started with Baba Nanak is reaching its fruition with the Sikhs taking over both the spiritual and temporal responsibilities (*din* and *dunia*).

Banda Singh's effort, however, collapsed, and Bhangu finds this hard to explain. His way out of this dilemma is to relate this development in terms of Banda Singh's personal lapses, which ranged from his not showing respect to "Mata Ji," the wife of the tenth Guru, to his moral infringements. Bhangu's narrative of the first half of the eighteenth century is thus based on secondhand accounts, and reflects his interpretation of how and why these events unfolded the way they did.

Once we reach Bhangu's description of the post-1750 period, the significance of his account is of much higher order. Here his parents and their peers were the makers of Sikh history, and he himself an eyewitness to the events of the time. We have no reason to question his claims to this effect, and many of these observations appear in writing for the first time in Sikh literature. Given his range of interest in the affairs of the Panth, he is able to present a thick-textured account of Sikh religious, political, and social life of the period as he saw it.

First and most important, Bhangu confirms Sikh belief of his time that Guru Gobind Singh formally transferred his personal authority to the Panth, and hence the title of his text "The Rise of *Sri Gur Panth*."[43] For him, the antecedents of this decision could be seen in the position of the *sangat* in early Sikh history.[44] Once Guru Gobind Singh took the nectar of the double-edged sword (*khande di pahul*) from the "five Singhs" (*panj bhujangi jo bhae Gur unte pahul line*, s. 16: 20), it made him part of the community, and his authority was formally passed on to the Khalsa Panth.[45]

In addition, Bhangu emphasizes the continuation of the Guru Granth as the heart of Sikh religious life of his time and anyone interested in finding the Sikh beliefs should read its text (*kichhaku bahv gur sabad bichar, kahon dekh Sri Granth majhar*, s. 5:2). His primary interest in the Guru Granth is in institutional terms. The text enjoyed the central authority within the Panth, and Bhangu put his categorical support behind the belief that no one can tinker with its contents, regardless of his stature within the Panth (s. 88:11-12).[46] Sikh places of worship were the houses of the Guru Granth (*gurdwara*). The text was placed on a cot on a high platform,

covered in expensive cloth, and a canopy put above it.[47] As the authority within the Panth, the text of the Guru Granth accompanied Sikhs in battles (*tin main Granth turat thai doi, ik Amritsariai Damdamai joi*, s. 132:111), and Bhangu mentions Lakhpat Rai, a Hindu Rajput working for the Afghan administration, making efforts to destroy the manuscripts of the Guru Granth.[48]

Bhangu reports that the formal Sikh devotional life of the period comprised four layers: the recitation of the contents of the Guru Granth (*Guru Granth banhi parhi Guru Nanak pag dhar dhain*, s. 152:37), addressing supplication to it (*parhai banhi ardaso karai*, s. 68:3), taking *vak* ("uttering," *Sri gurvak un pai furmaia*, s. 151:18), which meant opening the text and reading a composition on the top left-hand corner and considering that as the divine answer to the supplication offered earlier, and the distribution of the blessed food (*karhah vartiyo kar ardas*, s. 120:89)The recitation of the contents of the Guru Granth was an essential part of Sikh religious life from the early period in Sikh history, and we have evidence that uninterrupted reading of the text (*akhand path*) was performed in the 1790s.[49]

Bhangu offers interesting observations about the institution of "supplication" (*ardas*) as it unfolded during his time. The term appears in the writings of Baba Nanak, and it is certain that this practice started at the very founding of the Panth.[50] By 1700, we have references to a person whose duty was to perform *ardas* (*ardasia*), and Bhangu reports such pictorial details as to how this person stood and performed it with folded hands (*ja ardasian kari ardas, hath jorh kharh hazuri pass*, s. 58:9). In his narrative, he alludes to the actual text of the *ardas* performed at two points. The first reports Guru Gobind Singh's using the opening lines of the *Chandi di Var* to invoke help from his predecessors, and the second refers to Sikhs' supplication to die with their long hair intact (*Satguru sikhi sang nibhai sis kesan ke sath*, s. 152:48).[51] As for as I know, this is the first reference of this kind in Sikh writings.

His description of the role of *vak* from the Guru Granth is woven into a fascinating narration of one of the sunset prayer sessions at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, in 1861. The Sikh leaders have dips in the holy pool, gather in the presence of the Guru Granth, touch their foreheads in front of it before sitting, listen to the evening prayers (*rahiras*), and then do their *ardas*. After the prayer service, a Brahman from Kasur makes an appeal: the local commander has taken his wife away and the Sikh leadership is his only source of help. In response to the request, the leaders return to the presence of the Guru Granth offer another *ardas*, and the Sikh sitting in attendance with the text reads the *vak*.

