



# Sikh Research Journal

**Vol. 3 No. 1**

This article is from \*Sikh Research Journal\*, the online peer-reviewed journal of Sikh and Punjabi Studies

Sikh Research Journal \*Vol. 3 No. 1 Published: Fall 2018.

<http://sikhresearchjournal.org>

<http://sikhfoundation.org>



# Sikh Research Journal

**Vol. 3 No. 1**

This article is from \*Sikh Research Journal\*, the online peer-reviewed journal of Sikh and Punjabi Studies

Sikh Research Journal \*Vol. 3 No. 1 Published: Fall 2018.

<http://sikhresearchjournal.org>

<http://sikhfoundation.org>

# **Christian And Sikh Communities In Iran And Role Of Language Identity: A Comparative Approach To The Social-Linguistic Aspects Of The Christianity And Sikhism In The Middle East**

Rajdeep Singh<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Linguistics, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran

## **Abstract**

Middle East is the birthplace of all major Abrahamic religions. However, the Christian community in the Middle East does not enjoy the same diversity as Christians enjoy in the West. In this study, we approach the Christian faith in Iran from the socio-linguistic perspective which can be further applied to the wider region because we observe the same trend in the region. We look at the role of language and its influence on the development of the religion. By conducting a qualitative/quantitative experiment, we delve into the main issues to highlight the reasons behind the apparent features of Middle-Eastern Christianity. Language identity is further investigated as it has an important place in the heart of the Christian faith in Iran. Armenian development and changes in Iran is considered since it is the working language of the Armenian Church in Iran. On the other hand, our study shows that religions, such as the Sikhism, that maintains a rather balanced linguistic identity, have more potential to grow.

## **Introduction**

Christianity is originated in the Middle-east and has been part of the lifestyle of millions of people in this region for thousands of years. However, when we look more precisely to the components of the Christian community in the region, we readily notice the strict ethnic and racial framework within which the Christian faith is defined. As Pappé (2005) states “With regard to the Middle East, this dichotomy goes along religious, sectarian, gender and geographical lines. Christians and Jews are regarded as more developed than Muslims... and within each category women as 'developing' rather than 'developed' - women's transition to the status of 'developed' being the ultimate proof of the process being completed.” (p. 6). This shows that the Middle-East is composed of a mosaic of religious beliefs along the ethnic lines. Though Held and Cummings claim that “it should not be overlooked that a great many followers of Islam do not reside in the Middle East at all” (p. 1), we should take into account the fact that the middle eastern politics is still dominated by Islam as the sole source of all political decision makings in the Middle-East, and other religions, including but not limited to Christianity, do not have the space necessary to play a role in the political scene. Cragg (1991) investigates the Arab Christianity from the social perspective, and touches on the topics such as Arabism and the power it exerts on the Christian faith. Though we should be conscious that religion in Iran and wider middle east has its own particular characteristics which cannot be easily interpolated from one country to another. In fact, in certain ways, the policies of the Persian empire (550–330 BC) molded post-exilic Judaism; the Persians facilitated the Jews for their peaceful return to Jerusalem which is something hard to imagine in today's middle east. This is how theologian Walter Brueggemann notes:

Compared to the complicated and vexed story of Yahweh with the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, the story of Yahweh with the Persians lacks drama. On the horizon of this testimony, the Persians are not recalcitrant vassals of Yahweh, need not be broken by Yahweh, and so need no Yahwistic recovery. In this modeling of nations as partners, Persia is the exemplar of a positive, responsive partner. (Brueggemann, 2012, p. 518)

In our study, we look at another example where the linguistic element of the Christian faith prevents its own development. Singh (2018) investigates how cognitive processing and language are related in the syntax. However, we look rather at the social side of interaction between language and cognitive processing in order to examine some of the changes in Armenian language spoken in Iran. Voskanian (2002) investigates the role of borrowing and loan words from Iranian languages in the development of the secret language of the gypsies in the near East, i.e. Lom. In our study, we also point out to the way Armenian in Iran has undergone a continuous change and its linguistic elements are further analyzed. On the other hand, we know that in Iran there is a wide ethnic diversity which makes it hard to define minority in the sole framework of religion. Indeed, the language plays an important role in the ethnic identity in Iran, which is further discussed in another city (Amanolahi, 2005). Sanasarian (1995) on the other hand puts more emphasis on the political limitations for the minorities in a powerful state. However, in our study, the state does not play a significant role in the way that Christianity has been adapted to the environment as we see

the situation for Iranian Christians in the long term, which is not affected by the current political system. Singh (2018) considers the language change in Iran and how it can be delimited in a concrete way. He proposes a model which shows that foreign languages vying for the same territory affect and change the way the aboriginal language is spoken. This shows how languages and their interaction play an important role in the overall society. Hassan (2007) investigates the minorities and their roles in Iran, evidencing a strong psychological ethnic presence of Armenians in the Iranian medias, and a rather absent of other faith followers' opinions in the Iranian media. However, the clear trend is that there is a strong evidence of a faster rate of growth of Baha'i faith and Sikhism in Iran and the wider Middle East.

When we look at the minorities in Iran, it is important to take attention to the linguistic component because the minorities are rather defined in Iran based on the language identity associated with them. That's why the investigation of the differences in the practice of Christianity in Iran and wider Middle East should include the linguistic parameter as the most deciding one. Singh (2018) shows how the auxiliary verbs form a cognitive image for the language user. In fact, he claims that the way auxiliary verb is used depends on the cognitive-language interplay, bringing a notion of language identity to the whole cognitive processing. Nercissians (2001) defines the patterns of language use by ethnic minorities in Tehran, associating the linguistic code with the minority sense of ethnic identity. Language should be regarded as a manifestation of the more inner processing which prepositions show such a rather complex inner spatial senses (Singh, 2018). Therefore, we should consider the possibility that language develops a specific lexicon for the inner thoughts, religion being one of the important aspects of that. Many also have challenged the idea that language decides in a great deal the way a minority lives through different historical periods. Berberian (2005) actually challenges the idea of language and ethnicity connection by placing the Armenian minority outside the overall perspective of Iranian identity, proposing a rather mosaic type of social identity for Iran. This however does not solve the main problem of the slow movement of Christianity in Iran and wider Middle East, hand in hand with the ethnic identity features. Singh (2018) looks through the semantic and symbolic functions that exert pressure on the way religious words are preserved. This shows that a more holistic approach to the religion and the way it is formed, considering the semantic-symbolic notions, is preferable. Van Gordor (2010) points out to the diversity of Iranian cultural scene while investigating the inter-relation between Christianity and Islam, the role of Christian community in Iran. However, the very important notion of linguistic element and its interaction with the way religion is handled in the society are not dealt with by Van Gordor. Singh (2018) examines the quality of cognate words in different language by proposing the mirroring effect model. His findings show that we should look at the language and its development in a more holistic way, including the way it may borrow words from other languages.

In fact, Middle-eastern Christian community has formed in a way that it is rather associated with a special ethnic group. A great example is the large Christian community in Iran which is of Armenian origin. This is an important characteristic of Christianity in the region, i.e. having ethnic base, which we will try to explain by the linguistic method. When it comes to the Armenian Orthodox church in Iran, the main religious ceremonies are conducted in Armenian while everyday conversation is in a mixture of Armenian and Persian; Armenian is spoken at home, and Persian at school and wider society. However, this duality of language use makes it easier to discover some more deep-rooted features of Iranian Christian community compared to the more mainstream Christian community abroad. In fact, knowing Armenian is the main identity of Christians in Iran, which makes the conversion harder for fellow Iranians of other ethnic and religious background.

### **Language Identity**

In this study, we conducted two surveys, one from Orthodox church in Tehran, the other from Armenians in Armenia. Thereafter, we investigated the responses based on the open code qualitative analysis. We used a survey to obtain 12 main factors which affect both Armenians and Iranian Christians. I asked one other colleague to do the same analysis on the survey responses. The inter-rater agreement is 84%. We also needed to see if the construct validity still holds. For this end, we used AMOS 20 for confirmation of the factor analysis. Based on the results, we had to remove items which showed multicollinearity and also those that show insufficient loading (<0.6). After removing the mentioned items, we calculated the alpha reliabilities and the mean scores of the remaining items. 40 persons were responded with verbal data which ranged from one word responses to long paragraphs. Overall, the open coding was done after the axial coding.

### **Findings And Discussion**

After performing the CFA, we ended with 5 items from the main 12 items. The 5 factor structures yielded a series of fit indices which supports the construct validity of the instrument ( $\chi^2 = 1298.8$ ,  $df = 640$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.16$ ,  $TLI = 0.91$ ,  $CFI = .95$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.068$ ). the overall Alpha reliabilities of the 5 factors is 0.94. alpha reliabilities of the factors are reported in table1. Based on the responses, we made the first coding which we show the main coding scheme as it is illustrated in the table1.

Table1. Coding of the survey of Iranian Christians

Factors	items A	items B	keywords	Standardized validity coefficient	Cronbach's alpha reliability	Mean(SD)
Social pressure	I feel that people expect me to be different.	I feel that I should carry the burden of my Armenian society.	Feeling Expectations Burden Differences society	0.7	0.87	5.06
identity	I have a sense of identity associated to my Armenian heritage.	I am an Armenian Christian and it is different to other branches of Christianity.	Heritage Association Sense of identity Christian branches	0.94	0.94	5.35
Low-profile	I do not like sharing my beliefs with others.	I do my own business and I do not like to get engaged politically.	Own life Non-engagement Politics beliefs	0.80	0.93	5.55
Valuable customs	We have many festivities and it is our duty to continue our ancestral customs.	I try to keep our customs as they are part of what I am.	Customs Values Festivity Duty Ancestral continuation	0.76	0.95	5.44
Language factor	I love my mother tongue and use it in my prayers.	I prefer talking in Armenian with my Christian friends, but with other Iranians I speak in Persian.	Armenian Persian Friends Preference	0.72	0.90	5.63

Just as it is shown in the table1, we conducted several circles of the open coding until we got to the main factors influencing the way Iranian Christians feel about their language and lifestyle. As we can clearly say from our survey result, the sense of identity and Armenian heritage are among the most important features for Christianity in Iran, which on its own is another evidence of the rather local and ethnic characteristic of the Christianity which is practiced in Iran. This reveals another important point which concerns the religion identity itself. One study also shows how Iranian students were developing identity conflict while acquiring Hausa which is a completely different

language (Singh, 2018). This shows that language works as a refuge where people normally turn throughout their lives.

### RELIGION: RETURNING TO THE ESSENTIAL CORE

From our analysis, we can go on to claim that religion, even the most universal one, becomes a rather limited ethnic faith which requires the special heritage linearity. The Christianity, which is a universal religion, just as Islam, can experience this return to the core in special circumstances and situations. From our study, the feeling that Iranian Christians are associated with the Armenian identity is made clear and this shows how religions can change their identity themselves to cope with situations where they are minority. In fact, we conducted a small scale survey from Armenians from Armenia to see if they also consider the ethnic criteria as important. The scheme of the coding is illustrated in the table2.

Table2. Coding of the survey of Armenian from Armenia

code	Extract of the working A	Extract of the working B	keywords	Standardized validity coefficient	Cronbach's alpha reliability	Mean(SD)
Religion quality	I am proud of my religion, which brings peace in my heart.	My religion is something inner to me, but I love all the prayers that I perform in the church.	Religion Inner Prayer Peace rituals	0.80	0.98	6.3
progress	I feel that I am not such a good Christian and I love to get better.	I like to attend church more often, even though it's hard to arrange things for that.	Progress Attending church Getting better Future	0.83	0.89	6.7
devotion	So many problems to overcome for a better future. I prefer having a deeper religious belief than any other thing.	I see myself as someone who likes to give more to the poor as it is my duty in life as a good Christian.	Deeper belief Duty Helping Altruism Good Christian	0.76	0.84	6.45
Unity	I see myself as part of the wider Christian community in the whole world.	I like to connect to other brothers/sisters to see how they live and react in the society.	Connecting Socializing Community Wider community Reaction part	0.90	0.89	6.38
Bible	I love reading Bible to feel closer to	Important thing is to read much more about my religion.	Bible God	0.89	0.95	6.31

	Lord.	I want to have God's words in what I do.	Feeling Importance knowledge			
--	-------	--	------------------------------	--	--	--

Our survey shows that the majority sees their religion as Christianity and the ethnicity was not an important factor to them. In fact, it is like the ethnicity dissolves in the much bigger unit which is the religion itself. Another point is the importance of language which definitely points out to the way language plays a role in the religious context. Armenians from Armenia did not give the same prominence that Iranian Christians gave. This clearly shows how the rising competition between languages brings about a sense of language identity as well. This is a decisive factor when we consider the evolution of Armenian through its history in Iran. Armenian language has two major branches, the western and eastern Armenian. The majority of Armenians today speak the eastern variety, including in Iran. Despite the passage of time, eastern Armenian is still a very lively language and it is used in everyday life by Iranian Christians. In fact, the changes in Armenian have been much less than changes in Kurdish, showing how the religion and language identity play a role in this. However, in phonetic there are some differences between Armenian spoken in Iran and Armenia. This shows how the language is less resilient in the phonetic dimension compared to grammar and lexicon. Overall, we can classify the main differences in Armenian in Iran and Armenia as it is illustrated in Table3.

