

# Guru Granth Sahib and Its Context

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Editor  
J. S. Neki



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# Introduction

J. S. Neki

In order to celebrate the quadricentenary of the compilation of Guru Granth Sahib and its installation in Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar in 1604, the Government of India set up a National Level Committee under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh in 2004.

A part of these celebrations involved organizing five Regional Seminars to discuss significant aspects of that distinctive holy book. Those Regional Seminars were held in Amritsar, Varanasi, Pune, Kolkata and Madurai so as to represent respectively the Northern, Central, Western, Eastern and Southern regions of India. These seminars were to be crowned by an International Seminar to be held in New Delhi.

The responsibility to organize the academic input for these seminars was delegated to Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan while financial support was provided by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

The proceedings of the International Seminar that was held in Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on 30<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2005 are being presented in the present volume *Guru Granth Sahib and its Context*. Those who made presentations in this seminar\* as also those who participated in the discussions are outstanding scholars who belong to a fairly wide range of religious denominations. Some of them, who hailed from outside India, especially from Pakistan, Bangladesh,

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\* Vide Biodata of the Participants at the end of the volume.

U.K., U.S.A. and Canada, have made significant contributions to the seminar.

Guru Granth Sahib is a distinctive holy book that teaches reverence for all religions. Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith, said:

Just as there is one sun that makes for a variety of seasons,

So too, there is One Creator and He makes for a variety of revelations. - S.G.G.S. p.12.

Today we talk of inter-faith dialogue as the essential means for achieving inter-religious peace. Guru Granth Sahib, a holy book compiled several centuries back, not only affirms the need for inter-faith dialogue, but actually provides a model of inter-faith communication within its very corpus. It contains works not only of the Sikh Gurus, but also of even more numerous Hindu Bhaktas and Muslim Dervishes, thus making it a really pluralist scripture. Not just that, Guru Nanak even records a gist of his actual dialogues with Siddha Yogis in a work called Siddha Gosti which portrays how dignified were those inter-faith dialogues.

The first version of this holy book is now known as the Adi Granth, 'the First Book'. It was compiled by the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, and scribed under his supervision by Bhai Gurdas a highly revered Sikh scholar of those times. However, the final version, in which the works of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, were also included, was compiled by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. This expanded version was installed as the eternal Guru by Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 in Nanded. Since that time, it has been designated as Guru Granth Sahib.

The Sikhs hold this holy book in the highest esteem. They repeat every day:

Hold Guru Granth Sahib in great reverence

As the living embodiment of the Gurus.

Anyone who is desirous of meeting the Lord, God,

Should be able to discover Him through its holy Word!

No Gurdwara, the Sikh place of worship, is possible without the presiding presence of this holy book in it. The message of this book is not merely for the Sikhs. It is for the entire mankind.

Befittingly then, this seminar, whose proceedings are here

presented, seems to make significant contributions on many essential aspects of this distinctive scripture.

We are grateful to Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India and President of the Sadan, for his Inaugural Address and to Shri Jaipal Reddy, The Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting and Culture, for presiding over the function. We are also grateful to Dr. Amrik Singh, Officiating President of the Sadan, and other office bearers of the Sadan for their cooperation and support and to the Department of Culture, Government of India, for their financial support and help from time to time. We would also like to place on record our appreciation of Dr. Mohinder Singh, Director of the Sadan, and his dedicated team for organizing the seminar and making other related arrangements.

Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan  
New Delhi.

J.S. NEKI  
*Hony. General Secretary*



राष्ट्रपति  
भारत गणतंत्र  
PRESIDENT  
REPUBLIC OF INDIA

**MESSAGE**

I am happy to know that the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan and Department of Culture are jointly organising an International Seminar on 'Guru Granth Sahib and its Context' to mark the Quid-centenary of the installation of Guru Granth Sahib on October 30-31, 2005.

The cherished and noble values of the Guru Granth Sahib should inspire all of us to follow the message of love, compassion, unity, brotherhood of man and supremacy of God the Almighty. Respect for all religions has also been preached by this Holy Book, a message relevant in today's world.

On this occasion, I extend my greetings and felicitations to all those associated with the Sadan and wish the Seminar and Quid-centenary all success.

(A.P.J. Abdul Kalam)

New Delhi  
October 28, 2005

# Welcome Address

**Amrik Singh**

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh,  
Shri Jaipal Reddy, my colleagues in the Sadan,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the issue of celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the compilation of the Adi Granth came up for discussion amongst us, it was clear to us that the Sadan should organise something which is really memorable. That is how the decision to organise an International Seminar on this occasion was taken.

The next question was how to go about organising it. We approached the Ministry of Culture, and as a result of detailed discussion not only between us but also with the Advisory Committee set up for this purpose, it was decided that the said seminar would be organised jointly with the Ministry of Culture. The academic planning as also the other details were to be taken care of by the Sadan but financial and other kinds of support were to come from the Ministry of Culture. Whether we have been able to do the job successfully or not is now for the participants to decide.

Having said this, I wish to express my grateful thanks as also on behalf of other members of the Sadan to you, the Prime Minister, for having kindly agreed to inaugurate the seminar.

Once all these decisions had been taken, we had to decide on a specific theme to focus on. After a certain amount of discussion, the theme of the seminar as formulated was the Adi Granth and its Context. Dr. J.S. Neki undertook to look after the academic part.

