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Religious space as a stage for love: Translating Sikh scripture as a woman

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Abstract

The sacred book of Sikhism, *Ādi Granth*, which is known by the faithful as the *Guru Granth Sahib*, is a compilation of the utterances of the Sikh Gurus and other figures, both Sikh and non-Sikh, whose writings reflect a similar worldview. The first English translation of *Ādi Granth* was commissioned by the British administration and entrusted to a German scholar, Ernest Trumpp (1877). Since then, almost all translations have been produced by men, with the first English translation of the entire *Guru Granth Sahib* by Sikh scholar Gopal Singh appearing only in 1960. This article showcases the work and person(a) of Baljit Kaur Tulsi (1915-1997), one of the first women translators of the Sikh sacred texts. I begin by contextualizing Tulsi's life and work, then move on to her English rendering of *Anand*, a sacred composition in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. I compare the first stanza with that of the translation by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh. I conclude that despite having different idiolects and worldviews, the two translators, both of whom are deeply religious, speak first and foremost as women and their woman-centered position is evident in their translations.

Keywords

Sikhism, *Ādi Granth, Anand*, *Jap*, Baljit Kaur Tulsi

> Life bursts into fullness, absence into genuine presence, suffering into bliss, mortification into delight, Nothingness into ecstasy, and vice versa. Religious space is thus transformed into a stage for love, while the search for truth becomes a matter of body-to-body, spirit-to-spirit, body-to-spirit encounters.
>
> Julia Kristeva, *Teresa, My Love: An Imagined Life of the Saint of Avila* (2008, p. 36)

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1. By way of introduction

In a very personal essay titled "Why Did I Not Light the Fire", Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh revisits her mother's funeral and uses it as a foil to assess women's role in the religious life of the Sikhs. Though in charge of daily worship in home *gurudwara*s (Sikh temples) and often more familiar than their menfolk with the ritual texts memorized in childhood, women are not allowed to carry out the same duties in public *gurudwara*s; they cannot act as *granthī*s (readers) and they cannot perform *kīrtan* (singing), though neither the scripture nor *rahit maryada* or 'code of conduct' explicitly forbid it. The *Guru Granth Sahib* (henceforth the GGS), "the focal point of all Sikh rituals and ceremonies" (Kaur Singh, 2000, p. 70) is "physically *enclosed* by men; its meaning is not properly *disclosed;* it is linguistically *closed off;* it is *closed up* in rites of passage; and it is *closed to* women by their social conditioning." (p. 64, italics in the original). To date, all major English translations of the GGS have been authored by men, be they European scholars (Trumpp 1877; Macauliffe 1909) or Sikh intellectuals (Gopal Singh 1960; Manmohan Singh 1962-1969; Gurbachan Singh Talib 1987; Pritham Singh Chahal 1993; Darshan Singh 2005; Kartar Singh Duggal 2004; Sant Singh Khalsa [not dated]). However, through a covert 'bargaining with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 274), a few women have managed to find a way to gain a foothold in this indubitably male space, setting forth their understanding of the sacred texts. The earliest, tiny examples of female translatorial ventures amount to timid exercises in scriptural exegesis. Dating from early twentieth century, they may be found embedded in articles scattered in school or college magazines, occasional pamphlets and handouts, all too easily kept from public view and buried in the archive. Further, similar manifestations, found in popular magazines of the time, come in the guise of lyrical poems, their diction and subject matter linking them to the medieval devotional (with the GGS providing templates), further tempered by the English Romantic, often by way of Rabindranath Tagore (Schomer, 1984, pp. 219-220) or — as might be the case with Tulsi — women writers like Sarojini Naidu (Hoene, 2021). Though neglected earlier, in view of "recent studies demonstrate[ing] poignantly […] that throughout most of her history, the woman writer has had to state her self-definitions in code form, disguising passion as piety, rebellion as obedience' (Ostriker, 1985, p. 315), the exegetic renderings presented as innocuous lyrics reignited scholarly attention.

One of the first women to have her translations launched as stand-alone publications was Baljit Kaur Tulsi (1915-1997), a poetess and an educator. Known predominantly for her poetry, much of it spiritual, she published several books on Sikhism in her later life, and specifically after her retirement in 1973. Four of those are English renderings of the compositions from the Sikh sacred texts, the GGS and the *Dasam Granth,* the first two from the former and the second two from the latter: 1. *Psalms of hope. Poetic exegesis of Bani of Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur* (1978); 2. *Revelation of divine bliss. Poetic exegesis and commentary of Anand Sahib of Shri Guru Amar Dass Ji* (1981); 3. *The Ramayana of Guru Shri Gobind Singh Ji* (1967)[1]; 4. *Divine effulgence of the formless Lord. Part I. Jap Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Poetic exegesis and translation* (1985). Interestingly, three of these books have been furnished with a common sub-title, *Poetic Exegesis*, which, on the one hand, surreptitiously draws on the author's reputation as a poetess, and on the other, shields her from possible reprimand(s) on account of textual/ translatorial discrepancy or overstepping the mark.