Table3. Differences between Armenian in Iran and Armenia

Main categories	Percentage of differences
vocabulary	20
Grammar	5
Phonetics	35

Here, we see how the phonetics has been influenced more than any other categories. This also makes sense since we see how other languages change in their phonetics when they begin speaking in other parts of the world, like English in England versus Australia. However, the grammar is the least influenced by the place and it shows that it forms a sense of identity. In fact, having a similar grammar makes the lecture sessions in church easier and many other issues are avoided by having the same grammar. Therefore, it is clearly a language specific quality which is to keep the grammar rather intact when the language is disperses around a specific area. Therefore, formula1 is what we can state about the geographic expansion of the language which is written below.

Formula1:

$$language\ expansion \cong \pm language\ lexicon \pm language\ phonetics + constant\ grammar$$

Just as the above mentioned formula, language reacts in a special way that it is hard to say exactly the outcome. However, the approximate result clearly shows how the lexicon and phonetics are rather free to change and borrow from other local languages, while grammar remains resistant to big changes.

### **Sikhism growth and balanced language identity**

When it comes to the Sikhism situation, we see a rather different picture which shows that the language identity is not mentioned to be the reason behind its attraction in the Middle East despite having the same difficult environmental circumstances in the Middle East, even way harsher ones compared to the Christian faith. Here, language does play a significant role as Sikhism does not have a sacred language identity and uses Persian, Arabic, English and many other languages to vehicle its message to the community. This balanced language identity helps it to grow under different conditions and to attract people from other ethnicities. The comparison between the Sikhism and the Christian faith clearly shows how language plays an extremely important role in the formation and continuation of religions despite the differences in geography and ethnicity. Jaspal and Coyle(2010) conduct an evaluative comparison between modern Punjabi, a language which is initially described as the 'mother tongue' for

Sikhs, and ‘the language of the Guru Granth Sahib’. They claim that “although much of the existing literature depicts the ‘mother tongue’ as a vital aspect of identity, ‘an aspect of the soul, if not the soul itself made manifest’, here this language does not appear to take precedence over that of holy scripture” (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010). This shows that Sikhism goes beyond the language barriers to convey its message of peace and unity, attracting many youths in Iran and the Middle East. In order to understand the way Sikh followers identify themselves with a specific ethnic identity, we provided 100 Sikh participants of equal gender representation with a survey regarding their sense and understanding of the religion. The scheme of the coding is illustrated in the table4.

Table4. Coding of the survey of Sikh faith participants

code	Extract of the working A	Extract of the working B	keywords	Standardized validity coefficient	Cronbach’s alpha reliability	Mean(SD)
Gender equality	I feel so proud to be a female follower of Sikhism because women need the same right as men.	I am glad to be part of a community where there is equality among everyone.	Gender Equality Community Women Rights	0.84	0.99	6.7
Better life	I feel so glad to be close to follow my religion as it makes me a better person.	Sikhism empowers its followers and brings a permanent light into their hearts.	Empowering Light Life Happiness	0.80	0.86	6.1
Devotion	I care about my religion and feel responsible to implement it in all aspects of my life.	I do not see any issue wearing turbans as it is a sign of my devotion to Sikhism.	Devotion Responsibility Turban Love	0.73	0.83	6.08
Freedom of choice	The freedom to choose and practice religion is at the foundation of my religion.	I do not feel obliged but pleased to follow my values.	Freedom Obligation Community Values Religion	0.89	0.85	6.38
Inner peace	When I read a passage from Guru Granth Sahib, it brings me the gift of peace and tranquility.	When I go to Gurdwara, I feel suspended in an ocean of tranquility.	Peace Gurdwara Guru Success Emotion	0.85	0.92	6.21

As it is shown in the table4, the responses brings a clear insight to the way Sikhs feel about their religion, far away in Iran. Tranquility, better life and gender equality are some of the main points of interest to them, which shows that language and ethnic identity plays a much lesser role for the small but vibrant Sikh community in Iran and Middle East.



## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Our study shows that the Christian faith could not develop in the Middle-East because of the ethno-racial aspect that it has acquired throughout its old history. In fact, religions get back to their core essential when the overall situation for their growth is not provided. This can be seen in almost all of the local religions for whom the propagation seems almost impossible. On the other, language does accelerate the return to the core by connecting the race and language in a much deeper way. This makes it even harder for the outside world to connect to the same values that the religion claims to protect in its institutions. Armenian language in Iran plays that special linguistic barrier which prevents other fellow citizens to approach the Christian faith, creating a small ethno-linguistic environment for the followers. Furthermore, wherever the Christianity is the minority religion the influence of language dramatically declines. This can be seen in countries with the same language but different religions. Therefore, language is an important component of both religion formation and restriction. In fact, in our study, we conclude that the religion interacts with the language in order to adapt to new situations whenever it is threatened by religions surrounding it. Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang (2001) investigate the role of language, parents and peers in ethnic identity, concluding that ethnic language proficiency, and in-group peer interaction predicted ethnic identity. This is in line with the findings of our study where the influence of language in the development of religiousness is highlighted. Furthermore, Armenian language usage in Iran showed how the grammar component plays that essential role of unity among the Christian faith followers in the Middle-East. The most constant component of language change is its core grammar while phonetics and lexicon get influenced heavily by the new environment and other languages. The situation of Armenians in Iran, though, cannot be considered as a complete prototype for the whole region. Al-Khatib (2001) examines the language situation of the Armenians in Jordan, where they constitute a small new minority for the last 100 years. He investigates the language shift in Armenian and points out to the fact that Armenian is found to be used in very restricted situation and by a very small number of people. This shows that the old historic Armenian community in Iran has created a more robust language identity to cling to, compared to the more newly formed Armenian community in Jordan. However, still the ethnic identity of Christianity in Jordan confirms our findings that the Christianity in the Middle East, being a minority, follows a strict ethnic path. Sikhism is also a great example of how the balanced language identity helps a religion to grow and have followers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. As our study showed, the Sikhism in Iran does not put an ethnic and language barrier to the followers. It is this lack of a language identity which helps Sikhism to survive and prosper.

## **References**

Al-Khatib, M.A. (2001). Language shift among the Armenians of Jordan. *The International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 154, 153177.

- Amanolahi, S. (2005). A note on ethnicity and ethnic groups in Iran. *Iran & the Caucasus*, 9(1), 37-41.
- Berberian, H. (2005). Traversing boundaries and selves: Iranian-Armenian identities during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25 (2): 219-96.
- Brueggemann, W. (2012). Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy Revisited. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* vol. 74: 28-38.
- Cragg, K. (1991). *The Arab Christian: a history in the Middle East*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- Hassan, H. D. (2007). *Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities*.
- Held, C., C. & Cummings, J., T. (2006). "Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East." *The Contemporary Middle East*, edited by Karl Yambert. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Jaspal, R. & Coyle, A. (2010b). 'My language, my people': language and ethnic identity among British-born South Asians. *South Asian Diaspora* 2(2): 201–218.
- Nercissians, E. (2001). Bilingualism and Diglossia: Patterns of Language Use by Ethnic Minorities in Tehran. *Int'l. J. Soc. Lang.* 148 (2001), 59-70.
- Pappe, I. (2005) *The Modern Middle East*. London: Routledge.
- Phinney, J. S., Romero, I., Nava, M., & Huang, D. (2001). The role of language, parents, and peers in ethnic identity among adolescents in immigrant families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30, 135–153.
- Sanasarian, E. (1995). State dominance and communal perseverance: The Armenian diaspora in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979-1989. *Diaspora* 4 (3), 243-265.
- Singh, R. (2018). Derivational Grammar Model and Basket Verb: A Novel Approach to the Inflectional Phrase in the Generative Grammar and Cognitive Processing. *English Linguistics Research*, Vol.7, No.2.
- Singh, R. (2018). Auxiliary Verbs in Serbo-Croatian, French, Persian, Spanish and English: A Cognitive-Semantic Approach to the Auxiliary Verb Usage and Passive Voice. *English Linguistics Research*, Vol.7, No.3.
- Singh, R. (2018). A Cognitive Approach to the Semantics in the Sacred Context: Semantic and Symbolic Function of Sacred Words. *English Linguistics Research*, Vol.7, No.3.
- Singh, R. (2018). Norwegian and Persian spatial prepositions: a novel comparative and syntactic approach to the spatial prepositions. *KAAV international journal of English, literature, and linguistics*, vol.5/ page no.1-8.
- Singh, R. (2018). Language change and directionality: A novel model for language change in Persian and Iranian languages from the sociolinguistic perspective. *KAAV International journal of English, Literature, and linguistics*, vol.5/page no.1-8.
- Singh, R. (2018). Error Analysis of Persian Learners of Hausa Language: Cognitive Approach to Errors. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, vol.45/page no.10-15.
- Singh, R. (2018). Mirroring Effects and the Water Code: A Cognitive-Semantic Approach to Natural Morphology in the Religious-Cultural Context. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, vol.46/page no.37-41.
- Van Gordor, A., C. (2010). *Christianity in Persia and the Status of Non-Muslims in Iran*. MD: Lexington Books.
- Voskanian, V. (2002). The Iranian Loan-Words in Lomavren, The Secret Language of the Armenian Gypsies. *Iran & the Caucasus*. Vol. 6, No. 1/2 (2002), 169-180.



# Sikh Research Journal

**Vol. 3 No. 1**

This article is from \*Sikh Research Journal\*, the online peer-reviewed journal of Sikh and Punjabi Studies

Sikh Research Journal \*Vol. 3 No. 1 Published: Fall 2018.

<http://sikhresearchjournal.org>

<http://sikhfoundation.org>

# **Minority Ministers in Media:**

## **A Study on Digital Representations of Canadian Sikh Politicians in Mainstream Media and Their Effects on Race Relations in Canada**

Abstract: Focusing on Harjit Singh Sajjan and Navdeep Singh Bains of the Trudeau Administration, this project analyzes the effects of popular digital representations of Canadian Sikh Ministers, in daily news, on race relations in Canada, as quantified by representations of hate crimes. These representations are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively; this study looks to how many representations in major media there are as well as what the specifics of certain representations do. This research draws on scholarly journals and theoretical articles for analysis; it uses them to determine the significance of specific representations and representations generally. It also examines primary sources, such as images from newspaper articles from the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, and Metro News about Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan and Minister Navdeep Singh Bains to discuss the importance of positive representations of Sikhs and explore how positive stereotypes are employed. The study finds that positive digital representations of diasporic communities in politics are key to evoking social change and affecting social life. Moreover, this study undermines the notion that political participation alone is sufficient to cause social change, as digital representation of participation is integral.

Sohela Suri

Supervising Professor: Dr. Colleen Tremonte

12 December 2016

## Preface

Anytime anyone write or says anything they do so with all of their biases. True objectivity is not possible, thus I felt it was only appropriate to acknowledge my positionality overtly. I am a Sikh-American woman, and, especially in the history section, it will be apparent that I take a very pro-Sikh stance. Also, even though I was born in the USA, my family is from Karol Bagh, Delhi, and both of my parents experienced and lived through the 1984 riots. This also has bearing on how I tell the history of these events, and how I approach Sikhs as a diasporic community. Another aspect of my subject position that probably also affects my account of these events is the fact that my family are, per my father's side, Khukrains. This means that we are part of a specific caste, and we were quite privileged in India. All of this quite heavily skews how I portray 1984 and Sikhism, but the unique way to understand these is essential to my analysis and how I approach this topic.

Furthermore, I keep the hair on my head, and every man in my family, excluding my maternal grandmother's side who are Hindu, for generations have kept their hair and worn a turban. This is a large part of the reason I find Sardars, turban-wearing men, such an interesting subject of study. Throughout my life, I have witnessed first-hand what it is like to be a Sardar in North America, especially post-9/11. Witnessing the type of suffering my brother and father

endured was really hard, even though I never personally had that experience nor will I. However, through even just witnessing, I realized how important it was to explore the experience of Sardars. I also realized that when the western world can become more educated about Sardars and more accepting, then only will Sikhs truly have a space and be welcomed. Therefore, I think that, even though other Sikh experiences are important and deserve to be analyzed, my passion lies in the critical analysis of how Sikh men are received by society and how their actions can help create space and warrant hospitality.

Moreover, I lived and worked in Canada, specifically downtown Toronto, during the summer of 2016. While there, I experienced a fair amount of racism. This shocked me, because throughout my life, my family has visited Canada many times, but we usually went to the Mississauga/Brampton area where the majority of people are Sikhs, Hindus, or Muslims. Living in downtown, I discovered that my experiences in Mississauga/Brampton were not representative of wider Canadian society. I realized quickly, there are just as many inter-racial tensions in Canada as the USA; however, they were not publicized or really discussed in the past. This changed upon Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's inauguration when he was sworn with a cabinet that included four Sikhs. The way that these representations instigated the media to actually begin covering what occurred in Canadian society fascinated me, and that's how I decided that this was a topic that was important and

needed to be written about. As this is a very current event, I already know that my finding cannot be considered concrete; however, this analysis as a starting point is important.

