

## Bachittar Natak and Gur Sobha: Exploring the Role of Braj Bhasha in Sikh History

Manoj Kumar

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### Abstract

This article aims to shed light on the importance of Braj Bhasha in Sikh history, alongside Guru Gobind Singh's writings, and on the role linguistic unity played. Despite the distinct regional powers, language served as a bridge connecting regional history to the national narrative. We can observe that the use of Braj Bhasha in Sikh history symbolises the awakening of a distinct consciousness. By employing this widely spoken language in rural areas, Guru Gobind Singh ensured that Sikh identity was not confined to a single region but reached a broader audience.

The focus is on something other than assessing the texts' historical accuracy or their contribution to period and regional reconstructions, as traditionally done. Instead, the emphasis lies on comprehending how these texts, through the prism of memory, construct and interpret the past. This exploration reveals a symbiotic relationship between textual and material representations that collaboratively articulate the historical imagination of the Guru community. Within this broader context, Guru Gobind Singh's adoption of Braj Bhasha was far more than a literary preference; it carried deep cultural and political significance. It signified that Sikh intellectual and literary traditions were not confined to Punjab alone but were actively engaging with the wider literary world of the subcontinent.

**Keywords:** - Brajbhasa, Sikh history, Bacchhitar Natak, Gur Sobha, Sikh Identity, Guruship

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### Bachitra Natak: *The Wondrous Drama*

"हम इह काज जगत मो आए, धरम हेत गुरदेव पठाए।  
धर्म चलावन संत उबारन, दुष्ट सभन को मूल उपारन।"

*I have come into this world with a divine purpose; the Guru has sent me for this cause. to uphold righteousness, protect saints, and uproot all evil*

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- Assistant Professor : History, School of Undergraduate Studies Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi
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As India's medieval period drew to a close, a new social and political order emerged, laying the foundation for a fresh administrative system. During this time, provincial structures began to establish a new political order distinct from the centralised power of Mughal rule and to adopt a sovereignty-led governance model. The history of the Sikhs has always been one of glory, marked by leadership and resilience.

जुल्फे अनूप जानकी  
नागिन स्याह बाँकी  
अद्भुत अदाएँ तन की  
ऐसो दुल्हन कहाँ है?

The term Bachitra Natak has multiple connotations, referring to an individual composition in the Dasam Granth consisting of fourteen chapters, notably featuring a section titled Apni Katha ("My Story"). Sikh authors may alternatively employ Bachitra Natak to specifically denote Apni Katha rather than the broader composition to which it belongs. Adding to the complexity, other works within the Dasam Granth might be collectively labelled Bachitra Natak Granth (Jaggi 1966, 9-10). Several compositions, including Chandi Charitra Ukti Bilas, Chandi Charitra 2, Chaubis Avatar, Brahmā Avatar, and Rudra Avatar, indicate their association with the Bachitra Natak Granth, suggesting an intended holistic interpretation, whether by the author's intent or by a later compiler's arrangement.<sup>1</sup> Within Bachitra Natak, purportedly composed by Guru Gobind Singh, the author traces their lineage from the inception of creation, recounting past lives and detailing actions during their Guru tenure, including conflicts with hill chiefs and the Mughals.

The author declares a divine purpose of establishing dharma and vanquishing its adversaries, narrating meditation on deities Mahakal [Mahākālā] and Kalaka [Kālākā] in the Himalayas upon receiving the call to be born. The composition is commonly believed to cover events up to 1696, with a notable absence of the foundation of the Khalsa, lamented by Sikh commentators.<sup>2</sup> Despite debates on authorship, many Sikh and Western interpreters, even those sceptical of Guru Gobind Singh composing the entirety of the Dasam Granth, acknowledge this as an authentic work by the Guru. Further elaboration on this composition is presented in the subsequent chapter.<sup>3</sup> The importance of Braj Bhasha in Sikh history did not end with Guru Gobind Singh; rather, it continued to shape Sikh historical consciousness well into the nineteenth century. One of the finest examples of this continuity is the monumental Guru Pratap Suraj Granth by Santokh Singh (1787–1843). Trained in

Amritsar and later patronised in the Delhi region, Santokh Singh composed this vast and highly stylised narrative in Braj Bhasha, presenting the lives of the Sikh Gurus and their families in thousands of verses. The text became one of the most influential and widely read sources for Sikh history during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its composition in Braj was not accidental; it reflected a conscious literary choice to place Sikh historical memory within the wider intellectual and devotional traditions of North India.