Perhaps it would be in order to say something about what considerations led us to formulate the theme in this manner.

While 400 years is not a particularly long span of time in the history of a faith, it must be acknowledged at the same time that these four centuries have witnessed many ups and downs in the history of the Sikhs. One of the two things that helped us to decide was the fact that there have been considerable advances in the field of scholarship about the Adi Granth during the last century or so. This issue will come up repeatedly in the various discussions that take place during the course of the academic sessions.

It is the second thing which gave us a certain amount of pride in what the Gurus had accomplished and I do wish to refer to it. If there is one scripture which can be described as truly inter-faith in character, it is the Adi Granth. More than thirty poets are represented in the Adi Granth. Out of them, the Sikh Gurus are not more than half a dozen. The remaining ones belong to the two parallel and influential schools of thought in the medieval period. In saying this I refer to the Bhakti movement as also the Sufi movement.

Both these movements are represented by some of their more prominent exponents. Once again, it is not possible to go into details, for those will get discussed as we go along. For our part, we wish to reiterate that we are proud to belong to a faith which is essentially collaborative in character and represents an impressive range of achievements both in terms of spiritual insight and performance.

What India needs today is this kind of an inter-faith approach. Without claiming too much for it, it can be said that the country is slowly moving in that direction. Only the movement is slow and sometimes there are ups and downs. But the overall direction is clear and that direction is towards understanding one another and working out that kind of a stable polity where pluralism and co-existence would before long become the prevailing ethos of this society. To a certain extent, the Adi Granth, which was later on elevated to the status of Guru eternal, will have played some role in that process.

I do not intend to say anything more on this issue except to repeat my gratitude to the Prime Minister, Shri Jaipal Reddy and

the Ministry of Culture and all those who collaborated with us in working out the mechanism of this seminar. I also wish to express my gratitude to the members of the Executive Council, the Director and his staff and the various contributors who have contributed and will participate in the discussions that will take place. With these words I welcome you all and hope the deliberations of the Seminar will be meaningful.

## Inaugural Address\*

**Dr. Manmohan Singh**  
(Prime Minister of India)

My Cabinet Colleague, Shri Jaipal Reddyji,  
Friends from the Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan,  
Dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be amongst you to inaugurate this international seminar on “Guru Granth Sahib and its Context”, to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the installation of the Adi Granth at the Harmandir Sahib. My personal association with Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan adds to the sense of privilege I feel as a proud Indian, and as a Sikh, in discussing the eternal relevance of this important sacred text.

I also welcome the release today of a translation of the Guru Granth Sahib into German. This work, by Dr. Jarnail Singh, who is unfortunately unable to be with us today, is a labour of love. I am also happy that as a result of initiative taken by the Sadan, Dr. Swami Veda Bharati has translated selected hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib into English and their translation into Spanish has also been done through the munificence of Swamiji. I offer my felicitations to all those involved in these projects. These are all worthy efforts, in keeping with the decision of our National level Celebration Committee to mark the four hundredth anniversary of the Guru Granth Sahib.

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\* Text of the Inaugural Address delivered at the International Seminar on “Guru Granth Sahib and its Context” at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, on October 30, 2005, jointly organised by Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan and Department of Culture, Government of India.

Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not dwell at length on the historical context and the manner in which the Adi Granth was composed. Our knowledge of these aspects is substantially evolved, and in any case, I cannot claim expertise over this fascinating subject. However, as one who has found great spiritual and mental solace from the teachings of this remarkable sacred text, suffice to say that I do believe that the Guru Granth Sahib has contributed immensely – perhaps disproportionately – to our composite culture in the past four centuries. The impact of its teachings has been so profound that it has influenced language, literature, art and of course the history of much of this subcontinent in a relatively brief period of time.

Scholars and historians tell us that this sacred text distills the essence of the wisdom of that great period of philosophical ferment in India, during the Sufi and Bhakti movement. That period of social and philosophical enquiry followed the unprecedented interaction between the great faiths of Islam and Hinduism in our ancient homeland.

From their interaction arose a number of saints who sought to synthesize the mystic elements of both faiths. Writing in different languages, using different forms, they were untied in the simplicity of their message and the colloquial idioms that they adopted from daily life. This common idiom, this *sant bhasha*, made their essentially common message enormously powerful. Therefore, even today, it can still be a matter of some surprise to recall that the great *sufi* and *bhakti* saints were separated by several centuries. This shows a certain universality of the thoughts of these mystic saints, which were inherited by their spiritual successors.