## I. Introduction

Representations in digital space, specifically in the media, dictate societal beliefs and norms. Actions only really have effects when they are known about, hence the importance of media and representations in creating social change. Minorities, specifically diasporic peoples, participating in politics are important, but that participation is most meaningful when represented in the media, particularly digitally. Were America to have its first Muslim Secretary of State it would only be impactful if it were publicized, and most people rely on digital representations, such as online news, to learn about things like that. Without representation, policy may change, but society will not. Social change and paradigm shift are essential to any real move towards egalitarian societies. In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau created an opportunity for Sikhs to make social change by appointing four to his cabinet; however, the effects of this are because of the representations of these bodies in this space versus directly being benefits of the occupation of this space.

The rise of representations of hate crimes in Canada is illustrative of the effects of digital representations of Sikhs, particularly Sardars, breaking into political space. Through creating and racializing<sup>i</sup> political space for Sikhs, Sikh politicians create space for Sikhs in society; people become less ignorant and more tolerant, in regard to the Sikh people, as a result of positive stereotypes. However,



this tolerance and enlightenment are not a direct result of the politicians breaking political space, themselves, rather they result from the digital representations of these politicians breaching this space in mainstream media, via the Toronto Star, Globe and Mail, and Metro Toronto. Representations of Sardars uniquely affect race-relations, as Sardars are more often the victims of hate crimes within the Sikh community. Thus the correlation between the increase in positive representations of Sardar politicians and the increase in coverage of hate crimes is demonstrative the effects minorities, specifically diasporic peoples, in politics can have.<sup>ii</sup>

This paper begins with a brief account of the history of Sikhism, background on the Canadian-Sikh Ministers, and background on the news outlets used for analysis. This will lay a practical foundation that will be complimented by the theoretical framework which will follow. It includes a discussion of Islamophobia, misrecognition, visual politics, and the ethics of looking. These will allow for the discussion of how popular representations of Sardars in Canada have changed from the Harper Administration to the Trudeau Administration, as well as the specific positive stereotypes that have been established because of how the Honourable Harjit Singh Sajjan and the Honourable Navdeep Singh Bains are portrayed in the media. The paper will then conclude with a discussion of the effects of these representations and stereotypes on Sikh-non-Sikh relations in Canada as quantified by the changes in the coverage of hate crimes.

## II. Background

### A. Sikhism and the Diaspora

Sikhism is a religion which began roughly 500 years ago in Talwandi, Pakistan, now known as Nankana Sahib, Pakistan, and it is the fifth largest religion in the world (Arjan Singh 99). One particularly distinguishable practice in Sikhism is that of keeping hair, it is one of the 5 Ks, which are the five main Sikh articles of faith; Sikhism is the only religion in the world in which a turban is worn as an article of faith. Men usually wear turbans, called a “pagri,” and keep their beard, while women who keep their hair often wear a “chunni,” scarves which are used to cover a women’s head, unlike a hijab not all of a women’s hair is covered with a chunni. This is all tied into the K “kesh,” meaning hair. The 5 Ks are all physical identifiers used to construct a Sikh “pechan,” which is effectively an identity (Eleanor Nesbitt 1-61). It is insufficient to just use the term identity, since it is much more than that for Sikhs, especially Sardars. Any Sikh man who wears a pagri is referred to as a “Sardar.” Sardars are often the victims of hate crimes and microaggressions (Anne Murphy 189-91).

Sikhs inhabited, mainly, the Empire of Punjab until 1947; Mountbatten split up Punjab between India and Pakistan, and then the empire broke into many states. Sikhs moved all around India, but the Indian states of Punjab and Delhi held the highest concentrations of Sikhs. Most Sikhs did not leave India, until the 1984 Sikh

Genocide. In June of 1984, Indira Gandhi ordered an attack on Harmandir Sahib, one of the most holy places in Sikhism. Gandhi used the excuse of Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale to justify this. Bhindrawale, at the time, was an advocate of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, which was an extensive list of demands to improve the lives of Sikhs in India: recognition of Sikh scholars, free access to Nankana Sahib<sup>iii</sup>, demolition of the caste system, development of farmers in Punjab, and free distribution and translations of Gurbani<sup>iv</sup>. Although one could categorize him as an extremist, he was not a threat to anyone. Nonetheless, Indira Gandhi portrayed him as terrorist and threat to Indian national security. Gandhi has a reputation of being anti-Sikh prior to this incident. She allowed and encouraged the Indian army to storm into Harmandir Sahib, destroy the Gurudwara, and murder thousands of innocent Sikhs. This was not actually because of any fear of Sikhs or Bhindrawale, but rather a ploy to scare Sikhs into never opposing anti-national policies of Congress. For 10 days not only Gurudwaras but Sikhs throughout Punjab were attacked. The ongoing in June of 1984 are referred to as “Operation Blue Star” by the Indian government, and the “Ten Days of Terror” by the Sikh people.

The bloodbath continued in November of 1984 when Indira Gandhi was murdered by her two Sikh Body Guards, Satwant Singh and Beant Singh, with their service weapons. Indian politicians, most if not all of whom were Hindu at the time, called for attacks on Sikhs in the capitol, New Delhi<sup>v</sup>. The politicians

themselves at the time even participated in the killings. This event was gruesome, and Sikhs were killed in cold blood. This was the first large scale display of anti-Sikh sentiment by the Indian government, and it will forever be a stain on the Indian government's reputation (Bruce La Brack 619-620, Bhabani Sen Gupta 364-366, and Darshan Tatla). Roughly 8,000<sup>vi</sup> Sikhs were murdered between June and November, possibly more. The statistics on these events will never be certain. As a result of these events, many Sikhs left India. Most went to the US, Canada, and the UK. Canada, today, has one of the largest Sikh populations outside of India. About 650,000 Sikhs, according to World Atlas, currently live in Canada; that is 1.96% of the Sikh population in the world. Canadian Sikhs make up 1.5% of the Canadian population, according to the Washington Post; however, Punjabi, the language spoken by Sikhs and those from Punjab, is the third language and Canada. Sikhs have been in Canadian Politics since the 1950s, but have only recently entered the parliamentary level. Minister Sajjan and Minister Bains are the first to hold their respective position.

## **B. Sikhs in Prime Minister Trudeau's Cabinet**

“Gurbax Singh Mahli and Harbans (Herb) Dhaliwal were the first Sikhs elected to the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa” in 1993 (explorAsian). In November of 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (hereafter Trudeau) selected a

cabinet with an equal number of men and women for the first time in Canadian history, among these men and women he appointed four Sikhs to his cabinet: the Honourable Navdeep Singh Bains, the Honourable Bardish Chagger, the Honourable Harjit Singh Sajjan, and the Honourable Amarjeet Sohi (Jessica Murphy; “The Team”). Of these, one is a Mona<sup>vii</sup> man, one is a Mona woman, and two are Sardar men. There have been Mona Sikhs in Canadian Prime Ministers’ cabinets before; however, there have never been Sardars. Therefore, this study will not consider the Honourable Amarjeet Sohi and the Honourable Bardish Chagger<sup>viii</sup>.

The Honourable Harjit Singh Sajjan (hereafter Minister Sajjan) and the Honourable Navdeep Singh Bains (hereafter Minister Bains) are the first Sardar Ministers in a Canadian Prime Minister’s cabinet; Minister Bains and Minister Sajjan are both the first Sardars to hold each of their respective offices. Minister Sajjan is the current Minister of National Defense. He served eleven years in the Vancouver Police Department, served three separate deployments to Kandahar, Afghanistan, and received the Order of Military Merit, one of the Canadian military’s highest recognitions. He was also the first Sikh-Canadian to command a Canadian army reserve regiment. Minister Bains is the current Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. He was former Prime Minister Paul Martin’s Parliamentary Secretary, and he was the “Critic for Public Works

and Government Services, the Treasury Board, International Trade, Natural Resources, and Small Business and Tourism.” Both Ministers were elected to some type of office prior to becoming Ministers, and both hail from Sikh-dominated communities (“The Honourable Harjit Singh Sajjan”; “The Honourable Navdeep Singh Bains”). This may have some bearing on their political success.

### **C. The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, and Metro News Toronto**

The Globe and Mail<sup>ix</sup>, the Toronto Star<sup>x</sup>, and Metro News Toronto<sup>xi</sup> are the three top daily news outlets in Canada (James Rubec; "Top 10 Canadian Print Outlets"). All of these news outlets' websites portray a predominantly white staff. The Globe and Mail has only three South Asians on staff; unfortunately, their website does not include profiles for each staff member, so the amount of total people of color is inconclusive. This figure is an estimate based on names (“Online Staff”). The Toronto Star staff is not listed in full online; however, there are author profiles. Per the profiles and images<sup>xii</sup> available on their website, all authors are white or could all pass for being white (Keenen et al). Metro News Toronto does not have a full list of staff either, but they do have author profiles, some of which include photos. From the photos<sup>xiii</sup> shown, two authors from the Metro News are people of color or people who cannot pass for being white (Ngabo et al). None of

these are concrete statistics, rather estimates based on representations of their staff and authors on each website.

Each news outlet has a different focus. The Globe and Mail is focused on a balance of national and international news, and covers everything from business and technology to entertainment and lifestyle. The Toronto Star, however, is concerned more with national and local news, and it prioritizes social news, especially as it pertains to fighting injustices. Metro News Toronto, then, is one of seven offshoot of Metro News, and is concerned with more local news. The three are, again, popular through Canada, despite what they may or may not cover. Moreover, each news outlet is accessed by millions of people daily. Each is also available online and in print. None of these sources are particularly concerned with stories about Sikhs; however, every single one of them has some type of concern with politics, which makes them a particularly interesting unit of measure.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

To understand how Sikhs are viewed in Canadian society, and North American society at large, it is imperative one understands Islamophobia. Islamophobia affects anyone or anything that is or could be affiliated with Islam in any way. This affects Sikh because wearing a turban has been attributed to Islam, in part because of the image of Osama Bin Laden which circulated after 9/11 (Katy

Pal Sian 251-54). This causes ignorance and erasure of the Sikh identity. Another consequence of this is misrecognition. The combination of these leads to Sikhs suffering the consequences of Islamophobia and the trauma which results from misrecognition. These can be combatted by constructive stereotypes which inspire education.

Although some argue stereotypes cannot be constructive, since they play into the generalization of different communities; that does not diminish the potential constructive characteristics of said generalizations. Positive stereotyping is the only way the homogenization of people can be exploited by the stereotypes to inspire change. When positive stereotypes are promoted, people are more inclined to do more independent research and to learn more in general about they who have been stereotyped. This contributed to the lessening of ignorance and misrecognition (Margret Shih et al 335-37; Arpana Gupta et al 101-14; Alan Lambert et al 1002-16). In this specific case, despite the media determining representations of the Sardar politicians, positive representations in general pushback against the status quo and establish a starting point for change.

Furthermore, to understand these representations, one must assess visual politics and acknowledge the ethics of looking. Visual politics are predicated off the right to look. The right to look is the concept that looking is an act during which both people must mutually invent one another to find one's self and one



another, since we all dialogically construct our identities (Mirzoeff 472-474).

Because our right to look, as autonomous beings, is intrinsic, not being allowed to look is a violation of our natural human rights. When the media fails to cover stories or actively dismisses an entire group of people they are infringing upon our right to look<sup>xiv</sup>. Therefore, to analyze photos one must consider how the aesthetics are reflective and can affect social change.

Another theoretical basis for analyzing political participation is looking to the way space is racialized. Racialization of space refers to the process through which space is transformed and race is inserted into it; rather, it is the phenomena which occurs when a person or a group of people enter a physical, digital, or ideological space, which may or may not have been traditionally dominated by a dominant cultural or social group, and create space through a process of racialization (George Lipsitz 28-34). In Canadian politics, Sardar politicians at the federal level create space for other Sikhs and Sardars in politics, and this is essential to the representations of this creating social space for Sikhs. Both the immediate political space and social space created are byproducts of the racialization of space.

#### **IV. Sardar Politicians in the Media**

##### **A. Digital Representations of Sikhs<sup>xv</sup> from Harper to Trudeau**

Sikhs have never been central in Canadian media; however, between the Trudeau and Harper Administrations there has been a rise in representations. Under Harper, the Globe and Mail had zero articles, the Toronto Star had fifteen articles about Sikhs, and Metro News Toronto had twelve articles. Moreover, none of these articles has consistent representations of Sikhs. All of them actually used quite general, static images. Comparatively, under Trudeau, the Globe and Mail had zero articles about Sikhs, the Toronto Star had thirty five articles about Sikhs, and Metro News Toronto had twenty seven articles about Sikhs. These were all complex, varied representations but consistently presented Sikhs in a positive light. Notably, the Globe and Mail has zero articles about Sikhs consistently. They have one article referencing Minister Bains, but do not label it as being about Sikhs or a Sikh. Considering that the Globe and Mail is the top news outlet in Canada, it is quite problematic that they continue to disregard Sikhs. It is also interesting, since they are the only news outlet with, as far as they portray on their website, South Asians on their staff. However, both the Toronto Star and Metro News Toronto have produce over twice as many articles as under the Harper Administration during the Trudeau Administration. Many of these articles which were produced under the Trudeau Administration were about Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan and Minister Navdeep Singh Bains. The specifics of these representations have helped

instigate changed in how Canadian society at large views Sikhs, particularly Sardars.

## **B. Representations of Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan**

Minister Sajjan, the Minister of National Defense for Canada, is depicted dynamically, in that many variations of him are shown. Consider two specific images which circulate the media consistently Figure 1 and Figure 2. Each of these figures has a different appeal and presents Minister Sajjan in a different perspective. These collectively show Sardars at large in a different light and push back against negative stereotypes. They present Sikhs to society as real, complex people who are more than silent, disposable members of society.