Anand (GGS 917-922), the subject of the second of the four books authored by Tulsi and mentioned above, is a forty-stanza composition by the third Sikh guru, Amar Das (1479–1574). It is recited early in the morning; its six stanzas (the first five and the last) are chanted at all Sikh rituals, irrespective of the nature of the event; also, the short, six-stanza arrangement forms a part of the evening prayer, *Rehras*. Baljit Kaur Tulsi's English rendering of *Anand*

[1] The second edition of this book was published in 2022 by Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, New Delhi.

covers all forty stanzas and is preceded by an introductory 'Preamble' (1981, pp. 1-16), which provides interesting insights into its author's spiritual understanding of the text tempting one to view her devotionalism as an example of an authorial self-representation, or "even, to take the point further, as a form of autobiography, if only the autobiography of the imagination." (Lambert-Hurley, 2015, p. 247). In Lambert-Hurley's proposal, formulated first in the context of Indian Muslim women's life-writings, "[t]he adjective *autobiographical* is […] appropriated as an inclusive hold-all for a wide range of self-referential writing—even 'the marvelous and the miraculous'" (p. 247), with the devotion-inspired 'self-referential writing' and by extension, impassioned transcreations of sacred texts, providing women with a narrative strategy that "could be interpreted as a means of drawing a metaphorical veil over women's voices—not meant to be heard in the South Asian context—while, at the same time, endowing their individual experiences with a kind of validity not achievable otherwise." (p. 241). Keeping in mind the notion of 'translatorial habitus' (Simeoni, 1998) and the evident need for validation of personal experience and/or agency on part of women by creatively adapting available templates, this paper proposes to scrutinize Tulsi's project involving *Anand* (with special focus on the first of the six stanzas used in daily worship), and briefly compare her renderings of the oft-used verses to Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh's more recent translation of the same as found in her book of Sikh prayers, first published as *The Name of My Beloved. Verses of the Sikh Gurus* (1995), while locating both renderings within a larger corpus authored by men.

2. Baljit Kaur Tulsi: fashioning of the self

My first encounter with Baljit Kaur Tulsi came about in the course of a larger study of what can be broadly termed as 'Punjabi identity in the narratives of the self'. Looking for the early 20th century female voices in Punjabi writings, I repeatedly came across two names, Harnam Kaur[2] and Baljit Kaur Tulsi. Both were referred to as the first modern female Punjabi poets but beyond their names, dates marking their birth and death, and the titles of their first published collections (Awan, 2015), not much could be found. Through pure "good luck and the serendipity of history" (Burton, 2003, p. 4), I was able to establish links with people who knew and remembered them, filling the silence surrounding their lives with personal reminiscences.

Baljit Kaur Tulsi's life spans a period of modern Indian history marked by momentous historical changes. Born in 1915, in Jhelum, in what is now Pakistan, she was brought up and educated in Lahore, capital of the undivided Punjab and home to three religious communities: Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. Her father, Bua Ditta Bal, was a Punjabi Hindu; her mother, Mehar Kaur, came from a Sikh family. The family lore has it that after her marriage Mehar Kaur continued to visit the gurdwara regularly; two of her sons (and a daughter) eventually became Sikhs.[3] This in itself was not unusual for a Punjabi family, where customarily the eldest son would often have his hair kept unshorn and be brought up as a Sikh. However, what was unusual, was for a young daughter to take such a bold step, possibly transgressing parental authority, all on her own: we are told that as an adolescent, Baljit Kaur Tulsi went to the gurudwara, alone, and formally adopted Sikhism. The ceremony, besides a change of name (in this case, from a generic Kaushalya to the typically Sikh, Baljit Kaur) would have entailed taking *amrit* ('nectar' or sweetened water stirred by a double-edged sword) and undertaking to adopt the five holy symbols (hair or *kesh*, sword or *kirpan*, underwear or *kacchera*, comb or *khandhā* and steel bracelet or *kara*) of a Khalsa Sikh. Indeed, following this ceremony she always carried a *kirpan*

[2] Harnam Kaur, also Harnam Kaur Nabha (1898-1976), was the daughter-in-law of Kahn Singh Nabha (1861-1938), a Punjabi scholar associated with the Singh Sabha movement.

[3] All details pertaining to Baljit Kaur Tulsi's early life have been graciously provided by her sons, Ravi Tejpal Singh Tulsi and Kavi Tejpal Singh Tulsi. They have also shared with me the out-of-print books of their mother.

on a *gatra* (cloth strap) worn over her clothes. However, to understand the significance of this seemingly private act one needs to look at the milieu in which it took place and consider factors such as educational opportunities, socio-religious background and identity politics that shaped Tulsi's sense of the self.

