Gurmukhi Script, its origin

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One of our readers Gyani Darbara Singh ji of Gurdwara Nanak Jhira Sahib writes in response to our news item on page 12 of Sampark (March- April 2018) issue. He pointed out that the statement "Guru Angad Devji developed Gurmukhi script" is not correct. There is no where mentioned in Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji that Guru Angad Dev ji has written Gurukhi script. But is authentically mentioned at page 432 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji that Gumukhi script has been written by Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji and there is a special mention " Patti Likhi". Sri Guru Angad Devji preached the Gurmukhi script with great love and affection otherwise in which language Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji uttered Gurbani.

It is partially true what Gyani Darbara Singh ji has mentioned, but Guru Nanak Dev ji developed Gurmukhi is also not true. Gurmukhi script (proto-gurmukhi) exited much before Guru Nanak Dev ji. In a well of Athoor (Ludiana distrrict), a kutba was found which was much older that the birth of Guru Nanak Dev ji, in which letters are much closer to modern Gurmukhi script. These letter are much similar to Mahajani script which was prevalent in Punjab much before Guru Nanak Dev ji. The letters no doubt existed much before the time of Guru Angad Dev ji (even of Guru Nanak Dev ji) as they had their origin in Brahmi (5th to 8th century BC), an Aryan script, but the origin of script is attributed to Guru Angad Dev ji. He not only modified and rearranged certain letters but also shaped them in into a script. He gave a new shape and new order to the alphabet and made it precise and accurate. He fixed one letter for each of the Punjabi phonemes; use of vowels-symbols was made obligatory, letters meant for conjuncts were not adopted and only those letters were retained which depicted sounds of the then spoken language. (Encyclopedia of Sikhism, Punjabi University)

There are two major theories on how the Proto-Gurmukhī script emerged in the 15th century. G.B. Singh in his book, *Gurmukhi Lipi da Janam te Vikas*. Chandigarh: Punjab University, 1950, while quoting al-Biruni's Ta'rikh al-Hind (1030 CE), says that the script evolved from Ardhanagari. Al-Biruni writes that the Ardhanagari script was used in Bathinda and western parts of the Punjab in the 10th century. For some time, Bathinda remained the capital of the kingdom of Bhati Rajputs of the Pal clan, who ruled North India before the Muslims occupied the country. According to al-Biruni, Ardhanagari was a mixture of devanagari used in Ujjain and Malwa and Siddha Matrika or the last stage of *Siddha* script, a variant of the Śāradā script used in Kashmir. This theory is confusing as Gurmukhī characters have a very close resemblance with "Siddh Matrika" inscriptions found at some sacred wells in Punjab as G.B Singh notes, one being the hathur inscription dating to just before the birth of Guru Nanak. Siddh Matrika seems to have been the prevalent script for devotional writings in Punjab right up to the founding of Sikhism, after which its successor Gurmukhī appears.

Pritam Singh, in his article "Gurmukhi Lipi." Khoj Patrika. p. 110, vol.36, 1992. Punjabi University, has also traced the origins of Gurmukhī to the Siddha Matrika. "Siddha Matrika" along with its sister Takri alphabet has its origins in the Śāradā script of Kashmir.

Tarlochan Singh Bedi (Gurmukhi Lipi da Janam te Vikas. Punjabi University, 1999) writes that the Gurmukhī script developed in the 10-14th centuries from the Devasesha stage of the Śāradā script, the intermediate phase being Siddha Matrika, before the final evolution into Gurmukhī. His argument is that from the 10th century, regional differences started to appear between the Śāradā script used in Punjab, the Hill States (partly Himachal Pradesh) and Kashmir. The regional Śāradā script evolved from this stage until the 14th century, when it starts to appear in the form of Gurmukhī. Indian epigraphists call this stage Devasesha, while Bedi prefers the name Pritham Gurmukhī or Proto-Gurmukhī.