The first image is of one which shows Minister Sajjan in his field and interacting with other. This shows him as being amicable and approachable and combats stereotypes that Sikh men are scary or terrorists. These types of image are humanizing for Sardar men; furthermore, they underscore the intelligence and capability of Sikhs. In



this picture particularly, all of Sajjan medals are displayed showing how decorated of a serviceman he is and how much he has done for Canadian society (Figure 1).

Images like this which show Sardars thriving in field they are not typically

associated with are essential to Canadian society viewing Sikhs as more than the popular stereotypes.

The second image shows Minister Sajjan using open hand motions, making

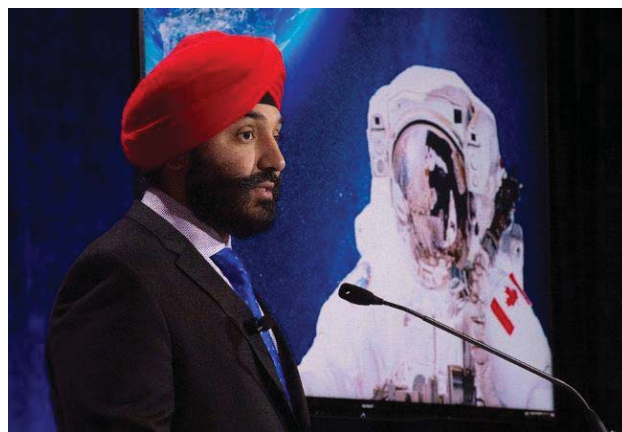


eye contact, and looking as if he were concerned and about to say something of importance (Figure 2). Certain motions and facial expressions are used to evoke empathy, such as open hand gestures (Carroll Izard et al 83-113). Presenting Minister Sajjan with open hand shows

him as more friendly and approachable. Moreover, people are more likely to consider someone trustworthy when they are shown with more open body language. Also, the way that he looked engaged and concerned in this particular setting of a gathering of politicians makes him appear like he is consciously trying to make a change and like he truly cares for Canada.

### **C. Representations of Minister Navdeep Singh Bains**

Minister Bains, the Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development for Canada, is depicted as portrayed by the media in a way that compliments Minister Sajjan's representations. Consider Figure 3 and Figure 4. These also push back against negative



stereotypes and further humanize Sikhs. These figures complicate the understanding non-Sikh Canadian society has of Sikhs as it adds another face to the community. They also show how the Sikh community is not a homogenous community.

Figure three shows Minister Bains giving a speech at an event related to space. This is demonstrative of Minister Bains' dedication to his field and intelligence. He looks serious and focused, which portrays him as competent and capable of more than driving a taxi or running a liquor store. This image, like the image of Sajjan, helps circulate a narrative that Sikhs are capable members of society (Figure 3). It also shows a Sardar again in a context in which he is recognized as a Sikh.

The next figure depicts an interaction between Trudeau and Minister Bains. They are clearly sharing a laugh over something. This displays the comical, fun side of Sikh. It further presents Sikhs as people with complex personalities (Figure



Figure 4

4). It shows another facet of Bains' personality showing him as imperfect and not always serious; this detracts from the mundane image presented about politicians and Sikhs. This interaction with Trudeau specifically is a good representation

because it shows that a Sikh and a white Canadian can have a good, friendly

relationship. This makes Sikhs appear more approachable to the rest of Canadian society and shows how tension are not inherent. All of these representations themselves also contribute to non-Sikh Canadians learning about Sikh more generally, and being able to recognize Sikhs as a distinct group in society

## **V. Effects of Representations on Hate Crimes**

In a year under the Harper Administration, the Globe and Mail had zero articles, the Toronto Star had two articles, and Metro News Toronto had one article about hate crimes committed against Sikhs. In a year under the Trudeau Administration the Globe and Mail had zero articles, the Toronto Star had eleven articles, and Metro News Toronto has six articles about hate crimes committed against Sikhs. Violence against Asians in North America is mostly manifested in hate crimes, so looking at how hate crimes are prioritized in media will uncover how this violence and hatred is or is not problematized by the media (Njoki Nathani Wane et al 202-203). No news outlets have overwhelming coverage of hate crimes,<sup>xvi</sup> but representations have been on the rise. On an individual level hate crimes are not indicative of the sentiments of wider society; however, how often they are covered in the media is indicative and affects how society views Sikhs. Therefore these representations are key, specifically when they are digital.

Digital representations today are important, since today most people get their knowledge online. Moreover, digital images are permanent and spread easily, versus print news where only certain people can access it. Although digital media does have its limitations, online news is more easily available than print news. Furthermore, the representations of hate crimes are illustrative of how much society cares about Sikhs and their suffering. Media covering hate crimes is almost indicative of the willingness of Canadian society to witness the suffering of Sikhs. Also, without representation of these Sardar politicians, social priorities would not have changed. Thus, these representation were key to getting society's and the media's attention, so that they may represent what struggles Sikhs face and cover stories about Sikhs. Now Sikhs are represented better and are considered a less disposable facet of Canadian society. These representations not only affect society, but also policy. For example, Punjabi is now the third language of Canada after English and French. This means that now, because Punjabi, the language of Sikh people, is deemed important by the government and society, Sikh people, and Punjabi at large, now have more access to documents and government resources.

None of this social change or political change would have been possible without physical racialization of space which was captured and represented. These hate crimes would not have been covered had Minister Sajjan and Minister Bains not entered physical political space and made into a place for Sikhs and for



minorities. This allowed for society to see Sikhs in a different light and consider them a more important group in society. Then the physical racialization of space translated into the racialization of social space. Representations of breaches of space and disruption of norms like this are uniquely key to the social changes that are so important to society becoming more egalitarian.

## **VI. Conclusion**

For Sikhs, but also minorities and diasporic people at large, participation in politics is the first step to finding or creating social space. Once Sikhs participate in politics, representations of their participation push back against negative stereotypes and create positive stereotypes which combat ignorance. Once positive stereotypes are proliferated throughout society people are more open to learning about individuals and groups. Certain representations, like those of Minister Sajjan and Minister Bains, can even help formerly silenced and ignored communities become more spoken about. This starts to create space for these individuals socially, because of their physical presence in politics and how that is depicted. These portrayals are important and can act as a gateway for not only members of the represented person's community, but for other minority and diasporic communities. It can help them gain access to platforms not available to them otherwise.



## Works Cited

- Brack, Bruce La. "The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood." *Pacific Affairs* 73.4 (2001): 619-20. *ProQuest*. Web.
- explorASIAN. "Sikh Canadian History." *Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society*. WordPress, 14 Mar. 2013. Web.
- Gupta, Arpana, Dawn M. Szymanski, and Frederick T. L. Leong. "The "model Minority Myth": Internalized Racialism of Positive Stereotypes as Correlates of Psychological Distress, and Attitudes Toward Help-Seeking." *Asian American Journal of Psychology* 2.2 (2011): 101-14. *ProQuest*. Web.
- Gupta, Bhabani Sen. "Punjab: Fading of Sikh Diaspora." *Economic and Political Weekly* 25.7/8 (1990): 364-66. Web.
- Izard, Carroll E., Jerome Kagan, and Robert B. Zajonc. *Emotions, Cognition, and Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. Print.
- Keenan, Edward, Michael Geist, Judith Timson, Tim Harper, Ellen Roseman, Heather Mallic, Catherine Porter, Ellie, and Martin Rehg Cohn. "Thestar.com | Toronto Star | Canada's Largest Daily." *Thestar.com*. Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd, n.d. Web.

- Lambert, Alan J., et al. "Mood and the Correction of Positive Versus Negative Stereotypes." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Attitudes and Social Cognition* 72.5 (1997): 1002-16. *ProQuest*. Web.
- Lipsitz, George. "The Black Spatial Imaginary." *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011. 27-34. Print.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. "The Right to Look." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2011, pp. 473–496. *JSTOR*. Web.
- Murphy, Anne. "SIKHS AT LARGE: Religion, Culture, and Politics in Global Perspective." *Pacific Affairs* 83.1 (2010): 189-91. *ProQuest*. Web.
- Murphy, Jessica. "Trudeau Gives Canada First Cabinet with Equal Number of Men and Women." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 04 Nov. 2015. Web.
- Nesbitt, Eleanor M. *Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- Ngabo, Gilbert, Rosemary Westwood, Irene Kuan, Luke Simcoe, Matt Elliot, Jessica Smith Cross, Stephen Goetz, May Warren, and Kristen Thompson. "Metro News." *Metronews.ca*. Free Daily News Group Inc, n.d. Web.
- "ONLINE STAFF." *Globeandmail.com*. GlobeLink.ca, n.d. Web.

Pal Sian, Katy. "Don't Freak I'm Sikh." *Thinking through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*. By AbdoolKarim Vakil. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. 251-54. Print.

Rubec, James. "Canada's Top 20 Daily Newspapers." *Cision*. Cision Canada Inc, 14 Jan. 2016. Web.

Shih, Margaret, and Todd L. Pittinsky. "Reflections on Positive Stereotypes Research and on Replications." *Social psychology* 45.4 (2014): 335-7. *ProQuest*. Web.

Singh, Arjan Kirpal. "The Universal Ideal of Sikhism." *Global Dialogue* 2.1 (2000): 99-108. *ProQuest*. Web.

Tatla, Darshan Singh. *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search For Statehood*. UCL, 1999. *ProQuest*. Web.

"The Honourable Harjit Singh Sajjan." *Prime Minister of Canada*. N.p., 24 Oct. 2016. Web.

"The Honourable Navdeep Singh Bains." *Prime Minister of Canada*. N.p., 24 Oct. 2016. Web.

"The Team." *Prime Minister of Canada*. Canada, n.d. Web.

"Top 10 Canadian Print Outlets." *MediaMiser Top 10 Canadian Print Outlets Comments*. MediaMiser, 05 Jan. 2016. Web.

Wane, Njoki Nathani, et al. "Anti-Asian Violence in North America: Asian

American and Asian Canadian Reflections on Hate, Healing and

Resistance." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 35.1 (2003): 202-3. *ProQuest*. Web.

---

<sup>i</sup> Racialization has many interpretations, as it is a process and a discourse which varies contextually. For the purposes of this research, racialization is a process through which (George Lipsitz 28-34).

<sup>ii</sup> I recognize that not even community of diasporic people or minorities is able to access this platform; however, those who can open an avenue for others. Sikhs entering politics is good for not only the Sikh community, but other communities as well since representations of any non-dominant ground entering political space pushes back on the status quo.

<sup>iii</sup> Nankana Sahib is a Gurudwara, Sikh place of worship, in modern day Pakistan. It is located in the city of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth. Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji is the founder of Sikhism. Moreover, this particular Gurudwara has great historical and sentimental significance within the Sikh community.

<sup>iv</sup> Gurbani are Sikh prayers and hymns. In this context, it is referring to written holy scriptures.

<sup>v</sup> My parents lived through this. It is not often that they or any of my family members talk about the attacks, as they were so incredibly traumatic; however, when my mom did speak of the attacks with me, she recalled people banging on her door asking if there were any Sikhs who lived there, wanting to kill her family.

<sup>vi</sup> Less than 3,000 were killed throughout the entire duration of the 1984 attacks according to the government, but those statistics were to downplay the genocide which they, to date, refuse to acknowledge.

<sup>vii</sup> "Mona" means a Sikh who cuts his hair and does not wear a turban.

<sup>viii</sup> I acknowledge that the Honourable Bardish Chagger and the Honourable Amarjeet Sohi are important, and their participation in politics is valuable; however, for the purposes of this research, it would be more beneficial to analyze the representations of solely the Sardars. Not only because Sardars are more often victims of hate crimes than Monas, but more so because Sardars are physically representative of Sikhs and create a unique avenue for education and positive stereotypes. There is more stigma about Sikhs who wear pagris than Sikhs who do not, so establishing positive stereotypes about Sardars is key to social change, hence my choice to focus on Sardar Harjit Singh Sajjan and Sardar Navdeep Singh Bains.

<sup>ix</sup> For more information about the Globe and Mail visit <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/>. This could potentially be beneficial, as you can look at which types of stories are featured and how this source organizes stories.

<sup>x</sup> For more information about the Toronto Star visit <https://www.thestar.com/>. This could potentially be beneficial, as you can look at which types of stories are featured and how this source organizes stories.

<sup>xi</sup> For more information about Metro News Toronto visit <http://www.metronews.ca/>. This could potentially be beneficial, as you can look at which types of stories are featured and how this source organizes stories.

<sup>xii</sup> Each of the following names are linked to their profiles. These were the only available profiles: [Edward Keenan](#), [Michael Geist](#), [Judith Timson](#), [Tim Harper](#), [Ellen Roseman](#), [Heather Mallick](#), [Ellie](#), [Catherine Porter](#), and [Martin Regg Cohn](#).

<sup>xiii</sup> Each of the following names are linked to their profiles. These were the only available profiles: [Gilbert Ngabo](#), [Rosemary Westwood](#), [Irene Kuan](#), [Luke Simcoe](#), [Matt Elliot](#), [Jessica Smith Cross](#), [Steve Goetz](#), [May Warren](#), and [Kristen Thompson](#).

