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

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[4] I am grateful to Gurinder Singh Mann for this information.

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

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

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

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

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

[6] For example, see Sahib Singh (1962-64) for a Punjabi translation. The earlier explanatory *Shabdarth* (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1941), which has gone through several editions since its original publication, was primarily the work of Professor Teja Singh.
[7] The Punjabi original is often rendered as *Jap* in Roman letters. *Ji* is an honorific. The additional honorific *Sahib* is often added as well, so *Japji Sahib* is a common reference. I am grateful to Gurinder Singh Mann for some of these observations.

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

2. Translations of *Gurbani*: Setting the Stage

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

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

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

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

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

portions of the GGS that one can only consider a small subset of them. The choice of translations in this paper is skewed toward "modern," relatively "academic" renderings, as described later in this section.[10]

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

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

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

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[10] One significant early translation that is omitted here is that of Professor Teja Singh, published in 1919. That rendering contains a large amount of interpretive material mixed in with the translation, making it somewhat different in nature than the versions analyzed in this paper, and less suitable for the comparisons undertaken here.
[11] These five versions have been summarized by Sant Singh Khalsa, in comments available on several web sites, but very much reflecting his own opinions. See, for example, http://www.sikhs.org/english/english.htm.
[12] Macauliffe's translation also tends to use archaic English forms fairly regularly, as will be seen in the selection used in this paper.
[13] Manmohan Singh provided a modern Punjabi translation as well in his 8-volume work, while Chahil used a three column format with the original, the English translation, and a Roman script transliteration. Variations of these combinations are now available in several digital formats on the Internet.
[14] A journalistic article that critically examines some problematic aspects of this translation is Kaur, A. (2015), which also notes that the SGPC has been using the Sant Singh Khalsa translation on its website: this seems to be only as a downloadable pdf file: see sgpc.net/downloads.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Translation Strategies

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

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

[18] Nikky Singh was employed in the United States, McLeod in New Zealand (although he regularly visited North American universities), and Shackle and Mandair in England and the United States respectively.
[19] Presumably Trumpp's dictionary and grammar were not available to Macauliffe, having gone back to Europe with their author.

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

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

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

[20] All of these observations may be found in Macauliffe's preface.
[21] Further points made by Macauliffe on grammatical constructions include the following, "In my translation from the Sikh sacred writings I freely use the subjunctive mood which is fast disappearing from the English language. The solemn form of the third person singular of the present tense I have employed for obvious reasons. My Sikh readers may easily learn that this form is not now used in conversation or ordinary prose." (p. xxx)

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

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

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

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

[22] He mentions the use of the double vertical lines in his translations, but they are missing from his translation of the *Jap[u] Ji*, though present in other translated selections.
[23] Later contributions are described by SM as increasingly incorporating Braj Bhasha forms and "learned Sanskritic vocabulary." (p. xx) In earlier work, Shackle (1983) is much less categorical on the language forms in the GGS. For example, "The language of the *Guru Granth Sahib*… is of very mixed character, since it draws upon a variety of local languages and dialects, as well as incorporating a good many archaic forms and words….the language has been referred to here as 'the sacred language of the Sikhs', abbreviated to SLS" (Preface, p. ii). In a relevant analysis, Singh, N. (2001) critiques an alternative claim that the language of the GGS is "*sant-bhasha*."

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

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

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

4. The Translations and Discussion

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

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

[25] Indeed, SM may be the only translators of the GGS to discuss this issue in the technical language of metrical structures.

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

Jap[u] Ji Pauṛi 13: Gurmukhi and Transliteration

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

Mannai suraṯ hovai man buḏẖ.
Mannai sagal bẖavaṇ kī suḏẖ.
Mannai muhi cẖotā nā kẖā▫e.
Mannai jam kai sāth na jā▫e.
Aisā nām niranjan ho▫e.
Je ko man jāṇai man ko▫e. ||13||