Discussing girls' educational options in the early 20th century Lahore in the context of Kinnaird Collage, Tulsi's *alma mater*, Maskiell writes:

> The type of education given to any Punjabi child was a family decision […] Order of birth often made a difference for a daughter's educational chances. The eldest daughter would usually have an arranged marriage while still in her teens. A younger daughter would be allowed to receive a longer period of education and to delay her marriage. Often this reflected the father's growing influence among the elders of the family. The more established he was professionally, the easier it would be for him or his wife to postpone a younger daughter's wedding. The pattern was probably also connected with a tendency toward indulging the youngest (or only) daughter, a common practice among all communal groups. A few early twentieth-century Punjabi families included fathers who had received an English education and who wanted their daughters 'to do something new,' as one early alumna described her father. (1985, p. 60)

With Baljit being the youngest child, all the above factors would have been at play. Undoubtedly, she was the best educated among the four siblings, with her degrees, B.T. and M.A.,[4] displayed after her name on the title page of all her books, not a mean ambition in times when a Punjabi woman's persona was subsumed in that of her father or husband.

It would be safe to assume that the event of her *amrit* ceremony would have taken place sometime around 1930 or thereafter, probably when Tulsi was at Kinnaird Collage, the first women's collage to be established in Punjab (1913). Described as "a rare early twentieth-century institution that promoted female intellectual equality and encouraged women to consider professional careers after graduation", it was headed by Isabell Tylor McNair (its principal from 1928 till 1950), a strong advocate of "Western ideas of female intellectual equality." (Maskiell, 1985, p. 57). "In contrast to provincial government and university policies on women's education" when "during the 1920s and 1930s, university officials supported a special provision for women's domestic training as part of the Punjab University's liberal arts curriculum", the same was gently subverted in Tulsi's *alma mater*, with "the Kinnaird missionary staff direct[ing] student life and extracurricular activities away from training women for domestic roles to teach them to be informed teachers and responsible citizens." (p. 57). The atmosphere at Kinnaird Collage and the impact its charismatic principal and teachers exerted on its students would have provided Tulsi not only with an excellent grasp of English but also a roadmap for future career: after acquiring a professional degree, she became a teacher, of Maths. She worked as a teacher before and after her marriage, rising to the rank of the deputy director of Department of Social Welfare, Punjab.

An affluent, middle-class Lahore household like that of Tulsi's father would have been highly attuned to political and religious cross-currents at work in public domain/s. With Bua Ditta Bal being a follower of Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist organisation (1875), the household would have seen a steady influx of pamphlets and tracts expounding movement's beliefs as well as its position vis a vis the other socio-religious reform movements at work in the Punjab, such as the Singh Sabha (1873) and the Ahmadiyya (1889), the first representing Sikhs and the second,

[4] Baljit Kaur obtained her B.A. from Kinnaird Collage; after her marriage (1938) she continued her studies, obtaining her B.T. in 1939 and her M.A. in 1956 (Tulsi, 2019, p. 30).

Muslims. With an eye on creating "new (and often competing) versions of 'true' Hinduism, 'true' Islam, and 'true' Sikhism' […] [the] dominant strategy was to eliminate the apparent fluidity that had characterised earlier practice […] [and] demarcate communities that would then be grounded exclusively in sanctioned beliefs and practices" (Rinehart, 1998, p. 186), those to be subsequently disseminated in print. However, even the most cursory glance at the print culture of the late colonial Punjab reveals its unique linguistic contours. Though the colloquial language used by the Punjabis irrespective of religious affiliation was Punjabi, it was Urdu that came to be designated as the official language of colonial government across the Punjab (1854), the status quo remaining in place until the end of colonial rule in 1947 (Mir, 2010, p. 41). Similar acts of nominating Urdu as the official language of British administrative units such as North West Provinces (1837) and Oudh (1858), triggered off, c. 1860s, the Hindi-Urdu controversy with Hindi projected as the language of the Hindus and Urdu as the language of Muslims. This "controversy spread to other provinces, including the Punjab, which […] proved to be an even more complicated and contested linguistic terrain as activists there associated specific religious communities not only with Hindi and Urdu but with Punjabi as well." (p. 23). While Arya Samaj promoted Hindi (though most of its tracts in Punjab continued to be published in Urdu else English) and Muslim organizations favoured Urdu, Punjabi, written in *gurmukhī* script, was claimed as a distinct Sikh language.[5] Farina Mir expounds:

> […] to this end, Singh Sabha intellectuals such as Bhai Vir Singh and Kahan Singh Nabha wrote extensively in Punjabi on Sikh themes, and the organization established its own printing press, the Wazir Hind Press (est. 1892), and petitioned the government for social recognition of Punjabi in schools and the government. Partisans of Hindi such as the Arya Samaj similarly petitioned the state to make Hindi the language of provincial education and government. Muslim groups […] countered with petitions asking the state to maintain its support for Urdu. (Mir, 2010, p. 23)

Moreover, "[a]part from their concerns with reforms in religion and women's education", the movements "also led to the hardening of religious identities", while simultaneously producing "images of idealized womanhood to legitimize and consolidate their religious identities." (Minocha, 2018, p. 35) As demonstrated by Doris Jakobsh (2006, pp. 210-235) in her discussion on the feminisation of the Sikh ritual, one of the issues debated at length by the Singh Sabha reformers was the very question whether women could be initiated into the Khalsa, and if so, how. Ultimately, "[a]t the annual meeting of the Singh Sabha […] in 1900, a motion was passed that the form of initiation […] was to be identical for men and women" (p. 210). The "Singh Sabha claims of females' unobstructed inclusion within the order of the Khalsa necessitated novel versions of history" (p. 227) that would extend the concept of equal female participation historically, including participation in the *amrit* ceremony, right to the times of guru Gobind Singh, the founder of the Khalsa. With the last guru's wife, Sahib Dewan, styled now Sahib Kaur and the proliferation of Sikh-specific names for girls, it was only natural that "Kaur had become the signifier of Sikh female collective identity" (p. 232).