<sup>xiv</sup> Partaking in this article, further googling images, and even looking at the images provided are a part of the process of looking.

---

<sup>xv</sup> The reason I choose to look at representations of Sikhs versus just of Sardars is because my argument is that the positive representations of Sardars politicians are beneficial for the entire Sikh community. Moreover, I consider both positive and negative representations here.

<sup>xvi</sup> The way I have quantified representation of hate crimes for each news outlet is by simply searching “Sikh” on each website and finding all of the relevant articles regarding hate crimes committed against Sikhs. Trudeau has been in office for a year, so I am comparing the representations since November 4, 2015 with an average of the year before that under the Harper administration.



# Sikh Research Journal

**Vol. 3 No. 1**

This article is from \*Sikh Research Journal\*, the online peer-reviewed journal of Sikh and Punjabi Studies

Sikh Research Journal \*Vol. 3 No. 1 Published: Fall 2018.

<http://sikhresearchjournal.org>

<http://sikhfoundation.org>

# The Challenge of Translating the Guru Granth Sahib: An Illustration and Preliminary Reflections\*

Nirvikar Singh

Sarbjit Singh Aurora Chair of Sikh and Punjabi Studies

University of California, Santa Cruz

March 2017

## 1. Introduction

For devout Sikhs, the words of Guru Nanak and his successors, or *Gurbani*, as canonized in the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), are the core guide for living this human life.<sup>1</sup> There are variations of language used in the GGS, but they are all vernaculars, and all written in Gurmukhi script. The words would have been directly comprehensible to Sikhs at the time of the human Gurus, whether read directly or listened to in recitation or in *kirtan* (singing).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this direct access to *Gurbani*, without the mediation of a priestly class, was and is an important feature of the Sikh faith tradition. In this context, it is important to recognize the impact of displacements in time and location that affect the depth and breadth of direct access to *Gurbani*.<sup>3</sup>

Modernization and migration pose significant, though not insurmountable challenges to comprehension of *Gurbani*. Even those fluent in modern Punjabi require additional education to understand some individual words, phrases, allusions and metaphors that are contained in the GGS. This issue of comprehending meaning can, to some extent, be separated from the knowledge of the script. For example, editions of the GGS were produced in Devanagari and Farsi script over a century ago, making them readable by a broader segment of the population than those who were literate in Gurmukhi, particularly Sindhi and Kabuli Sikhs.<sup>4</sup> Currently, the GGS has been transliterated in the Roman alphabet, which is used in English as well as numerous other languages around the world.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, there were early attempts to translate and explain the message of *Gurbani* in contemporary Punjabi prose. It was recognized that even literacy in Punjabi did not guarantee immediate or full comprehension, and various interpretative guides were written, often reflecting the individual perspective of the writer. In the twentieth century, there was a more systematic

---

\* I am grateful to Rahuldeep Singh Gill and Gurinder Singh Mann for helpful comments on incomplete drafts. They are blameless for remaining shortcomings.

<sup>1</sup> Useful references for background on the Sikhs and their history and beliefs, among many available, are Grewal (1990) and Mann (2001, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> On *kirtan*, and some useful analysis of the relationship of singing to the words of the GGS, see Kaur, I. (2011a, b).

<sup>3</sup> For example, as discussed in the next section, an English translation is now featured in live broadcasts of *kirtan* from the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Gurinder Singh Mann for this information.

<sup>5</sup> There is no standard method of transliteration, so several variants exist, which presents a separate issue and challenge for those unfamiliar with the pronunciation of the original language.

community effort to provide a complete guide to the GGS in Punjabi.<sup>6</sup> In addition, guides appeared in other languages as well, combining some element of translation with explication and interpretation. The boundary between translation and explication is sometimes fuzzy, of course, and translators use footnotes and even parenthetical interpolations to flesh out meanings or nuances.

Recognizing the complex set of issues involved in bridging *Gurbani* as written down and canonized, and its modern comprehension in varied locations and circumstances, this paper seeks to highlight some basic elements of the challenge of translating the GGS into modern English. This is of particular interest for three reasons. First, there is a significant global Sikh diaspora that has its highest numbers by far in English-speaking countries. In addition, many educated Indians use English as a second or even first language. Second, English is the predominant language of academic work and modern scholarship, so is often the language of access to *Gurbani* for scholars. Third, as a result of the combination of the first two factors, translations of the GGS into other languages have often been done by working from English translations, rather than from the original. This further magnifies the importance of English translations.

The topic is so large in scope that this paper uses a novel strategy, working with a small segment of the GGS – one verse of its best known component, the *Jap[u] Ji*<sup>7</sup> – and comparing multiple translations of this single verse. These comparisons turn out to be quite surprising, and I hope this will validate the methodology of this exercise. The reasoning behind the choice of the particular verse is presented in section 4. In section 2, I provide a brief overview of various English translations of *Gurbani*. Many of these are not complete translations of the GGS, but only of excerpts. Nevertheless, at least one complete English translation has become almost ubiquitous, and I explain its origins and status in this second section.

In the third section, I summarize how some of those translators whose work I consider here have addressed the challenges of translating *Gurbani*. Along with some material on the earlier translators' approaches, the self-described approaches of two individual translators and one pair of translators working as a team are presented here in detail: all four of the translators are academics whose careers are or were in Western universities. In the fourth section I introduce the verse I will use for comparisons and the reasons for the choice. Then I turn to various translations of the verse, along with commentaries by individual translators, and my own comparisons and discussion. This focused exercise reveals some fundamental challenges of translation at several levels, including core ideas relating to the message of *Gurbani*, as well as more mundane practical challenges of translation. The comparison also illustrates different

---

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Sahib Singh (1962-64) for a Punjabi translation. The earlier explanatory *Shabdarth* (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1941), which has gone through several editions since its original publication, was primarily the work of Professor Teja Singh.

<sup>7</sup> The Punjabi original is often rendered as *Jap* in Roman letters. *Ji* is an honorific. The additional honorific *Sahib* is often added as well, so *Japji Sahib* is a common reference. I am grateful to Gurinder Singh Mann for some of these observations.



translation tactics and strategies, which can also impinge on the conveyance of meaning. There is no attempt to distill a “best” translation, which might be a futile exercise: nevertheless, comparisons may inform individual searches for understanding or future translation efforts. The fifth and final section provides a summary conclusion and suggestions for further research.

## 2. Translations of *Gurbani*: Setting the Stage

The first English translation of the GGS was, as is well known, by Ernest Trumpp (1877), a German philologist, missionary and academic.<sup>8</sup> He did not provide a complete translation, but managed to cover a substantial portion of the book. Interestingly, English was not his mother tongue, something he acknowledged in his preface.<sup>9</sup> Trumpp’s translation was accompanied by dismissive and negative remarks about the GGS and the Sikh faith, and is chiefly remembered for that reason. Going into the factors that shaped Trumpp’s attitude is beyond the scope of this paper, although the psychology of the translator, and not just expertise, can clearly have some bearing on the task of translation.

It is also well known that Trumpp’s effort met with outrage among the Sikh community, because of his perceived disrespectful comments (and behavior as well, during the process of translation). An effort was made to provide an alternative, resulting in Max Arthur Macauliffe’s (1909) six-volume work, which interwove another incomplete translation of the GGS with a history of the Sikh faith and an explication of its beliefs, something Trumpp had also done, but with a markedly different attitude. Macauliffe, unlike Trumpp, claimed to have found Sikhs who were well-versed enough in the language and meanings of the GGS to aid him in his translation. Like Trumpp, he commented on the difficulties of translating a volume with multiple languages and archaic terms. Unlike Trumpp, Macauliffe found respect and regard from the Sikh community, and he reciprocated those feelings, again in contrast to Trumpp. Once more, these issues, though important, are mostly tangential to the scope of this paper.

Macauliffe’s translation of the GGS had a more lasting impact than Trumpp’s, perhaps, in that another full-scale English translation of the entire volume was not attempted for many decades. However, comprehensive interpretive work in Punjabi/Gurmukhi continued (see footnote 6), as did translations of different segments of the GGS, particularly the *Jap[u] Ji*, which is its opening composition, as well as generally being viewed by Sikhs as providing the core of the Gurus’ teachings. Translations of the *Jap[u] Ji* have been so much more common than those of other

---

<sup>8</sup> Trumpp’s missionary activities are perhaps the least well known aspect of his career, and were possibly somewhat incidental. An obituary written soon after his death (Anonymous, 1885) states that “...on his third journey to India...the Doctor was called upon to study Pushto...He was soon able to preach the Gospel in their own tongue to the Natives several evenings every week.” Indeed, after this trip, Trumpp became a curate back in Germany, before his next trip to India, which was for the purpose of translating the GGS.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Trumpp wrote quite candidly that, “...English is not my mother-tongue, and ... I was therefore often at a loss how to translate such abstruse philosophical matters clearly into an idiom [English] which, since I no longer hear it spoken, is gradually receding from my memory.” (Trumpp, 1877, p. VIII).

portions of the GGS that one can only consider a small subset of them. The choice of translations in this paper is skewed toward “modern,” relatively “academic” renderings, as described later in this section.<sup>10</sup>

There are five complete English translations of the GGS available.<sup>11</sup> The earliest of these was completed about 1960, by Dr. Gopal Singh, an acclaimed Punjabi writer and poet. It was an impressive effort and well received, especially by international readers, but its linguistic style has restricted its appeal and longevity. A reasonable conjecture is that the translator sought to convey sacred authority by using language reminiscent of the King James Bible, or of that approximate period (including words such as ‘thou,’ ‘thine,’ and even ‘forsooth’).<sup>12</sup>

A second translation was done by Manmohan Singh, and also completed around 1960. It was subsequently published by the SGPC, in 1962. This was done independently of Gopal Singh’s work, but also contains relatively archaic English vocabulary and grammar. In this case, the language may have been a function of the colonial education system, but that is again a conjecture. A third effort, by the eminent scholar and writer Gurbachan Singh Talib, was sponsored – unlike the first two – by an academic institution (Punjabi University, Patiala), and was completed in 1984. In this case also, the vocabulary and grammar of the translation were awkward in many instances. A fourth translation, published in 1993 by Pritam Singh Chahil, was essentially a revision of Manmohan Singh’s work.<sup>13</sup>

The fifth complete translation of the GGS is by Sant Singh Khalsa, an MD living in the US, who first published it in 1993. He describes it himself as being based primarily on the Manmohan Singh translation, but with the removal of antiquated idioms. However, even cursory examination suggests that the differences in the two translations appear to be quite substantial. Khalsa’s self-stated objectives also included achieving “an accurate translation of the Guru’s Word” and presenting it in “an elegant format.” Most strikingly, he labels his work as the “Khalsa Consensus Translation.” Indeed, Sant Singh Khalsa’s translation has become near ubiquitous, especially in digital formats, and his appellation for the translation (with its bold claim to being authoritative through general consensus) also gets used often, though his version also has critics.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> One significant early translation that is omitted here is that of Professor Teja Singh, published in 1919. That rendering contains a large amount of interpretive material mixed in with the translation, making it somewhat different in nature than the versions analyzed in this paper, and less suitable for the comparisons undertaken here.

<sup>11</sup> These five versions have been summarized by Sant Singh Khalsa, in comments available on several web sites, but very much reflecting his own opinions. See, for example, <http://www.sikhs.org/english/english.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Macauliffe’s translation also tends to use archaic English forms fairly regularly, as will be seen in the selection used in this paper.

<sup>13</sup> Manmohan Singh provided a modern Punjabi translation as well in his 8-volume work, while Chahil used a three column format with the original, the English translation, and a Roman script transliteration. Variations of these combinations are now available in several digital formats on the Internet.

<sup>14</sup> A journalistic article that critically examines some problematic aspects of this translation is Kaur, A. (2015), which also notes that the SGPC has been using the Sant Singh Khalsa translation on its website: this seems to be only as a downloadable pdf file: see [sgpc.net/downloads](http://sgpc.net/downloads).

As an illustration of the choices being made by or for the contemporary Sikh community, in India as well as abroad, consider the live kirtan broadcast from the *Darbar Sahib*, Amritsar, which is carried by the Indian commercial television channel PTC Punjabi, and has assumed considerable significance for Sikhs worldwide. The broadcast is available as a live stream on several web sites as well, making it globally accessible. In the first half of 2016, the broadcast began including a bar at the bottom of the screen which carried the Gurmukhi original of the words being sung, as well as an English translation. Direct observation and inspection of recorded clips available on the web indicate that the initial broadcasts in this format used the Sant Singh Khalsa translation, but at some stage a shift was made to the Manmohan Singh translation.<sup>15</sup> Both translations can be compared line by line at the web site of [srigranth.org](http://srigranth.org),<sup>16</sup> although one has to toggle between the two translations. Given the purpose, for live ongoing broadcasts, the choice had to be made from existing complete translations, and presumably the easy availability of digital versions also factored into the decision.

While there are only a handful of translations of the entire GGS, a large number of translations of selections from the book are available, especially, as noted earlier, for the *Jap[u] Ji*. An early example of such a selection is a volume sponsored by UNESCO in 1960. The task was delegated to India's Sahitya Akademi, which in turn deputed Teja Singh, a retired Chief Justice of the Punjab High Court, to chair a committee of translators.<sup>17</sup> The product of this effort was Trilochan Singh et al. (1960). Of the five members of this committee, Khushwant Singh seems to have played a special role, since, according to the preface of the volume, "The translations were revised from the point of view of English style by G.S. Fraser, working with Khushwant Singh." While Fraser, a Scottish poet and academic, is not listed among the translators, his name appears below the five translators' names as having revised the volume's content. The selections are quite extensive, amounting to over 200 printed pages.