To begin with, therefore, the Guru Granth Sahib brought these different voices together in one place. While compiling the sayings of the sacred Gurus before him, Guru Arjun Dev had a plethora of material, as well as the obvious editorial freedom, to select and reject. Guru Arjun Devji collated the sayings of those who shared the broad and all encompassing spiritual outlook of Guru Nanak, such as Baba Farid, Kabir, Jaidev, Namdev, Ravidas, and several others. This illustrates his all-inclusive approach. The ideals of monotheism, rational enquiry, brotherhood of humankind, egalitarianism, concern

for women – all of these are recurrent themes in the teachings of these saints, and in the Guru Granth Sahib. Many of them – Guru Nanak Dev ji in particular – embodied the spiritual convergence between Islam and Hinduism of that time. Perhaps denomination and regions was also an act of both religious and secular integration. To the extent one can extrapolate a modern metaphor to those times, the compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib is a unique and pioneering example of an inter-faith dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to dwell on these ideas briefly. It is remarkable how, in that age of great political instability and social crisis, the teachings of these holy men are so stark and simple. Perhaps the message had to be reduced to its basics, born as it was in a time of great stress. This also explains the common message underlying the teachings of the sufi and bhakti saints. Many of these teachings are therefore particularly relevant today, in our troubled and weary world. I would add, however, that it is simultaneously ironic and a little saddening to realize that many of the same evils that plagued our society four hundred years ago, continue to do so today. I therefore believe that the message that emerges from the Guru Granth Sahib aims at addressing the most basic doubts and dilemmas of humanity, which have remained unchanged over centuries.

Although this sacred text is embedded in the historical context in which the sayings were compiled, it is even today a collection of what we would now call very progressive teachings, aimed at creating an ideal world. This ideal world would be a world without borders, free from the pernicious divisions of caste and status, one where differences of religion and language are rendered irrelevant. The teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib seek to harmonize the world as we know it. These teachings synthesize the essential wisdom of all religions and earlier mystic saints, and the ancient traditional cultural and civilizational ethos of the Indian people. In doing so, it sets out a powerful and appealing message of gender equality, concern for women and concern for our natural environment. It defines a moral compass for humanity to follow, but without adopting an imperative approach. Most of all,

it sets out an agenda for social equity that is most relevant for our society today.

For instance, the common teaching of the *Guru Granth Sahib* explicitly proscribes the reprehensible practice of female infanticide, the customs of purdah and evil of sati. Guru Nanak said, "why do you despise her who gives birth to monarchs and prophets?" Similarly, we find a common concern for maintaining the ecological and environmental balance. Guru Nanak's reverence for life, for nature and for God's creation is illustrated by his sayings.

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥  
ਦਿਵਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ ॥  
(ਜਪੁਜੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੮)

Air the Guru, Water the Father,  
Great Earth the Mother:  
Nurses – Night and Day,  
In whose lap the world doth play.  
(Japji, S.G.G.S., p. 8)

These teachings argue for a life, which if well led, would address both the internal crisis of the human spirit as well as external crisis in our society and our natural environment, which are often the result of spiritual emptiness and irresponsibility.

The transcendental vision embodied in the *Adi Granth* is described by our scholar President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan thus:

"In the tradition of India, Nanak Dev believes in religion as realization, *anubhava*. Those who adopt his view subordinate ritualistic practices and creedal definitions. Nanak Dev does not believe in the ultimacy of the distinction between Hindu and Mussalman. He goes beyond these distinctions and fosters a religion of spirit which is universal in character... Nanak Dev affirms the possibility which is now becoming popular and was anticipated by the Sikh Gurus. No wonder that the *Adi Granth*, which is the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, contains the utterances of holy men of both Hinduism and Islam."

Such an ideal social order, without religious or political boundaries, is described by Guru Arjun Dev as *Halemi Raj*. The relevant hymn in the Guru Granth reads as follows:

ਹੁਣਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਆ ਮਿਹਰਵਾਣ ਦਾ ॥ ਪੈ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਕਿਸੈ ਰਵਾਣਦਾ ॥

ਸਭ ਸੁਖਾਲੀ ਵੁਠੀਆ ਇਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਹਲੇਮੀ ਰਾਜੁ ਜੀਉ ॥ ੧੩ ॥

(ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੭੪)

The merciful Lord has now given the Command,  
That no one will domineer over  
and give pain to another.  
And, all will abide in peace  
Such, O dear, is the rule of my compassionate God.  
(S.G.G.S., p. 74)

This concept as described in the Guru Granth Sahib resembles, in some ways, the modern ideal of a welfare state. Such a society is not defined or created by state directives or legislation but is the result of a spiritual transformation of all its constituents. This concept of an egalitarian society, free from the exploitation of man by his fellow man, is further corroborated in the hymns of Bhagat Ravidas, who describes an ideal city -- Begumpura -- a city without defined boundaries, free from fear and grief. According to Ravidas the citizens of such an ideal society would not have excess of taxes, nor would they live in fear of injustice:

ਬੇਗਮ ਪੁਰਾ ਸਹਰ ਕੇ ਨਾਉ ॥ ਦੂਖੁ ਅੰਦੋਹੁ ਨਹੀ ਤਿਹਿ ਠਾਉ ॥

ਨਾਂ ਤਸਵੀਸ ਖਿਰਾਜੁ ਨ ਮਾਲੁ ॥ ਖਉਫੁ ਨ ਖਤਾ ਨ ਤਰਸੁ ਜਵਾਲੁ ॥ ੧ ॥

ਅਬ ਮੋਹਿ ਖੂਬ ਵਤਨ ਗਹ ਪਾਈ ॥ ਉਹਾਂ ਬੈਰਿ ਸਦਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਭਾਈ ॥

(ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੩੪੫)

Griefless' is the name of my Town.  
Where abide not either pain or care.  
No anguish there of tax on goods,  
Neither fear, nor error, nor dread, nor decline.  
Oh! how wondrous is my fatherland,

*Where there is always Peace and Calm, O friend !*

(S.G.G.S., p. 345)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is by no means an exhaustive elaboration of the eternally relevant ideals of the Guru Granth Sahib. As participants at this important seminar, you have the opportunity to provide new and valuable insights into the continuing relevance and validity of the eternal message of the great Gurus. Once again, I thank you for inviting me to participate in this meaningful and evocative event. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you..