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

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[26] *Slok* or *shalok* is also a type of verse, and the 38 *pauṛis* of the Jap[u] Ji are bookended by the two *sloks*, giving 40 verses in all.
[27] Interestingly, even this seemingly more straightforward word (as compared to *mannai*) triggers varied translation choices – several translators render it as "hearkening" (to the Name or the Word).
[28] A detailed analysis of sound, music and words in the process of "listening" and its effects on the mind/spirit can be found in Kaur, I. (2011a). For example, she argues that "These deeper listeners would therefore transcend sonic and sensory listening to a deeper level of consciousness…" (p. 303).
[29] In Gurmukhi, the line is ਸੁਣਿਆ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਕੀਤਾ ਭਾਉ . The 21st *pauṛi* is quite long, having 18 lines with a range of ideas developed in it that ultimately support what may be termed the core message of the third line (which will itself be partially explicated in the discussion that follows in this paper). Again, Kaur, I. (20011a) is a useful reference.
[30] These approximate counts are generated through the use of Gurbani Researcher Version 2.01 (Gurjot Singh et al., 2002), which offers a very flexible and useful "fuzzy search" function.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[31] Of course, there are additional important concepts in these six lines – they are considered in the last subsection of this section.

> and remembrance is better conveyed by our 'acceptance' rather than by the 'belief' preferred by many translators, with its inappropriate rationalistic associations.[32]

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

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

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

Syntax

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

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

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

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

[35] Rahuldeep Singh Gill has pointed out to me that *naam* can mean "reputation" in everyday usage.

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

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

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

Terms for the Divine

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

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

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

translators have cautioned against the connotations of "God" for translating the GGS. "Lord" can have similar issues,[38] along with the gender aspect, which we consider next.

Gender

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

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

Metaphor and Myth

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

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

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

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

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

Other Meanings

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

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

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

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

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

5. Conclusion

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

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

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

[40] One interesting observation is that all the translators render *ho▫e* in line five as "is." Examining some discussions of *Naam* in the literature, perhaps there is a case for a more dynamic rendering in translation of how the action *mannai* becomes imbued as the pure or stainless *Naam* in the human *man*.
[41] For example, see Bell (1991), Hermans (2014) and Munday (2016).
[42] The possible benefits of improved accessibility and appreciation are straightforward at one level, but there are many complexities and nuances at another level, since subjectivities will always come to bear on such matters, and there will be tradeoffs in trying to reach different groups and for different purposes.

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

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

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

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

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Appendix: Translations

Ernest Trumpp Translation, 1877

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

Max Macauliffe Translation, 1909

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

UNESCO Translation, 1960 [45]

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

Gopal Singh Translation, 1960 [46]

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

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[45] In the published version, the first, third and fourth lines are split at the mid-line capitalization, and there is a line space before the last two lines.
[46] As published, the first clause, "Those who believe" in the first line is given a separate line, so that there are seven printed lines. This is presumably done to substitute for repetition of the clause in each of four lines, which is what occurs in the original.

Manmohan Singh Translation, 1962

By truly believing in the Lord's Name Divine comprehension enters man's mind and understanding.
By truly believing in God's Name the Knowledge of all the spheres is acquired.
The worshipper of God suffers not blows on his face.
Through inner belief in the Lord's Name man goes not with death's minister.
Such is the stainless Name of God.
If someone puts faith in the Lord's Name, he shall, then understand it within his mind.

Sant Singh Khalsa Translation, 1993

The faithful have intuitive awareness and intelligence.
The faithful know about all worlds and realms.
The faithful shall never be struck across the face.
The faithful do not have to go with the Messenger of Death.
Such is the Name of the Immaculate Lord.
Only one who has faith comes to know such a state of mind. || 13 ||

Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh Translation, 1995

Remembering, our mind and intellect awaken,
Remembering, we learn of all the worlds;
Remembering, we are safe from blows and pain;
Remembering, we part company with death.
So wondrous is the Immaculate Name,
It is known only by those who hold It in their mind.

William Hewat McLeod Translation, 1997 [47]

By believing one gains inner sight and wisdom;
By believing one wins access to the mansions of the mind.
Death no longer smites the believer,
Freed by faith from the summons to depart.
Such is the wonder of the precious Name of One who is wholly pure.
They who know that Name within will find within that peace.

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[47] As published, this translation is printed in paragraph form, and lines 3 and 4 above are integrated in one sentence.

Christopher Shackle and Arvind-Pal Mandair Translation, 2005

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