Another selection of translated verses, by Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, was published in 1995, and is somewhat less extensive, although it also includes verses from the Dasam Granth that are part of the daily prescribed liturgy for Sikhs. Like the UNESCO volume, Nikky Singh's translations include the complete *Jap[u] Ji* and *Sukhmani Sahib*, and there are other overlaps. A much more limited translation was provided by Hew McLeod in an appendix to his overview book on Sikhism (McLeod, 1997), and this also includes the entire *Jap[u] Ji*. A third extensive translation of selections from the GGS and Dasam Granth is that of Christopher Shackle and Arvind-Pal Mandair (2005), which is about as substantial as the UNESCO volume, but with quite different coverage, including, for example, the complete *Anand Sahib* and *Siddh Gosht*, but

---

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this shift is understandable in terms of organizational patronage: Manmohan Singh's translation was originally published by the SGPC.

<sup>16</sup> See [www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani](http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani). Video clips of the kirtan from *Darbar Sahib*, including recent ones with the text at the bottom of the screen, can be found at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

<sup>17</sup> According to the book's preface, Bhai Vir Singh, the eminent Sikh writer, advised in the selection of translators and verse, although he passed away well before the actual volume was published. The Teja Singh here is not the author of the *Shabdarth* and early translator of the *Jap[u] Ji* mentioned in footnotes 6 and 10.

excluding *Sukhmani Sahib*. As is the case for the other selections, the complete *Jap[u] Ji* is included in this collection of translations. All these last three sets of translations were carried out by scholars based in Western universities,<sup>18</sup> all with expertise in aspects of Sikh and Punjabi Studies.

The three “modern” academic translations, together with the two earliest translations, three of the complete translations of GGS, and the committee translation together constitute nine different translations that provide a basis in this paper for discussion and comparison of the challenges of translating *Gurbani* into English. This set excludes numerous other translations and interpretations of the *Jap[u] Ji*, but it will be seen that even just these nine provide an astonishing variety of language, and illustrate an array of choices made by the different translators. Describing the details of this variety and drawing implications from this examination is the goal of this paper. Before that central task, the next section considers some general issues of translation as discussed by some of the translators themselves.

### 3. Translation Strategies

Ernest Trumpp (1877), in his preface, presents a narrative in which the language he is translating is already “obsolete to a great extent” (p. VI), and in which he found his Sikh informants without any relevant knowledge. He describes finding three commentaries which “though very deficient, proved very useful” (p. VI) to him. He complains that his Sikh informants would mislead him, and that he proceeded to read through the entire volume on his own and create a grammar and dictionary, which he used later, after returning to Europe, to complete the translation that he published. Trumpp’s disdain for the content and the language of the GGS is well known, but he did appreciate the volume as a “treasury of the old Hindui dialects” (p. VIII). At the same time, his views on language also were somewhat opinionated, so that he characterized the Arabic- and Persian-root words in the GGS as “received into the Granth in a very mutilated form.” (p. VII) His discomfort with the concepts in the GGS was even greater, making him far from an ideal translator, but nevertheless a useful point of reference and comparison.

Max Macauliffe (1909) also begins by noting the challenges of archaism and heterogeneity of the language of the GGS, and the absence of a written dictionary.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, he is much more positive about the assistance he received from Sikh experts, even though he noted that there were fewer than ten such experts in his estimation, and few or none of those could provide interpretations in English. Macauliffe’s translation strategy is avowedly colored by a desire to make up for the insults of Trumpp. Beyond that, his stated motives include making the writings accessible to Sikhs fluent in English, to capture the traditional knowledge of Sikh experts who

---

<sup>18</sup> Nikky Singh was employed in the United States, McLeod in New Zealand (although he regularly visited North American universities), and Shackle and Mandair in England and the United States respectively.

<sup>19</sup> Presumably Trumpp’s dictionary and grammar were not available to Macauliffe, having gone back to Europe with their author.

were dying out, and to fix a translation before the vernacular diverged even further from the language of the GGS, a process he saw as accelerating even in his time. In contrast to Trumpp, Macauliffe describes a collaborative, iterative process, wherein different interpretations are weighed and ranked, with alternatives sometimes given in footnotes.<sup>20</sup> He also emphasizes his use of simple language, as being in keeping with the language and aims of the Sikh Gurus, subject to maintaining a “necessary solemnity of form” (p. xxx). In contrast to Trumpp’s complaint of “dark and perplexing language” (p. VII), Macauliffe does not see “metaphysical subtleties” (p. xxx), although he does acknowledge challenges in finding English equivalents of concepts in some cases. He also says he did his utmost to avoid archaisms in his translation.<sup>21</sup>

Turning to more recent translation efforts, the UNESCO-sponsored volume (1960) contains a brief introduction to Sikh beliefs and history, but there is absolutely nothing on the challenges of translation or alternative strategies. Gopal Singh (1960) also covers Sikh philosophy and history, but is explicit as well on his translation methods and goals. While noting the language challenges emphasized by Trumpp and Macauliffe, he highlights the poetry of the original, something seemingly neglected by those early efforts. He affirms an aim of retaining that poetic substance without sacrificing literal meaning, although he acknowledges “a little departure in phrasing” when forced by the idiomatic demands of English or “where the dignity of the original demanded” (p. XIX). He also includes copious footnotes with extended explanations and even digressions on the content of specific lines and verses. While Gopal Singh was a well-known writer and scholar of Sikhism, Manmohan Singh’s (1962) motivation appears to have come as an act of devotion after losing all his worldly possessions in the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Arguably, although the translator used a large number of antiquated English expressions, his output was a somewhat more direct rendering of the original than that of Gopal Singh. He also provided copious notes to his translation, mostly in the form of word-to-word matching. Finally, Sant Singh Khalsa (1993) has been forthright in claiming to supersede earlier complete translations by providing greater accuracy, elegance and immediacy of impact, while eliminating antiquated idioms and preserving word order wherever possible. The extent to which each of these translators has met their stated goals overall is something that readers have to judge, and this paper provides a tiny slice of information for making that judgment.

The three most recent translations differ from the other six in being by academics based in Western universities. They are therefore more articulate and self-conscious about their task. Coming to the challenge later than the others, they are able to benefit from those previous attempts, and focus on refinement rather than the basic meanings that Trumpp struggled with. In addition to the earlier translations, these newest efforts also had access to detailed interpretations

---

<sup>20</sup> All of these observations may be found in Macauliffe’s preface.

<sup>21</sup> Further points made by Macauliffe on grammatical constructions include the following, “In my translation from the Sikh sacred writings I freely use the subjunctive mood which is fast disappearing from the English language. The solemn form of the third person singular of the present tense I have employed for obvious reasons. My Sikh readers may easily learn that this form is not now used in conversation or ordinary prose.” (p. xxx)



and commentaries that explained the meaning of the verses of the GGS in modern Punjabi, creating a vital bridge for translators into English.

NGK Singh (1995) provides an extensive discussion of issues in translating the GGS. She makes the obvious point about avoiding archaic English in the translation, but then introduces several newer concerns. Most importantly, she appears to be the first to raise the issue of the use of male gender for the Divine, and of male pronouns more generally in translating original language which is often not gendered. Beyond this, she also addresses the general issue of how the Divine is described, and the import of allusions to Hindu names and mythological references. In the same context, she discusses the problematic of using Christian-centered terms such as “God” for the Divine. She discusses the complexity and heterogeneity of the original language, and the challenges of retaining and conveying poetic images and cadences in the translation. Finally, she highlights the challenges of translating core concepts such *dharam* and *hukam*, which again carry allusions from their root languages or contexts, but have their own nuances in the GGS. Many of these issues were touched on by earlier translators, but NGK Singh provides a more comprehensive and integrated discussion.

Hew McLeod (1997) is relatively brief in his remarks on his translations. He notes that they are “relatively free,” that he has sometimes added words to maintain the rhythm of the original form, and that he has made a “determined effort” to “preserve the spirit of the original.” (p. 269) McLeod highlights the importance of gender-free language for the Eternal One, and explicitly acknowledges the influence of NGK Singh on his attention to this aspect of translation, admitting shortcomings on this score in his own earlier translations. He also spends some space discussing the need to avoid Christian-tinged terms for the Divine, especially “God.” Finally, he notes that for reasons of space, individual lines (marked by a double vertical line in the original) are not separated as would be the convention with English verse, but presented in paragraph format.<sup>22</sup>

The latest of the translations considered in this paper represents, in one respect, coming full circle. Christopher Shackle, who co-authored the translations in Shackle and Mandair (SM, 2005) is a linguist, much as Ernest Trumpp was, and brings that particular academic sensibility to the task. The translations in this volume are prefaced by a discussion of the languages used, as well as a particular presentation of Sikh history, including the context of the Trumpp and Macauliffe translations. Unlike other translators who emphasized the variety of language elements in the GGS, SM describe the “core idiom of all the earlier Gurus” as a mixture of “Old Punjabi and Old Hindi” (p. xx).<sup>23</sup> SM’s discussion and critique of the translations of Trumpp and

---

<sup>22</sup> He mentions the use of the double vertical lines in his translations, but they are missing from his translation of the *Jap[u] Ji*, though present in other translated selections.

<sup>23</sup> Later contributions are described by SM as increasingly incorporating Braj Bhasha forms and “learned Sanskrit vocabulary.” (p. xx) In earlier work, Shackle (1983) is much less categorical on the language forms in the GGS. For example, “The language of the *Guru Granth Sahib*... is of very mixed character, since it draws upon a variety of local languages and dialects, as well as incorporating a good many archaic forms and words...the language has been referred to here as ‘the sacred language of the Sikhs’, abbreviated to SLS” (Preface, p. ii). In a relevant analysis, Singh, N. (2001) critiques an alternative claim that the language of the GGS is “*sant-bhasha*.”

Macauliffe is heavily influenced by a particular reading of the history of the period, and is beyond the scope of the current paper, but does contain some useful insights as well as problematic assertions.<sup>24</sup>

Turning to translation strategies, SM emphasize the need to “reproduce at least some of the most salient features of the poetic form” (p. xlvii) along with capturing the “original essence of the Gurus’ teachings.” They note the difficulty posed by the “formal and cultural distance from modern English norms.” SM acknowledge the loss of the musical dimension of the original in any translation, and, in a related point, explain why they did not seek rhyming structures as in the original – not only because of the well-known paucity of rhymes in English, but also the danger of evoking the structure of Christian hymns, which are sung. Nevertheless, SM assert that they have done more systematic justice to the poetic structure of the original than at least some of their predecessors, including rhythmic structures, in particular, in this claim.<sup>25</sup> Like other translators, they note the challenges of teasing out meanings, and the consequent necessity of occasional explanatory footnotes. In keeping with Shackle’s linguistic expertise, the translators also pay attention to detailed issues of punctuation and capitalization. Finally, in keeping with the concerns raised by NGK Singh, SM provide an extended discussion of how they have striven to be as gender-neutral and gender-inclusive as possible in their translations.

One might conclude from the above that, especially among the most recent academic translators, there is considerable concordance of sensibilities and techniques for translation. The next section shows how, even in the context of a small, extremely well-known segment of GGS, considerable divergences arise in practice.

#### 4. The Translations and Discussion

The selection chosen for this paper is the thirteenth *pauri* (verse or stanza, literally, step) of the *Jap[u] Ji* (see below). As noted earlier, choosing from this composition has the virtue of using the best known and most translated component of the GGS, making the point of challenges in translation more forcefully. Beyond that, the choice of this particular *pauri* reflects this author’s subjective judgment, but there are some specific reasons for the particular choice. Chief among these is that this *pauri* has, as a central concept, *mannai*, which turns out to be extremely challenging to translate. The *pauri* also contains idiomatic or metaphoric language, a mythological allusion, and several other words capturing significant ideas. Of course, these

---

<sup>24</sup> The difficulty is that the commentary on the translations is blended with a particular position on the role and activities of “reformist Sikhs.” This is a complex issue that has not received adequate scholarly attention, displaying a tendency to repeat one or two analyses unquestioningly without examining the original sources. In SM’s presentation, there is also copious commentary on the theological aims of the “reformists,” but without any sources. This entire issue is beyond the scope of this paper, but was partly addressed in Singh, N. (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, SM may be the only translators of the GGS to discuss this issue in the technical language of metrical structures.

criteria can be met by many other verses from the GGS, so the discussion here is illustrative and not exhaustive.