As historian J. S. Grewal has argued in *History, Literature, and Identity*, literary traditions were central to the making of Sikh identity. The Braj compositions of Guru Gobind Singh's court and later historical works, such as the *Suraj Granth*, reveal how language became a medium for preserving faith, memory, and collective identity. In historical traditions across the world, language has always played a crucial role in shaping memory, whether in the North or the South, and Sikh history is no exception. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Braj functioned as a unifying literary language for Sikh intellectual life, connecting communities beyond Punjab. However, by the nineteenth century, as Gurmukhi, Shahmukhi, and Punjabi consolidated as distinct linguistic identities, Braj gradually lost its central place in Sikh literary culture. This shift was also shaped by rising sectarian and political assertions, which increasingly narrowed Sikh identity into regional linguistic boundaries. In this process, the earlier flourishing connection between Sikh history and Braj Bhasha was often sidelined, even though it had played a foundational role in shaping Sikh historical memory and literary heritage.

### **Bachitra Natak: Cosmic Narrative and Sikh Mission**

Bachitra Natak intricately weaves Guru Gobind Singh's life into a cosmic tapestry spanning from Satyayuga to the present Kaliyuga. This narrative transcends biography, portraying a cosmic order (dharma) disrupted by the failures of religious teachers and rulers across the yugas. The arrival of the Gurus, including Guru Nanak, marks a renewed cosmic effort. Born into a lineage that includes the avatar Ram, the poet distinguishes himself as chosen by the Supreme Lord for a unique mission. J. S. Grewal suggests that Bachitra Natak confirms that Guru Gobind Singh's conviction as Guru Nanak's true successor is divinely supported. The narrative gains legitimacy through Guru Tegh Bahadur's sacrifice for those expressing devotion through the tilak and sacred thread.<sup>4</sup> This aligns with the Kshatriya's dharmic duties, protecting Brahmins. Yet, Bachitra Natak sharply contrasts the Sikh Gurus' mission with that of traditional religious leaders in Hinduism and Islam.<sup>5</sup> Despite being born into a lineage

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that includes ancestors like the avatar Ram, the poet distinguishes himself from the failures of earlier avatars and prophets. Chosen by the Lord for a specific mission, the poet's sense of purpose aligns with both the broader context of the passing yugas and the unique history of the Sikh Gurus. J. S. Grewal suggests that *Bachitra Natak* confirms Guru Gobind Singh's conviction as the true successor of Guru Nanak, supported by the divine in his formidable mission.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Bachitra Natak: A Literary Odyssey Beyond Autobiography***

Commonly labelled an autobiography, *Bachitra Natak* defies such classification within the conventional contours of the genre. While often considered groundbreaking for its autobiographical nature, this view oversimplifies its intricate role within the broader context of Indian literature at the time. Designating *Bachitra Natak* as a pioneering work of its kind might underscore its significance. Yet, such a classification must be revised to understand its literary context, antecedents, and unique role within the *Dasam Granth*. Characterised as an autobiography, the text prompts an anachronistic comparison with later autobiographical genres, providing little insight into the extensive genealogy preceding Guru Gobind Singh's life account. Rather than aligning with contemporary autobiography norms, *Bachitra Natak* shows greater affinity with traditional Indian genres, such as panegyrics dedicated to both regal and spiritual figures. Commencing with a hymn in praise of God, the narrative seamlessly transitions to the cosmic creation and the poet's lineage, forging a direct link to pivotal events in cosmic history.

A more nuanced comparison aligns *Bachitra Natak* with poetic compositions extolling the lineages of kings and religious leaders, prevalent in Puranas, epics, and courtly compositions.<sup>7</sup> These lineages, epitomised by solar and lunar dynasties, historically served as a legitimising force for rulers. The text uniquely intertwines eulogies of great rulers with narratives of their triumphs in battle, a predominant theme echoing throughout *Bachitra Natak*. Preceding Guru Gobind Singh's life story, the text intricately weaves tales of cosmic battles and familial conflicts, setting the stage for the central martial theme. Six of the eight chapters devoted to Guru Gobind Singh's life primarily focus on detailed accounts of his military exploits, culminating in the establishment of Anandpur after the battle of Bhangani. This victory, portrayed as a hallmark of a just ruler, exemplifies Guru Gobind Singh's commitment to uplifting the virtuous and vanquishing the malevolent. Thus, *Bachitra Natak* transcends the confines of a conventional autobiography, embodying a literary saga that intricately intertwines spiritual legacy and martial valour.<sup>8</sup> One central motif

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resonating throughout *Bachitra Natak* concerns the leader's duty to establish a realm where virtue flourishes and malevolence is vanquished, necessitating battles to safeguard it. This recurrent theme manifests in vivid accounts of conflicts mirroring the earlier struggles of leaders like Ram and his progeny. Additionally, it manifests more intimately in the reproach of individuals who abandoned the Guru, recounted in the chapter.<sup>9</sup>

Complementing the theme of effective leadership, encapsulated in the creation of a virtuous territory, is a crucial motif of religious leadership, epitomised by the concept of the avatara, a divine envoy dispatched by God to reinstate the righteous dharmic order. While the poet refrains from explicitly labelling himself an avatar, the context strongly suggests that Guru Gobind Singh's divine birth serves a similar purpose. This notion permeates both the specific narrative of *Bachitra Natak*, where the poet takes birth at God's behest, and the broader canvas of the *Dasam Granth*, portraying avatars sent by Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma, along with the goddess combating demons, all in service of the greater good and the restoration of proper dharma.<sup>10</sup>

The portrayal of Guru Gobind Singh in the avatar role has spurred discomfort among some Sikh commentators, who perceive it as an assimilation into a Hindu framework. Alternatively, a plausible interpretation is that *Bachitra Natak* presents all preceding avatars and prophets as unsuccessful in their missions. The role ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh thus signifies a novel conceptualisation of the divine figure sent by God to defend righteousness. *Bachitra Natak* weaves a tapestry that intertwines enduring Indic themes, lineage (*vamsha*), the erosion of dharma over the ages, and avatars sent to restore it, with the specific concerns of late seventeenth-century Punjab. Against the backdrop of warring hill chiefs, entanglements with Mughal authorities, and the ascendancy of the Sikh Panth, the narrative unfolds in the first person. It delves into the struggles of a righteous ruler striving to forge a realm conducive to virtuous living, bridging the human rulers' struggles with those of the gods. The narrative culminates with the poet alluding to his recounting of the goddess's exploits, accentuating the explicit parallels between the battles of righteous rulers and those waged by deities. In the nineteenth century, a colonial historical sensibility emerged, reshaping Sikh historical representation in novel ways, particularly in Punjabi. The literary history of North India, specifically Sikh intellectual production, which is mainly situated in Punjab, results from an intricate interplay between Western Asian and Southern Asian intellectual legacies and literary traditions. This is particularly evident in Sikh intellectual endeavours, occurring at a

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geographical nexus in northwestern India that has witnessed extensive cultural interactions with the West. Key sources relevant to Sikh literary and religious cultural production exist in three major languages: Punjabi and other modern Indo-Aryan languages (such as Braj, a vernacular literary language prevalent in North India); Persian, employed in the Mughal court and beyond, as well as in the Dasam Granth; and later, English.

The Gurus' compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib and Dasam Granth often exhibit influence from Braj,<sup>11</sup> a versatile poetic idiom appealing to various groups. Persian traditions, established by the eleventh century, linked Punjab with political centres to the west, and later, during Akbar's reign, Persian became the dominant administrative language, extending its influence to the Sikh courts. Muzaffar Alam's work illustrates the entrenched Persian traditions in the region, highlighting Lahore as "Little Ghazna" in the eleventh century and emphasising Punjab's connection with Western political centres.<sup>12</sup> The post-Mughal rulers<sup>13</sup> of Punjab, including Guru Gobind Singh, played a pivotal role in shaping Sikh cultural production, utilising diverse languages such as Persian and Braj.<sup>14</sup> A notable instance is Guru Gobind Singh's Zafar Nama, a plea for justice to the Mughal emperor, composed in Persian and preserved in the Dasam Granth.

Despite occasional discomfort with Persian in Sikh discourse, its influence persisted, and Persian compositions were seamlessly integrated into Sikh contexts, written in the Gurmukhi script. Likewise, Braj literature, typically inscribed in Devanagari, was also expressed in Gurmukhi, the script associated with Sikh scriptures. The linguistic panorama of Sikh intellectual output demonstrates complementarity and synergy among Persian, vernaculars such as Braj, and Sanskrit, eschewing a competitive paradigm. The Dasam Granth,<sup>15</sup> traditionally ascribed to the Tenth Guru, mirrors this linguistic dynamism, featuring Persian sections in Gurmukhi/Shahmukhi alongside content influenced by Persianate courtly idioms and puranic sources. Sikh historical literature, emerging in a Persianized intellectual milieu, embraced diverse literary forms in both Braj and Persian. The courtly nature of Sikh literature, influenced by the Mughal court's grammar, left an indelible mark on rituals and ceremonies across linguistic registers. The Dasam Granth, emanating from the Sikh court, epitomises a distinctive conception of leadership blending spiritual and worldly responsibilities. Scholars argue that the Khalsa notion of Dharam (right conduct) imbues ideas of rule and political sovereignty, diverging from classical definitions.<sup>16</sup> Braj's use in Sikh literary production assumes significance, linking with Vaishnava devotional works of literature and courtly contexts.<sup>17</sup> As elucidated by

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Allison Busch, the preference for Braj over Sanskrit may stem from considerations of accessibility and the incorporation of Persian-Arabic vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> This intricate web of language choices underscores the multifaceted nature of Sikh cultural production within a dynamic historical and linguistic milieu.<sup>19</sup>

The text delves into the intricacies of language choices in Sikh cultural production, suggesting that the preference for Braj over Sanskrit may be influenced by its emotive, possibly feminine registers, which are less readily available in Persian. The understanding of the term "darbar" or "court" is expanded beyond a purely statist interpretation, proposing a more accurate translation as a "gathering" or "audience," acknowledging its broader social and cultural implications outside strict political connotations.<sup>20</sup> The courtly orientations within Sikh tradition, already complex, gained further temporal features with the rise of political power held by leaders of Sikh misals, kinship-based militias organising resistance and consolidating local control in the early to mid-eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

In this period, the writing of histories in Persian, Punjabi, and Braj, sometimes in a combination of the latter two or a Punjabi-sized version of Persian, assumed significance in Sikh centres of power.<sup>22</sup> Establishing an imperial presence under Ranjit Singh and the resistance efforts of Sikh rulers in the eastern Punjab against absorption into Ranjit Singh's kingdom fostered historical production, as Purnima Dhavan demonstrates. Persian historical production in these courts served as a diplomatic counter-offensive to maintain autonomy from Ranjit Singh and the East India Company's encroachments. The acquisition of sovereignty during this time influenced the historical sense and courtly practices, including collecting and other memorial activities. Historical representations in Punjab were therefore intricately linked to various factors, reflecting the dynamic interplay of power, language choices, and cultural orientations.

### **Glimpses of Sikh Heritage: Sainapati's Gur Sobha**

*(sainâpati kavîtâ kahe gurdarsan te pâ, kare bhalî va burî nit satigurû lae savâr – Sainapati would compose after a glimpse at the Guru's face; The Divine Guru would set right the omissions and commissions in the composed draft).* Sainapati's Sri Gur Sobha is an essential text that was written in the court of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. Three things about Sri Gur Sobha stand out that make it an exceptionally invaluable text. First, it is largely devoid of mythology and grounded in a kind of historical writing seldom practised in that period. Second, according to the Guru Ratanmal (1734), the Guru himself sometimes read and corrected Sri Gursobha

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while it was being composed. Sainapati presents a discursive tradition that departs radically from other contemporaneous writings, such as the *Bachitar Natak* (1696), which are often uncritically attributed to Guru Gobind Singh in Sikh scholarship. It is fascinating that Sainapati is aware of the *Bachitar Natak* and even uses it as a model, but departs from its theology and liberal use of Hindu mythology.

While the author of the *Bachitar Natak* finds it necessary to locate Guru Gobind Singh's lineage within the Vaishnava divine king Râma's Sun dynasty, Senapati prefers to locate him within a distinct tradition that begins with Guru Nanak. If the author of the *Bachitar Natak* calls Guru Tegh Bahadur "hind dî châdar" (The protector of Hindustan), Senapati universalises the Guru's sacrifice by referring to him as the "jagat di châdar" (The protector of the world). Professor Kulwant Singh is to be congratulated for making an essential contribution to Sikh Studies. Not only has he translated a very difficult work from Braj bhasha into English, but he has also given us a critical introduction to the text. He provides explanatory notes on terms from South Asian mythology, along with other details, at the end of each chapter. The translation displays the author's erudition and background in both Punjabi and English literary studies. Not only is the English version highly readable, but it is also faithful to the original text and maintains the beauty of the translated version.

The translator's effort in maintaining the rhythm and melody of this poetic text by rendering it in free English verse is commendable. His work engages with critical scholarship on the *Gursobha* by Anne Murphy, Ami P. Shah and J.S. Grewal. The present work adds a fresh perspective to the debates surrounding this once-influential text and deserves to be read widely. The historical epoch under scrutiny witnessed the burgeoning aspirations of the Sikh community, alongside other groups, towards attaining sovereign rule. It is imperative, however, to eschew a deterministic perspective that views subsequent developments, such as Ranjit Singh's late eighteenth-century sovereignty, as an inevitable historical progression from earlier junctures. The texts analysed occupy distinct and nuanced positions along the trajectory leading to Sikh leaders' sovereignty, divorcing Sikh identity from an inherent connection to state sovereignty.<sup>23</sup> By interrogating this assumption, we can delve into the multifaceted historical imaginaries that animated the Sikh collective consciousness in the eighteenth century, steering clear of the assumption that Sikhs constitute a preordained "nation." Instead, we acknowledge alternative modes of collective representation that transcend conventional statist paradigms. In this milieu, the notion of the path, or "community," emerges as a form of Sikh collective organisation that resists reduction to conventional forms of sovereignty seen in

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Realpolitik. The realisation of sovereignty by Sikh leaders is consistently shadowed by the persistent existence of an egalitarian, collective sovereignty that deviates from the more pragmatic and state-centric sovereignty of political realism.<sup>24</sup>

The initial text demanding attention is "Gur Sobhā" or "Splendour of the Guru," a composition by Sainapati in the early eighteenth century. This period marked the Sikh community's transformative shift from an era characterised by human Guruship to one where ultimate authority rested in the sacred canon (the Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib) and the community. Guru Gobind Singh was pivotal in articulating this transition through the interconnected principles of granth (text) and panth (community). "Gur Sobhā" unfolds as a poetic narrative depicting the life of the final living Guru and the evolution of the Sikh community during this pivotal period.<sup>25</sup> The examination of this text, alongside others, aims to unveil the diverse conceptualisations of the past employed by the author. While "Gur Sobhā" does not signify the genesis of Sikh interest in past representations, it is a continuation and a heightened expression of the commitment observed from the earliest stages of Sikh tradition.

From the author's perspective, the text assumes the form of a saki. "Sainapati's Gur Sobhā" took shape in the early eighteenth century, with the author explicitly stating its raison d'être to extol the Guru. The author attributes the text's inspiration and literary prowess to the faithful Guru, underscoring a divine guiding force.<sup>26</sup> The text commences by establishing the date of its creation, delineating the lineage of Sikh Gurus, and narrating the formation of the path. It then unfolds a chronological tapestry of the past, centring on specific narrated events involving the Guru within historical contexts. However, the text transcends the conventional bounds of mere biography; its ambit extends to the aspiration to articulate the Sikh community itself as a historical process. In doing so, "Gur Sobhā" embodies a uniquely Sikh rationale, intricately interwoven with other narrative forms.<sup>27</sup> Sainapati's work is widely acknowledged as a pivotal early instance of a literary genre that emerged in the early eighteenth century and was known as gurbilas, denoting the "sport" or "play" of the Guru. This genre typically commences with compositions attributed to the Tenth Guru, particularly his Bacittar Natak. According to Surjit Hans, an authority on these materials, the Bacittar Natak and all gurbilas literature are intrinsically concerned with history. Described as a "nascent history," this genre, under the exigencies of the era, adheres more faithfully to the imperatives of the future than to the mundane details of the present. Gur Sobha, in particular, delves into the life of Guru Gobind Singh, though it also references his