Theme Paper

Sri Guru Granth Sahib  
as doctrine of *Nam* and *Prem*

J. S. Neki

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a distinctive holy book. It is not a historical document, nor an album of mythology, nor a treatise about rituals, nor even a corpus of canonical statutes. It is a collection of lyrical songs ensconced in which is the guidance about how to live a God-oriented life. It does not claim to be an exclusivist scripture. It does not include the works of the Sikh Gurus alone, but also those of many other holy men from both the Aryan and the Semitic fold. It addresses the entire mankind. 'No one is an alien, none a stranger' in its persuasion.

Every other known scripture came into being with the founder of the respective faith or came to be assembled later. In Guru Granth Sahib, however, are included the works of Jaidev (b.1172) a Hindu Brahmin, and Farid (b.1173), a Muslim Sufi, who preceded Guru Nanak (1469-1539) the founder of the Sikh faith by about three centuries. The holy man whose works were the last to have been preserved in this sacred collection was Guru Tegh Bahadur (d.1675). Thus Guru Granth Sahib represents full five centuries of spiritual wisdom – from Jaidev to Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Guru Granth Sahib inspires two basic doctrines: those of *Nam* and *Prem*.

## The Doctrine of *Nam*

*Nam* is the vertebral doctrine of the Sikh faith. The term *Nam* appears over five thousand times in Guru Granth Sahib. That itself testifies its centrality. In fact, the Guru himself says:

In the House of Nanak, if there is any one thing, it is *Nam*<sup>1</sup>.  
S.G.G.S. p. 1136

*Nam* literally means 'name' and the term is often employed to denote the name of God. God, however, has no name, so has been called *aname* or 'nameless'<sup>2</sup>. All His names that we know of are 'action-names', describing His dynamic attributes. His primordial name that has been recognised in Guru Granth Sahib is *Sat Nam*<sup>3</sup> often literally translated as 'True Name'.

It would be gratifying now to consider first what *Nam* semantically connotes. This term is presumably derived from any three of the following Sanskrit roots – *mna*, *nam*, and *namn* – which respectively mean remembering, addressing and a substantive. So *Nam* would mean a noun employed for remembering or addressing someone.

We may here pause and ponder over what a name really signifies even in this narrow semantic sense. To understand it, let us take an example of a name – say 'table'. What does this term 'table' stand for? It can stand for a wooden table, a steel table, or a table of masonry work. It might be a rectangular table, a round table, or of any other shape. It might even be a table presenting data in a tabular form or it may be a table of the Law. All these are very different things. Hence, the term 'table' does not signify any one specific thing, but the spirit or the essence of one and all of these. Hence, *Nam* stands for 'essence' or 'spirit'. *Sat* also has at least three meanings: truth, existence and holiness. Hence *Sat-Nam* can signify 'Essence of Truth', 'Essence of Existence' or 'the Holy Spirit'. In all these three senses, *Sat-Nam* impresses one as a primordial name and not an attributive name of God.

*Nam*, being essence, is subtle. It is revealed in the form of *shabd* that gets negotiated through the agency of language. However, the verbal denotation of any experience can at best *suggest* that experience, not *reveal* it. Hence "when speaks the soul, the soul no longer speaks". That is what the Gurus have called *akath katha* or the undiscursable discourse, the ineffable account.

*Nam*, has another connotation also. It is the creative intent of God. Guru Nanak Dev, in *Asa-di-var* addresses God and says:

You created Yourself, and created Your *Nam*.

In the second place You shaped the Creation,

Then, sitting within it, You beheld it with delight<sup>4</sup>.

S.G.G.S. p. 463

After the Creator had created Himself, He assumed His *Nam* and following upon that fashioned the Creation. *Nam*, then, is nothing different from the Creator but represents His own state of motivation for causing the Creation. Thus viewed, *Nam* also seems to have a teleological character. *Nam* not only creates, it also sustains the Creation. Guru Arjan Dev testifies it when he says:

*Nam* is the support of the Heavens and the nether worlds,

It supports the entire universe<sup>5</sup>. S.G.G.S. p.284

*Nam* thus has many semantic layers -- it is a substantive<sup>6</sup>, the cause of Creation<sup>7</sup>, the means of salvation<sup>8</sup> and the Creator Himself<sup>9</sup>. No wonder then that *Nam* becomes the central most doctrine of the Sikh faith.

*Nam* has also great archetypal significance. In Hinduism, the bhaktas of the South, the North, the East and the West of India all subscribe to the doctrine of *Nam*.

In Islam, the Qur'an begins with the Name of God. Sufis all praise the *Nam*. In Christianity, Jesus (in John 15-16) says, "no matter what you ask from the Father using my name, he will give it to you." In the Jewish religion, a believer blesses the Name of Yahweh (Ps.113.vv) though he may not pronounce it. In Buddhism, *Namu* is at the centre of the faith. Such widespread acceptance of *Nam* cannot be without an archetypal significance ensconced in it.