### *Jap[u] Ji Pauṛi 13: Gurmukhi and Transliteration*

ਮੰਨੈ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਮਨਿ ਬੁਧਿ ॥  
 ਮੰਨੈ ਸਗਲ ਭਵਣ ਕੀ ਸੁਧਿ ॥  
 ਮੰਨੈ ਮੁਹਿ ਚੋਟਾ ਨ ਖਾਇ ॥  
 ਮੰਨੈ ਜਮ ਕੈ ਸਾਥਿ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥  
 ਐਸਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਹੋਇ ॥  
 ਜੇ ਕੋ ਮੰਨਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਮਨਿ ਕੋਇ ॥੧੩॥

*Mannai suraṭ hovai man budh.*

*Mannai sagal bhavan kī sudh.*

*Mannai muhi chotā nā khāe.*

*Mannai jam kai sāth na jāe.*

*Aisā nām niranjan hoē.*

*Je ko man jāṇai man koē. ||13||*

Before turning to discussion of the *pauṛi* itself, some brief context is useful. The *Jap[u] Ji* has 38 *pauṛis* and two *sloks*,<sup>26</sup> and the chosen one is the second in a set of four (12-15) focused on the concept of *mannai*. This set is preceded by four *pauṛis* (8-11) focused on the concept *suṇi=ai*, which is relatively easy to translate as “listening” (or often as “hearing”),<sup>27</sup> although with deeper connotations than everyday physical listening.<sup>28</sup> *Pauṛi* 21 of *Jap[u] Ji* brings both concepts together in its third line, *Suṇi=ā mani=ā man kīṭā bhā=ō*, where the use of both concepts echoes the earlier *pauṛis*.<sup>29</sup> The word *mannai* and its variants, all indicating similar ideas in the contexts used, occur dozens of times in the GGS, although this number is dwarfed by several hundred occurrences of *suṇi=ai* and variations on that word.<sup>30</sup> Next we turn to discussing the nine translations, which are given in the appendix.

<sup>26</sup> *Slok* or *shalok* is also a type of verse, and the 38 *pauṛis* of the *Jap[u] Ji* are bookended by the two *sloks*, giving 40 verses in all.

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, even this seemingly more straightforward word (as compared to *mannai*) triggers varied translation choices – several translators render it as “hearkening” (to the Name or the Word).

<sup>28</sup> A detailed analysis of sound, music and words in the process of “listening” and its effects on the mind/spirit can be found in Kaur, I. (2011a). For example, she argues that “These deeper listeners would therefore transcend sonic and sensory listening to a deeper level of consciousness...” (p. 303).

<sup>29</sup> In Gurmukhi, the line is ਸੁਣਿਆ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਕੀਤਾ ਭਾਉ . The 21<sup>st</sup> *pauṛi* is quite long, having 18 lines with a range of ideas developed in it that ultimately support what may be termed the core message of the third line (which will itself be partially explicated in the discussion that follows in this paper). Again, Kaur, I. (2011a) is a useful reference.

<sup>30</sup> These approximate counts are generated through the use of Gurbani Researcher Version 2.01 (Gurjot Singh et al., 2002), which offers a very flexible and useful “fuzzy search” function.



### **Structure**

The original has six lines, the first four of which begin with the word *mannai*, the *pauri*'s central idea. Only five of the nine translations considered here (Trumpp, Macauliffe, SS Khalsa, NGK Singh and SM) follow this format exactly. The UNESCO translation makes the greatest departure from the original structure. Three of the original lines are split (giving nine lines in the published version), and the last two lines are separated by a line space. The repetition of the core concept (translated in this case as “belief”) is attenuated, with the translated word being used only in the lines corresponding to the first and third of the original. In the line corresponding to the fourth in the original, the word “faith” is used to convey the same meaning as “belief.”

The Gopal Singh translation abandons the repetition of the first four lines entirely, creating a separate first line “Those who believe,” with the implication that the next four lines refer to this set of people. Manmohan Singh preserves the original six-line structure, and uses repetition in the first two lines “By truly believing,” but switches in line three to “The worshipper of God” and in line four to “Through inner belief.” McLeod combines lines three and four, reversing the sequence of ideas between the two in doing so. He also uses one variation on “believing” and one substitution of “faith.” Therefore, one can see that the four translations that modify the structure do so in varied ways.

### **Core Concept**

As already noted, and as is clear from the original, the key idea of this *pauri* and the group to which it belongs is captured in the word *mannai*. The translation of this word is therefore of central importance.<sup>31</sup> Many have noted the difficulty of translating words which have shades and nuances of meaning in their original language that are not easily expressible in another tongue. *Mannai* certainly fits into this category, so one has to recognize this limitation in discussing how different translators have managed the specific task being considered here. Four of the translations (coincidentally, all those which have altered the structure of the original to some extent) use the word “believing” (or “belief” or “believe,” depending on the syntax, which is considered separately below).

Gopal Singh offers a lengthy footnote on his choice, referencing the Vedas and Upanishads. According to him, the Vedic meaning is “logical reflection,” which is conceived of as following hearing (or listening) and preceding disciplined meditation. He then argues that the Upanishadic usage has different connotations, more in line with Guru Nanak’s thought, but does not provide a specific justification for the particular word choice.

At this point, the commentary of SM, who prefer the word “acceptance,” is worth quoting in full.

There is no exact English equivalent for the word used here (*manne ki*) [which occurs in *pauri* 12] and throughout stanzas 13-15 (*mannai*), but its sense of reverent mindfulness

---

<sup>31</sup> Of course, there are additional important concepts in these six lines – they are considered in the last subsection of this section.

and remembrance is better conveyed by our ‘acceptance’ rather than by the ‘belief’ preferred by many translators, with its inappropriate rationalistic associations.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, the assertions in this single sentence, especially the question of what “belief” connotes, raise a host of deep issues which are beyond the scope of the current exercise. Note, however, that NGK Singh does use “remembering,” while Trumpp provides, arguably, the most “obvious” translation, corresponding to the idea of “minding”, or giving a certain kind of attention,<sup>33</sup> by writing “If he mind (it)” – although the issues raised by the extra words “he” and “it” need to be discussed separately.

There are two further alternatives for the central concept used in this selection of translations. McLeod, the UNESCO committee and Manmohan Singh all use the word “faith” at some point in their translations, and SS Khalsa adopts this word throughout, referring to “The faithful” in his translation. Finally, Macauliffe chooses to translate *mannai* as “obeying,” which is certainly within the penumbra of meanings of the original, but which conveys something quite far from “belief,” perhaps being closest to SM’s “acceptance.”

Believing, remembering, obeying, accepting, being faithful, minding – which is the “best” choice? It is beyond the expertise of this author to answer that question, if there is one that could emerge through some process of analysis or consensus.<sup>34</sup> One can take the position that any choice involves some compromise and scope for miscommunication, unless there is extensive accompanying commentary. That is certainly a viable position. The main point to be made here is that translators of the GGS have perhaps not engaged with these issues as deeply as might be possible, even for common and well-known portions of the GGS, and for central concepts contained within them.

### ***Syntax***

While the issue of precisely which English word should represent *mannai* is an obvious one, there are two less obvious features of the passage. The first is the object of human attention, and the second is the nature of the “action” that is being discussed. In the original, the object is implicit in the first four lines, only articulated explicitly in the fifth line, the *Naam* (typically translated as Name, although this is not the only connotation<sup>35</sup>), itself a complex concept.<sup>36</sup> Trumpp seeks to make the initial references clear by including “the name” in parentheses in the

---

<sup>32</sup> Shackle and Mandair (2005), footnote 10 in Notes, Jap[u] Ji, pp. 145-46, with the footnoted text appearing on p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, notions of being “mindful” have become popular and increasingly influential in modern Western contexts, though the origins of this approach come from Buddhist thought. I have suggested that “minding” is “obvious” because many people will be tempted to correlate *man* with “mind.” This issue is discussed in the last subsection of this section.

<sup>34</sup> One cannot resist the temptation to note that there is a much larger and well-known issue involved here, in terms of the distance that sometimes exists between scholars who assert their understandings, and a community’s own understandings, of texts, concepts, practices and so on.

<sup>35</sup> Rahuldeep Singh Gill has pointed out to me that *naam* can mean “reputation” in everyday usage.

<sup>36</sup> It is impossible to even scratch the surface with respect to the concept, but one can think of the term as referring to the pervasive presence of the Divine.

first line, and “it” in parentheses in the next three lines. Macauliffe adopts a more Christian terminology, by including “Him” in each of the first four lines. The UNESCO committee and Manmohan Singh each include references to the Name, without parentheses – the former has two and the latter three. The other five translations adhere more closely to the original, and do not insert the “clarificatory” references.

Turning to the second syntactical issue, the most natural form of representing *mannai* in English might seem to be the present participle form of the verb chosen. Macauliffe (“obeying”) and NGK Singh (“remembering”) use this form consistently, while Manmohan Singh and McLeod use it twice (“believing”), switching to alternatives for other lines that have *mannai*. The other two translations that use “belief” avoid this verb form completely, however. Trumpp and SM could have chosen this form, which would have been “minding” and “accepting” respectively, but do not. In the former case, it is difficult to conjecture as to Trumpp’s reasoning, but given what SM write in their discussion of translation strategies, they may have been swayed by considerations of rhythm or meter. One can perhaps make the case that the beginning “through” before “acceptance” does convey some of the active sense that translating *mannai* seems to require. The final example, of SS Khalsa, is somewhat different: it refers to the “faithful” which loses the sense of the original that an activity is required, even if not a physical one. Even “being faithful” or “having faith” would not seem to convey the sense of the original.

### ***Terms for the Divine***

While the GGS is replete with different terms for the Divine, or aspects of the Divine, used for poetic, didactic reasons, and possibly other reasons as well, the selection analyzed here only has a single occurrence, that of *Naam*, in the fifth line. Many of the translations, however, insert additional terms – this is aside from the added explications of the object for *mannai*, already discussed. Thus, Trumpp refers to the “Supreme Being” in line 5, after already having translated *Naam* as “the name.” Macauliffe introduces references to “God” in lines 5 and 6, the first of these qualifying *Naam*. Similarly, SS Khalsa adds “Lord” along with “Name” in line 5 and McLeod refers to the “Name of One.” Manmohan Singh has the most insertions, adding “Lord” in lines 1, 4 and 6, and “God” in lines 2, 3 and 5. Gopal Singh does something different altogether, substituting “Word” for *Naam* in line 5.<sup>37</sup>

Since the UNESCO translation does include inserted references to *Naam*, that leaves only the NGK Singh and SM translations that adhere to the original in this respect, that is, references to the Divine in this *pauri*. Note that there are two issues here: one is the introduction of words not in the original, and the other is the specific words used. As noted earlier, several recent academic

---

<sup>37</sup> McLeod (1968, p. 195) asserts that for all “practical purposes” the two words, *Naam* and *Shabad* [Word] are synonymous, although he also gives examples where one is the object of communication and the other is the medium of communication.

translators have cautioned against the connotations of “God” for translating the GGS. “Lord” can have similar issues,<sup>38</sup> along with the gender aspect, which we consider next.

### ***Gender***

The issue of avoiding gendered terms for the Divine was discussed in the section on translation strategies. In the selection being analyzed in this paper, there are several examples that violate this stricture, although they are less common among the more recent translations. Thus Macauliffe uses “Him” for “God,” a term which itself carries gender connotations. The UNESCO translation uses “His” in line 5, while Manmohan Singh uses “God” and “Lord” multiple times. The relatively new translation of SS Khalsa also introduces “Lord” extraneously. McLeod, NGK Singh and SM all manage to be gender-neutral, with McLeod using the impersonal “One” in line 5 and NGK Singh using “It” in line 6. Interestingly, both Gopal Singh and Trumpp also avoid gendered references to the Divine.

Another example of gendering in translation which is absent in the original is the use of “man” or male pronouns for humans. Here Trumpp is liberal in using “he” and “his.” Macauliffe refers to “man,” the UNESCO committee uses “He” in the last line, and Manmohan Singh uses “man” and male pronouns throughout his translation. The other five translations avoid the problem entirely either by eschewing pronouns, or using gender neutral plurals, or by using the impersonal “one.”

### ***Metaphor and Myth***

Idiomatic and metaphorical usages are common in the GGS, as are mythological allusions. The selection considered in this paper provides examples of both. Consider line 3 first, where the second part is translated quite literally by Trumpp as “he is not struck in the face.” Several other translators favor this literalness: “suffers not blows on his face” (Manmohan Singh); “shall never be struck across the face” (SS Khalsa); “all slaps on the face are avoided” (SM). Other translators interpret the phrase as representing a more general situation. Thus, Macauliffe translates as “suffereth not punishment,” while NGK Singh says “safe from blows and pain.”

The other three translations, however, seem to depart considerably from the original, each in a different way. The UNESCO committee’s “One avoids ignorant stumbling” adds a particular, even idiosyncratic, interpretation. Gopal Singh keeps some of the literal (blows) but omits “face,” and adds a parenthetical phrase that seems to be inserted mainly to achieve a rhyme: “no Blows, (no Sorrow’s breath).” Finally, in another idiosyncratic interpretation, McLeod combines the ideas in lines 3 and 4, and makes Death the source that “no longer smites.”