Bhangu quotes Guru Arjan's *Var* to have appeared as the *vak*.[52] Its content was interpreted as a signal for the Sikhs to attack Kasur. This was part of their duty to

help the hapless and have the Brahman's wife released from the custody of a tyrant in accordance to their beliefs in divine justice (s. 138:1-29). Here, then, is the meeting of the Guru Panth in the presence of the Guru Granth at the holiest Sikh site of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. Bhangu refers to another incident where an *ardas* was performed and the *vak* came from Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani* (*Sri Granth vak un phurmaya, huto ju madh Sukhmani dharaya*, s. 150:18). The depth of the collective Sikh remembrance of these public supplications and the divine replies that came in response to them reflect the harmony between the beliefs and actions of the Guru Panth.

As for the content of Sikh religious beliefs, Bhangu is not interested in giving us a catalogue of normative beliefs but rather shows them practiced among the Sikhs of his time. This brings the Sikh code of conduct and belief to focus (*aur rahit jo Satigur kahi, usi rahit so rahita vahi*, s. 58.2:62), and he presents it at the personal level (for a model Sikh male, see s. 76:1-4; and a model Sikh female, see s. 85:1-10), as well as the collective level.[53]

The rise of the Panth's political power during Bhangu's lifetime resulted in the building of Sikh places of worship. Bhangu provides an account of the building of the gurdwara at the site where the Mughal commander of Sirhind had beheaded the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh. After the Sikh capture of the town in the early 1760s, its older residents were gathered to find the precise location of the happening (*bridh purash uhan puchh bulae, asthan pate un sabhai batae*, s. 148:4). The site having been marked, Sikh flags and war drums were planted there (*jhande gaddo au nagare dharao, bahao Singh ehan puj karao*, s. 148:19). The next morning, a platform was built, and a text of the Guru Granth covered in cloth with a canopy above it and five weapons in front of it was ceremonially placed there (s. 148:20-21). A Sikh was appointed to take care of the text and the site, and a land grant was assigned for its maintenance (s. 148:22-25).

For Bhangu, the political mission of the Panth has been an indivisible part of its thinking since its very inception.[54] He builds on the belief prevalent among mid-sixteenth-century Sikhs that Baba Nanak was the "master of both the spiritual and the temporal matters (*din duni sacho patishah*), but in his grace he gave the political power to Mir Babur (1483-1530), the founder of the Mughal dynasty."[55] Three generations afterward, Babur's descendants began to misuse their power and eventually forfeited their right to rule. The martyrdom of Guru Arjan (1606) and Guru Tegh Bahadur (1675) provided the concrete instances of this failure.

As a result of Mughal injustice, Guru Gobind Singh decided to "destroy them and elevate the Sikhs" to the position of power.[56] The Sikhs were then turned into Singhs, assigned a visible identity, and the mission to struggle against injustice.[57]

For Bhangu, the Guru was the ruler of the Anandpur area in the 1690s (s. 18), and even after the fall of the town, he kept his regal status and traveled like a king (*baje nagare jhulahin nishan parhahai banhia kis karain na kanh*, s. 26:2).[58] During his lifetime, he blessed the Panth to rule over the central Punjab.[59]

Reiterating Baba Nanak's status as the temporal and spiritual head of the Panth, Guru Gobind Singh elevated the Sikhs to the level of the rulers (*rajas*). The Panth was to bring divine justice to the earth and its members were not to accept any authority except that of the Divine.[60] In line with the literature and the ideas popular at Anandpur, Bhangu is convinced that it was the turn of the Sikhs to rule, and any disturbance in this scheme would be an infringement of the divine design. The milestones on this path to Sikh power included their arrival in Delhi, their imposition of revenue on its residents, and using this collection to build the gurdwaras in the early 1780s (ss. 156-158).[61]

Sikh sacrifice was part of the narrative of bringing divine rule on earth (*Vahiguru ji ki fateh*), and Guru Gobind Singh himself provided the model for this (*Sikhan kaj su Guru hamare, sis dio nij sanh parvare*, s. 101:27). Bhangu describes the scene of Sikh prisoners being taken through the streets of Delhi (s. 62:16-19), Mani Singh's death (s. 88:57-59), and that of many others including his own grandfather, Maihtab Singh, to show this struggle. In the process, he underlines the Sikh ability to withstand physical pain while reciting their sacred compositions from the Guru Granth.[62] They had the obligation to claim the Panth's right to rule over the land as blessed by their Gurus.[63]