### **The Doctrine of Prem**

The second of the twin doctrines is that of *Prem*. Classically, three main spiritual pathways that have been recognised are those of *karma* (action), *jnana* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion). The Gurus, however, gave primacy to *bhakti*. Even *karma* has received stress in the Sikh faith, but only in subordination to *bhakti*. It has first of all to be in the form of philanthropic service (*seva*); to be dedicated, with

devotion, to the Creator. Even *jnana* has a place, albeit a subordinate one. As Kabir says in Guru Granth Sahib, 'For instructing the mind one needs only a little bit of knowledge'<sup>10</sup>. Primary emphasis is therefore on *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is nothing but transcendent love for the Divine.

In the eyes of the Gurus, God Himself is Love -- *Prem Purakh*<sup>11</sup>. He is also *prem-parayan* i.e. 'dedicated to Love'. He is the embodiment of Love and affection<sup>12</sup>. Love always desires to give itself away. So God also desired to dole out His love. That is why, He caused the Creation.

In order to distribute His loving Grace,  
He created the whole expanse<sup>13</sup>. S.G.G.S. p. 463

After causing the Creation, He did not retire or sit away from His creation. He sat immanent within it - that also in the form of love<sup>14</sup>. Hence from wherever love comes to us -- say from the parents, siblings, spouse, children or friends -- it is only God's love that we receive through them. The one language in which God communicates is that of immense Love<sup>15</sup>. To communicate with Him, man also must employ the same lingo. *Prem* (love) and *bhakti* (devotion) together make *premabhakti* which is considered the main highway to God.

The Guru has made me understand

That the Lord is obtained through love, affection and devotion<sup>16</sup>.  
S.G.G.S. p. 245

*Bhakti* as we have noted, is love in transcendence. Vallabha has distinguished seven steps of *bhakti*. These are *bhava* (emotional attachment), *prem* (love), *pranaya* (reverential longing), *sneha* (tenderness), *raga* (affection with desire), *anuraga* (vehemently desirous love) and *vyasana* (addictive devotion). The Gurus do not propose any such intellectual sophistication but employ most of these terms interchangeably. However, they prescribe much stricter criteria for *bhakti*. Even participation in the game of love is extremely hazardous. Guru Nanak says:

If you want to play the game of love with me,

Then step into my path with your severed head in your hand.

As you step in here, hand over your head to me,

Then pay no attention to what others say<sup>17</sup>. S.G.G.S. p. 1412.

Guru Angad Dev defines for us what true love is. He says :

What sort of love is that which may cling to another?

He alone is a real lover who remains immersed in His love.

One who feels good when things go right, and bad when things go wrong, Cannot be reckoned a lover.

He only trades for his own account<sup>18</sup>. S.G.G.S. p. 474

Having to part from one's beloved is most painful. Pangs of separation from one's love are called *birha*. One who has suffered no *birha*, has in reality, never loved. Sheikh Farid has this to say about *birha*:

People merely talk of the suffering of separation.

O *birha*, you are the ruler of all.

The body in which *birha* never has sprouted,

Look upon it as a mere cremation ground<sup>19</sup>. S.G.G.S. p. 1379.

Even transcendent love has archetypal underpinnings. It must be distinguished from passionate romantic love. In Guru Granth Sahib *kama* or lustful love is considered a moral bane. *Bhakti* or transcendent love is morally as well as spiritually uplifting. The Bible also makes a distinction between *erotic* love that seeks fulfilment through union with the object of desire and *agape* or love with God which gathers up righteousness, mercy and Divine love. Sufis make a distinction between *ishq-i-majazi* (mundane love) and *ishq-i-haqiqi* (Divine love).

Yet the mystical union of the soul with God is often described with symbols drawn from sexual ecstasy. I am here reminded of two poets, Dante and Pundit Kalidas. Dante, in *The Divine Comedy*, records his spiritual pilgrimage as having its awakening in romantic love. The mystery and beauty in the eyes of Beatrice, his beloved, lead him to Paradise. There again her eyes lead him close to God. Thus in Dante the vision of love becomes not the apotheosis of romantic love but its transmutation.

The other poet, Pundit Kalidas, was a Punjabi *qissakar* known for his Punjabi version of Hindu classics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In his seventies, he tried his hand on the romantic *qissa* of Heer and Ranjha and then took his manuscript to his spiritual preceptor for approval. The Master, however, said, "You have been admired for your writings on spiritual themes. How come, you have at such an advanced age turned towards this tale of *ishq-i-majazi*?" Kalidas

brought back his manuscript and changed the names of Heer and Ranjha to *Jiva* and *Mukti* and assigned other suitable names to the remaining dramatis personae. Then he carried the same, minimally modified, manuscript back to his preceptor. The Master had no hesitation in approving that manuscript for it then appeared to be one of *ishq-i-haqiqi*. So *eros* and *agape*, *kama* and *bhakti* can even blend into each other. In fact, the Guru says that

God is the only Male in the world;  
All others are merely His soul-brides<sup>20</sup>. S.G.G.S. p. 591

He further tells us that

On the same bridal couch are lying  
The Divine Husband and the human soul-bride.  
But they cannot have union because  
The rigid wall of (the bride's)  
ego stands between them<sup>21</sup>. S.G.G.S. p. 737

The Guru therefore counsels us to surrender the ego and thus enjoy the loving embrace of the Lord. Love for the Lord is the highest virtue in the eyes of the Guru. So, the Guru says:

I do not crave for a kingdom, nor even for deliverance,  
I only cherish the love of the lotus feet of the Lord<sup>22</sup>.  
S.G.G.S. p. 534

The Guru emphasises that when *Nam* and *Prem* come together, placid peace prevails<sup>23</sup>.