Line 4 also has a metaphorical usage in addressing death, but in doing so contains a mythological allusion that would have been well known to 16<sup>th</sup> century Punjabis, namely, to Yama, the lord (or

---

<sup>38</sup> It is important to note, however, that *Sahib*, which occurs fairly often in the GGS, can be translated as “Lord” or “Master.” Nevertheless, NGK Singh makes a case against taking that approach. In the current example, there is no corresponding word in the original, and the insertion of “Lord” is entirely extraneous.

god or messenger) of death, in the Sanskrit or modern Hindi form. The original uses the Punjabi form, which Macauliffe reproduces transliterated, while Trumpp substitutes the Sanskrit/Hindi form.<sup>39</sup> SS Khalsa translates as “Messenger of Death,” while Manmohan Singh uses “death’s minister,” avoiding – arguably appropriately – capital letters. Gopal Singh implies the mythological with a capitalized “Death” – though one could argue that this is a common English usage even in the absence of any allusion to Yama. McLeod also capitalizes “Death,” but since he moves it to the beginning of line three, it is impossible to tell whether the capitalization was intended to convey any allusion, or simply the result of beginning a sentence. UNESCO, NGK Singh and SM all simply use “death” uncapitalized, but, as is the case for most of the translations, retaining a hint of the allusion to Yama with words like “go” and “depart.” The UNESCO committee takes a different tack, however, saying that the “fear of death is broken.”

### *Other Meanings*

Several important ideas conveyed in the short six lines of *pauri* 13 still remain to be discussed. What proceeds from following the injunction “*mannai*”? Trumpp translates the second part of line one as “understanding and wisdom is obtained in the heart.” Macauliffe renders it as “wisdom and understanding *enter* the mind;” the consequences are translated similarly, but the site of these (*man*) has variants. In his first analysis of Guru Nanak’s teachings, McLeod (1968) states, “The word *man* as used by Guru Nanak has no satisfactory English translation.” (p. 178) He goes on to argue that though it is usually rendered as “mind,” that word lacks the breadth of meaning and association of the original. After long disquisitions comparing the usage with Vedic and Yogic contexts, he observes that *man* in some contexts extends to “what in English is usually covered by ‘heart’.” (p. 179) Thus, McLeod covers both options used by the two earliest translators. He goes on, however, to add “soul” as yet another English substitute in some contexts of use in the GGS.

UNESCO, Gopal Singh, Manmohan Singh, NGK Singh and SM all use “mind” for *man* in line 1, while SS Khalsa and McLeod structure their translation to avoid using any specific English word. Further inspection of the original and comparison of the translations reveals further nuances and complications. The word *surat* is sometimes translated as “awareness” (SSKhalsa, SM), or “consciousness” (Gopal Singh), while *budh* can be rendered as “wise.” Trumpp and Macauliffe use “understanding” and “wisdom” to refer to the qualities imbued in the *man*. But Manmohan Singh refers to “mind and understanding” as the seat of impact, while NGK Singh puts “mind and intellect” together. As to the process and result, “awaken,” “soars,” “envelops,” “inner sight,” “enlightenment” and “Divine comprehension” are all used by different translators: four words of the original elicit a wide variety of translation efforts.

Line 2 provides fewer challenges for the translators, and less variation, although McLeod introduces the phrase “mansions of the mind” as a poetic flourish. Detailed comparison is left to

---

<sup>39</sup> While Trumpp offers no footnote, Macauliffe has a detailed note, explaining *Jam* as well as the interpretation that what is being presented here is the concept of ending the cycle of rebirth by being absorbed in the Divine.

the reader. Line 5 also is treated relatively similarly by the translators, with Macauliffe's being the most concise rendering, "So pure is God's name," and "stainless" and "immaculate" being straightforward substitutes for "pure" in the other translations. Finally, line 6 features many of the issues already covered, with some additional minor observations: for example, Macauliffe switches to using "heart" for *man* here, and also introduces the somewhat jarring notion of "pleasure" in conveying the idea of "knowing" the *Naam*. Some of the other translators also make slightly idiosyncratic choices in this line.<sup>40</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The generic challenges of any translation are well-recognized, and have been subject to more sophisticated analyses than this paper has offered, in generic terms<sup>41</sup> as well as in specific cases: translation issues for the GGS were reviewed in Section 3. The subjectivity of translators is also well-known, with many examples that are easily adduced, across a range of types of literature, and also illustrated by the examples presented here. However, the particular case of translation of the GGS, or components of it, raises specific issues that are of importance irrespective of whether or not analyzing such translations adds to our theoretical understanding of the process and difficulties of translation in general.

Perhaps the most obvious importance is to the Sikh community itself, which, as indicated in the introduction, is affected by globalization and modernity in ways that make translations of the GGS, in English in particular, almost indispensable for at least initial understanding of their sacred text. Currently, the author of one complete English translation claims that it is a "consensus translation," while another complete translation is being used in subtitles of live broadcasts of *kirtan* singing from the GGS. Limited selections of the GGS have been translated by scholars, but they only reach relatively small readerships. One message of this paper is to provide a concrete illustration to Sikhs of the challenges they face in making the meaning and appreciation of their sacred text accessible to those – Sikh and non-Sikh – who are not intimately conversant with the language of the original.<sup>42</sup>

Even the available academic translations, as argued and illustrated in this paper, vary considerably in their execution of the task, and, while a unique "best" translation is impossible, comparisons presented in this paper, for even a small selection of six lines of the GGS, indicate – at least to this author – that there is room for improvement even in such scholarly translations of

---

<sup>40</sup> One interesting observation is that all the translators render *ho'e* in line five as "is." Examining some discussions of *Naam* in the literature, perhaps there is a case for a more dynamic rendering in translation of how the action *mannai* becomes imbued as the pure or stainless *Naam* in the human *man*.

<sup>41</sup> For example, see Bell (1991), Hermans (2014) and Munday (2016).

<sup>42</sup> The possible benefits of improved accessibility and appreciation are straightforward at one level, but there are many complexities and nuances at another level, since subjectivities will always come to bear on such matters, and there will be tradeoffs in trying to reach different groups and for different purposes.



selections from the GGS. The quality of these translations can have some bearing on how other academics are informed, and therefore on how they approach the study of the Sikhs, although there are many sub-areas of this study in which knowledge of the meanings of the GGS is not required, or needed only in a limited or cursory manner. And, of course, translations alone are not sufficient to convey the depth of meaning and nuance that a scholar might seek, although an excellent and accurate (to the extent possible) translation, with careful explanatory notes as needed, is better than a translation that fails to conform well to the original.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately, translation is not a glamorous or well-rewarded task in modern academia. Nevertheless, this paper suggests that greater scholarly insight into issues of Sikh belief, doctrine or self-understanding might be gained from comparisons of existing translations, and from efforts to produce “better” translations wherever possible. Again, it has to be acknowledged that what constitutes a “better” translation can be subjective. And a commonplace or popular translation may not be the most accurate or “best” possible rendering.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, there is, in the view expressed in this paper, room for questioning and for improvement.

## References

Anonymous (1885), The Late Dr. Trumpp, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer and Record*, Vol. X, New Series, pp. 613-615, August.

Bell, Roger T. (1991), *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice*, Harlow, UK: Longman.

Gill, Rahuldeep Singh (2016), *Drinking from Love's Cup: Surrender and Sacrifice in the Vars of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla*, New York, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

Grewal, Jagtar Singh (1990), *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hermans, Theo (2014) [1985], *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, ed., Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Kaur, Anju (2015), American yogis distort Sikh scripture, *Sikh Free Press*, April 14, available at <http://sikhfreepress.org/headlines/2667/american-yogis-distort-sikh-scripture>.

---

<sup>43</sup> An outstanding recent example is that of Gill (2016), which combines a new and more accurate translation of some of the works of the important Sikh historical figure, Bhai Gurdas Bhalla, with a careful development of the implications of those writings for our understanding of important aspects of Sikh history.

<sup>44</sup> A significant issue that crops up in this case is how one is to judge a translation that might be widely or even unanimously accepted by members of the Sikh community, but is deemed by scholars to be inaccurate by the standard of some historical meaning. It is not clear if such a situation ever arises in translations of the GGS: a conjecture is that there is widespread variation in how different members of the community interpret or understand many core ideas in the GGS. Again, that assertion would not be a scholarly novelty.

- Kaur, Inderjit (2011a), Musical aesthetic in the Guru Granth and implications for the performance practice of Sikh *shabad kīrtan*, *Sikh Formations*, 7 (3), 297-312.
- Kaur, Inderjit (2011b), Sikh Shabad Kīrtan and Gurmat Sangīt: What's in the Name?, *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 18 (1-2), 251-278.
- Khalsa, Sant Singh (1993), *Siri Guru Granth Sahib English Translation*, available at [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com).
- Macauliffe, Max Arthur (1909), *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors, in Six Volumes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, available at <https://archive.org/search.php?query=max%20arthur%20macauliffe>.
- Mann, Gurinder Singh (2001), *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mann, Gurinder Singh (2003), *Sikhism*, Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- McLeod, W. Hew (1968), *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McLeod, W. Hew (1997), *Sikhism*, London: Penguin Books.
- Munday, Jeremy (2016), *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (1941), *Shabdarth Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, Vols. 1-4, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.
- Shackle, Christopher (1983), *An Introduction to the Sacred Language of the Sikhs*, New Delhi: Heritage Publishers.
- Shackle, Christopher and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (2005), *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Sikh Scriptures*, (edited and translated), London: Routledge.
- Singh, Gopal (1960), *Sri Guru-Granth Sahib (English Version)*, Delhi: Gur Das Kapur & Sons.
- Singh, Gurjot, *et al.* (2002), *Gurbani Researcher 2.01(CD)*, Cupertino: International Institute of Gurmat Studies.
- Singh, Manmohan (1962), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (translation)*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.
- Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur (1995), *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus*, San Francisco: Harper Publishing.



Singh, Nirvikar (2001), Guru Nanak and the Sants: A Reappraisal, *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 8, 1, pp. 1-34.

Singh, Nirvikar (2003), *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion: A Personal Reflection*, First Annual Guru Nanak Lecture, San Jose State University, November 15.

Singh, Sahib (1962-64), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan*, Vols. 1-10, Jalandhar, Punjab: Raj Publishers.

Singh, Trilochan, Jodh Singh, Kapur Singh, Bawa Harikishan Singh and Khushwant Singh (1960), *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, New York: MacMillan.

Trumpp, Ernest (1877), *The Adi Granth, or The Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs, Translated from the Original Gurmukhi, with Introductory Essays*, London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., available at <https://archive.org/details/cu31924023913217>

## Appendix: Translations

### *Ernest Trumpp Translation, 1877*

If one mind (the name), understanding and wisdom is obtained in the heart.  
If he mind (it), the knowledge of the whole world.  
If he mind (it), he is not struck in the face.  
If he mind (it), he does not go with Yama.  
Such is the name of the Supreme Being.  
If one mind it, he knows it in his heart.

### *Max Macauliffe Translation, 1909*

By obeying Him wisdom and understanding *enter* the mind;  
By obeying Him man knoweth all worlds;  
By obeying Him man suffereth not punishment;  
By obeying Him man shall not depart with Jam —  
So pure is God's name —  
Whoever obeyeth God knoweth the pleasure of it in his own heart.

### *UNESCO Translation, 1960* <sup>45</sup>

Through belief in the Name The mind soars high into enlightenment.  
The whole universe stands self-revealed.  
Through inner belief in the Name One avoids ignorant stumbling  
In the light of such a faith The fear of death is broken.  
Such is the power of His stainless Name.  
He who truly believes in it, knows it.

### *Gopal Singh Translation, 1960* <sup>46</sup>

Those who believe, Their minds awaken to Higher Consciousness,  
To inner knowledge of all spheres.  
For them no Blows, (no Sorrow's breath),  
For them no longer the ways of Death.  
Such is the Word Immaculate:  
Were one to Believe with all one's heart!

---

<sup>45</sup> In the published version, the first, third and fourth lines are split at the mid-line capitalization, and there is a line space before the last two lines.

<sup>46</sup> As published, the first clause, "Those who believe" in the first line is given a separate line, so that there are seven printed lines. This is presumably done to substitute for repetition of the clause in each of four lines, which is what occurs in the original.

***Manmohan Singh Translation, 1962***

By truly believing in the Lord's Name Divine comprehension enters man's mind and understanding.

By truly believing in God's Name the Knowledge of all the spheres is acquired.

The worshipper of God suffers not blows on his face.

Through inner belief in the Lord's Name man goes not with death's minister.

Such is the stainless Name of God.

If someone puts faith in the Lord's Name, he shall, then understand it within his mind.

***Sant Singh Khalsa Translation, 1993***

The faithful have intuitive awareness and intelligence.

The faithful know about all worlds and realms.

The faithful shall never be struck across the face.

The faithful do not have to go with the Messenger of Death.

Such is the Name of the Immaculate Lord.

Only one who has faith comes to know such a state of mind. || 13 ||

***Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh Translation, 1995***

Remembering, our mind and intellect awaken,

Remembering, we learn of all the worlds;

Remembering, we are safe from blows and pain;

Remembering, we part company with death.

So wondrous is the Immaculate Name,

It is known only by those who hold It in their mind.

***William Hewat McLeod Translation, 1997***<sup>47</sup>

By believing one gains inner sight and wisdom;

By believing one wins access to the mansions of the mind.

Death no longer smites the believer,

Freed by faith from the summons to depart.

Such is the wonder of the precious Name of One who is wholly pure.

They who know that Name within will find within that peace.

---

<sup>47</sup> As published, this translation is printed in paragraph form, and lines 3 and 4 above are integrated in one sentence.

*Christopher Shackle and Arvind-Pal Mandair Translation, 2005*

Through acceptance, awareness envelops the mind  
Through acceptance, the universe comes to be known  
Through acceptance, all slaps on the face are avoided  
Through acceptance, there is no departure with death  
Such is the Name which is free from all stain  
To be known to the mind through acceptance