Bhangu also provides us a good sense of the social makeup of the Panth around 1800. He is understandably focused on presenting the mainstream activities, but in the process refers to divisions within Sikh society. He registers the continuation of the fissures that had developed during the Guru period (Mine, Dhirmalie, Ramraie, Hindalie) and also introduces the ones that had surfaced in the later period. These groups include the followers of Banda Singh (ss. 58:2; 69-70); Gulab Rai Sodhi, a cousin of Guru Gobind Singh, who occupied Anandpur after the departure of the Sikhs from there in 1704 (s. 73); and the descendants of Gangu Shah, a Masand in early Sikh history (s. 76-77).[64] The divisions here were based on the recognition of personal authority of these leaders, on the one hand, and the changes they introduced in the conduct of those who looked up to them for guidance, on the other. For instance, Bhangu condemns Banda Singh for tinkering with the Khalsa salutation, wearing red instead of blue, banning the consumption of meat eating, and so on,[65] and Kharak Singh in the line of Gangu Shah for reintroducing the administering of the "nectar of the feet" (*kahio une charan pahul leven*, s. 76:19),

which he sees replaced with the *khande di pahul* in the Panth (*Sikh kahe ham adi pahul khande*, s. 76:20).

He also presents the regional divides within the Panth, which from his point of view had important political overtones. He finds it hard to reconcile with the fact that the cis-Satluj/Malwa chiefs accepted the suzerainty of the East India Company, and emphasizes that the tradition of subservience has been with this branch of leadership since the very beginning of its history. For Bhangu, these people never had loyalty to the Panth (ss. 132:137; 133:20; 134:1) or its mission to establish sovereignty. For him, there is no doubt that the religious center of the Panth is Amritsar, its political power is based in the Khalsa Darbar at Lahore, and the Sikhs of this area reflect the blessings of the tenth Guru.

Bhangu also refers to the divisions within the Panth that were based on the diversity of early social background of the Sikhs (s. 15:22-24). As for the norm, Bhangu is categorical that, having undergone the ceremony of *khande di pahul*, all Sikhs stand on equal footing.[66] The backgrounds of Sikh leaders such as Jat (erstwhile nomads), Khatri (urban upper-caste Hindus), and so on, always appear when they are introduced in Bhangu's narrative. The personal qualities of a leader obviously mattered most, and many prominent ones among them came from the lower castes, but the simple fact of his mentioning these details is noteworthy. The institution of *langar*, the communal sharing of food, was foundational to Sikh society and it was thriving during this period, but the location of erstwhile untouchable caste groups that had joined the Sikh fold is not always clear in his account.[67]

The Panth around 1800 thus comprised people of diverse backgrounds, who all worshiped and followed the Guru Granth, the repository of the divine wisdom revealed to them, believed in the authority of the Guru Panth, and considered the land of central Punjab (*majha*) to be a divine gift for them to rule over (s. 29:17-18). For anyone to speak ill of the Panth raised real fury (*khote bachan vahi mukho uchare, ham jivat vahi Panth dhadhkare*, s. 95:26), and the Sikh enemies were not only restricted to the Mughals and the Afghans, but included Hindu Rajputs such as Massa Ranghar and Lakhpat Rai, who worked for the rulers.

Bhangu's depiction of Sikh society helps us trace the aspiration of the Panth from its start at Kartarpur, crystallization at Anandpur, and evolution during the eighteenth century. Historians have examined this look back into the past with varied degree of success. In my view, however, scholars also need to register that this significant text appears at the cusp of Sikh history, and could be seen as a threshold to understand the Panth's response to the new developments that began to unfold with the arrival of the Europeans around 1800. A number of questions can be

raised, such as which aspects of Sikh religious, political, and social thinking remained intact, which underwent modification/transformations, and which disappeared altogether from the overall framework presented in *Sri Guru Panth Prakash*. I believe that scholarly conversation constructed around these issues would bring a more effective understanding of the developments that unfolded within the Panth in recent times.[68]

Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, it is useful to briefly reflect on the state of current Sikh scholarship. The availability of its several editions, reprints, and audio-commentary indicates that there is interest in reading Sikh texts within the Panth. Scholars who have worked on this document range from Sikh savants such as Vir Singh, a literary giant, and Santa Singh, a political leader of considerable reckoning, to several university-based academicians in the Punjab and the West (see Bibliography), and reflect a wide diversity of training in the field. The enterprise of Sikh history writing at present is thus multilayered and vibrant.

