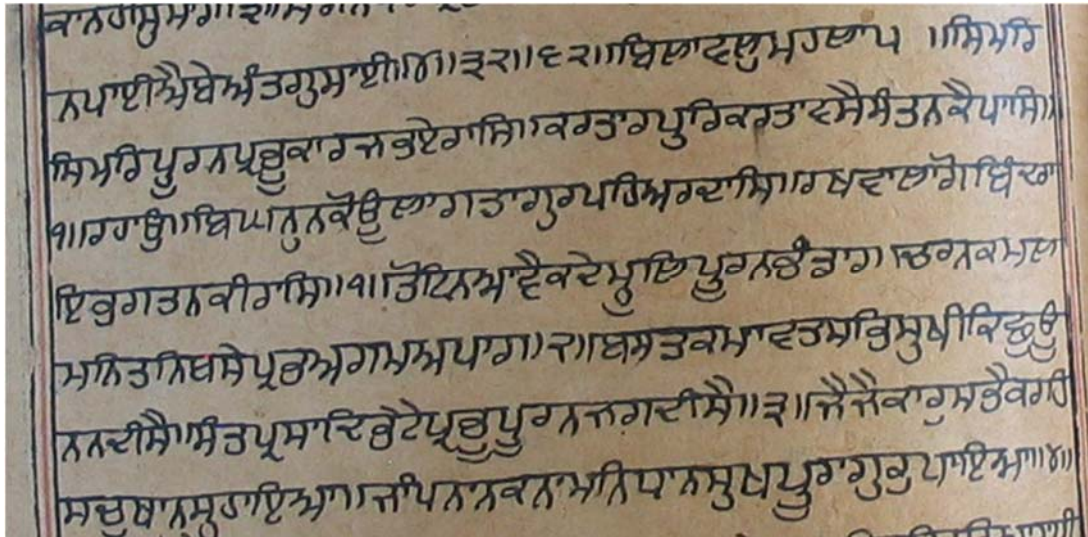


Baba Nanak's *joti jot samaunh purab* at Kartarpur:

some reflections



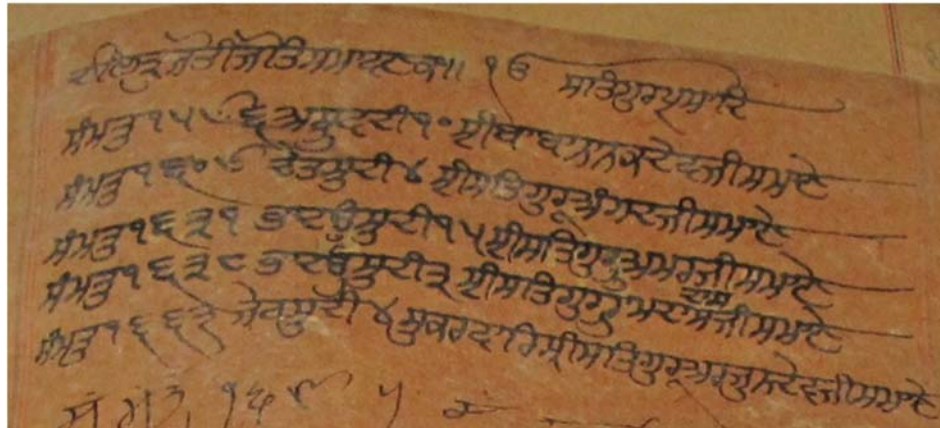
From a pre-1638 *pothi* of *gur-banhi*

The decision of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) and the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) to commemorate the *joti jot samaunh purab* ("immersion of [Baba Nanak's] light into the Light/death anniversary") of Baba Nanak at Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur, on September 22, would be welcomed by the Sikhs living in Punjabi Suba and around the globe.

The PSGPC's leadership deserves gratitude and recognition for undertaking this important initiative. As a student of Sikh history, it is my obligation to explain the significance of this occasion and pray that the leadership of the SGPC (Amritsar), SGPC (Delhi), Punjabi Suba government, Chandigarh, and all other Sikh organizations will offer their full cooperation during this historic opportunity.

This picture below comes from a manuscript completed in 1604 under the guidance of Guru Arjan. Its ceremonial transportation from the *gur-dwara* at Ramsar to Darbar Sahib was reenacted by the SGPC organized program on August 19, in Amritsar. The picture carries the first record of the dates of what the Sikhs of that time understood to be the *gur-purabs* ("divine-occasions," based on Baba Nanak's use of the title "*guru*" for the divine) to be commemorated.

For Sikhs living in the sixteenth century, the Sikh sacred calendar began with Baba Nanak's death anniversary and, given the circumstance that followed the founder's death—namely Guru Angad's move to Khadur—the observance of this *gur-purab* would have begun there. Subsequently, the commemoration would have been observed at Goindval and Amritsar, and other places, as the Sikh center shifted to new places.