Among the figures of authority, present in Baljit Kaur's early life and tied to the Singh Sabha movement, one of the most important would have been Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957), "author of numerous novels, poems, religious histories, biographies of the Gurus, pamphlets, newspaper articles and tracts, […] the father-figure amongst Punjabi writers who turned to writing in Punjabi at a time when it was not considered a language of literary speech among the learned in Punjab" (Mohinder Singh, 2020, p. 118); man voted in 1999 "the most influential Sikh of the

[5] Punjabi, written in Perso-Arabic script (shahmukhī), was the most prevalent medium of Punjabi literary production, though Sikh sacred texts were recorded in gurmukhī. At present, Indian Punjab uses the gurmukhī script while Pakistan Punjab, the shahmukhī.

century."(p. 117). One of Bhai Vir Singh's earliest literary creations was the historical novel, *Sundarī* (1898), set in the 18th century Punjab when Sikh political fortunes were at their lowest. The adventures of its heroine, Surasti, a Hindu girl kidnapped by a Mughal chief and rescued by a Khalsa warrior only to take *amrit* (and a Sikh name, Sundar Kaur or Sundari), set Bhai Vir Singh on the project of writing an *imaginary history* of the Sikh community. (Murphy, 2012, pp. 134-145). Though easy to dismiss as "didactic, with a repetitive plot, and moreover […] suffused in a cloying morality" (Malhotra, 2020, p. 41), *Sundarī* never went out of print, influencing countless generations of wo/men readers, including Baljit Kaur. In her analysis of the novel, Malhotra foregrounds several issues that would have been pertinent to an impressionable reader in the process of fashioning her own identity: an attempt, on the part of the author, to create "a coherent Sikh/Khalsa community and a new Sikh woman" and the parallel project of exploring "a genealogical self, as also a self-associated with an identifiable Sikh/Khalsa community" (p. 42). Baljit Kaur's opportune appropriation of Sikh identity and her conscious choice of Punjabi as the vehicle of poetic utterance brought together the social, the political and the personal already present in her life. A brief overview of linguistic choices of some other writers of Tulsi's generation, all Punjabi speakers connected to Lahore, reveals a plethora of possible trajectories, making Tulsi's choice less obvious and thus more remarkable: English—Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), Khushwant Singh (1915-2014); Urdu—Krishan Chander (1914-1977), Rajinder Singh Bedi (1915-1984); Punjabi—Amrita Pritam (1919-2005), Kartar Singh Duggal (1917-2012), the last also writing in Urdu and English; Hindi—Upendranath Ashk (1910-1996), Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003).

Baljit Kaur Tulsi's long, close connection with the person of Bhai Vir Singh is attested to in many, not always tangible, ways. However, recent edition of Tulsi's selected poems, *Āo sakhī / Come, friend* (2019), contains an interesting document (pp. 155-156) which links the two directly. It is a facsimile of a short letter, one of many in the possession of Tulsi family, written by Bhai Vir Singh and addressed to Baljit Kaur. Dated 25.7.52, it lovingly opens with *srī kākī jīo*, 'dearest child', and discusses a manuscript she had sent him. As explained in the note introducing the letter and its author (p. 154), Bhai Vir Singh used this form of endearment specifically when writing to or speaking with two people, the well-known Punjabi poet, Dhani Ram Chatrik (1876-1954), and Baljit Kaur Tulsi, the first always addressed as *kākā jī* (son, child) and the second, as *kākī jī* (daughter, child).

Baljit Kaur's family also mentions her encounter with the two towering literary figures associated with Gandhi and Indian independence movement, Sarojini Naidu and Rabindranath Tagore. Apparently at a function presenting Tagore to Lahore society, young Baljit Kaur approached Sarojini Naidu, who was conducting the event, with a request to allow her to recite her Punjabi poem composed specially for the occasion. The poem was received well and Tagore invited her to visit him next day at his hosts' residence, where she was asked to sing *gurbāṇī*. It is plausible to assume she chose something she knew by heart, hence from the repertoire of daily prayers, which would have included Tagore's favourite *arātī* hymn (by Guru Nanak), already translated by him into Bengali. Both Rabindranath Tagore's and Sarojini Naidu's works were probably on Baljit Kaur's reading list, the title of one of her poetry collections, *Premānjulī* (1959) or *Love Offerings*, possibly styled on Tagore's Noble prize-winning volume, *Gitanjali* or *Song Offerings* (1910). Similarly, Naidu's influence on Tulsi, so far unstudied, might be glimpsed in Tulsi's translations of the Sikh hymns where "sensorial language, its emotive effect and [the] underlying aesthetic ideals" (Hoene, 2021, p. 967) seem to echo Naidu's "multisensorial scenescapes that evoke the Indian principle of *rasa*." (p. 966). The same reading list probably included writings of Puran Singh (1881-1931), scientist, mystic and "a prolific author in both Punjabi and English who was drawn back from a restless spiritual search to Sikhism by [Bhai]

