

AUTHENTICITY OF KARTARPURI BIR

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Introduction

It is Guru Arjun Dev who made the important and sagacious decision to compile the Aad Granth as the Sikh scripture so that the spiritual and ideological identity of the Sikh Religion and Panth is established. An additional reason for the Guru to undertake the task was that it had come to his notice that persons outside the Panth were writing devotional hymns and giving them currency as the production of the Gurus. It is a settled and accepted tradition that the Fifth Guru compiled the Aad Granth with Bhai Gurdas as the scribe; and that the original Aad Granth is present with the Sodhis at Kartarpur. After the study of this Bir by Dr Jodh Singh and the publication of his book, Kartarpuri Bir De Darshan, it was considered that the authenticity of the Bir had been firmly established; but some oblique and incorrect observations by McLeod tended to throw doubt on its authenticity. It was, therefore, considered necessary to make a detailed study of the issue after a close examination of the Bir at Kartarpur. This article comprises the result of that examination.

Custody

After its preparation, the Bir was installed at Harimandar Sahib, Amritsar, on Bhadon Sudhi Ist Samat 1661. The tradition and historical writings are unanimous that from Amritsar the Aad Granth was shifted to Kartarpur when the family of the Sixth Guru moved to that place. It is accepted that the original Aad Granth remained with the family of Dhirmal, the great grandson of the Guru, and his descendants at Kartarpur, even after the Gurus had shifted from there. Historical writings are also clear that during the time of the Ninth and Tenth Gurus, the Aad Granth was with the successors of Dhirmal. For, many copies of the Aad Granth, in which the bani (hymns) of the Ninth Guru had been recorded in the time of the Ninth or the Tenth Guru, show that those had been corrected by comparison with the Granth of the Fifth Guru. [1] It is not in doubt that all through the subsequent period, the Aad Granth at Kartarpur remained the Granth of reference for authenticating the bani of the Gurus and the bhagats. [2] And, it remained in the custody of the Sodhis of Kartarpur. After 1708 A. D., the Sikhs passed through an extremely difficult time. In that period, the question of the change of the custody of the Aad Granth could not arise. After Ranjit Singh came into power, he procured the Granth for himself and kept it with him as a national treasure of the Sikhs. After the British conquest of the Punjab, the Bir passed into the hands of the Indian Government. Thereafter, the Bir became the subject of a civil suit and it was restored to the descendants of Dhirmal. Therefore, its custody first with the Sodhis of Kartarpur, then with Ranjit Singh, and again with the Kartarpur family, is an important piece of evidence. Because, the presence and recovery of a manuscript, document, or book from its natural and proper custody and environment is a relevant and weighty factor in showing its originality.

Claim of Originality Undisputed

We are not aware of any other copy of Aad Granth on behalf of which any claim of originality has ever been made. In India where there is an unfortunate tendency to make false claims about the presence of sacred places, scriptures, documents, manuscripts, etc., the singular absence of any claim of originality for any other Bir, is a very remarkable fact to show that the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir has never been in doubt. Before we record the internal evidence showing the authenticity of the Bir, we shall indicate the method adopted in writing the Kartarpuri Bir.

Method of Writing

The knowledge of this method is necessary for understanding why the original Aad Granth has certain unusual features and incongruities and why those could never occur in a Granth which had been copied from the original or another Granth. The bani of Aad Granth has been classified rag-wise, and in each rag the bani has been recorded Guru-wise, bhagat bani being at the end. A particular sequence in regard to shabads, saloks, ashtpadis, chhants, vars has been observed. In bhagat bani, the bani of Kabir comes first, then of Namdev, and thereafter of bhagat Ravi Das and others. In order to eliminate any chance of interpolation the couplets or verses (padas) have been numbered. In addition, the shabads, saloks, etc., of a particular Guru or rag have also been numbered serially. Further, reference of these numbers of shabads is given in the table of contents, along with the quotation of the first words of each hymn. Hence, there cannot be any chance of interpolation without it being detected. The scribe had also to devise a method by which the task could be accomplished easily and speedily. It is important to understand that while the bani was being recorded in the Granth, the work of collection of bani of the first four Gurus and the bhagats was also going on simultaneously. Therefore, the scribe had to take care of two things, first, that an adequate number of leaves were allotted to a particular rag, and within a rag to each Guru or bhagat, so as to enable the scribe to write within the allotted space the related bani anticipated to be available. Secondly, the bani under each rag was being written simultaneously, and, while the bani of one Guru, bhagat, or author was being collected, it was also being sorted out and recorded separately at appropriate places under each rag in accordance with the set scheme that had been devised. There being a single scribe for this gigantic task, sometimes this anticipation went wrong and many of the incongruities, as we shall see, are due to wrong anticipation, or late collection of bani. We also find that the numbering of the leaves of the book had been done

in advance. The pages of the Kartarpuri Bir show two things. If the book is opened, the number of the page stands given only to the page on the left hand side; the page facing on the right hand side is deemed to be a part of it. We might call the page on the left 15/1, and the one on the right 15/2. However, in the Kartarpuri Bir, the number given to the page on the left is 15 and not 15/1. Secondly, after making a rough guess about the bani likely to be available for each section or rag, one or more clusters or bunches of eight or sixteen leaves each, numbered in advance, were allotted for each rag or section of the bani. And, as and when the bani, or part of it, of a particular rag, section, Guru, or bhagat was available, it was sorted out and copied out at the appropriate place in the concerned packets or sections, in proper sequence. In addition, totals of padas, shabads, or shaloks of each Guru or the totals of the shabads of each rag are also serially given. We shall hereafter record pieces of internal evidence into two parts : (i) those that are individually conclusive, and (ii) those that are, coupled with other evidence, conclusive in showing the authenticity of the Bir.

