

COMPARISON OF THE FIVE COMPLETE TRANSLATIONS OF THE SIRI GURU GRANT'H SAHIB

1. BHAI GOPAL SINGH TRANSLATION

The first complete translation of the Siri Guru Grant'h Sahib into English was provided by Dr. Gopal Singh; this was completed around 1960. It was published in a four volume set, and has received wide distribution. The 'International Edition' published by the World Sikh University Press in 1978, has a light blue cover.

Dr. Gopal Singh's stellar reputation for scholarly work in service of the Dharma is well deserved. In fact, the introduction to the work, in the first of the four volumes, is a remarkable work in and of itself. Especially readable and worthwhile is Section II: On the Philosophy of Sikh Religion. In this treatise on comparative religion, he traces the common threads of religious thought throughout the ages, giving one a deeper appreciation of Sikh Dharma. His brief explanation of the Kundalini and Yogic traditions is well-done.

His grammar, however, is somewhat antiquated and distracting.

For example:

"Yea Manifests He in a myriad ways."

"For several births thou wert a mere worm."

"He, (whose way is this,) Knows his Master and Compassion comes into him, And becomes Eternal he: he dies not thereafter."

He included excellent footnotes explaining legendary persons, Hindu mythology and local folk idioms, and these often reveal more clearly the true meaning of the Guru's Word. Often, he explains the linguistic derivation of a word or idiom. From his thorough understanding of comparative religion, he brings to light the common threads which run through Sikhism and other religions.

Page breaks are only roughly approximated to the original, and the numbering system of the original is roughly preserved, although there are a large number of mistakes in the numbers.

2. MAN MOHAN SINGH TRANSLATION

A very different translation was published just a short time after Dr. Gopal Singh's work came out. Back in 1948, after Sardar Man Mohan Singh, a devout Sikh, lost everything worldly in the partition of India and Pakistan, he began work on what would be a lasting legacy. He worked on this for 12 years, completing it in 1960. This is the 'eight-volume set' with the original Gurmukhi, side-by-side with translations into English and Panjabi, with nearly every word individually cross-referenced across the three languages. The S.G.P.C. published and distributed this 8-volume set in a dark blue cover, starting with the first volume in 1962, and completing the eighth in 1969, the year in which Man Mohan Singh passed on.

For the first time, Sikhs all around the world had access to a most practical resource in understanding the Word of the Guru. It has become common practice in all parts of the world to install this 8 volume set as Guru, and read out the Hukam in both Gurmukhi and English, and sometimes in Panjaabi as well. Many Gurdwaras, especially larger ones, have a single volume Bir installed, and use this 8-volume set to read out the translation.

Page breaks *appear* to be precisely placed, but are not correlated to the original with any precision, and there are many typographical errors. There are also small passages of the original which are omitted in this work-again, typographical mistakes.

Overall, this work represents a distinctly more accurate and direct translation of the Guru's Word, although it includes a large number of antiquated, idiosyncratic expressions more common to 18th and 19th century British India-words like mammon (for Maya), myrmidon, collyrium, mumpers, gnosis (for knowledge), apostates, sans (French for without), etc. Much of his grammar is so dated as to be distracting, and even confusing to the modern ear.

For example:

"Raising, the embankments of my mind's field, I gaze at the high sky or mansion.
When Divine devotion enters bride's mind-home, the Friendly Guest pays her a visit."
He, who slanders Thy attendant, him Thou chrushesth and destroyest".

In spite of these difficulties, the translation has a much deeper impact, and a more obvious accuracy, than the Bhai Gopal Singh translation. It is very poetic, and conveys a sense of humility and devotion.

3. GURBACHAN SINGH TALIB TRANSLATION

According to his own introduction to the book, Gurbachan Singh Talib of Panjabi University, Patiala, was assigned in 1977 the task of compiling a new translation of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. It is grammatically the least satisfying - that is, the most distracting -of the three works so far.

For example:

"In listening to laudation of the Name etemal find I life."

"To whomsoever the vision of unicity does grant, propped by the holy congregation, of the Lord's love has joy"

He does include many useful footnotes, shedding some light on the Guru's Teachings. Overall, however, it adds little to the Man Mohan Singh translation, and it has not superseded either of the previous translations.

4. PRITAM SINGH CHAHIL TRANSLATION

More recently, in 1993, another work was printed and made available. Pritam Singh Chahil printed the Man Mohan Singh Edition back in Chandigarh, in the 1960's; in 1986, he was inspired by a Gurdwara service in Berkeley, in which the '8 volume set' was installed as Guru, and 'Shabad sheets' were passed out to the Sangat. He had a vision that the entire Guru should be printed in this three-column format, and so he set about to do it. He completed it in 1990, and in 1993, it became available.