The publishing houses that have produced and sponsored these editions include the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the premier Sikh organization managing historic gurdwaras in the Punjab; a Patiala-based Nihang establishment; "Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan," a Sikh forum in New Delhi; "Fateh," a group of young Sikhs in the United States that was active in the 1990s, and Singh Brothers, a commercial publishing house based in Amritsar. The Institute of Sikh Studies, a Sikh forum in the Chandigarh area sponsored a translation of the text in English.[69] This list reflects the complex and diverse context of the field, which goes beyond the academic concerns generally associated with university-based studies, scholars, and publishing agencies.[70]

Our discussion of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* also points to the critical zones in the field that need addressing. Although four printed editions, two manuscripts of the text (MS 276 and MS 797), a doctoral thesis, and a set of scholarly essays in Punjabi as well as in English are easily obtainable, the issues related to its date of completion, precise contents, and the life story of its author largely remain where Vir Singh left them a century ago. Given the nature of scholarship around this early nineteenth-century text, it is hard to believe that the information pertaining to the documents created in the previous centuries could be any better. I already alluded to the need for revisiting current scholarly understanding of the texts of both Kuir Singh and Sukha Singh in the light of what Bhangu has to say or does not say about them in *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*.

One cannot overemphasize the fact that an effective use of information available in early sources requires a clear understanding of their dating and contexts of their making. Thanks to the work of the previous generation of dedicated scholars, source materials to accomplish this task are present in the public institutions of the Punjab.[71] The Bibliography below confirms that manuscripts of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* and the essential scholarly wherewithal required to create a critical edition are available. One cannot help but hope that scholars and institutions interested in the development of the field will address this fundamental need with the urgency it deserves.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] All references to the text are from *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, edited by Balwant Singh Dhillon (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2004), 1-448. Hereafter references to the sakhis will be given as s. numbers.

[2] These themes appear in the writings contained in the Guru Granth; *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, edited by Vir Singh (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1986); *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, edited by Gursharan Kaur Jaggi (New Delhi, Arsi Publishers, 2010); *Janam Sakhi Miharban*, 2 vols., edited by Kirpal Singh et al. (Amritsar: Khalsa College, 1962, 1969); *Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala*, edited by Gurbachan Kaur (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1987). For discussion of *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, see Rahuldeep Singh Gill, "Growing

the Banyan Tree: Early Sikh Tradition in the Works of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla," Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009.

[3] In the last sakhi of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, there is reference to its public recitation at the house of the author. At present, the Nihangs (literally, "carefree"), a colorful group within the Sikh community, recite this text in their worship sessions. They believe it has the potential to inspire its listeners to become better Sikhs. I am grateful to Baba Santa Singh for a set of cassettes of his audio-commentary on the text that he gave to me during one our meeting at the headquarters of his group in Talwandi Sabo, Bhatinda, in 2000.

[4] These texts that borrowed the title from Bhangu include the following:
1850. Kavi Bansi, *Sri Guru Panth Binod*. Patiala.
Mid-1860s. Nihal Singh Nirmala, *Sri Guru Panth Prakash* (unpublished).
Mid-1870s. Gian Singh [Amritsari], *Sri Panth Prakash* (unpublished).
1878. Gian Singh [Nirmala], *Sri Guru Panth Prakash* (it was expanded in 1888 and 1898).
1914. Kala Singh Namdhari, *Panth Prakash*.
For details, see Shamsher Singh Ashok, "*Prachin Panth Prakash di Rachna te Prasang-Bhed*," *Singh Sabha Patrika* (August 1978), 118-126.

[5] For *taksali* scholarship, see relevant sections in G. W. Leitner, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab* [1882] (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1971); for his contribution to this important debate, see Nazer Singh, "Leitner in Lahore: Life and Works," *Panjab Past and Present* (April 2000): 94-108).

[6] For this period, see J. D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs* [1849] (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1985), 121-130.

[7] Charles Francis Massey, *Chiefs and Families of Note … of the Punjab* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1890), 1: 262-263. For the death year of Sham Singh, see Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2007), 4: 82. Gupta informs us that Sham Singh died during a Sikh engagement with the Iranian army under the command of Nadir Shah. Bhagat Singh also records the same year of death; see his *A History of Sikh Misals* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1993), 37, 268-269.

[8] *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, edited by Jit Singh Sital (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara, Prabandhak Committee, 2004), introduction, 32sasa.

[9] For the texts that follow this mode of notation, see Kuir Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10*, edited by Shamsher Singh Ashok (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1961); and Sukha Singh, *Gur Bilas Patshahi 10*, edited by Gursharan Kaur Jaggi (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1989), 442. It might be useful to note that the titles in the manuscripts of both these text begin with "*sri*," see MS 605, f. 1, and MS 2297, f. 1, both at Khalsa College.