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father, Guru Tegh Bahadur. The chronological narrative culminates with Guru Gobind Singh's demise in 1708.<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to the generic characterisation of hagiography aiming to transcend the temporal and historical, Gur Sobha is intricately woven into the fabric of chronological and geographically ordered past events, focusing on the Guru's historical context and the community's evolution within a specific spatiotemporal framework. This text witnesses transformative developments at the intersection of religion and politics during the early eighteenth century. It captures the transition from the era of living Guruship, embodying the political turbulence in Punjab as successor groups contended for supremacy amid the fragmentation of Mughal power. Although the dynamics outlined were nascent during the text's composition, the conflicts depicted mirror the Sikh community's position within an unsettled political landscape at an embryonic stage of this transformative process.<sup>29</sup>

*Now, the poet describes Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur*

*With the impassable mountains around, the auspicious place on the bank of the Satluj (1)*

*The month of Chet passed, and everyone gathered for a mela (an unmatched festival gathering).*

*For the lesson of Vaisakhi, the true Guru deliberated (2)*

*The sangat from all cities came for darshan ("sacred viewing"). He was compassionate and gave darshan to the doer and creator of the world (3)*

*Gobind Singh was made happy, and the Sangat was made rapturous*

*He revealed the Khalsa and lifted up all difficulties (4)*

The entire community gathered on the banks of the Satluj.<sup>30</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Historical Analysis of Braj Bhasha in Sikh History and the relation of north indian is very historical in the 16th century and in the context of the Bhakti Movement. In Sikh History, there are multiple sources and evidence we use to represent Braj in the Dasam Granth and the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The significance of Braj Bhasha in Sikh history can only be understood when one recognises its wider literary and cultural position in early modern India. By the seventeenth century, Braj had emerged as one of the most prestigious literary languages of North India, deeply

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connected with the sacred landscape of Braj, the land of Krishna around Mathura and Vrindavan. It had become the principal medium of both devotional and courtly poetry. The celebrated Bhakti poet Surdas composed his monumental Sursagar in Braj, while even Amir Khusro incorporated Braj elements into his multilingual compositions. Historians such as Allison Busch have argued that Braj functioned as a “literary cosmopolis,” transcending regional boundaries and becoming a shared cultural language across northern India. Even the Mughal courts extended patronage to Braj poetry alongside Persian, which further enhanced its prestige.

It signified that Sikh intellectual and literary traditions were not confined to Punjab alone but were actively engaging with the wider literary world of the subcontinent. At Paonta Sahib and Anandpur Sahib, the Guru patronised fifty-two court poets who translated important Sanskrit texts into Braj, producing an extraordinary body of literature. Scholars like Pashaura Singh and J.S. Grewal note that this project reflected both the Guru’s commitment to knowledge production and the universalisation of Sikh thought. However, much of this rich literary corpus was lost during the crossing of the Sirsa River before the Battle of Chamkaur in 1704, a loss remembered by historians as one of the most tragic cultural destructions in Sikh history.

The role of Braj Bhasha in Sikh religious life extends far beyond the Dasam Granth. The Guru Granth Sahib itself contains compositions in multiple languages, including Braj, which reflects the linguistic openness and inclusiveness of the Sikh scriptural tradition from its very beginning. Guru Nanak composed his hymns in different vernacular registers so that his teachings could reach ordinary people. This tradition was continued and strengthened by the succeeding Sikh Gurus. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh, Braj Bhasha had become the preferred language for some of the most significant literary and theological compositions because it offered the widest cultural and geographical reach. Works such as the Bachitra Natak and Khalsa Mahima, along with the Savaiye of the Dasam Granth, were composed in Braj. These compositions later became part of the Sikh Nitnem (daily prayers), and their highly Sanskritised Braj gave them a sense of spiritual authority and liturgical depth. Every Sikh who recites these verses today participates in a linguistic tradition rooted in the devotional heritage of North India.