It is in a three-column format, with Gurmukhi on the left, English translation on the right, and Romanised transliteration in the center of each page. He has made a fairly close, but not exact, approximation of page breaks, and preserved the numbering system fairly well.

This translation is a revised version of the Man Mohan Singh translation, and as thus, it is the finest complete translation of the Guru yet published; its unique format allows the Guru's Word to be approximated in pronunciation, even by those who do not yet read Gurmukhi. However, the transliteration system used is the old British-English transliteration, wherein the word for ਕ੍ਯ - KAYSH - meaning 'hair' - is transliterated as KESH. Most modern readers will pronounce KESH to rhyme with 'mesh', thereby mispronouncing this important word. This is the same transliteration system by which most of us mispronounced inqnm - 'Nit Naym'; {We read the transliteration

"NIT NEM", and we mispronounced it.} **'NIT NAYM' and KAYSH' are the correct pronunciations.**

Also, some of the more distracting idioms and antiquated expressions of the Man Mohan Singh translation are copied verbatim.

It is distributed in two forms: a four-volume set, and also a single volume. It is eminently suitable for installation in Gurdwara. It is a large volume, 12 by 17 inches (34 inches wide when opened). It is also a very valuable tool in the process of learning to read and understand Gurmukhi, although it does not have the word -to-word notations of the Man Mohan Singh edition.

5. KHALSA CONSENSUS TRANSLATION

This translation is already available on disc, although it is still in the process of being edited. It is based on all the available translations, working primarily from the Man Mohan Singh translation. The objectives are:

- first, to achieve an accurate translation of the Guru's Word;
- to present the Guru's Word in an elegant format which follows the original as much as possible;
- to eliminate the antiquated idioms which are so distracting to the modern ear,
- to preserve the word order and symmetry of the original whenever possible: and
- to achieve the immediacy of impact which the Guru's Word deserves in translation.

In this version, we are preserving exact page breaks to the original, along with all of the numbers at the ends of lines.

It might be illuminating to compare passages in the various translations. Here is the Mul Mantra and the first Pauree of Jap Ji in the various translations:

COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS:

ORIGINAL GURMUKHI:

< > siq nwmu
krqw prKuInrBauInrvhu
Akwl mriq Aj hl sBMgr pswid]
] j pu]
Awid scu j gwid scu]
hYBl scunwnk hsl Bl scu] 1]
scYsic n hwel j yscI l K vwr]
cpYcp n hwel j yI wie rhw il v qwr]
BiKAw BK n aqrl j ybhw prlAw Bwr]
shs isAwxpw l K hoh q iek n cl Ynwil]
ikv sicAwrw helAYikv kWYqtYpwil]
hkim rj wel cl xw nwnk il iKAw nwil] 1]

BHAI GOPAL SINGH:

By the Grace of the One Supreme Being, The Eternal, The All-pervading Purusha, The Creator, Without Fear, Without Hate, the Being Beyond Time, Non-incarnated, Self-existent, The Enlightener.

MEDITATIONS

True in the Beginning, True in the Primeval age

True He is and True He shall be. [1]

Thinking avails not, how so hard one thinks;

Nor silence avails, howsoever one shrinks

Into oneself. Nor hunger goes

With the (Pleasure) loads of the worlds.
Of a myriad cleverness, not one works.
How then to be True? How rend the Veil of sham, untruth?
His Will (forsooth)
Inborn in us, ingrained,
Thou follow.
(Thus is Truth attained). [1]

MAN MOHAN SINGH:

There is but one God. True is His Name, creative His personality and immortal His form. He is without fear, sans enmity, unborn and self-illuminated. By the Guru's grace (He is obtained).

Embrace His meditation.

True in the prime, True in the beginning of ages, True He is even now and True He, verily, shall be, O Nanak!

By pondering, man cannot have a conception of God, even though he may ponder over lacs of time.

Even though one be silent and remains absorbed constantly he obtains not mind's silence.

The hunger of the hungry departs not, even though he may pile up loads of the worlds (valuables).

Man may possess thousands and lacs of wits, but not even one goes with (him) or (avails him in the Lord's court).

How can we be true and how can the screen of untruth be rent? By obeying, O Nanak! the pre-ordained order of the Lord of will.

GURBACHAN SINGH TALIB:

He is the Sole Supreme Being; of eternal manifestation;

Creator, immanent Reality; Without Fear;

Without Rancour; Timeless Form; Unincarnated;

Self-Existent; *Realized* by grace of the holy Preceptor.

Japu (Prayer-Chant)

In primal Time, in all Time, was the Creator;

Nothing is real but the Eternal.