Here one might ask a question. When all the aspects of *Nam* and *Prem* are the same in most faiths, then what is special about Guru Granth Sahib? In this context let us take note of three things. First, whoever talks about Truth he shall essentially say the same thing as has been said before him, because Truth never changes. That establishes its validity. Anything else would be only blasphemous. Hence, one who seeks Truth, must not look for novelty. Secondly, Guru Granth Sahib makes no claim of possessing Truth exclusively. On the other hand, it presents its own corpus as a model of pluralism – meaning that the same Truth can be revealed unto many. In fact, in this rests its reliability. The world has only lately started talking about inter-faith dialogue. Guru Granth Sahib in itself is a highly significant example thereof. Thirdly, since Guru Granth Sahib aims at uniting all, it

discourages all such divisive practices as rituals and superstitions. That ensures its universality. Thus, the message of Guru Granth Sahib establishes its validity, reliability and universality.

Let me conclude by reciting the verse that Guru Arjan Dev composed to mark the conclusion of this holy book.

Truth, contentment, contemplation  
are the three things in this plate.

Also the Lord's ambrosial *Nam*  
that gives full surfeit.

Whoever cherishes and enjoys it,  
Sure he 'll be salvaged.

So, you cherish it in your heart,  
'tis what you can't forsake.

Hold on to the feet of the Lord,  
and cross the ocean dark.

Nanak says: Thus you shall know,<sup>24</sup>  
everywhere 's expanse of the Lord . S.G.G.S., p. 1429

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# Address

**Jaipal Reddy**

Respected Prime Minister,  
Prof. Amrik Singh and friends,

I feel greatly honoured in addressing this august gathering on the occasion of conclusion of year long celebration of the quadricentenary of the installation of the Adi Granth in the Golden Temple. As you know the Government of India had set up a National Level Committee under the chairmanship of the Hon'ble Prime Minister to celebrate this great occasion in a most befitting manner. The Committee, which met at the residence of the Prime Minister, decided that in addition to various religious functions being organised in Amritsar and other parts of India regional seminars and other academic functions should be organised to propagate the essentially unifying message of Guru Granth Sahib to promote emotional integration of India.

I am glad to know that keeping in mind the advice of the Prime Minister and other distinguished members of the National Level Celebration Committee five regional seminars have been organised with Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan working as a nodal agency. I am also happy to note that the regional seminars in Kolkata, Pune, Varanasi, Amritsar and Madurai were funded by the Department of Culture of the Government of India. What is heartening to me is the fact that there has been generous involvement of the scholars from different parts of India and the local communities in all the regional seminars.

While going through the programme of this international seminar I note with satisfaction that the organisers have designed the seminar in such a way so as to cover not only the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, Bhagatas and Sufi saints but have also taken up for discussion issues which are greatly relevant in the Indian context and the larger world order. I will be early looking forward to the discussion of various issues during the four academic sessions and the valedictory session thereafter. For us it is a matter of great encouragement and satisfaction that the Hon'ble Prime Minister in spite of his very busy schedule after his return from a tour of the Eastern States has found time to inaugurate this important international seminar which marks the conclusion of year long celebrations.

The Sikh community is fortunate in so far as their scripture is concerned. The scripture was compiled under the direct supervision of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, who also put a final seal of authority on it by inscribing the *Mool Mantra* in his own hand on a folio of the Adi Granth which is now popularly known as the Kartarpuri Bir.

The version which is currently popular with the Sikh community is the one prepared by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib and is popularly known as the *Damdami Bir*. While preparing this Bir with the help of Bhai Mani Singh, the Guru added the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur therein. It was this extended scripture which was given Guruship at Nanded in October, 1708. The scripture has since then remained Guru Eternal for the Sikhs. Before talking any further about the Guru Granth and its teachings it would be worth while to talk about the founder and his message which forms the core of the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib.

As you know the Sikh faith was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) who preached strict monotheism and described the Creator as *Ikk* (One), without a second. Guru Nanak's philosophy of God is best described in his composition *Jappi* which forms the preamble of Guru Granth Sahib. His teachings are strictly monotheistic, without scope for the worship of any deity or human teacher. Guru Nanak's teachings can be briefly summed up as remembering God, earning one's livelihood through honest means and sharing fruits of one's

labour with others. To practise his teachings of equality Guru Nanak started the twin institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat*, emphasizing that all assemble in a congregation and while partaking food from the community kitchen should sit in one line without distinction of high and low or rich and poor.

Guru Nanak travelled throughout India and neighbouring countries, including Sri Lanka, in a spirit of dialogue with other religious traditions of his time. There is a story that when Guru Nanak visited Multan, the local religious leaders confronted him with a bowl of milk filled to the brim indicating thereby that the land was overfilled with numerous religious teachers and that there was no place to accommodate a new creed. We are told that instead of arguing with them, the Guru quietly placed a petal of jasmine over the bowl thereby indicating that he would strive for unison with the existing religious traditions, and his followers would live with other communities the way jasmine floated in the bowl without disturbing the content. At a time when there are growing conflicts among religious traditions all over the world Guru Nanak's example should serve as a timely reminder of the well-established tradition of peaceful co-existence.