The Sikh gurus adopted proto-Gurmukhī to write the Guru Granth Sahib, the religious scriptures of the Sikhs. Other contemporary scripts used in the Punjab were Takri and the Ladaā scripts. The Takri alphabet developed through the Devasesha stage of the Śāradā script and is found mainly in the Hill States such as Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, where it is called Chambyali, and in Jammu Division, where it is known as Dogri. The local Takri variants got the status of official scripts in some of the Punjab Hill States, and were used for both administrative and literary purposes until the 19th century. After 1948, when Himachal Pradesh was established as an administrative unit, the local Takri variants were replaced by Devanagari.

Meanwhile, the mercantile scripts of Punjab known as the Landa scripts were normally not used for literary purposes. Landa means alphabet "without tail", implying that the script did not have vowel symbols. In Punjab, there were at least ten different scripts classified as Landa, Mahajani being the most popular. The Landā scripts were used for household and trade purposes. Compared to the Laddā, Sikh Gurus favoured the use of Proto-Gurmukhī, because of the difficulties involved in pronouncing words without vowel signs.

Bhai Sahib Bhai Veer Singh ji writes: "Griason writes that he feels Gurmukhi letters were designed by Guru Angad Dev ji. Gurbani Pothi which Guru Amar Das

got written, contains a couplet by Guru Nanak in Raag Sarang 'Pooran param jot parmesa'. On one corner of this couplet it is written "Guru Angad created Gurmukhi letters and presented before Baba. This means Guru Angad under the instruction of Guru Nanak might have developed Gurmukhi letters and shown to Guru Nanak. There is a *pati* written by Guru Nanak in Raag Asa which has different sequence of letters than what we have now. But GB Singh says the Punjabi script is much older than Guru Nanak and was improved by Guru Angad.

The usage of Gurmukhī letters in Guru Granth Sahib meant that the script developed its own orthographical rules. In the following epochs, Gurmukhī became the prime script applied for literary writings of the Sikhs. Later in the 20th century, the script was given the authority as the official script of the Punjab India, while in the Punjab Pakistan, the Persianate Shahmukhi alphabet is still in use.

Bahadur Shah would not keep his word. His willingness to let his Sikhs fight for the Mughals was meant to train them for bigger military confrontations which subsequently enabled them to play bigger roles in the history of north India.

It may sound coincidental but the fighter to continue the struggle against the Mughals was found by Guru Gobind Singh in Nanded itself a short distance away from the spot where he had his last meeting with Bahadur Shah. The name of the fighter was Madho Dass, a Bairagi Sadhu, meaning 'the one who had renounced the worldly life of a householder'. He was given the Pahul in September 1708: baptized with Amrit prepared with the Khanda in the same way as Guru Sahib had done for the first time in March 1699. Thus he became a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh and was named Gurbaksh Singh, meaning 'blessed by the Guru'.

However he came to be known as Banda Bahadur or Banda Singh Bahadur. This happened when he met Guru Gobind Singh for the first time sitting on his Asan or his seat in a comfortable pose. He asked in a challenging voice, "Who are you?" Guru Sahib asked, "Don't you know who I am?" Madho Das realized who he was and said, "Oh, so you are Guru Gobind Singh." Then, with due humility, he lowered his head to the ground and said, "Guru Maharaj, I am your Banda," meaning 'Male Slave'. Thus he was known as 'Banda of the Guru' and when he crushed Mughal rule in Punjab, his followers called him Banda Bahadur or Banda Singh Bahadur.

Madho Das being blessed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji after the Birs-his magical forces_were unable to move Guru Ji from the bed which made Madho Das realise the Gurus supreme Godly Powers

Madho Das said to Guru Gobind Singh, "I am your Banda" meaning 'Man-Slave'.

Madho Das was named Gurbax Singh_Blessing of the Guru_When the Guru asked him what was his name he had humbly replied_I am your Banda_man_slave. dho Das was named Gurbax Singh after taking the Amrit from Guru Gobind Singh.

Gurbaksh Singh alias Banda Bahadur alias Banda Singh Bahadur shook the foundation of Mughal Empire in North India during the next seven years - 1709 to 1715- and paved the way for complete liberation of Punjab from 1764 onwards. His pioneering struggle helped establish the Sikh Empire which put a stop to the six monthly raids from Afghanistan and forcible conversion of people. It was achieved at great personal sacrifices by innumerable Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh.