

POTHI PARMESAR KA THAAN

(ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ॥)

Dr. Devinder Pal Singh

Centre for Understanding Sikhism,
4-215, M. V. Blvd., Mississauga, L5A 1Y7, ON, Canada,
drdpsn@hotmail.com

Pothi, a popular Punjabi word, means a book. Among the Sikhs, however, pothi signifies a sacred book, especially one containing gurbani or scriptural text. Although the word is used even for the Aad Granth in the index of the original recension prepared by Guru Arjan. He probably alluding to the Aad Granth pronounces pothi to be "the abode of God" for it contains "complete knowledge of God" (AGGS, p 1226). However, in Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1-2], the word 'pothi' has been used to depict a prayer book, a sacred book, a holy scripture and the Hindu scriptures. In this article, the historico-critical analysis of the words pothi, pamesar and than is done. In addition to the interpretation of the verse 'Pothi Pamesar Ka Thaan', the role and importance of pothis (holy scriptures) for spiritual enlightenment is described. It is pointed out that AGGS advises us to avoid the ritualism of pothi recital. Rather it exhorts us to understand the real meaning of what is written in holy scriptures (pothis). Also, it urges us to become a God conscious being [3] (Brahm Giani) - a person who always delights in doing good to others.

Pothi- Meaning of the Term

Pothi, a popular Punjabi word is derived from the Sanskrit - *pustaka* (book), from the root - *pust* (to bind) via the Pali - *potlhaka* and Prakrit - *puttha*. Besides Punjabi, the word pothi, meaning a book [4-7], is current in Maithili, Bhojpuri and Marathi languages as well.

Among the Sikhs, however, pothi signifies a sacred book, especially one containing gurbani or scriptural texts and of a moderate size, generally larger than a gutka but smaller than the Aad Granth. Although the word is used even for the Aad Granth in the index of the original recension prepared by Guru Arjan, now preserved at Kartarpur, near Jalandhar.

In the puratan janam sakhi, the earliest known written account of the life story of Guru Nanak, the book of hymns which he gave to his successor Guru Angad, is called a pothi. Guru Arjan Dev, probably alluding to the Adi Granth pronounces pothi to be "the abode of God" for it contains "complete knowledge of God" (AGGS, p 1226).

At several places in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, pothi refers to sacred books of the Hindus as distinguished from those of the Muslims for which the words used are *kateb* or Quran.

Pothi in Sikhism- A brief history

Some record [8-10] is believed to have been kept of the first Guru's Bani during his time - most probably by his companions - Bhai Mardana included. Baba Buda and Bhai Datu - both

followers of the Guru are also recorded in history as having kept records of the Guru's Bani. When Guru Angad was enthroned as the second Guru, he was given five paisas, a coconut and a 'pothi' - a book which it is believed had within it some of the hymns of Guru Nanak - this Pothi is not available today. This pothi might also have contained Shabads of the various Bhagats of that sub continent - such as Bhagat Kabir and Bhagat Farid - both of whom had great followings.

The Mohan Pothi

Guru Angad bought together the Bani composed by his predecessor, and recited them to Bhai Paira Mokha who scribed these to form another pothi. This pothi was passed to Guru Amar Das ji when he was bestowed as the third Guru and in his time he also sought to bring together the Bani of the preceding Gurus into one pothi. He commissioned the services of his grandson Bhai Sahansar Ram to this effect and recited the Bani to the scribe. This pothi was kept by Sahansar Ram and was later passed to his father - Bhai Mohan. It henceforth became known as the Mohan pothi.

During the compilation of the Mohan pothi, Bhai Datu and Baba Buda - both contemporaries of the first and second gurus were asked to recite those hymns (*shabads*) that they had come to learn by heart, many more it is said were collated from pieces of paper and from the pothi handed down from guru to guru. It is said that Bhai Datu had in his possession a pothi which contained many hymns (*shabads*) of the first Guru. The Mohan pothi is in two volumes, the first volume is 600 pages and the second 448. It is in 14 sections and contains the *bani* (hymns) of the first three gurus and Bhagat Kabir, Bhagat Trilochan, Bhagat Nam Dev, Bhagat Sain, Bhagat Ravi Das, Bhagat Jai Dev, but not Bhagat Farid. Notably it does not contain all the hymns (*shabads*) of Guru Nanak .

The Aad Granth

By the period of the fifth Guru - Guru Arjan , jealousy had grown amongst the Sikh disciples - particularly sparked by his elder brother Bhai Prithi Chand who had claimed ascension to the spiritual throne over Guru Arjan . Bhai Prithi Chand had allegedly composed his own *bani* (hymns)- some of it a corrupted version of previous gurus' hymns - in an attempt to claim authenticity. As a result of this, in the year 1603, Guru Arjan sought to update the collection of hymns.

The Guru erected a tent by the side of the Harimandir Sahib - which was then under construction and called for Bhai Gurdas - a renowned Sikh scholar - for the purposes of scribing this new version. The guru called for all previous pothis to be submitted to him, in the interests of the task at hand. The spot where this pothi was compiled, is marked today as Ramsar.

It is said that when the guru sent messengers to Bhai Mohan - possessor of the previous pothi, the latter was in deep meditation and did not wish to be disturbed. Every time the representatives returned to Bhai Mohan, he was found to be sitting in meditation and hence they returned in dismay. Bhai Mohan is said to be a very devout Sikh of positive character and good

spiritual prowess. The guru then decided upon visiting the Sikh personally. On that occasion he sang a hymn (*shabad*) outside the door of Bhai Mohan - thereby awakening the Sikh out of his meditation, it was thus that the guru acquired the Mohan Pothis.

This compilation was the most complete to date and added to it were the compositions of Bhagat Farid. This version became known as the Aad Granth. A ceremony was performed on the occasion when the Holy Granth Sahib was completed in the August of 1604 - It coincided with the completion of the gurudwara - Harimandir Sahib. On that day, the guru placed the Holy Granth Sahib on a gadi (seat) that he would normally sit on and himself sat on a gadi (seat) lower to that. Baba Buda was made the first granthi (custodian of the Holy Granth).

Pothi and Sikh Scholars

As is well known, there are eight English translations of AGGS (by Dr Gopal Singh, S. Manmohan Singh, S. Gurbachan Singh Talib, S. Pritam Singh Chahil, Gurbachan Singh Makin, Kartar Singh Duggal, Dr. Darshan Singh and Dr Sant Singh Khalsa) [11] available. Similarly, there are five punjabi interpretations (Sri Guru Granth Sahib Nirnai Steek by Giani Harbans Singh, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan by Prof. Sahib Singh, Arth Bodh - Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji by Dr. Rattan Singh Jaggi, Sri Ameer Bhandar Sampradai Teeka by Sant Kirpal Singh, Santhya Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji by Bhai Vir Singh, and one Hindi translation with meanings (by Sh. Manmohan Sehgal) [12] available. Thus a total of 14 different interpretations of the verse 'Pothi Parmesar Ka Thaan' are available. A few representative interpretations are presented below;

According to Dr. Sant Singh Khalsa [13] the English translation of the above verse is;
This Holy Book is the home of the Transcendent Lord God. (Saarang, Fifth Mehl, p 1226)

Prof. Sahib Singh in his teeka (interpretation) titled 'Sri Guru Granth Darpan' [14-15] provides the following interpretation for the above verse.

ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ (ਗੀ) ਪਰਮਾਤਮਾ ਦੇ ਮਿਲਾਪ ਦੀ ਥਾਂ ਹੈ।

(ਪੋਥੀ = ਉਹ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਜਿਸ ਵਿਚ ਪਰਮਾਤਮਾ ਦੀ ਸਿਫਤ-ਸਾਲਾਹ ਲਿਖੀ ਪਈ ਹੈ, ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ। ਥਾਨੁ = ਮਿਲਣ ਦਾ ਥਾਂ।)

Giani Badan Singh in his 'Faridkot wala Teeka' [16] interprets the above verse as;

(ਪੋਥੀ) ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪਰਮੇਸ਼ੁਰ ਕਾ (ਥਾਨੁ) ਅਸਥਾਨ ਹੈ।

According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji Steek [17] the interpretation of the above verse is as follows;

ਇਹ ਪਵਿੱਤ੍ਰ ਪੁਸਤਕ, (ਆਦਿ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ) ਪਰਮ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਦਾ ਨਿਵਾਸ ਅਸਥਾਨ ਹੈ।

Giani Kirpal Singh in his Sri Ameer Bhandar Sampardai Steek [18-19] interprets the above verse as;

ਇਹ ਪੋਥੀ ਜਿਸ ਵਿਚ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਉਚਾਰਨ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੋਈ ਹੈ, ਇਹ ਪਰਮੇਸ਼ਰ ਦਾ ਬਾਨੁ-ਸਰੂਪ ਹੈ। (ਵਾ: ਇਹ ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸ਼ਰ ਦੇ ਰਹਿਣੇ ਦਾ ਅਸਥਾਨ ਹੈ। ਵਾ: ਇਹ ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸ਼ਰ ਰੂਪ ਅਸਥਾਨ ਦੀ ਪਰਾਪਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਹੈ।)

Let us have a look, at the way these terms e.g. pothi, parnesar and thaan are described in AGGS.