In many ways, Braj in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries functioned as a cultural connector, much like Prakrit and Pali did in the post-Vedic age. Just as Pali became the practical language of the Buddhist masses while Sanskrit remained

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associated with elite and Brahmanical circles, Braj emerged as a shared literary and communicative medium across North India. It was not confined to one caste or region. This explains why Guru Gobind Singh and the Sikh Gurus adopted Braj not merely for Punjab, but for a much wider audience stretching from Paonta Sahib to Patna and from Punjab to Hazur Sahib. In this sense, Braj became a bridge language that connected communities, devotion, and political thought across regions.

Taken together, the Gursobha, the Bachitra Natak, and the wider Braj Bhasha literary tradition represent three deeply connected dimensions of Sikh literary, historical, and spiritual imagination. They emerged at a time of intense political conflict and social transformation, when Sikh identity was being shaped under immense pressure. Guru Gobind Singh was not only a warrior and spiritual guide, but also a poet, patron, and thinker who understood that communities preserve themselves through memory, literature, and shared narratives. At the same time, these traditions also invite critical reflection. The question of authorship within the Dasam Granth remains an important scholarly debate: whether all compositions are the Guru's own or partly the work of his court poets. Similarly, Gursobha, though historically valuable, is also a text of praise and devotion, which means it must be read with caution as both history and panegyric. These questions, however, do not weaken these texts; rather, they make them more important for serious historical inquiry.

Overall, Sikh history remains one of the most significant historical developments of the eighteenth century, particularly in the formation of new political and religious identities in South Asia. Within this broader history, the use of Braj Bhasha occupies a central place. Language has always played a crucial role in shaping historical consciousness, regional power, and collective memory in Indian history. In the Sikh context, Braj became more than a literary medium; it was a bridge connecting Punjab with wider regions such as Paonta, Patna, and Nanded, carrying devotional, political, and historical ideas across communities. The powerful message of Braj Bhasha lies in its ability to narrate regional histories while preserving broader cultural connections. Even today, at Hazur Sahib, where the Dasam Granth and the Guru Granth Sahib continue to exist in living dialogue, this tradition reminds us that Sikh history is not only a story of resistance and faith, but also of language, memory, and literary creativity.

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21. Bhai Mihar Singh, *Panjab da Raushan Qissa* (Manuscript, dated 1859, IOL, Oriental Manuscript Panjabi, p. 41, for an example of such a formulation. Mir has also noted the inclusion of popular qisse in a similarly dated Persian historical work. Car Bagh-1-Paijab Mir "Gente and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives, pp. 727-28.
22. Poornima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawaks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition (1699-1799)*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, pp. 23-27.
23. Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011, pp. 41-51.
24. *Bhai Balevāli Janamukht*, Bhai Jawahar Singh Kripal Singh and Company, Arun Prakashan, Amritsar, 1971, p. 67.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
26. Louis E. Fenech, "Martyrdom: W. H. McLeod and His Students", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 2001, pp. 75-94.
27. I refer here to Ganda Singh's edited version of *Gur Sobha*. Purnima Dhavan's suggestion of 1708 for the text's completion is convincing: for an overview of the debate and her rationale, see. Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*, p. 182. G. S. Mann argues for 1701 as the date of the text's initiation (Mann, "Sources for the Study," p. 252). On the text in general. See Surjit Hans, *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature* (Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1988), and J. S. Grewal, "Praising the Khalsa: Sainapat's Gursobha," in *The Khalsa: Sikh and non-Sikh Perspectives*, ed. by J. S. Grewal (Manohar, New Delhi, 2004), pp. 35-45. The text was first published in print in 1925 by Akali Kaur Singh Ji Nihang. It comprises 20 chapters and features a range of poetic forms.
28. W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs Of The Khalsa, A History Of The Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 32-33
29. W. H. McLeod, "Hagiography of the Sikhs" (ed.), Textual Sources; texts in the genre are strongly intertextually related. Bilas is, in this context, often translated as "splendour," but the core meaning of bilas or vilar is, as noted, as noted.
30. W.H. McLeod, *Who Is Sikh ?*, The Problem Of Sikh Identity, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 4

**Dr Manoj Kaumar, Email-**