[10] S. S. Hans, "Rattan Singh Bhangoo's Method of Writing History," *Proceedings of Punjab History Conference* (1976), 53 and note 3.
[11] Harinder Singh [Chopra]. "Editing of *Panth Prakash* of Rattan Singh Bhangu by Vir Singh" (Ph.D. dissertation, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar), Introduction, xxx.

[12] For an illuminating discussion, see J. S. Grewal, "Sovereignty of the Third Panth: Bhangu's *Guru Panth Prakash*," pp. 253-272 in *Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).

[13] Ami P. Shah first brought this important issue to focus while working on her doctoral dissertation entitled "In Praise of the Guru: A Translation and Study of Sainapati's *Sri Gursobha*," University of California, Santa Barbara, 2010.

[14] The evidence at our disposal indicate the possibility of a third line, which has "*adi manaun ganhpatih bighan nivaran har*" in its invocation, see Shamsher Singh Ashok, *Punjabi Hath Likhatan di Suchi* (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1961), 1:400

[15] I am grateful to Pal Singh Purewal (*Jantri: 500 Years* [Mohali: Punjab School Education Board, 1994]) for helping me decipher this entry.

[16] For another of the second verse reading—*pathak srote nit he hoi nihal nihal*, see Kahn Singh Nabha's *Mahan Kosh* (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag,1981), 793-794. This would mean that both the reader and the listeners enjoyed the experience of public recitation daily.

[17] For these details, see Lepel H. Griffin, *The Rajas of the Punjab* (Lahore: Punjab Printing, 1870), 122 and 157.

[18] Reference to the Sikhs begin to appear in the British sources from the 1760s onward; see a letter from Fort William, dated April 10, 1767, addressed to the Directors of the East India Company, London. For its text, see Harry Verelest, *A View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal* (London: J. Nourse Bookseller, 1772), 49. I am grateful to Harpreet Singh of New Zealand for bringing this document to my notice. The Sikh building of the gurdwaras in Delhi beginning the 1780s, the Sikhs' increasing influence in the Punjab during these decades, and the move of the East India Company officials to Ludhiana after 1800 added to this impetus.

   For more details, see Amandeep Singh Madra and Paramjit Singh, *Sicques, Tigers, or Thieves* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), and J. S. Grewal, *Historical Writings on the Sikhs (1784-2011): Western Enterprise and Indian Response* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012).

[19] Purnima Dhavan is the only scholar who has focused on these texts; see her "Redemptive Pasts and Imperiled Futures: The Writing of Sikh History," *Sikh Formations*, 3, 2: 111-124. I am grateful to her for an email exchange in which she confirmed the dates I mention here.

[20] *sal atharan sai bite adhik chausathe soi, morayo par utar Ranjit Singh dal joi*, s. 2:7.

[21] For the text of the treaty, see H. S. Bhatia, *Rare Documents on Sikhs and Their Rule in the Punjab* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep, 1992), 81.

[22] *tuh age sabh dine dar, tuhi so lare so jave har*, . . . *lare are aki bhave hari ave tuhi pas*, s. 152:114-118).

[23] Sohan Lal Suri, *Umda Uttwarikh*, translated by Amarwant Singh (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1985), 161 and 166-167.

[24] See note 6 above.

[25] Without providing any specific reference, Lal Singh Giani makes claims of family relationship between Bhangu and Sainapati; see Jit Singh Sital's *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, 15

[26] *Jagah jagah so sabhi likheyai, granth badhan te manahu sankeyai, jin ko lor sunan ki hoi, aur pustakan te sun lai soi . . . Sanskrit Bhakha Farsi ghani, bahut dhhor sakhi gurbani*, s. 11:8.

[27] *Rattan Singh jim suni thi pita apane pas, s.* 148:26; *jim kar hamari mat bakhani,* s. 156:2.

[28] In the past decade, Louis E. Fenech has made important efforts in tracing the influence of Islamic historiography on Sikh thinking, and one hopes that others would expand this area further.

[29] Here Bhangu stands apart from all his peers whose bouts of creativity underwent shifts according to the nature of patronage available to them; Santokh Singh (1787-1843) is a case in point.

[30] *Suno Sikh Gur Singh piare, Rattan Singh sunh liki sudhare*, s. 140:67; *likhi so khatar Khalsai, par sun karai ardas*, s. 148:26; *jo kuchh age saregi sunion Sikh bharai*, s. 155:23.