Nothing shall last but the Eternal. (1)

Ritual purification, though million-fold, may not purify the mind;
Nor may absorption in trance still it, however long and continuous.
Possessing worlds multiple quenches not the rage of avarice and desire.
A thousand million feats of intellect bring not *emancipation*.
How then to become true to the Creator?
how demolish the wall of illusion?
Through obedience to His Ordinance and Will.
Saith Nanak :This *blessing* too is pre-ordained. (1)

PRITAM SINGH CHAHIL:

The Creator of all is One, the only One. Truth is his name. He is the doer of everything. He is without fear and without enmity. His form is immortal. He is unborn and self-illuminated. He is realized by Guru's grace.

MEDITATE

He was True in the beginning. He was True through all ages. He is True even now. Nanak says, He shall ever be True. 1. By pondering, one cannot have the conception of God even though one may think million times. Even though one be silent and remain constantly absorbed, He cannot be known by this silence.

The hunger of the hungry does not appease even though one may collect loads of worldly valuables. One may have millions of skills but none goes with him in the hereafter. How can one become truthful and dispel the veil of illusion? Nanak says by obeying the pre-ordained order of the Lord and surrendering to His Will. 1.

KHALSA CONSENSUS TRANSLATION:

One Universal Creator God.

The Name is Truth.

Creative Being Personified. No Fear. No Hatred.

Image Of The Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent,

By Guru's Grace,

Chant And Meditate:

True In The Primal Beginning. True Throughout The Ages.

True Here And Now. O Nanak, Forever And Ever True. || 1 ||

By thinking, He cannot be reduced to thought, even by thinking hundreds of thousands of times. By remaining silent, inner silence is not obtained, even by remaining lovingly

absorbed deep within. The hunger of the hungry is not appeased, even by piling up loads of worldly goods. Hundreds of thousands of clever tricks, but not even one of them will go along with you in the end. So how can one become truthful? And how can the veil of illusion be torn away? O Nanak, He has written that you shall obey the Hukam of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will. II 1 II

CRITIQUE OF THE ABOVE TRANSLATIONS:

In review of Bhai Gopal Singh's translation, what sticks out most are the forced rhymes, achieved by breaking up sutras and sentence structure, and the frequently inserted parenthetical phrases. These create unavoidable distractions for the reader. Moreover, his use of word such as 'howso' and 'forsooth', words not in common usage, further detract from the impact of the rendering.

Man Mohan Singh's translation is perhaps even more obtuse to the modern reader. He uses words such as 'lacs' (meaning tens of thousands), which will be understandable to the Indian reader, but not to those who are not conversant with either Panjaabi or Gurmukhi. He also includes words such as 'sans', a French term meaning 'without'. This term, unfortunately, will be meaningless to the less erudite reader. As mentioned above, other antiquated expressions abound, such as apostates, myrmidons, mumpers, mammon, etc.

He often uses phrases which are not grammatically correct, such as, 'Even though one be silent and remains absorbed constantly he obtains not mind's silence.' And, similarly to Bhai Gopal Singh, he inserts parenthetical phrases of words not actually in the original Gurmukhi, which are intended to more fully elucidate the meaning of the passage. Again, the use of parentheses is usually distracting.

Gurbachan Singh Talib takes much wider license with the Guru's Word, so that the original is often not even locatable in the translation. While all others have translated 'soch' in the first Pauree of Jap Ji as 'thought' or 'conceptualization', he alone translates it as 'ritual purification'. And when translating 'Hai bhee sach, Naanak hosee bhee sach', instead of the accepted translation of 'sach' as 'Truth', he translates these lines as, 'Nothing is real but the Eternal. Nothing shall last but the Eternal.'" Instead of parentheses to denote words and phrases added to the translation which are not in the original, he uses italics, which is still distracting.

His grammatical phrasing also frequently fails to conform to standard usage: 'How then to become true to the Creator? how demolish the wall of illusion?'

As with the previous translations, these grammatical errors stick out to the well-versed reader of English, and detract from their impact.

Pritam Singh Chahil's translation more closely approximates readable English in its phraseology and idioms, and this translation is now the premiere translation, the standard by which others will be compared. But his grammar, once again, falls short of the mark: For

example,' . . . even though one may think million times.', and 'The hunger of the hungry does not appease even though one may collect loads of worldly valuables.'

The Khalsa Consensus Translation has been written in contemporary English, maintaining consistent grammar. The idioms are those in common usage, and word order reflects the original whenever possible. Repeated words in the original are faithfully repeated in the translation. For example: 'Simaro simar simar sukh paavao' -'Meditate, meditate, meditate in remembrance, and find peace.' Page breaks are exactly correlated with the original single-volume Bir.

Once again, this is a work in progress, and input is welcome.

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