Vir Singh's example." (Shackle, 2014, p. 120)

Tulsi's poems, which initially appeared in Punjabi magazines (Navĩ dunīã̃, Prītam, Phulwaṛī), caught the attention of the reading public early on, much before her first volume of poetry came out in a book form in 1945. The very first history of Punjabi literature in English, published in 1933 and written by Mohan Singh (actually: Mohan Singh Uberoi Diwana, 1898-1984), has one short paragraph which tellingly sums up contemporary Punjabi writing by women:

> Women have begun to handle social and religious themes but as yet neither inspiration nor aspiration has been strong enough in any one of them to produce a piece of prose or poetry of note. Education and social freedom have as yet only touched and adorned their exterior. An exception may be made of Harnam Kaur and Baljit Kaur whose verses have attracted some attention. (Singh, 1956, p. 91)

What is of interest here is not only the fact that, in this book on Punjabi literature, Baljit Kaur, then seventeen, is mentioned as a promising poet, but that she is mentioned under her Sikh name, possibly at first merely her *nom de plume* and, later, the name denoting her chosen identity.

3. *Anand*: Translation as spiritual journey in search of the self

Of the four books by Tulsi, listed in the Introduction, two have two iterations: *Revelation of Divine Bliss* (1981) and *Divine Effulgence of the Formless Lord* (1985). While the first, showcasing the English rendering of *Anand* of Guru Amar Das, re-appears as *Divine Bliss* (1990), the second is re-titled in the subsequent issue simply as *Japu Sahib* (1988)[6]. Besides modified titles there is also a clear change in the organization of the text/s in the second iterations, with sharp departure from the notion of 'poetic exegesis' and strong emphasis on closer rendering of the original compositions.

In the case of *Japu Sahib*, both the 1985 and 1988 iterations are marked as first edition, making them, for the purpose of research, two different books, which indeed they are. The 1985 volume (subtitled "Part I") comprises only the first 49 stanzas of the original composition, the first line of each given first in transcription, then in *gurmukhī* script, and followed by 'poetic exegesis' in English. The 1988 volume includes all 199 stanzas of *Jap(u)* and their presentation is different. All verses are now placed in two parallel columns, one for the Punjabi originals, the other, their English renderings, with all potentially difficult words glossed at the bottom of the page. The text in question being a litany of One Being's names, the glossary makes an informed reading much easier. There are also marked differences regarding the peritexts attending both *Jap(u)* volumes. A brief comparison demonstrates for example that "Proem", made up of a short note addressed to the reader and telling of the author acquiring her true understanding of the sacred composition through the revelatory 'Grace of the Lord' (Tulsi, 1985, p. 9), and two visionary poems, titled respectively "Vision of Mother Earth" and "Vision of a woman writhing in labour pains"[7], are dropped in the second iteration. So is the introduction, "Meditating on Jap Sahib" (pp. 16-22). The second, 1988 rendering, has instead "Preamble" (Tulsi, 1988, pp. viii-xix), with subsections clearly marked as "Words", "Lilt of the verses", "Words — Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian" and "Chhand-meter", the same changing the mode of the introduction from

[6] *Jap Sahib*, with *Jap* written also *Japu* (the final 'u' is short and usually not pronounced), is a composition by Guru Gobind Singh, found in *Dasam Granth* and a part of daily prayers or *nitnem*.

[7] I have amended the title of the poem from "Vision of a woman writing in a labour pains" (this is the exact reproduction of the title) to "Vision of a woman writhing in labour pains" as the first two lines of the poem read: 'Cry, cry not, O woman, in pain! / Writhe writhe not, O woman in suffering!' (Tulsi, 1985, p. 12); I am attributing the difference to a typo introduced in printing, possibly an unwitting male intervention.

the spiritual (1985) to the scholarly (1988). In both cases the introductions are meticulously dated and appended by Baljit Kaur Tulsi's full name and address. In the case of the first book, the date given is 4.10.1984; in the case of the second, 15.3.1988, allowing for easy compilation of chronology.

Interestingly, Tulsi choose to rework the rendering of *Jap* before revisiting *Anand*, which had been published much earlier (cf. Tulsi, 1981, 1990). The guess here would be simple expediency. As already noted, the first rendering of *Jap* comprised only the first 49 stanzas and was subtitled 'Part I', with Tulsi probably at work on other parts. Having the material fresh in her mind and having possibly rethought her approach to 'poetic exegesis' versus close translation, she opted for the second, subsequently producing a totally new English version of the whole *Jap*.