[31] Historians of Punjabi literature have not taken any interest in Bhangu's text. His use of the various poetic forms to describe different types of experience is yet to be looked into in any detail.

[32] Surjit Singh Hans, "Rattan Singh Bhangoo's Purpose of Writing the *Prachin Panth Prakash*," *Proceeding of Punjab History Conference* (April), 80-81.

[33] These include the writings of scholars such as Louis E. Fenech, and Purnima Dhavan, see Bibliography below.

[34] I have great respect for Prof. Hans' scholarship and consider his *Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* (Jalandhar: ABS publications, 1988) a land-

mark study in the field; my observation here is to simply show the problems a faulty edition can create for a historian.

[35] *Nishan kesari jim bijal taraje*, s. 162:25; *jandi jim singh pujio jhanda*, s. 152:46).

[36] For other texts, see Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian ka*, edited by Rattan Singh Jaggi [1769] (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1972); Sarupdas Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, edited by Utam Singh Bhatia [1776] (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1971); *Mahima Prakash (Vartak)*, edited by Kulwinder Singh Bajwa [1800?] (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2004); Santokh Singh, *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*, edited by Bhai Vir Singh [1842] (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar, 1963).

[37] Harinder Singh concludes his introduction with the claim that the verse that urges the reader "to consult *Puratan Janam Sakhi*" for additional details of Baba Nanak's life "is not by Rattan Singh Bhangu but by Bhai Vir Singh." This is obviously incorrect. For an endorsement of Harinder Singh's mistaken observation, see Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 190.

[38] *Sri Gur Bilas madhu bahu likhi so ham such likhai, jo sochi si Sukha Singhai so main kahun pragatiai*, ss. 17:27; 18.1:2; 18:18; 26:13.

[39] In my record, the early manuscripts of these texts include:
Puratan: 1588, 1670, 1690, 1730, 1731, 1734, 1757, 1758, 1772.
Bala: 1658, 1713, 1724, 1739, 1755, 1760, 1768, 1781, 1799, 1800.
Miharban: 1754, 1776, 1780, 1802, 1828.

[40] Beginning with the 1870s, efforts have been made to attribute this text to Guru Gobind Singh and thus obtain it the status of "secondary Sikh scripture." In the light of debates raging around this text within the present-day Sikh community, the absence of any reference to it in *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* becomes extremely important.

[41] See note 9 above.

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[42] For a discussion of this development, see Surinder Singh, *Sikh Coins* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 41.

[43] *Ab ham Khalsai dayon gurayi, dayon tika Khalsai lai*, s. 19.2:7; *Guru Khalso Khalso Guru, kahi gayo Guru bhayo jab turu*, s. 108:63; *Satigur kahayo tho ham singh piare, putar potre eie hamare*, s. 88:8. For this position, see *Rahitname*, edited by Piara Singh Padam [1695] (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1995), 66-67; Kavi Sainapati, *Sri Gur Sobha*, edited by Ganda Singh [pre-1710] (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1988), 170.

[44] *Guru Granth main likhiayo joi, Sikh sangat kahai sat su hoi*, s. 108:38; *Gur sangat sangat gur ahi, gur sangat man bhed kachhu nahi*, s. 88:13).

[45] *Yo Satigur kam sabh Khalasai diyo, mukhtayar Khalsa sabh than kio . . . jahi jahi panj bhujangi hoi, gurdware tul man layo soi*, s. 17:2-4).

[46] For the same position on this issue, see Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian ka*, 136.

[47] *Banvai tharho chauki dhari upar chandovo tani . . . chauki ko turat takhat banhaya, sath rumalan khub dhakaya*, s. 148:20-21.

[48] *Granth pothi hath avahi vahi, madh dariai dubavai tahi*, s. 115:6; *Gur ko nam kahanh hatayo, pothi Granth tain khuh dubaiyo*, s. 115:27.

[49] Sarup Singh Koushish, *Guru Kian Sakhian*, edited by Piara Singh Padam and Garja Singh [1790] (Patiala: Kalam Mandir, 1986), 177.

[50] From Farsi *arz-dosat*, the term *ardas* appears twenty-seven times in Baba Nanak's compositions.

[51] Both the opening section associated with Guru Gobind Singh and the protection of uncut hair are part of the present-day Sikh *ardas*.

[52] In Rag Basant, Guru Granth, page 1193 in the standard printed edition.

[53] *Rahit jahan the thorhe Sikh, nikal gai vai bahu fauj pikh*, s. 56:8; *sayanan ne yo bat batai, larhai ke phat kahai su dhai, milan bhajan ih sar doi, larh mar mukanh adha soi*, s. 112:41; *girayo pariyo jo gilajo pavai, nahin khalso us mar gavavai*, s. 154:21.

[54] *Mari kahayo shah sacho koi, asan kahaya shah Nanak joi; mari kahayo bhayo Nanak faqir, un shai ki kia tatbir; hamai kahayo vahi shahin ko shah, din duni sacho patshah*, s. 2:35.

[55] For the earliest reference to this, see *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, 128-129.

[56] *Guru Gobind sun gusa aia turk nash hit panth banhai*, s. 14:5; *Sikh ubaran dishat sangharan*, s. 14:11.

[57] *Singhan panth kab luk chip hoiyo, singhan Panth kab luke lukiyo. Singhan panth dange ko bhaio, Singhan janam sang shashataran laiyo*, s. 15:7.

[58] Kavi Sainapati, *Sri Gur Sobha*, 156-157.

[59] *Madh Punjabah raj kamavahi,…Sri Satgur unko kahi dayo*, s. 17:20; *ham rakhat patshahi dava,… patshahi chad kim lahain nababi, . . . ham patshahi Satigur dai hanai hanai lai, jahin jahin bahain zamin mal tahin tahin takhat banai*, s. 84.1:36-39.

[60] *Khalsa hovai khud khuda jim khubi khub khudai, an na mania an ki ik sache bin patshah*, s. 15:37.

[61] This important chapter of Sikh history is yet to be adequately constructed and its significance properly assessed. Bhangu's parents would have known Baghel Singh, the core leader who gathered sufficient military strength to build a gurdwara in Chandani Chowk right next to the Mughal seat of power in Red Fort, Delhi.

[62] For Banda Singh's execution in Delhi, see Amandeep Singh Madra and Paramjit Singh, *Sicques, Tigers, or Thieves*, 43-48.

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[63] *Ham ichha surgai nahi ham ichhia Khalsai sang, larhno marno nahin darain chahain Turkan son jang*, s. 152:630.

[64] In this text, there is only one reference to an Udasi named Gurbaksh. He is reported to be the caretaker of the site of the cremation of Guru Tegh Bahadur's head in Anandpur (s. 71). Bhangu's silence about these people does not look like an anomaly if one takes into consideration their absence in sixteenth-century narratives as well as rahit literature created around 1700. I believe that the issues such as the precise meaning of the term "udasi," their relationship with Sri Chand, the son of Baba Nanak, and their association with the Panth are yet to be adequately addressed.

[65] *Suho tho jo Guru hatayo… Vahiguru ki fateh hatai…masi mad ke nerh na ave*, s. 58,2:32-33.

[66] *Ikai sunahire sabhi ralai, bhin bhet kicch rakhan na pai, char baran au ashram char, tag tiko dai tirhagi utar*, s. 16:12.

[67] Given Baba Nanak's rejection of the caste divisions and his close association with Mardana, who came from the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy, it seems fair to assume that these people ate along with others in the langar. It is not entirely clear as to how this aspect of Sikh thinking evolved in the eighteenth century. Bhangu writes of Sham Singh, his grandfather, feeding the people "from Hindustan" with him and "taking care" of the lowest ones (*Hindu hoi tis khulavai nal, nich hui tis karai pritpal*, s. 156:10). For another complex reference to this issue, see Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian ka*, 187-188.

[68] Note that there is no reference to Rattan Singh Bhangu in Harjot Oberoi's *Construction of Religious Boundaries* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), the best-known book on nineteenth-century Sikh history among Western academics.

[69] *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*, 2 vols., translated by Kulwant Singh (Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies, 2006).

[70] This complex texture of Sikh scholarship is not always clear to those who largely work with English writings on the Sikhs.

[71] Working under the leadership of Ganda Singh (1900-1987), Sikh *taksali* scholars such as Shamsher Singh Ashok (1903-1986) and Piara Singh Padam (1920-2001) did wonders in collecting the rare Sikh manuscripts. Davinder Kaur at Punjabi University, Patiala; Sardara Singh at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; Mritinjay Kumar at Panjab University, and others continued this work. These collections are being digitized, which will further help their accessibility.