Towards the last phase of his life Guru Nanak founded a city on the banks of river Ravi (now in Pakistan) and called it Kartarpur, i.e. Abode of God. There he worked on the field and shared his earnings with others. A community of disciples grew up at Kartarpur but it could not be described as any monastic order. On the other hand it was a fellowship of ordinary men and women from different faith traditions engaged in normal occupations of life, earning their livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruit of their labour with others. But what was remarkable about Kartarpur was the fact that this provided a model of living which was to become the basis for the development of Sikh society and Sikh value system in the days to come. Herein the Guru and his followers got up before dawn and after ablutions said their prayers. The spiritual routine being over, the Guru and his followers partook the sacred food from the community kitchen and then attended to the day's work. In the evening they

again assembled at a common place and collectively recited their evening prayer and shared food. Before going to bed they all recited the *Kirtan Sobila*, songs of acclaim.

This new philosophy of life with its emphasis on early rising, working hard and always remembering God, created a society in which there could neither be any exploiters nor exploitation. The emphasis on honest living and sharing one's earnings with others laid the foundation of an egalitarian order and universal responsibility. To those exploiting the mother earth for material gains the Sikhs and their scripture the Guru Granth Sahib have something worth while to offer.

Friends, as you know Guru Granth Sahib is revered not only by the Sikhs and Punjabis alone but by all those who believe in the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of mankind. The saints of Guru Granth Sahib speak not for any particular community or area but the whole humanity because of universality of their message. They are universal men who freed our minds from bigotry and superstition, dogma and ritual, and emphasized unifying features of each religion. The great seers of whose teachings are included in the Guru Granth are the guardians of the inner values who correct the fanaticisms of their superstitious followers. To my mind collection of hymns and compilation of this unique scripture by Guru Arjun Dev was a successful attempt to rejuvenate the spirit of religion and humanity in those difficult days.

As you know Guru Granth Sahib contains, besides the writings of the Sikh Gurus, compositions of almost all the medieval Hindu Bhaktas, like Kabir, Ramanand, Ravidas, Surdas, Sain and Bhikhan from the U.P., Jaidev from Bengal, Namdev, Trilochan and Parmanand from Maharashtra, Pipa and Dhanna from Rajasthan, and Beni, then popular all over North India. The writings of five Muslims – Baba Farid, Bhikhan, Satta, Baiwand and Mardana are also incorporated in the Granth. Baba Farid, Ganj-I-Shakar, it may be noted, was a great Muslim divine of the thirteenth century A.D. who did much to spread the message of unity of humankind.

Guru Granth Sahib is perhaps the only scripture which deals with issues which are relevant to present day conditions to echo social

concerns affecting the whole humanity. Such important issues as condemnation of caste system, gender equity and balance between religion and spirituality, concern for environment and elements of a welfare state, all find manifestation in this scripture.

Through their teachings and examples the Gurus and the Bhakats of the Guru Granth Sahib created an ideal society leading to morally healthy, materially rich, socially balanced and politically stable life without people facing any kind of oppression.

Another distinguishing feature of the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib is restoration of equal status to women which they had lost over the centuries. While Upanishads mention about Gargi and Maitreyi being highly learned women in ancient India, during the period of Manu and thereafter women were relegated to a lower status in the society and confined to the four walls of the house. Practice of female infanticide gained ground. Through his teachings and practice Guru Nanak and his successors restored the status of women and encouraged them to perform all those roles which were traditionally reserved for men.

At a time when because of predomination of science and technology the spiritual values have taken a back seat we need to look back at our past and try to evolve a model of society which is based upon compassion and universal responsibility. The Sikh religion and the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth have something special to contribute in this direction.

With these words I thank you all and specially thank the Prime Minister for being with us this evening.

# Vote of Thanks

Mohinder Singh

Esteemed Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singhji  
Shri Jaipal Reddyji, Members of the management of the Sadan,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel greatly honoured in being asked to propose a Vote of Thanks, which is both a pleasant and a difficult task. It is pleasant because I am thanking Dr. Manmohan Singh, a scholar statesman who occupies the august office of the Prime Minister of India. It is difficult because I do not find suitable words to adequately thank him for the patronage that he has extended to Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan over the years.

As you know this Seminar is being organized as a part of the larger national level celebrations of the quadricentenary of the compilation of Guru Granth Sahib. After organizing five regional seminars it is the finale wherein scholars from all over the world are making their contributions. It is very encouraging for us to know that Pir Nizami associated with the Dargah of Nizamuddin Aulia, and other spiritual leaders from various religious traditions have joined in paying their tributes to Guru Granth Sahib.

One of the major contributions of Guru Arjan Dev was compilation of Guru Granth Sahib in 1604 and its installation in the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple. In medieval times when there was growing conflict in the name of religion this was the first serious attempt in promoting emotional integration and unity of thought by Guru Arjan Dev through the compilation of the Adi

Granth. He not only compiled the *Granth* but also put his seal of authority by writing the *Mool Mantra* in his own hand. Fortunately for the community the original handwritten copy signed by the Guru is still preserved with the Sodhi family in Kartarpur.