The case of the two iterations of *Anand* is slightly different though again marked by clear movement from 'poetic exegesis' to translation more closely aligned with the original. Moreover, while *Revelation of Divine Bliss* (1981) is marked as first edition, *Divine Bliss* (1990) carries the information that this is a second edition, knitting the two closely, that, too, despite their different titles and subtitles. The introductory sections, titled "Preamble", are identical, the only difference being one additional sentence in the 1990 edition: "This book is being printed for the second time. Efforts have been made to give meanings in English version of the verses, along with quintessence of the Divine message, to help seekers of the divine path." (Tulsi, 1990, p. 24) However, the new presentation of the original text and its English translation is similar to that already encountered in the second iteration of *Jap*. In the case of *Anand*, the earlier, 1981 version presents each stanza by giving its number, first line of the original text in transcription and the 'poetic exegesis' in English. There is also an abundant use of exclamation marks emphasizing the translator's state of spiritual wonder (cf. Puran Singh, 1921; Sher Singh, 1938, for similar usage). The 1990 version displays the text using two parallel columns (like in the second *Jap* rendering of 1988), one for the Punjabi text in *gurmukhī*, second for its English translation. The translation keeps close to the original without resorting to lengthy exegesis conspicuous in the 1981 version. However, each two-column exposition is followed by a commentary ranging from a couple of paragraphs to a couple of pages, depending on the stanza. The form of presentation of the sacred text and its English translation, in two columns placed side by side, followed by a very personal commentary, attests to the enhanced sense of the authorial self, endowed with authority more perceptible than in the earlier iteration, as well as Tulsi's growing confidence in her role as translator-exegetist. Neither the authorial peritexts nor the English renderings of the sacred text betray anxiety over stylistic choices in presentation of meaning or its translatorial expansions. Rather, one may discern their author's conscious recourse to an ornate, archaizing language reserved at one time for the sacred, which might at first sight seem surprising considering the fact that though writing in the 1970s or 1980s, Tulsi adopts stylistic register reminiscent of the early 20th century Indian poetry in English with its strong "revival of classical Indian aesthetics, including *rasa*" (Hoene, 2021, p. 966). *Rasa* and its trappings play important role in Tulsi's literary writings, including translation, but the issue cannot be addressed here for the lack of space.

To understand better some of Tulsi's translatorial strategies and trace the trajectory of her development as a translator of sacred texts, let us examine briefly the first stanza of *Anand*, given first in transcription, and compare its poetic renderings in English, authored respectively by Tulsi and Kaur Singh. It is pertinent to remember that, both for Tulsi and Kaur Singh, the sacred text was a part of their lived lives, its words reverberating in their mind and evoking strong emotional responses whenever the stanzas, memorized in childhood, were recalled. For them, the act of translation was thus not about teasing out the meaning from a reluctant text but, rather, molding the overabundance of its signification into equally eloquent English

phrases. Below, I give the first stanza of *Anand* (GGS 917) in transliteration (1a), followed by my very literal translation (1b) in which I try to retain the original word sequence and the more poetic renderings by Tulsi (1c) and Kaur Singh (1d).

Example 1a

anandu bhaiā merī māe / **satigurū mai pāiā** //
satguru ta pāiā sahaja setī / mati vajīā vādhāīā //
rāga ratana parvāra parīa / sabadu gāvaṇa āīā //
sabdo ta gāvahu harī kerā / mani jinī vasāiā //
kahai nānaka anandu hoā / **satigurū mai pāiā** // 1 //

Example 1b

Bliss [I have] attained, my mother / **true guru I have found**
True guru I found with ease / in [my] mind rose sounds of jubilation
Ragas [and their?] jewel[-like] families [and] fairies / the word to sing have come.
The word is sung [by those], God / in whose mind resides
Says Nanak, bliss came about / **true guru I have found**

Example 1c

O mother! I have attained **Divine Bliss**. Enlightenment of the eternal **Lord**!
With the revealment of Truth, the force of evil vanished. My Inner self echoed with blissful, devotional and sacred songs.
All the nine muses felt inspired to sing the Divine word, in melodious strain, in harmonious course.
Let all sing the Divine Word in chorus, who have attained the Lords.
Nanak, **Divine Bliss**, Delightful spirit, Enlightenment of the Eternal Lord, has been attained. (Tulsi, 1990, p. 25)

Example 1d

My mother, I am in **bliss**, for I have found my **True Guru**,
The **True Guru** I found so **easily**,
my mind rings with felicitations.
Jewel-like melodies with their families and fairies from afar
have come to sing the Word within me.
Those with minds that house the **Divine**,
they sing the sacred Word.
Nanak says, I am in **bliss** for I have found my **True Guru**. (Kaur Singh, 2019, pp. 133-134)