From a *pothi* of *gur-banhi* dated 1604.

Given this historical context, the 2020 commemoration of Baba Nanak's anniversary would be **the first time ever in Sikh history that it is observed on the sacred soil of Kartarpur**. This phenomenal magnitude of this occasions lays responsibility on the shoulders of Sikh leaders to ensure that its historical importance is duly acknowledged and that the program is arranged with the requisite care that it deserves.

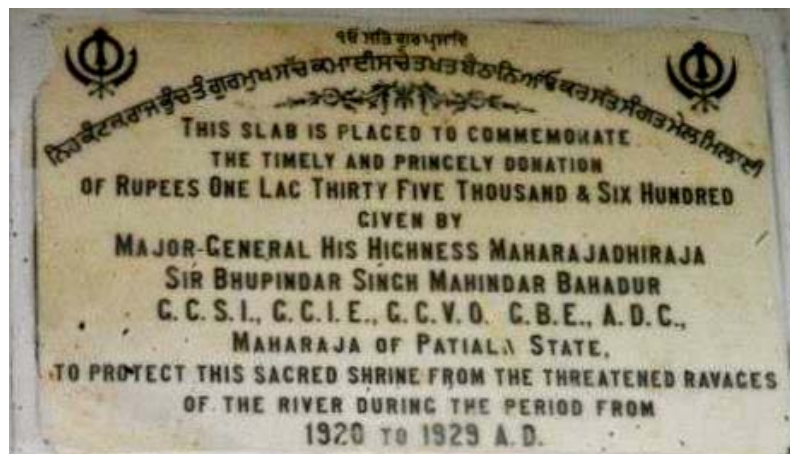
As we write, the spill-over of the 550th *parkash-purab* of Baba Nanak continues and the planting of trees by the SGPC leadership on the *gur-dwara* lands is welcome news; one looks forward to having more work produced in the months ahead. After investing considerable time in reflecting on the issue of the founding of Kartarpur, all the evidence I have found up points toward the town's founding around 1521. The establishment of Kartarpur in 1521 introduces a seminal date and an altogether new element in our understanding of Baba Nanak, the early Sikh community and Sikh history.

The seeds that Baba Nanak sowed sprouted while listening to the *gur-banhi* ("divine-utterances"). Singing about the unity of the Creator (*ek*) and the multiplicity of the creation (*anek*) and spreading the message to live productively in society by following his beliefs, Baba Nanak emphasized the importance of *din* ("transcendent") and *dunia* ("secular"). After Baba Nanak's passing, families that had gathered at Kartarpur continued to thrive in their homeland, and over centuries, their descendants carried the sounds of *gur-banhi* that now echo from the *gur-dwaras* around the globe.

With this evidence at our disposal, I appeal to the leadership of the Sikh Panth to consider the year ahead as the 500th anniversary of the founding of Kartarpur and Baba Nanak's formal establishment of the Sikh Panth. Until now, most Sikh scholars have only considered the birth and death of the founder worthy of commemoration. But now, it is time to begin thinking of the birth of the Panth as it continues to assess the previous five centuries of Sikh history.

The first issue that must be addressed involves the date of the event. The PSGPC plans to hold it on Tuesday September 22; the SGPC and other versions in circulation mark this as September 12. The Sikhs are fortunate to have firm dates of their *gur-purabs*—"Asu Vadi 10" is the date recorded in the picture above and the commemoration of this date to the present should not be too much of a challenge. Given the calendar confusion of the past two decades, it is imperative that every effort is made to honor the historical evidence we have in our possession regarding this date.

I do not expect the date issue to be solved at this point, but given the shortness of the time, some agreement could be reached between the PSGPC and the SGPC that allows sufficient time for a compromise on the date of holding this anniversary. The important issue is that this is the first time this *gur-purab* would be enacted on the sacred soil of Kartarpur, and it should be a fitting tribute to the founder of the Panth. This would require time and making Tuesday, September 22 or even extending it to Sunday, September 27, would be useful.



With Covid-19 haunting the globe, it may be better to invest energy in making live coverage of the *divan* available to the members of the Panth all over the globe as opposed to trying to gather people at Kartarpur. At this ceremony on the holy site of Kartarpur, an *ardas* should be made for divine assistance in the completion of the tradition's quinentennial and return to the spot where the Panth's history started and humbly seek blessings to take Baba Nanak's commitment to serving humanity to new heights in the times ahead.

I appeal to the members of the Panth to take a deep breath, try to understand how we all have arrived at this point in time, encourage scholars working on the Sikhs to formulate the challenges that lie ahead and elect/select leaders who possess the adequate wherewithal to lead us all on. This would be Baba Nanak's expectation from those he called the *gur-mukhs*/ *Sikhs* – praying for *sarbat da bhala* and the rule of *deg* and *tegh* in this difficult time for our shared humanity!

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