Select Bibliography

Manuscripts of *Sri Gur Panth Prakash*
I. New to the discussion
a. Present location: Private collection
Date of compilation: Not recorded
Number of folios:1-415
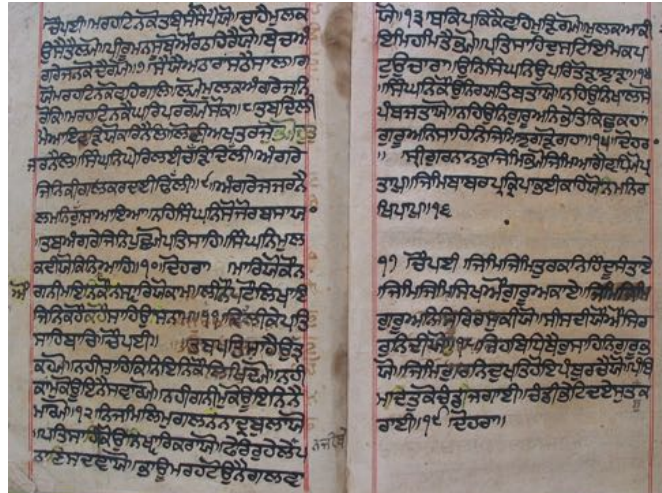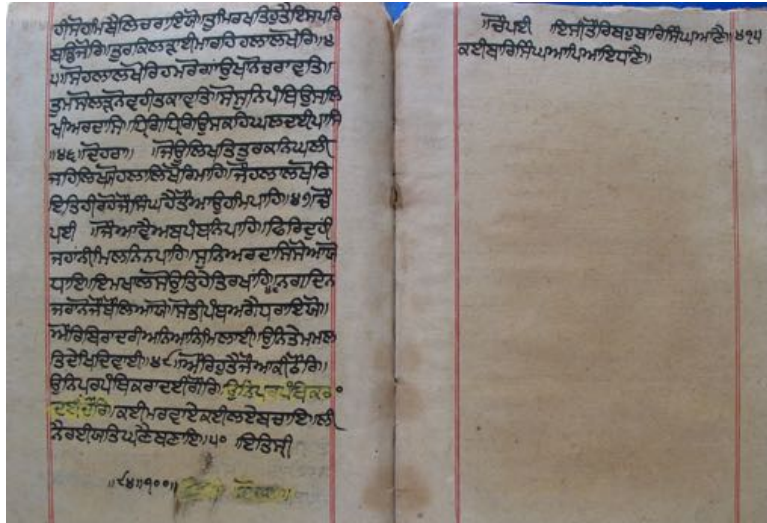
The internal evidence points to this manuscript being the earliest with the possibility of its being the original. Its physical features include the frequent appearance of yellow paste and corrections made above the original writing. The blank spaces in the text with independent numbers are allocated for verses to be filled. Some verses are later recorded, most likely in the same hand but different ink. The final sakhi (numbered 163 in printed editions) is absent here.

b. Present location: Private collection
Date of compilation: February-March 1842
Scribe: Dial Singh.
Number of folios:1-380
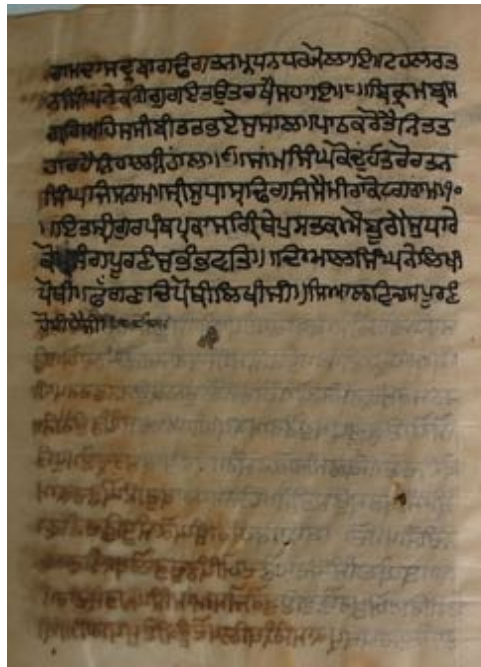
II. Easily accessible ones:
a. Present location: MS 797 Panjab University, Chandigarh
Date of compilation: Unrecorded
Number of folios:1-247

b. Present location: MS 276 Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Date of compilation: last folio missing
Number of folios:1-331

III. References to the following manuscripts appear in scholarly literature. With the exceptions of numbers 3 and 4, the locations of the remaining are presently unknown.

1. 1842. In the custody of Bhagwant Singh, Khanpur, Sangrur.
2. 1858. Mentioned in the colophon, see Vir Singh's edition of 1939.
   3. 1866. Ff. 1-314. MS 35. Moti Bagh, Patiala. This seems to be the manuscript that Vir Singh referred to in his text.
   4. Undated. With opening and closing folios lost. Balwant Singh Dhillon of Guru Nanak Dev University has a digital copy of this.
5. Undated. Associated with the Rarewala family.
   6. Undated. Known to have been available in the library of Punjab University, Lahore.

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