While both translations keep close to the original, there is a clearly discernible difference in rendering of certain key words and phrases as well as the adoption of literary style and register. But let me start with similarities. As one can see, *anand*, understood as an intense feeling of joy experienced by devotees in their submission to god or by mystics in their meditative trance (cf. Olivelle, 1997), is rendered as 'bliss' in both cases, in line with the standard understanding of the term, though Tulsi qualifies the same further by adding 'Divine' and introducing capital letters. Similarly, *sabadu*/*sabado* is rendered as 'Word', expounded by Tulsi as 'Divine Word', and given once as 'Word' and once as 'sacred Word' by Kaur Singh. The original has the bare *sabadu* or 'word' but in the GGS context *sabadu* always stands for 'divine utterance' else 'hymn' though its primary meaning is simply 'word', 'sound'. However, the two translators approach the key term *satguru*/*satigurū* differently. While Kaur Singh chooses to keep close to the literal meaning 'True Guru' — with 'true' for *sat*/*i* and *guru*/*ū* retained in English — Tulsi maintains respectful distance by opting for 'Eternal Lord' in the first and last line, and Truth in the second. Though for both translators *satguru*/*satigurū* stands for One Being [*Ikk Onkar*], Kaur Singh's rendering expands the semantic scope to include indirectly One Being's agents (like the Gurus),

while Tulsi's use of formal register fences the meaning in, raising the issue of the under-explored synergy between theological reasoning and translation (Hanna, 2019, p. 384).

The two translators also deal differently with the word *harī* of the fourth line, where *harī* is the usual (Hindu) appellation for God. Neither translator keeps the word in its original form, untranslated. Kaur Singh uses the more generic 'Divine' eschewing 'God' (on her views on the use of the same more below) and Tulsi resorts to 'Lord/s'. Though Tulsi's lexical choices seem more conservative and do not breach her traditional sense of the sacred, they intuitively follow the train of thought found later in the post-modern, feminist renderings of Kaur Singh. But in this case, the same could be attributed simply to Tulsi's Sikh worldview needing to distance itself from the un-Sikh elements — e.g., names for god(s) shared with other religion(s) — in line with the puristic aspirations of the Khalsa, while simultaneously giving free rein to author's poetic imagination.

In her essay, "Translating Sikh Scripture into English", Kaur Singh claims that "Jewish and Christian vocabulary and worldview are internalized and continue to be reproduced in modern translations" (2007, p. 42) of the GGS. Asserting that "[t]erms like 'God', 'Lord' and 'Soul' have distinctive connotations and belong to a particular value system, so they should not be imported uncritically into translations of Sikh literature" (p. 46), she proposes to translate *gurbāṇī* without using these terms and follows with her own, very successful examples set against other, authoritative translations. Such a clear-cut statement of purpose was undoubtedly easier to formulate or voice for a self-professed "Sikh feminist scholar" (p. 34) than for a Sikh woman translator of an earlier generation, socialized in a pre-feminist linguistic milieu and unequipped with the latter's vocabulary and stylistics. Von Flotow's suggestion that "[t]ranslators live between two cultures, and women translators live between at least three, patriarchy (public life) being the omnipresent third" (1997, p. 36) seems very pertinent in Tulsi's case, especially in view of the self-aware, gradual unfolding of her sense of authority through steady progression, from creation (her own poetry) to transcreation ('poetic exegesis') and finally, translation, as well as her constant re-thinking of her verbal choices and literary style.

A quick overview, inspired by Kaur Singh's contention regarding the use of 'God', of Tulsi's two English renderings of *Anand*, produces interesting results. While in the earlier, 'exegetic' version 'God' appears in 24 out of 40 stanzas, and in some cases, a number of times (e.g., in stanzas 21, 22, 33, 38 — four times each), the later version has only seven stanzas with 'God' (that, too, mostly with single use), of which two — 33 and 38 — overlap somewhat with the earlier usage tied basically to *harī*/*hari*; though rendered here as God, in other places in the composition the preferred rendering for the same is 'Lord'. It would appear that with the passing of time Tulsi felt the need to refer to One Being, irrespective of the term used in the original, by words different than 'God', an epithet lavishly resorted to earlier, and her first new choice was 'Lord'. In light of Flotow's views (1997) expressed in the context of debunking the myth of an 'invisible' translator for a translator that leaves a mark, possibly a 'gendered' mark on the text, one is inclined to see this shift of Tulsi's, combined with the need to revisit earlier renderings by preparing their new editions, as yet another evidence of an evolving sense of the self, including the translatorial self, in search of a clearly defined spiritual space and a new articulation. Though seemingly still tied to the patriarchal worldview with her preference for 'Lord', an epithet strongly eschewed by Kaur Singh, a close reading of Tulsi's translations and commentaries (alongside other peritexts) combined with retroactively readjusted understanding of her poetry (not discussed here), reveals a persona passionately devoted to knowing her Lord, the One Being, and resolutely expressing her all-consuming love by cloaking it in recalcitrant lyricism (cf. Rosenstein 2020).

In spite of the fact that both translations appear within a few years of each other, Tulsi's second iteration of *Anand* in 1990, and Kaur Singh's book containing the same in 1995[8], their language registers could not be different. Beyond the obviously personal (including the issue of naturally distinct idiolects), the other possible reasons could range from the generational to ideological. Tulsi's choice of the specific English register, which as demonstrated, she was engaged in modifying with each successive publication, was guided by an underlying need to retain the sacred character of the text in focus while simultaneously resorting to worn out, over-used vocabulary to express her innermost feelings that could not be expressed otherwise without calling undue attention to the self. Dubbing women poets 'the thieves of language' Ostriker (1985, pp. 315-316) writes:

> What distinguishes these poets, I propose, is not the shared, exclusive *langage des femmes* desired by some but a vigorous and various invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language, the treasuries where our meanings for "male" and "female" are themselves preserved. I have elsewhere examined the ways in which contemporary women poets employ traditional images for the female body – flower, water, earth – retaining the gender identification of these images but transforming their attributes *so* that flower means force instead of frailty, water means safety instead of death, and earth means creative imagination instead of passive generativeness.

It would be interesting to adopt Ostriker's lens and revisit Tulsi's peritexts attending the first iteration of *Jap* (1985), specifically the two poems, "Vision of Mother Earth" and "Vision of a woman writhing in labour pain", which were dropped from the second iteration as probably no longer required, the author having said her piece and moved on.

Writing in the context of Arabic translations of the Bible, Hanna (2019, p. 366) notes that, "[t]he increasing tendency to produce translations with the highest Arabic register drove early Arabic-speaking Christian translators to use phraseology from the Quran, which was seen, in addition to its religious authority, as the normative standard of language usage." Similarly, in the past, most translations of South Asian sacred texts, including the Sikh, availed of the 'high symbolic capital' of the English-language Bible, supplemented by other masterpieces of literary canon, often resorting to their archaic/archaizing language in an effort at 'domesticating' unruly Oriental text. Tulsi's translation quoted above introduces, for example, 'all nine muses', attempting to de-exoticize *raga*s before it became fashionable to retain such words untranslated in the text. Kaur Singh, starting from a different position and addressing different audience, simply renders the same as 'melodies'. But in another instance of a similar domestication resorted to by Tulsi, where the original phrase, *vedā mahi* / *in the Vedas*, is earlier glossed as '[in] the Holy word' (Tulsi, 1981, p. 50), the same is amended later to 'in Holy Vedas' with no discernible sense of anxiety (Tusi, 1990, p. 54). Likewise, Tusi's use of an English idiom to underline the veracity of Guru Nanak's message, "O, men of disbelief, / Reflect upon / The **gospel truths**" (Tulsi, 1981, p. 54), which did not appear to the then translator as incongruous or inappropriate in a Sikh context, was dispensed with in the later, terser iteration of the same stanza, by keeping closer to the original, "Says Guru Nanak, / Without recitation of the **True-Word** no liberation can be attained." (Tulsi, 1990, p. 58) Von Flotow (1997, p. 35) believes that "[t]ranslations published in a cultural context affected by feminism are remarkable for the metatexts that draw attention to the 'translator effect', the mark each translator, as gendered individual, leaves on the work". She qualifies this further by adding, "[i]n case of translators who identify themselves as feminists,

[8] The Penguin Classics edition of Hymns of the Sikh Gurus (2019) used in this paper was originally published as The Name of My Beloved. Verses of the Sikh Gurus (1995) in USA and republished under the same title in India in 2001.

these texts display a powerful sense of the translator's identity" (p. 35). But it is equally true that other (gendered) subjects, even if working in very patriarchal milieu and not thinking of themselves as feminists, leave indelible marks on their translations as well though probably in a more elusive manner. Tulsi's spiritual journey takes her from the poetically encoded visions of One Being, visions given to verbal exuberance and ecstasy, and presented in the form of outright lyrics else 'poetic exegesis' to more streamlined but no less ecstatic utterances of the texts re-visited under the guise of translation.

4. In lieu of conclusion

Following the recent release (3 November 2019) of a collection of Baljit Kaur Tulsi's poems, *Āo sakhī. Collection of Poems by Baljit Kaur Tulsi*, most media reporting the event referred to her as a poetess and spiritualist, the last descriptive, especially in the case of a woman, not heard often today. Its use, probably warranted by Tulsi's interest in things religious and her study and translation of *gurbāṇī*, indicates the high regard she was held in by people who knew her personally and admired her religious devotion, while surreptitiously finding her to be a fascinating enigma. Tulsi's recourse to a very specific type of language in her English translations, a very individual idiolect linked strongly to an earlier era, may be possibly understood better by studying it through the lens of the late colonial uses of English in poetry authored by Indians. Though referencing Sarojini Naidu's poetic output, Hoene's observations (2021, p. 968) could easily apply also to Tulsi, for whom Naidu was a figure of authority: "[her] sensuous sensescapes are heavy with adjectives and adverbs, which render them effusive and exalted to the point of eccentricity. But there is more to […the] poetic sensescapes than mere exaltation"; Hoene concludes by saying, "Representing the non-visual senses through the written word creates a tension of representation" (p. 968), a conundrum perceptible in Tulsi's English renderings of the sacred hymns and her very personal engagements with the texts as attested by the authorial peritexts. The present, exploratory study of Tulsi's translations, which are discussed here for the first time in English[9], conjures a glimpse of a persona consistently focused on the Sikh way of life, with everything else — poetic oeuvre, translations, professional carrier — subsumed in a desire to grasp the Ineffable and put the inexpressible experience in words.

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[9] I assume there might be studies devoted to Tulsi's life and work, both her poetry and her translations, in Punjabi, probably unpublished.

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