

The Approach

Sabad is inaccessible for most of the Sikh population. Although there are translations available in Panjabi text belonging to the early twentieth century by many celebrated Sikh giants, and some in English from recent times, there is a need for a fresh perspective that illuminates the panorama and magnitude within the Guru Granth Sahib to contemporary audiences in their current social, cultural, and linguistic context.

Given the above challenges, it is important to develop a well-researched resource of the Guru Granth Sahib, that caters to the global Sikh audience, utilizing unique technology to create global collaborations. In this light, the current project seeks to create a comprehensive interpretation and commentary of the Guru Granth Sahib in both Panjabi and English. Panjabi is for today's 80% Sikh population, and English is for the 7.5 billion people awaiting the Guru's Wisdom. When the world seeks *Sabad* in other languages, they will most likely apply the translation tools that use English as a basis.

Towards this end, this project is making use of current information technology tools coupled with the power of the world-wide web, to create a controlled collaborative effort between different subject-matter experts (SMEs) for research and production of interpretation, and commentary on the Guru Granth Sahib.

The end product of this huge collaborative work will be an automated platform, that provides open and intuitive online access to the infinite wisdom of the Guru Granth Sahib, in both Panjabi and English parallelly. The offerings on the platform will include, but will not be limited to:

1. A live website in both Panjabi and English that is searchable.
2. Access to individual word's grammatical function in the text, in addition to the literal and implied meaning, as well as the etymology of words like any standard dictionary.
3. A literal translation of the original text in Panjabi and English.
4. Interpretation of the text in modern Panjabi and English.
5. Commentary which is free from culture-specific understanding to connect with the global audience.
6. Incorporation of historical, musical, and poetical dimensions.

Translating Texts

When translating texts, there are at least three different levels to consider:

1. Particular words and terms: Each word has multileveled meanings and implications that can never be carried over into another language. When a word is used, it carries with it layers of historical development, contextual nuances, and half-hidden associations that are often unconsciously present even to the original verbalizer.
2. General concepts and ideas, along with their historical development and implications: At the level of ideas, as with individual words, one is often led in different directions by what seem to be near-equivalent terms. For example, if one uses the terms “scripture” or “canon” for the Guru Granth Sahib, one is immediately suggesting ideas, connotations, and implications that derive from the use and development of these ideas in the English context, some of which have Judeo-Christian undertones that would not be applicable in the Sikh context. Similarly, if one uses the terms “ved” or “shastra” (Hindu texts) for Guru Granth Sahib, it is equally inapplicable as they have Dharmic-Hindu overtones from the Indological contexts of “*shruti*” (heard) or “*smriti*” (memorized).
3. The intended audience; both of the original text and the translation: How much knowledge does one assume on the part of the reader? Does one aim for a strict, literal translation to remain “true” to the text, or does one aim for a translation that reads smoothly and meaningfully in the “host” language? How much “extra” information needs to be provided to make the English rendering as intelligible as the original was to its intended audience? This project is meant for a global audience, thus, contextualization and clarification are both offered to help better situate readers with no prior knowledge.

The ideal option is that translators’ choices are made through a combination of a number of factors: consistency with previous choices in translating these or similar terms, maintaining consistencies in literal translations and interpretive transcreations for English meaning, judgments on how much to rely on explanations through footnotes, perceptions of the needs and wants of the audience, and so forth.

Note: As there is no one-to-one correspondence between words in different languages, there is great danger of misrepresentation if a given word in one language is always translated with the same word in another disregarding the context. Hence, strict adherence to a “consistent” translation is not advisable. This, however, does not necessarily advocate arbitrariness or blatant inconsistency. A reasoned consistency is a laudable goal, but only with the caveat that the translator should be open to possible exceptions depending on the context.

The Method

This section provides an overview of the message contained in the *Bani* (composition). For example, Introduction to Asa Ki Var will include a brief on *saloks* (a heroic poetic form, similar to a ballad, written in stanzas) and *pauris* (a distinct pattern or a verse structure of Panjabi heroic-poetry).

Research (word meaning, grammar & etymology)

This section deals with the meaning of a word, its grammatical position in the line and its origin. Consequently, it has been divided into three subsections: Meaning, Grammar, and Etymology.

Word Meaning: It lists all possible sets of literal meanings and the implied meaning of the given word in the original text. Literal sets of meanings are separated from each other with a comma (,) and separated from an implied set of meanings with a semicolon (;).

Grammar: It lists all the grammatical aspects/functions of the word in the original text.

1. The word is categorized based on the following aspects:
 - a. *noun, case declension; gender, number*
 - b. *pronoun, case declension; person, gender, number*
 - c. *adjective/pronominal adjective, case declension like noun/pronoun*
 - d. *verb, tense; person, gender, number*
 - e. *adverb*
 - f. *particle*
 - g. *participle*
 - h. *postposition*
 - i. *conjunction*
 - j. *exclamatory*
2. A semicolon (;) is used to separate parts of speech designations/aspects of the word from their person, gender, and number.

Etymology:

1. Attempts have been made to give the etymology for each word. Commonly, the etymology of a word is given from Old Panjabi, Lehndi, Braj, Sindhi, Apbhransh, Prakrit, Pali, Sanskrit, etc. The corresponding words in Sanskrit and Arabic/Persian have been written in both Gurmukhi as well as Sanskrit and Arabic/Persian scripts, but the variants found in other languages have been written in Gurmukhi only. In Sanskrit, the masculine and feminine form of a verb

is the same. However, meanings have been given in the masculine form to match the prevailing norms in the linguistic sources.

2. The words of the Guru Granth Sahib, which have their corresponding singular or plural forms available in respective languages, have been written in the same forms. For the words that have not been found, their matching forms have been included.
3. Slash (/) has been used if more than one variant of a word is available in a language. A semicolon (;) has been used to separate one language form from the other as well as where the meaning of words changes. Inverted commas (“xyz”) are used when quoting the original text from a source.
4. Generally, no reference to any source is mentioned while giving etymology and linguistic forms of words, but if there is a need for reference, the information is included in the footnotes.
5. If the meaning of a word remains the same as in Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, etc., then the meaning of that word in other languages is not given.
6. Where there is a need for detail, the required information about the various uses of a particular word in the Guru Granth Sahib is provided in the footnotes.
7. Attempts are made to refer to almost all of the latest and old dictionaries as well as literary sources to show the linguistic forms.

Meaning (literal translation & interpretive transcreation)

Literal Translation (italic)

The italics text is the literal translation of the Guru Granth Sahib in which all words, their grammatical position, meanings, and contexts available in the original text have been retained. Because English (the target language) differs from the languages in the Guru Granth Sahib as it does not have its roots in orality, retaining the structural form and aural tonality of these languages in English is difficult. In order to bridge the gap between the two languages while still maintaining poetic balance and beauty, additional words have occasionally been added within parentheses in the English italics for readability, clarity, and poetic balance. At times, the sentence structure is switched around for readability and understanding.

Interpretive Transcreation (non-italic)

The non-italics text is the interpretive transcreation that provides an explanation of the original text. This does not attempt to match its Panjabi counterpart or to map on to the original text. It does not require parentheses as it is not a translation. Instead, it serves to elaborate, contextualize, and expound on the original text and its literal translation for better understanding.

Summary

Provides a brief summary of the message contained in the preceding *saloks* and the *pauri*, wherever required.

Dimensions (historical, musical, poetical)

Historical

Wherever required, historical details are given for a word/line/*sabad*. This will be helpful to understand the historical significance of the word/line/*sabad* and comprehend their meaning better in modern times. Information about the historical and cultural milieu (social setting and environment), origin of the *sabad*, etc. are shared from Sikh traditional sources such as Guru Granth Sahib interpretations, *rahitname* (lifestyle codes), *sakhi* (witness-narratives), *parchi* (Panjabi writing on the life stories of the Gurus, saints, and bhaktas), *janamsakhi* (birth-narrative), etc. as well as from the contemporary historical and cultural South Asian works.

Musical

The following information has been given about the musical aspect:

- The literal meaning of rag
- Usage of rag in the Guru Granth Sahib
- The historical dimensions of rag
- Taste and nature of rag
- The musical form of rag, *aroh*, *avroh*, *vadi*, etc.

Poetical

The Guru Granth Sahib is Divine-revelation. Its poetic beauty is also diverse and immeasurable, transcending established norms of literary poetics; it is beyond human capacity to describe it fully. Still, known standards of poetics are utilized, hinting at poetic aspects of the *Banis*. Attempts have been made to provide a brief overview of figures of speech, poetic forms, and the elements of stylistics used in a *salok/pauri*.

Footnotes

Footnotes serve multiple functions based on the need of the tagged text. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Provide additional or supporting information.
2. Define words/terms, phrases/idioms, symbols, ideas, etc.
3. Provide information, contextualization or direction on articulation/pronunciation of the text.
4. Provide context to the interpretation offered in the text (historical, cultural, linguistic, literary, poetic, etc.).

5. Citation, in original, from within the Guru Granth Sahib to further support a given position.

Commentary

The commentaries are contemporary adaptations of each *sabad* (*salok/pauri*) to explain their message to a global audience. Their details are:

- *Audience*: Global
- *Language*: Contemporary English and Panjabi
- *Consistency*: Contextualizing the message of Asa Ki Var and the Guru Granth Sahib
- *Purpose*: Inspiration, learning, and life transformation

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