Individually Conclusive Factors: (1) The Japu of Guru Nanak was recorded by the Fourth Guru. In all the handwritten Birs the practice was to record either the words “Japu Nisan”, or “Copy of the Copy of the Japu recorded by Guru Ram Das.” If the Bir was a third copy of the original Bir of the Fifth Guru, it would say “Copy of the copy of the copy of the Japu recorded by Guru Ram Das.” As the Fourth Guru was the person who collected and wrote the Japu, and the Fifth Guru was the first person to compile Aad Granth and copy Japu therein, in the Kartarpuri Bir alone it is written “Copy of the Japu recorded in the hand of Guru Ram Das.” No other Bir records these words, for, Bhai Gurdas was the first person to copy the Japu from the collection and writing by the Fourth Guru.

(2) Secondly, in this Bir at page 45, the dates of the demise of the first four Gurus alone are with the same pen and ink and in the hand of the original scribe of the Bir. The date of the demise of the Fifth Guru is in the hand of the original scribe but with a different pen and shade of ink. No other Bir fulfils this test. It is also very significant that while writing the dates of the demise of the first four Gurus, the day of the week is not mentioned. But in the case of the Fifth Guru, apart from the date, the day of the week is also mentioned though the scribe is the same. This shows clearly that the date of the demise of the Fifth Guru was written by Bhai Gurdas on a later day, otherwise had all the five dates been written at one time, either the day would have been mentioned in all the case or been absent from all the five entries.

(3) Thirdly, the words “Sudh” or “Sudh Keeche” (“It is correct” or “correct it”) appear at so many places in the Bir. These are supposed to be in the hand of the Fifth Guru since these are in a different hand and not in the hand of the scribe of the Bir, and the handwriting of these marginal observations resembles the handwriting of the Nishan of the Fifth Guru in the Bir. These words appear in other handwritten Birs as well. But those are in the same hand as of the scribe of the concerned Bir, showing that the Bir is a copy and not the original.

(4) The historical writings of Bhai Santokh Singh, Bhai Gurdas, Gur Bilas Chhevin Patshahi and others, [3] and the tradition assert that the Fifth Guru completed the Aad Granth in Bhadon Samat, 1661. The Kartarpuri Bir is the only Bir which records that it was completed in Bhadon, 1661 “Samat 1661 Miti Bhadon Vadi ekam I pothi likh pouhnche.” There is no handwritten Bir the record of which claims the same to have been completed on Bhadon Samat, 1661 or near about. In fact, this dated volume being the earliest, it is a good piece of evidence not only to show the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir but also to fix the date of the preparation of the Bir by the Fifth Guru.

(5) We have explained the method of allotment of clusters of papers for a rag or a proposed section of the Granth. For the expeditious completion of the work, the adoption of this method was natural and necessary, especially when the work of copying the collection of bani from different sources was going on side by side. This prior allotment of pages for a section had to be very liberal, so as to ensure that the available bani should not exceed the allotted space, nor thereby upset the entire system and sequence of rags and sections. But, evidently, this liberal allotment of leaves, based on rough anticipation of the bani likely to be available, was, in practice, bound to lead to a large number of pages remaining blank between different sections of the Aad Granth. And, this is what has actually happened in the case of the Kartarpuri Bir. The total numbered leaves of the Kartarpuri Bir are 974, comprising 1948 pages. Of these pages, 453 are entirely blank, hundreds of other pages are partly blank, and, considering that a fully utilized page accommodates 24 lines, the total space available on these partly blank pages comes up to another 133 full pages. Thus, of the total 1948 pages of this volume, the space of 586 of them remained unused. It is evident that this state of affairs could only arise in the originally written Aad Granth; it could never have happened in an Aad Granth which had been copied from the original. It is a fact that none of the writers like Jodh Singh, Harbhajan Singh and others, who have seen numerous handwritten Birs, state that any of the old handwritten Birs contains any blank pages or spaces. Obviously, in a copy, the very question of hundreds of pages being left blank does not arise, especially when it is copied by a single scribe. Because, in such a case the copyist has the entire material, ready and in proper sequence, before him for copying. The Banno Bir, which is supposed to be a copy of it, has only 467 folios. It is, therefore, out of question that the Kartarpuri Bir with 974 folios could be a copy of a Granth which had material that could be accommodated in about 467 folios. Generally, all the old handwritten Birs, including the Kartarpuri Bir, are in one hand. Therefore, this internal evidence in the Kartarpuri Bir is both incontrovertible and singly conclusive to show its originality.

(6) There are many shabads of bani which have originally been written twice but later this duplication has either been erased by hartal (a chemical used in those days to remove the writing), or scored out with the observation in the margin that the shabad was a duplication. In a copied Bir this duplication could never arise. This could happen only in the original in which case either the scribe himself or the compiler has on revision found the error and got the same removed by scoring out the duplicate shabad or shalok. This duplication has happened at pages 96/2, 186/2, 483/1, 511/1, 550/2, 836/1, 943/2, etc. Thus these duplications, too, are conclusive to prove its authenticity.