Pothi in Aad Guru Granth Sahib

In Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the word pothi is used 13 times to represent different things e.g. a prayer book, a sacred book, a holy scripture and Hindu scriptures.

Pothi - A Prayer Book

Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh Guru, describe pothi as a prayer book, in his Siree Raag hymns as;

ਪੋਥੀ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥ ਭਉ ਵਟੀ ਇਤੁ ਤਨਿ ਪਾਈਐ ॥ ਸਚੁ ਬੁਝਣੁ ਆਣਿ ਜਲਾਈਐ ॥੨॥ ਇਹੁ ਤੇਲੁ ਦੀਵਾ ਇਉ ਜਲੈ ॥
ਕਰਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤਉ ਮਿਲੈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ (ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ 25)

Let the reading of your prayer book be the oil and the Fear of God be the wick for the lamp of this body. Light this lamp with the understanding of Truth. ||2|| Use this oil to light this lamp. Light it, and meet your Lord and Master. ||1||Pause|| (Siree Raag, First Mehl, p 25)

Bhagat Kabir ji, a saint poet of Aad Guru Granth Sahib, describing the state of mendicants, refers pothi as a prayer book.

ਮੂਡੁ ਪਲੇਸਿ ਕਮਰ ਬਧਿ ਪੋਥੀ ॥ (ਭਗਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 871)

They (shaven-headed mendicants) rub their bare heads, and carry prayer-books in their waist-bands. (Bhagat Kabir ji, p 871)

Pothi - A Sacred Book

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, describing the importance of contemplation on God, refer to pothis as sacred books.

ਕਾਮਿ ਕਰੋਧਿ ਮੋਹਿ ਵਸਿ ਕੀਆ ਕਿਰਪਨ ਲੇਭਿ ਪਿਆਰੁ ॥ ਚਾਰੇ ਕਿਲਵਿਖ ਉਨਿ ਅਘ ਕੀਏ ਹੋਆ ਅਸੁਰ ਸੰਘਾਰੁ ॥ ਪੋਥੀ
ਗੀਤ ਕਵਿਤ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਦੇ ਨ ਕਰਨਿ ਧਰਿਆ ॥ ਚਿਤਿ ਆਵੈ ਓਸੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਤਾ ਨਿਮਖ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਤਰਿਆ ॥ (ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ
ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪੰਨਾ 70)

When you are under the power of sexual desire, anger and worldly attachment, or a greedy miser in love with your wealth; if you have committed the four great sins and other mistakes; even if you are a murderous fiend who has never taken the time to listen to sacred books, hymns and poetry - if you then come to remember the Supreme Lord God, and contemplate Him, even for a moment, you shall be saved. | (Siree Raag, Fifth Mehl, p 70)

Pothi - The Holy Scriptures

Guru Arjan Dev, emphasising the importance of contemplation on God, refers pothis as holy scriptures in his hymns of Raag Soohee.

ਸਿਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਪੁਕਾਰਨਿ ਪੋਥੀਆ ॥ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨਾ ਸਭਿ ਕੂੜੁ ਗਾਲ੍ਹੀ ਰੋਛੀਆ ॥ (ਸੂਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪੰਨਾ 761)

The Simritees, the Vedas, the Puraanas and the other holy scriptures proclaim that without the Naam, everything is false and worthless. (Soohee, Fifth Mehl, p 761)

Guru Nanak Dev in his hymns of Raag Gauree, while describing the state of a person, who is merely involved in a ritualistic recital of scriptures without imbibing the love of God in oneself, refers to pothis as scriptures.

ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਪੇਥੀ ਸਿੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਪਾਠਾ ॥ ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਪੜੈ ਸੁਣਿ ਥਾਟਾ ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਰਸ ਰਾਤੇ ਮਨੁ ਬਹੁ ਨਾਟਾ ॥ (ਗਉੜੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ 226)

You may read, recite and study the scriptures, the Simritees, and read Vedas and Puraanas until tired; but without being imbued with the Lord's essence, the mind wanders endlessly. (Gauree, First Mehl, P 226)

Pothi -Hindu Scriptures

Describing the contemporary social and religious environment, Guru Nanak in his hymns of Raamkalee, refers to pothis as the Hindu scriptures.

ਕਲਿ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ਕਤੇਬ ਕੁਰਾਣੁ ॥ ਪੇਥੀ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਰਹੇ ਪੁਰਾਣ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਉ ਭਇਆ ਰਹਮਾਣੁ ॥ ਕਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਤੂ ਏਕੋ ਜਾਣੁ ॥ (ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ 903)

In Kali Yuga, the Koran and the Bible have become famous. The Pandit's scriptures and the Puraanas are not respected. O Nanak, the Lord's Name now is Rehmaan, the Merciful. Know that there is only One Creator of the creation. (Raamkalee, First Mehl, p 903)

Guru Arjan Dev in his Raag Gauree Maajh hymns refers to pothis as holy Hindu scriptures (*vedas*).

ਪੇਥੀ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਬੇਦ ਖੋਜੰਤਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ ਹੋਇ ਬੈਰਾਗੀ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵੰਤਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ (ਰਾਗੁ ਗਉੜੀ ਮਾਝ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪੰਨਾ 216)

The Pandits, the religious scholars, study the books of the Vedas. Some become renunciates, and bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage. (Raag Gauree Maajh, Fifth Mehl, p 216)

Pothi and Present Situation

Guru Nanak in his hymns of Siree Raag, describes the state of his contemporary religious scholars/preachers, who recite their religious scriptures (pothis) without contemplation. He warns them of the futility of such an exercise, as it is laced with self-centred approach for material gains only.

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਵਾਚਹਿ ਪੇਥੀਆ ਨਾ ਬੁਝਹਿ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ ਅਨ ਕਉ ਮਤੀ ਦੇ ਚਲਹਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਵਾਪਾਰੁ ॥ ਕਥਨੀ ਝੂਠੀ ਜਗੁ ਭਵੈ ਰਹਈ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁ ਸਾਰੁ ॥ (ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ 56)

The Pandits, the religious scholars, read their books, but they do not understand the real meaning. They give instructions to others, and then walk away, but they deal in Maya (worldly desires) themselves. Speaking falsehood, they wander around the world, while those who remain true to the *shabad* (love of God) are excellent and exalted. (Siree Raag, First Mehl, p 56)

This trend is prevalent even today among most of the religious scholars / preachers. Most of them encourage the ritualistic recital of the scriptures rather than contemplation on what is mentioned therein. Guru Arjan Dev points out the futility of the ritualistic recitation of the holy scriptures (prayer books) as;

ਖਟੁ ਕਰਮਾ ਅਰੁ ਆਸਣੁ ਧੋਤੀ ॥ ਭਾਗਠਿ ਗ੍ਰਿਹਿ ਪੜੈ ਨਿਤੁ ਪੇਥੀ ॥ ਮਾਲਾ ਫੇਰੈ ਮੰਗੈ ਬਿਭੂਤੁ ॥ ਇਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਤਰਿਓ
ਮੀਤੁ ॥ (ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪੰਨਾ ੮੮੮)

You perform the six religious rituals, and sit wearing your loin-cloth. In the homes of the wealthy, you read the prayer book. You chant on your mala, and beg for money. No one has ever been saved in this way, friend. (Raamkalee, Fifth Mehl, p 888)

Pothi - A way to meet the Lord

Guru Nanak Dev suggests a way out of such a predicament. He emphasises that contemplation on what is mentioned in the holy scriptures (pothis) and thereby imbibing the love of God in oneself leads to spiritual enlightenment.

ਪੇਥੀ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥ ਭਉ ਵਟੀ ਇਤੁ ਤਨਿ ਪਾਈਐ ॥ ਸਚੁ ਬੁਝਣੁ ਆਣਿ ਜਲਾਈਐ ॥੨॥ ਇਹੁ ਤੇਲੁ ਦੀਵਾ ਇਉ ਜਲੈ ॥
ਕਰਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤਉ ਮਿਲੈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ (ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ 25)

Let the reading (understanding the real meaning) of your prayer book be the oil and the Fear of God be the wick for the lamp of this body. Light this lamp with the understanding of Truth. ||2|| Use this oil to light this lamp. Light it, and meet your Lord and Master. ||1||Pause|| (Siree Raag, First Mehl, p 25)

Guru Arjan Dev emphasises that all holy scriptures proclaim that contemplation on God leads to spiritual enlightenment. He advises that the company of the Holy persons (saadh sangat) do help us to get release from the stinging tentacles of maya (worldly desires and evils).

ਸਿਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਣ ਪੁਕਾਰਨਿ ਪੇਥੀਆ ॥ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨਾ ਸਭਿ ਕੂੜੁ ਗਾਲ੍ਹੀ ਹੋਛੀਆ ॥੧॥ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਅਪਾਰੁ ਭਗਤਾ
ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ ॥ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਮੋਹੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਸਾਧੂ ਸੰਗਿ ਨਸੈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ (ਸੂਰੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪੰਨਾ 761)

The Simritees, the Vedas, the Puraanas and the other holy scriptures proclaim that without the Naam, everything is false and worthless. ||1|| The infinite treasure of the Naam abides within the minds of the devotees. Birth and death, attachment and suffering, are erased in the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy. ||1||Pause|| (Soohee, Fifth Mehl, p 761)

Impermanence of Pothi

Impermanence is an undeniable and inescapable fact of human existence from which nothing that belongs to this earth is ever free. Everything in life is temporary. Everything is subject to change and alteration in the world. There is nothing in this world that is fixed and permanent. Existence is a flux, and a continuous becoming. In Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the concept of impermanence of things is enunciated to make us aware of the ephemeral nature of life and the material world. It articulates that the awareness and understanding of impermanent nature of things leads to liberation from the sorrows of human life. Thus the impermanence nature of material world and even the scriptures (*pothis*) is pointed out by Guru Arjan Dev in his hymns as;

ਸਿਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਸਾਸਤ੍ਰੁ ਬੇਦ ਚਾਰਿ ਖਟੁ ਦਰਸ ਸਮਾਸੀ ॥ ਪੇਥੀ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਗੀਤ ਕਵਿਤ ਕਵਤੇ ਭੀ ਜਾਸੀ ॥ (ਮਃ ੫, ਪੰਨਾ 1100)

The Simritees, Shaastras, the four Vedas and the six systems of philosophy shall vanish. Prayer books, Pandits, religious scholars, songs, poems and poets shall also depart. (Fifth Mehl, p 1100)

ਤੀਰਥ ਦੇਵ ਦੇਹੁਰਾ ਪੇਥੀ ॥ ਮਾਲਾ ਤਿਲਕੁ ਸੇਚ ਪਾਕ ਹੋਤੀ ॥ ਧੋਤੀ ਡੰਡਉਤਿ ਪਰਸਾਦਨ ਭੋਗਾ ॥ ਗਵਨੁ ਕਰੈਗੇ ਸਗਲੇ
ਲੋਗਾ ॥ (ਗਉੜੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪੰਨਾ 237)

The sacred shrines of pilgrimage, Gods, temples and holy books; rosaries, ceremonial tilak marks on the forehead, meditative people, the pure, and the performers of burnt offerings; wearing loin cloths, bowing in reverence and the enjoyment of sacred foods - all these, and all people, shall pass away. (Gauree, Fifth Mehl, p 237)

From above discussion it is obvious that the word 'pothi' represents a holy religious scriputre (AGGS inclusive), which can be used as a sacred prayerbook as well.

Parmesar

Parameshwara or Parameshwar means the Supreme God. It is transliterated from the Sanskrit word, ईश्वर (īśvāra). It refers to the sole deity in monotheism. The word "param" meaning the highest, is added to Ishwara to intensify the title of God. The word Parameshwara is a compound word formed by joining three words- parama + Ish +vara. The word parama means 'supreme'. The word Ish (Isha) means the ruler/master/owner. The word Vara means the best/ the noblest/ the excellent. Thus the word Parameshwara literally means 'the excellent supreme ruler/master'[20].

Parameshwara is also known as Absolute Reality or Absolute Truth. The term Parameshwara (Supreme Lord) is used specifically to indicate the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is also the "supreme controller". And yet it is common that in many Vedic scriptures the term Ishvara is used as a short form for Parameshwara. According to Shaiva puranas and siddhantas, Lord Shiva is Parameshwara. According to Bible translations into Hindi and Urdu, the Supreme Lord who loved the world and gave his only son so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life, as it is written in John 3:16, is Parameshwara [21].

Parmesar in Sikhism

Guru Nanak describes God as *nirankar* (from the Sanskrit *nirākārā*, meaning "formless"), *akal* (meaning "eternal") and *alakh* (from the Sanskrit *alakṣya*, meaning "invisible" or "unobserved"). Sikhism's holy scripture, Aad Guru Granth Sahib, starts with the figure "1", signifying the unity of God. Nānak's interpretation of God is that of a single, personal and transcendental creator with whom the devotee must develop a most intimate faith and relationship to achieve salvation.

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥(ਮਹਲਾ 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1)

One Universal Creator God. The Name Is Truth. Creative Being Personified. No Fear. No Hatred. Image Of The Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent. By Guru's Grace. (First Mehl, p 1)

Sikhism advocates the belief in one god who is omnipresent (*sarav vi'apak*), whose qualities are infinite and who is without gender, represented by the term *ik oankar*. The term *Waheguru* for God is also used in Sikhism [22].

Guru Nānak further emphasizes that a full understanding of God is beyond human beings, but that God is also not wholly unknowable. God is considered omnipresent in all creation and visible everywhere to the spiritually awakened. Guru Nānak stresses that God must be seen by human beings through "the inward eye" and that meditation must take place inwardly to achieve this enlightenment progressively. The rigorous application of this method enables communication between God and human beings.

Sikhs believe in a single god that has existed from the beginning of time and will survive forever. God is genderless, fearless, formless, immutable, ineffable, self-sufficient, omnipotent and not subject to the cycle of birth and death. God in Sikhism is depicted in three distinct aspects: God as deity; God in relation to creation; and God in relation to man. During a discourse with *siddhas* (wandering Hindu adepts), Guru Nānak was asked "Where was the Transcendent God before creation?." He replied:

ਆਦਿ ਕਉ ਬਿਸਮਾਦੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ਕਥੀਅਲੇ ਸੁੰਨ ਨਿਰੰਤਰਿ ਵਾਸੁ ਲੀਆ ॥(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ, ਪੰਨਾ ੯੪੦)

We can only express a sense of wonder about the beginning. The absolute abided endlessly deep within Himself then. (Raamkalee, First Mehl, Sidh Gosht, p 940)

Thus the word 'parmesar' connotes the creator of the universe - God, which can be remembered by its innumerable names e.g. Gobind, Hari, Prabhu, Allah, Ishwar etc.

Thaan in Aad Guru Granth Sahib

In Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the word 'Thaan' (and its variants e.g. suthaan, asthaan etc) is used 77 times to describe different things such as a seat, a place, a home, a dwelling, a shelter or a shrine. A few relevant verses are presented to authenticate the premise.

Thaan- A Seat

ਸਚੁ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹੀ ਅਮਰੁ ਸਚੁ ਸਚੇ ਸਚਾ ਥਾਨੁ ॥(ਮਃ 5, ਪੰਨਾ 48)

True is His Empire, and True is His Command. True is His Seat of True Authority.(Fifth Mehl, p 48)

ਉਚੀ ਹੂੰ ਉਚਾ ਥਾਨੁ ਅਗਮ ਅਪਾਰੀਆ ॥(ਮਃ 5, ਪੰਨਾ 520)

The seat of the inaccessible and infinite Lord is the highest of the high. (Fifth Mehl, p 520)

Thaan - A place

ਥਾਨੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਪਵਿਤੁ ਹੈ ਜਿਥੈ ਸੰਤ ਸਭਾ ॥ (ਮਃ 5, ਪੰਨਾ 44)

Embellished and immaculate is that place where the Saints gather together. (Fifth Mehl, p 44)

ਜਿਥੈ ਜਾਇ ਬਰੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸੇ ਥਾਨੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਜੇ ॥(ਮਃ 4, ਪੰਨਾ 450)

Wherever my True Guru goes and sits, that place is beautiful, O Lord King. (Fourth Mehl, p 450)

Thaan - A home

ਜਿਨਿ ਦੀਆ ਨਿਥਾਵੇ ਕਉ ਥਾਨੁ ॥ (ਮਃ 5, ਪੰਨਾ 177)

He has given a home to the homeless; (Fifth Mehl, p 177)

Thaan- A Dwelling

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਪੂਜਾ ਥਾਨੁ ਮੁਰਾਰਾ ॥ (ਮਃ 1, ਪੰਨਾ 411)

Worship and adoration within is the Lord's dwelling. (First Mehl, p 411)

Thaan - A Shelter

ਨਿਥਾਵੇ ਕਉ ਗੁਰਿ ਦੀਨੇ ਥਾਨੁ ॥ (ਮਃ 5, ਪੰਨਾ 395)

The Guru has given shelter to the shelterless. (Fifth Mehl, p 395)

Thaan - A Shrine

ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਸਾਚਾ ਥਾਨੁ ਤੀਰਥੁ ਦਸ ਪੁਰਬ ਸਦਾ ਦਸਾਹਰਾ ॥ (ਮਃ 1, ਪੰਨਾ 687)

The spiritual wisdom given by the Guru is the True sacred shrine of pilgrimage, where the ten festivals are always observed. (First Mehl, p 687)

From the above description, it is obvious that the word 'thaan' has been interpreted in accord with the context of the immediate text.

In the context of the verse 'Pothe Parmesar ka Thaan', if the word 'thaan' is interpreted as a place, a seat, a shelter, a home, a dwelling, or a shrine, it is being interpreted literally. Keeping in mind that God is infinite thereby confining Him to a particular place, is belittling His all-prevalent and all-pervading nature. Thereby it is suggested that the word 'thaan' should be interpreted as treatise (a formal and systematic exposition in writing of the principles of a subject, generally longer and more detailed than an essay).

In the light of above discussion the interpretation of the verse 'Pothe Parmesar ka Thaan' should be; a holy religious scripture (e.g. AGGS) is a treatise, which provides the knowledge and wisdom of God.

Conclusion

A historico-critical study of the verse ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ॥ (Pothe Parmesar ka Thaan), leads to the conclusion that a holy religious scripture (e.g. AGGS), is a treatise which provides the knowledge and wisdom of God. AGGS advises us to avoid the ritual of pothe (holy religious scripture) recital, rather it exhorts us to understand the real meaning of what is written in it. AGGS urges us to become a God conscious being (Brahm Giani) - a person who always delights in doing good to others.

References

- [1] Sri Guru Granth Sahib, (SGGS), 1983 (Reprint), S.G.P.C., Amritsar, p1430.
- [2] http://searchgurbani.com/guru_granth_sahib/search_results

- [3] <http://www.godconsciousness.com/mission.php>
- [4] <http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Pothi>
- [5] Harbans Singh (Ed.), The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Volume III, page 348, ISBN 8173803498
- [6] http://searchgurbani.com/mahan_kosh/view
- [7] <https://www.allaboutsikhs.com/scriptures/pothi>
- [8] Harjinder Singh, Sikhism: The Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), <http://www.sikhwomen.com/sikhism/scriptures/ggs/>
- [9] History of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. <http://www.sikhs.org/granth1.htm>
- [10] Kartarpur Pothe - Sikh text : <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Kartarpur-Pothi>
- [11] <http://www.sikhs.org/english/english.htm>
- [12] www.sikhnet.com/discussion/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=3839&sid=3edf5dcabf9c11a573b16ff34a85beb6
- [13] <http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?S=y> (English translation of SGGS by Sant Singh Khalsa)
- [14] <http://www.gurugranthdarpan.com/darpan2/0736.html>, p 736
- [15] www.gurbanifiles.org/gurmukhi/GuruGranth%20Darpan%20by%20Prof%20Sahib%20Singh.pdf
- [16] www.ik13.com/PDFS/Fridkot_Wala_Teeka.pdf
- [17] www.waheguru.nagpalsoft.com/granth_show.php?g=1&h=1&r=1&e=1&p=1&t=1&go=Go&ang=1226
- [18] Giani Kirpal Singh, Sampardai Teeka Sri Ameer Bhandar, Vol9, p 125. pub. by Bhai Chatur Singh Jeevan Singh, Amritsar
- [19] www.gurmatveechar.com/literature?browse=Steeks_and_Teekas/Sri_Guru_Granth_Sahib_Ji_Steeks_and_Teekas/Sant_Kirpal_Singh_Ji_Sato_Gali_Wale
- [20] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parameshwara_\(God\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parameshwara_(God))
- [21] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conceptions_of_God
- [22] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_in_Sikhism