(7) There is another set of corrected incongruities which shows conclusively the authenticity of Kartarpuri Bir. At page 778/1 there is a marginal note that shalok No. 22 of Mahila 1 which is recorded at page 799 and is correct should be read there at that page after shalok No. 21. It is also indicated at page 778/1 that shalok “Maru Mahila 3” “Agam Agochar Ve-Parwaha” which is there on this page should be read at page 788. Further, at page 788 there is a corresponding note that the 23rd shalok of Mahila 3 Agam Agochar Ve Parwaha which is at page 778 should be read there. At page 799/2 Maru Mahila 1, the shalok of which the correct place is at page 778, after shalok No. 21 of Mahila I, stands recorded. Now, these inadvertent incongruities are such as could not be rectified except by cross-references, especially as shalok of Mahila 3 is long and could not be accommodated in the margin at page 788, nor could Maru Mahila 1 at page 799/2 be accommodated at page 778 and scored out at page 799/2. In the Tatkara (contents of shaloks and shabads), too, these incongruities are reflected but rectified. At page

16/1 of the Tatkara, the first lines of all the shaloks of Mahila are written with their serial numbers 1 to 21. But in the margin, against shalok No. 21 of Mahila 1, the first line of shalok Kudrat Karnekar Aprara of Mahila 1, is vertically recorded. Its number is noted as No. 22 and page 799.

Further, at page 16/1 of the Tatkara, since in the text shalok of Mahila 3 Agam Agochar Ve-Parwaha actually, but incongruously, starts at page 778 immediately after shalok No. 21 of Mahila 1, its reference number and the first line of the shabad are recorded in the beginning, but its number is correctly given as shalok No. 23 of Mahila 3. Again, at this page 16/1 after the number and the first line of shalok No. 22 of Mahila 3, the number and line is of shalok 24 of Mahila 3. This is so because in the actual text shalok No. 23 of Mahila 3 comes between shalok 21 of Mahila 1 and shalok No. 1 of Mahila 3 at page 778 and not between shalok Nos. 22 and 24 of Mahila 3 at page 788. Another important feature of page 16/1 of the Tatkara is that the original shalok numberings of the first 23 shaloks of Mahila 3 on this page have been rubbed with hartal and thereafter these very 23 shaloks have been re-numbered, the first one as 23 and the remaining 22 numbers as 1 to 22. This clearly shows that originally the incongruity in the placement of shaloks 23 of Mahila 3 and shalok No. 22 of Mahila 1, that occurred in the text, was, actually reflected in the Tatkara by the scribe. But, when the out-of-sequence placements of these shaloks were later detected, the incongruities in the text were rectified by giving cross-references in the margin of the text at the appropriate pages, and, the errors in the Tatkara were corrected by rubbing with hartal the numbers of the first 23 shaloks of Mahila 3 and re-numbering them as numbers 23 and 1 to 22 of Mahila 3, and, in the case of, shalok No. 22 of Mahila 1, by writing its page and number correctly in the margin of page 16/1.

We have detailed these connected sets of corrections in the text and the Tatkara because these incongruities could happen only at the time of the original writing and never in the case of copying from the original text compiled by the Fifth Guru. It is also important to mention that on examination, no other Bir has revealed this set of incongruities at pages 778, 788 and 799 of the text and in the corresponding portions of the Tatkara. By itself this set of corrections alone is conclusive in proving the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir.

(8) Here we shall record a number of other corrected mistakes which in their character, implication and importance are similar to the ones described above.

(a) At page 804/2 it is recorded in the margin that instead of the 21st Pauri, 22nd has been written. Correspondingly on page 805/1 there is a note in the margin that the Pauri there should be sung and written as 21th Pauri. This error of sequence could never occur in a copy.

(b) There are numerous instances where shabads, shaloks and a part of bani have been written in the margin, evidently, because in each case the bani appears to have been found or collected later on and there being no place on the relevant page it had to be recorded in the margin. In some cases the bani has been given the proper serial number and the numbers of the subsequent bani re-numbered. But, in some cases, numbers following them have remained uncorrected and the bani in the margin has been given the same number as to the shalok or shabad after which it has to be read. These incongruities are so large in number and the bani has been written in the margin at so many places that all this could happen only in the original, either because of the late collection of bani or because the scribe, Bhai Gurdas, had not recorded it in its right sequence. For example, at pages 154/2, 252/1, 364/1, 694/1, 945, 182, 946,1, 148/2, 374/2, etc. additional bani has been written in the margins. At pages 940/1, 940/2, etc., the bani recorded in the margins has been given the same number as borne by one of the shabads on the page. Again, on pages 251/1, 265/2, 266/2, 399/2, 252/1, 499/2, 689/2, 690/1, 842/2, 841/2, etc., portions of the bani have been written in the margin and a mark given at the relevant place on the page to show where the marginal portion should be read.

(c) We know that at the end of each shabad or shalok the total of Pads, the total of shabads of each Guru, total of shabads of each rag, etc., have been recorded. The number of Mahila is also invariably given in addition. But, in the Kartarpuri Bir in scores of cases the number, totals, etc. were missed originally but were written later in small letters either in between or above the lines or in the margins, e. g. this has happened at pages 154/2, 164/2, 174/1, 240/2, 257/1,267/1, 269/1, 270/1, 270/2, 399/1, 455/2, 802/2, etc. Apart from that, in quite a large number of cases, these totals have not been given or given incompletely. This incongruity and its rectification as mentioned above are very common. There is a very clear reason for this feature of the Kartarpuri Bir. As the job of collection of bani and its recording was being done simultaneously, the scribe was never sure whether more shabads or bani of a Guru, requiring precedence of sequence over the shabads of bani already written, would or would not be available. As such, he had, as a necessary precaution and in order to avoid repeated scoring out and alterations of the totals, to leave the work of totalling to a later date. Therefore, this task of recording the totals had to be done as one of the last jobs to be completed. Perforce, the totals had to be squeezed in between or above the lines in small sized figures or in the margins. But such a position, too, could never arise in a copied Granth where the numbering would be complete and form a part of the line itself. The scribe could never fail to copy or record them in appropriate lines, even if in the original the numberings had been missing or been recorded in between or above the lines. In other handwritten Birs these incongruities do not occur. Even in the Banno Bir, totals are given in the lines themselves. Hence this feature of the Kartarpuri Bir, especially the large number in which these incongruities or omissions appear, proves its authenticity and originality.

(d) There is another kind of discrepancy in serial-wise numbering. On a number of pages the bani or the shabad has been scored out or removed by the use of hartal. But, the old serial numbering has remained uncorrected, e. g., this has happened at pages 186/2, 970/1. In some cases, the incongruity even stands reflected in the Tatkhara, because as the numbering has remained uncorrected in the Granth, it could evidently not be corrected in the Tatkhara which records only the state of numbering or sequence in the Granth, e. g. mention of shalok number 94/1 in the Tatkhara at page 7 has been scored out, and the numbering of subsequent references stands uncorrected. The large number of cancellations and uncorrected numberings in this Bir prove its originality since such a state could never occur in a copy.

(e) As noted already, within the bani of a rag or section, the sequence of shabads or shaloks is Guruwise. After it, normally comes the bani of Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas and then other bhagats. But, the sources of the bani of bhagat Kabir and other bhagats being quite scattered, its collection and selection for incorporation in the Granth must have taken quite long, since the same involved in the case of each part a scrutiny and decision by the Guru himself. The result was that in many instances the bani of bhagat Kabir appears in between, and that also not at one place, or after the recorded bani of bhagat Namdev. It might be argued that such an abnormal sequence being in the original, it would also be there in a copy of it; therefore, the Kartarpuri Bir, cannot claim any originality on this account. But, it is significant that the bani of bhagat Kabir, which is not in proper sequence has, evidently, been written on different occasions. This is clear from the fact that though the writing of these hymns is by the same scribe, in each case the writing differs in the size and shape of letters and the shade of ink. Had the Kartarpuri Bir been a copy, these differences in the shades of ink and the size of the letters that are there, could not have occurred, even though the break in sequence would have been there, because of the corresponding break being present in the original, e. g. at pages 842/2, 810/1 and 863/2, though the scribe is the same, the shades of ink and size of writing are different even in the case of the bani of the same bhagat or Guru. Therefore, while variations in sequence can be explained, variations in pens, shades of ink, and size of letters of the bani of the same bhagat cannot be explained in a continuous writing, except on the assumption that the Kartarpuri Bir is the original and these variations occurred because of the variant timings of collection, selection and recording of the bani of a particular bhagat. Besides, because of this noncontinuous writing of bhagat bani, the totals of the shabads of a bhagat have not been given as has been done in other cases. The fact is that in the Kartarpuri Bir, the bani of bhagat Kabir, and even some other bani, when found and selected later on have not at many places been recorded in the normal serial sequence of the Bir. But, these hymns have been written wherever space was available and even in the margin or between the bani of other bhagats, e. g. at pages 885/2, 945/1. But, the shades of ink and pens used for such bani are different

showing clearly variant times of its original collection and recording in the Kartarpuri Bir.

(f) Another feature of the Kartarpuri Bir is the large number of pages where the original writing has been obliterated by hartal and later at those very places bani has been written. Sometimes the space accommodating a whole shabad or hymn has been cleaned with hartal and new bani written at the place e. g. at pages 840/1, 870/2, 966/1, 966/2. Had the Kartarpuri Bir been a copy of the original, such a large number of places requiring the need of scoring out or rubbing or cleaning with hartal could never have arisen.

(g) Another significant feature of the Kartarpuri Bir is that at numerous places the headings and words like Ek Onkar or the Mahila, or name of the rag are written, but below these headings there is no bani or shabad and the place is blank. This is so at pages 279/2, 297/2, 248/1, 528/1, 520/2, 348/1, 468/2, 607/2, 617/1, 621/2. This writing of the heading like Mahila, rag etc., by the scribe clearly indicates that it was thought that the bani of that Guru or bhagat would be available for being written there, but actually it was either not available or not approved by the Fifth Guru. In a mere copy of the Aad Granth, such a thing could never happen, because where the original has no bani the question of recording the heading of a shabad or bani could never arise. Such recording of headings only, without being followed by related bani, is not present in any other handwritten Bir. It is also significant to mention that almost all these headings relate to the Fifth Guru who was alive at that time, e. g. pages 297/2, 248/1, 348/1, 418/2, 469/2, 528/1, 530/2, 607/2, 610/2, 617/1, and 621/2. Presumably, Bhai Gurdas' anticipation was that more shabads of the Guru were likely to be available under those Rags. This is also an important proof to show the originality of the Kartarpuri Bir. Because in a copy the occurrence of all these extra or lone headings, involving wrong anticipation, relating mostly to the Fifth or the living Guru could not arise.

(9) Other Important Factors: (a) The originality of the Kartarpuri Bir is also established by the Nishan or mark of the Fifth Guru. This mark, in those days meant, according to the accepted practice and tradition, the writing of the Mul Mantra of the Japuji in the hand of the Guru, the Fifth Guru in this case. This Nishan appears on page 29/1 of the Bir. As a mark of adoration, the page has been profusely decorated. The presence of the Nishan of the Fifth Guru is also noted in the Tatcara.

(b) At page 415/1 in the margin are written the words "The shabad is right." This shabad does not find mention in the Tatcara. But, this observation in the margin shows that for this Bir, there was a supervisor or editor, other than the scribe, who alone could record such an observation of approval regarding the shabad on the page. This observation shows the original character of the Kartarpuri Bir. Otherwise, if the Bir had been copied from another Bir, the question of such an observation by the scribe or some other person would not arise.

(c) In the Tatcara of shabads only the references of shabads 1 to 58 of Ramkali Mahila 5 are given. But, on page 681/2 of the Bir, which starts with shabad 59 of Ramkali Mahila 5 and ends with shabad 60 of Ramkali Mahila 5, two additional shabads of the Fifth Guru are written. Both these shabads are in a different hand from that of the scribe and their reference in the Tatcara of shabads is missing. This means that these two shabads were added or got added there by the editor or the compiler. Here again, the absence of the reference of these two shabads in the Tatcara and their text being in a different hand from that of the original scribe suggest that this feature could be only in the original and not in a copy. Because in a copy all the 1 to 60 shabads would normally be in the same hand. Similarly, Ramkali Mahila 5 Chhand No. 21 has no reference in the Tatcara, but the Chhand is present at its proper place, though it is in a different hand. This, too, supports the earlier inference drawn in the case of shabads 59 and 60. In both cases, the bani being of the Fifth Guru, it is very likely that he created it after 1604 A. D. and got it added at the appropriate places in the Aad Granth later on. The position is similar in the case of Basant ki Var composed by the Fifth Guru. This Var is recorded on page 854/2 in the middle of this page. But, there is no reference of this Var in the Tatcara, showing that the Fifth Guru composed it and got it included after Bhadon 1604 A. D. Hence, it could not find mention in the Tatcara that stood already completed. It is significant that in all other handwritten Birs, including the Banno Bir, reference of the Var is present in the Tatcara.

(d) At page 540 of the Bir the Nishan of the Sixth Guru is present. Its presence is also mentioned in the Tatcara. In the circumstances of the case, this is a very significant and natural thing to do. During the time of the Fifth Guru it had become abundantly clear that Guru Hargobind would succeed him. In fact, from the very start the Sixth Guru was associated with the task of the collection of the bani and preparation of the scripture. Some writers have even suggested that some of the dhunnies were got recorded by the Sixth Guru. They derive this inference from the fact that it is in the Kartarpuri Bir alone that we observe that the dhunnies of some Vars are recorded in a different hand or in small letters in between or above the normal written lines. In other copies of the Granth, including the Banno Bir, these have been written in the lines and in the same manner as the bani itself. It evidently suggests that in the Kartarpuri Bir the dhunnies were written on some later date, and presumably at the instance of the Sixth Guru.

Conclusion from Internal Evidence

We have detailed above the various pieces and types of internal evidence most of which are individually and incontrovertibly conclusive in proving that the Kartarpuri Bir is the original Aad Granth compiled by the Fifth Guru in 1604 A. D. The other pieces of evidence we have recorded are cumulatively, or coupled with the other evidence, equally conclusive in proving the authenticity of the Kartarpuri Bir to be the original production of the Fifth Guru.

Examination of Criticism by McLeod

Before we deal with the criticism of McLeod, let us record the present position and academic findings about the Banno Bir. This Bir is at present with the successors of Bhai Banno at Kanpur. It has been carefully seen by Bhai Mahan Singh, who examined the Kartarpuri Bir as well as a team of scholars from the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Prof. Pritam Singh, who has written a paper on the subject, and Principal Harbhajan Singh of Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar. All of them have concluded that this Bir was recorded in Samat 1699 (thirty eight years after the preparation of the Bir by the Fifth Guru) and this is the year written in the Bir itself. Secondly, in this Bir the controversial shabad, "Ranjhunara gao Sakhi", is clearly a later interpolation because it is written in very small letters in a different shade of ink from the original writing of the Bir. These two conclusions about the Banno Bir are academically accepted and are not in doubt.

We now record the criticism by McLeod. He writes:

"First, there is the universal agreement that the important differences distinguishing the Kartarpur manuscript from the Banno version consist exclusively of material included in the latter which is not to be found in the former. Secondly, there is the testimony of those who have inspected the Kartarpuri manuscript concerning the obliteration of portions of its text."

"A third factor is the presence in the standard printed editions of two fragments, corresponding to two of the three additional Banno hymns. In Ramkali rag there occurs a single couplet where there should apparently be a complete hymn. The remainder of the hymns in the same section indicate that the couplet must be either the first two lines of a chhant, or a shalok introducing a chhant. The second fragment corresponds to the Sur Das hymn in Sarang rag. In this instance the standard printed text contains only the first line. There seemed to be only one possible reason for the appearance of these two fragments. The bulk of the hymn in each case must have been deleted, leaving a small remainder which was faithfully copied into the standard printed text."

“A fourth point seemed to clinch the issue. The Banno text of the missing portions indicated good reasons for later deletion, particularly in the case of the Ramkali hymn by Guru Arjun. This hymn describes the puberty rites conducted by Guru Arjun at the initiation of his son Hargobind. The rites follow a standard Hindu pattern and in the third stanza there is a reference to the manner in which the boy's head was shaved. This feature is an obvious contradiction to the later prohibition of hair cutting. When the prohibition became mandatory, not merely for Jat Sikhs but also those of other castes, the reference in the hymn could only be regarded as intolerable.”

“Finally, there was ample evidence that others had already formed the same suspicions concerning the Kartarpur manuscript and were seeking alternative explanations. One writer has declared that the present Kartarpur manuscript is a Banno version, adding that the original manuscript of the Aad Granth must have been lost. Another has suggested that the present manuscript must be a first draft, subsequently amended by the Guru himself. Their evident uneasiness strengthened a hypothesis which already seemed firmly founded.”

“By this time the hypothesis will have become obvious. The conclusion which seemed to be emerging with increasing assurance was that the widely disseminated Banno version must represent the original text; and that the Kartarpur manuscript must be a shortened version of the same text. A few portions must have been deleted because they could not be reconciled with beliefs subsequently accepted by the Panth. This much appeared to be well established and another point could be added as a possibility. It seemed likely that the amendments had originally been made by omitting the problem passage from later manuscripts rather than by deleting them from the Kartarpur manuscript. These later manuscripts reflected the distinctive pattern of Khalsa belief. The omission of the problem passage together with the addition of compositions by Guru Tegh Bahadur constituted the Damdama version of the Aad Granth. Later still, portions of the Kartarpur manuscript (the original manuscript written by Bhai Gurdas) were rather ineptly obliterated in order to bring the two versions into line.” [4]

It appears that McLeod is unaware of the work done by Sahib Singh who disbelieves the Banno story and the statements of Mahan Singh and others who have recorded the two findings mentioned earlier. For, had it been known to him, he would certainly have tried to verify the factual position by an examination of the Banno Bir. And this, evidently, he never did. Nor has he, it appears, examined the Kartarpuri Bir. Whether or not McLeod was aware of the views of Sahib Singh about the Banno story and of Mahan Singh and others about the year of completion of the Banno Bir, is not our present concern. It is now well established that the Banno Bir was prepared not earlier than 1699 and the Banno story is a myth. As such, the very basis of the argument about the Kartarpuri Bir being a copy of the Banno Bir is knocked out. McLeod's argument that the additional bani of Surdas and Ramkali Mahila 5 that was present in the Banno Bir, had been copied in the Kartarpuri Bir, but deleted later on is equally baseless. For, we have seen that in both these cases the additional bani in the Banno Bir is either an interpolation or a later writing; and these verses, which are not present in the Kartarpuri Bir, had neither been copied there nor deleted. Therefore, McLeod's other arguments that the Kartarpuri Bir, which according to him had been copied from the Banno Bir, contained the so-called puberty hymn (additional 8 verses), but being incongruous with the later Khalsa belief was deleted, is also factually incorrect and fallacious. Kartarpuri Bir which was prepared in 1604 A. D. could not be copied from the Banno Bir prepared in 1642 A. D. ; nor was the puberty hymn originally present even in the Banno Bir of samat 1699, it being a clear later interpolation. In fact, it was never recorded in the Kartarpuri Bir. Therefore, the question of its deletion from the Kartarpuri Bir could not arise. Every student of the Kartarpuri Bir knows that it has the largest number of blank pages and deletions. These two facts are one of the strongest points in favour of its originality. Apart from the fact that the Banno Bir was prepared 38 years after the Kartarpuri Bir, it is ridiculous that a copyist given the task of copying the Banno Bir comprising 467 folios, or any Bir with such material as could be accommodated on about 465 leaves, would copy it out on 974 folios. McLeod knows, since he is aware of the work of Jodh Singh, and has even quoted it, that in the case of the puberty hymn and bhagat Surdas verses, there is no deletion in the Kartarpuri Bir (as also seen by us). Yet, knowing all this, he has, on the one hand, tried to build the argument about deletion on the basis of the use of hartal elsewhere, and, on the other hand, has made the equally misleading argument of the deletion of the puberty hymn from the Kartarpuri Bir because of the later Khalsa beliefs.

Here it is also pertinent to state that McLeod's suggestion that the so-called Ramkali hymn was deleted from the Kartarpuri Bir because of later Khalsa beliefs displays his ignorance both of the history of the Sikhs and of the Dhirmalias. The latter became a splinter group and they went to the extent of making a murderous assault on the Ninth Guru. They never recognized him or the Tenth Master as Guru. As such, there was no love lost between the Khalsa, a creation of the Tenth Guru, whom the Mughals wanted to destroy, and the Dhirmalias who were Pro-Establishment. Therefore, there is not the remotest possibility that the Dhirmalias would ever tamper with the Bir in their possession in order to oblige the Khalsa, and bring it in accord with the Rahit or symbols prescribed by the Tenth Guru. Rather, their avowed hostility towards the Khalsa would prompt them to highlight the hymn if it had ever existed in that Bir. On the other hand, the Banno people formed a part of the main-stream of the Sikhs and if Sikhs would have been interested in a deletion, they might have done that in their Bir. But, nothing of the sort happened in that Bir. McLeod's conjecture about the deletion of the so-called puberty hymn because of the Khalsa beliefs is, thus, not only impossible, but is also controverted even by the very facts and circumstances of the situation as it existed then.

Besides, we find that Principal Harbhajan Singh who made a detailed survey of the handwritten Birs in the Sikh Reference Library, Golden Temple, Amritsar, (since destroyed in the Blue Star Attack) and some other Birs, writes that in numerous of the old handwritten Birs he examined, this additional bani was nowhere present. He gives details of it in his book: *Gurbani Sampadan Nirne*. A statement about some of them is as follows:

“1. Bir No. 97 in the Sikh Reference Library: It was produced in Samat 1739 (1682 A. D.), some two decades before the creation of the Khalsa, and bears the Nishan of the Ninth Guru. It has no additional bani as is contained in the Banno Bir. 2. Pindi Lala (Gujrat) Wali Bir: It was produced in Samat 1732 (1675 A. D.). It bears the Nishan of Ninth Guru, but, unlike the Banno Bir, it contains no additional bani. 3. Bir No. 14 in the Sikh Reference Library: It was completed in Samat 1748 (1691 A. D.). It contains no additional bani as is present in the Banno Bir. 4. Bir written by Pakhar Mal Dhillon, grandson of Chaudhri Langahia Dhillon, a known devout Sikh of the Fifth Guru: It was written, in Samat 1745 (1668 A. D.). Unlike the Banno Bir, it contains no additional bani.” [5]

At Berkeley, McLeod raised two points: “One is the obscurity which envelops a significant period of the text's actual history. The other is the presence within the manuscript of numerous deletions.” [6] On the issue of deletions we have already found that these large number of deletions are a good proof of its originality, especially when there is no other Bir with deletions in such a large number and when at most of those places where bani has been written again by the same scribe, showing thereby that the writing rubbed off was not correct or approved by the Guru. Actually, it stands established that not only was the Banno Bir prepared in Samat 1699, but the puberty hymn itself was clearly a later interpolation even in the Banno Bir of 1699. McLeod has been lamenting his frustration in not being able to serve academic interests, because he was not allowed necessary access to the Kartarpuri Bir. He even went to the extent of recording that non-availability of Kartarpuri Bir to him suggested that there was something to conceal therein. [7] But one wonders why his academic keenness never led him to see the Banno Bir, which was available all these years for his examination. Had he cared to see, he would have found that the year of its production was Samat 1699. Does all this not suggest that his motives in making unwarranted statements were quite different and unbecoming a scholar.

In view of the above, it is clear that the suggestion about the Kartarpuri Bir being non-authentic or its being a copy of the Banno Bir is both baseless and untenable.

On the second issue about the custody of the Kartarpuri Bir, the doubts of McLeod are equally without any basis. Here, too, the position had been made clear by Mahan Singh. The historical writings show that Bidhi Chand and other Sikhs were very well aware of the great value of the Bir. They held it in the highest esteem. Actually, this was the real reason that Bidhi Chand and others, despite the wishes of the Guru, initially failed to return the Bir to the Dhirmalias towards whom they were hostile for their having attacked the Ninth Guru to kill him. Therefore, for understandable reasons, when again directed by the Guru to return the Bir, they were reluctant to meet the Dhirmalias face to face. And all they did was that they deposited the Bir at a safe place and sent a message to the Dhirmalias to pick it up, and this they did. [8] Further, there is little doubt that when the Tenth Guru at Anandpur Sahib wanted to prepare the Damdami version, it was to the Dhirmalias that he sent the message for loan of the Bir of the Fifth Guru. [9] So, whatever be the facts of the earlier part of the story, at the time of the Tenth Guru, the original authentic Bir was certainly with the Dhirmalias. After that, the Bir always remained in safe hands. Had the Bir been lost, it is impossible to imagine that Ranjit Singh who had waged a war for obtaining a horse, would not be aware of it and recover this venerable treasure, or that he would be satisfied with a spurious version of the original Bir.

Here it is not our purpose to ascertain whether McLeod made his observations out of sheer ignorance of the available facts and materials, or of his anxiety to suppress known but awkward facts, or of his conscious or unconscious bias because of his thirteen years of working and association with a Christian Mission in Punjab. But in either case, it does little credit to his credibility as a scholar to suggest tampering with a Scripture without having examined it or the connected literature on the issue. In view of the above, we conclude that McLeod's criticism is factually incorrect, and untenable, and even less than responsible.

An observation was made by McLeod that in order to remove scholarly doubts, access to the Kartarpuri Bir would need to be allowed and “the alternative may well be a growing conviction that there is something to hide.” The Kartarpuri Bir is private property and we do not hold any brief for its custodians. True, the Sodhis of Kartarpur while they do not permit access to every person who claims to be a scholar, yet, by all standards, their policy to allow access to the Kartarpuri Bir has been very liberal. In fact, during the current century there has been an extremely profuse exposure of the Kartarpuri Bir before genuine scholars and theologians. In the twenties, Master Isher Singh of the Sikh Vidyala, Tarn Taran, sent a team of scholars, who for many months made a detailed page by page and line by line study in order to prepare a standard version of Guru Granth Sahib. Second, is an equally major attempt of the S. G. P.

C. to prepare a meticulously accurate version of Guru Granth Sahib from the Kartarpuri Bir. A team consisting of two scholars, namely, Giani Piara Singh Sukhi and Sant Harbhajan Singh Nirmla worked from day to day for six months at Kartarpur. In addition, other scholars also regularly visited Kartarpur so as to supervise the work of the team. Leaf by leaf comparison of an unbound Bir of Guru Granth Sahib was made with the Kartarpuri Bir. Every variation in the unbound Bir was corrected in accordance with the Kartarpuri Bir. Thereafter, calligraphists prepared another faultless copy of the Granth. This having been done, printing blocks of this new version were made. A committee of scholars was again appointed to verify and approve the corrected version. Actually, about 733 variations, major or minor, were found in the old printed version and these were all corrected. Finally, a faultlessly accurate version of Guru Granth Sahib copied from the Kartarpuri Bir was approved and printed through the Punjabi Press, Hall Bazar, Amritsar. These versions have been printed a number of times and these printed copies of the Kartarpuri Bir are there for every scholar to see and study. Dr Jodh Singh's rejoinder recorded after the publication of McLeod's lectures states that the printed version today tallies completely with the Kartarpuri Bir. Apart from that, many times groups of scholars, individual scholars, both foreign and Indian, have been allowed access to the Kartarpuri Bir. Many reports of the committees of scholars who examined the Kartarpuri Bir for general and specific purposes are available. Jodh Singh's *Kartarpuri Bir De Darshan* is a detailed page by page record of the Kartarpuri Bir giving an account of every feature on each page, including variations in words, spellings, lagmatras, use of hartal, blank spaces, size of margins, obliteration by use of hartal, over-writing on hartal, scoring-out, writing in-between lines, above the lines and in the margins, variations in the size of letters, handwriting, ink, etc., etc. . Among individual records of examination, these notes by Jodh Singh (recorded by Giani Mahan Singh) are the most detailed and give a scrupulously accurate picture of the Kartarpuri Bir. In this background, it would be both unfair and incorrect to blame the custodians of the Bir that they have barred scholarly study or exposure to genuine scholars. The difficulty is that wild conjectures of some scholars like G. B. Singh and others have raised the suspicions of the custodians of the Bir. At present the Kartarpuri Bir is the property of the Dhir Mal family, and no one can be blamed if the custodians want to be sure of the bonafides of a scholar before allowing him access to it for a study of the Kartarpuri Bir. Their exercise of such discretion is natural, understandable and unobjectionable. But, McLeod continued with his misleading and incorrect statements. In a lecture at Berkeley published in 1978 he said, “The earliest representing nearest approach to Guru Arjun's dictation would be Banno, the second an intermediate recension bearing the actual marks of a later revision through the excision of unacceptable material would be Kartarpuri.” [10] In 1989, he published his book *The Sikhs*, in which he wrote, “This comparison suggests that the Banno recension may actually represent the original text by Bhai Gurdas”, but he adds, “if this is indeed the case, the original version has subsequently been amended by obliterating occasional portions of the text.”

[11] Four Sikh organisations, the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, the Council of Sikh Affairs, Chandigarh, the Academy of Sikh Religion and Culture, Patiala, and the Khalsa Diwan, Ludhiana, wrote to the Toronto University complaining about the misconduct of McLeod in making wrong statements about the Sikh Scripture, especially when he had made no serious effort to examine the Banno Bir or the Kartarpuri Bir. Probably, in response to these allegations against him, McLeod published a letter in the *India Abroad*, dated 14 December 1990, saying that he had abandoned his doubts about the Kartarpuri Bir after reading Jodh Singh's book, *Kartarpuri Bir de Darshan*. Since McLeod had made all his incorrect statements of 1975, 1978 and 1989 after accepting knowledge of Jodh Singh's book in his publication of 1975, Dr Dharmi of New York published all the statements of McLeod suggesting that the letter of McLeod in the *India Abroad* was another misstatement by him. All this indicates the level of scholarship, motivation and ethics at which McLeod has been working.

So far as the Kartarpuri Bir is concerned, it has since been examined by G. S. Mann of the Columbia University, USA, [12] and Pashaura Singh of the Toronto University, Canada, [13] and both of them have testified to its authenticity.

In sum, our analysis and examination of the Bir, the available material on the subject, and the statements of various authors lead us to the conclusion that the Kartarpuri Bir is incontrovertibly the authentic Aad Granth prepared by the Fifth Guru.

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