In the coming four years we will also be celebrating tercentenary of the *Gurgadi* of Guru Granth Sahib. I think our best tribute to Guru Granth Sahib would be to propagate its message by translating the scripture in different regional languages of India and prominent world languages. Dr. Jarnail Singh has done a commendable job by translating this scripture into French and German. I do hope others will follow his example.

With these words I thank the Prime Minister and Shri Jaipal Reddy once again. I would also like to thank the Department of Culture, which financed the seminar. I will be failing in my duty if I do not adequately thank the management and staff of the Sadan for their unstinted support in organizing this seminar.

# Guru Granth Sahib and its Context

J. S. Neki

## Introducing Guru Granth Sahib

It has been said, "Man can embody the truth, but he cannot know it"<sup>1</sup>. But Truth itself loves to be known. Guru Granth Sahib responds to this nature of Truth by providing a revealed text from which its essence can be known. This text embodies the spiritual wisdom of over five centuries from the birth of Jai Dev (1172) and Sheikh Farid (1173) to the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadar (1675). It embodies the spiritual compositions of six Gurus, and seventeen holy men of other religious denominations, including five Muslims, and twelve Hindus. Of the latter, only two were Brahmin, and ten belonged to the so called 'low caste' Hindus. Also included in it is a dirge composed by a relative of the third Guru and panegyric compositions by the bards of the fifth Guru's Court.

The contents of Guru Granth Sahib fall into the following formal categories:

1. Hymns or padas consisting of from two (dupade) to sixteen (solhe) short stanzas.
2. Metaphysical discourses called banis that include Jap ji, Anand, So Purakh, Sukhmani, Oankar &c.
3. Compositions in folklore style:
  - i. Spiritual odes or *Vars*.
  - ii. Acrostics around alphabets (*patti*), seasons (*rut*), months (*baramaha*), dates (*thitti*) and days (*var*).
  - iii. Dirges or *allahnian* and *sadd*.
  - iv. Songs of happiness called *Chhant*.

4. An inter-faith dialogue: between Guru Nanak and Siddha Yogis titled *SiddhGoshti*.
5. Aphorismic Compositions or *shlokas*.
6. Panegyrics (*sawayye*) in praise of the Gurus by the court bards.

Barring the opening metaphysical *bani*, Jap ji, and *panegyrics* and some *shlokas* (additional to those inserted in the *vars*) at the end, the entire Granth Sahib is set to classical *ragas* as modified by Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan Dev.

What we need to bear in mind is that this holy book is not a doctrinal treatise, nor is it a historical text, nor a collection of sermons, nor even a code of conduct. It largely consists of prayerful hymns - of supplication, laudation, thanksgiving, or expressive of love for, or pangs of separation from, God. Here and there, one does come across didactic compositions instructing man how to live his life with orientation towards God, loving regard for His Creation, considering all mankind as one and bestowing love and care on everyone without any distinction of caste, creed, clan, gender or social status.

Although basically it is a collection of God-inspired songs, yet all that the seekers need to believe is contained in this holy book. Guru Granth Sahib is looked upon by the followers of the Sikh faith not merely a book or scripture, but also as the embodiment and essence of the teaching of their Gurus.

The Granth Sahib opens with declaration of uncompromising monotheism. Such other beliefs as polytheism, materialism, atheism etc that are incongruent with monotheism find no place in it. It counsels man to live his life in accord with Divine will (*hukam*). Practising the presence of God, meditating on His holy Name (*Nam Sadhna*), singing His praise (*kirtan*), thanking Him for His gifts (*prasad*) and humbly serving fellow beings (*seva*) can lead an aspirant to fulfilment. To be able to find liberation, one does not have to run away from the responsibilities of worldly life and become a recluse. One can find liberation even while leading a householder's life. One must earn one's living by honest hard work (*dharma di kirt karni*) and sharing what one earns with the needy (*vand chhakna*). One must always remember that death is inevitable and its time unpredictable. So, one must ensure that when that moment arrives, the Name of

God is on one's lips and in one's mind:

ਜੀਵਤ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਸੇਵਿਓ ਅਪਨਾ ਚਲਤੇ ਰਾਖਿਓ ਚੀਤਿ।

During his life he served his Lord,

And as he departed, he enshrined Him Name in his mind.

– S.G.G.S. p.1000.

The context of Guru Granth Sahib

Context is the ambience of a text – conditions that precede or follow it, and thereby fix its meaning and determine its significance. In the case of Guru Granth Sahib, the context has many aspects. It includes (i) spirit of the times of which it seems to be a natural emergence; (ii) the preceding religious traditions from whose basic concepts Sri Guru Granth Sahib made significant departures; (iii) the context of Divine Revelations; (iv) the politico historical context; (v) the aesthetic context (vi) the context of apocrypha; (vii) the context of scriptures, and (viii) response of the people.

### 1. Spirit of the times

The Sikh faith, with which this holy book is particularly related, was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1530). From his time to the last of the Sikh Gurus, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), there was a galaxy of renowned holy men studding the spiritual horizon of the whole world. In India, there were many robust mystic saints including Dhanna, Pipa, Ravidas, Kabir, Ramanand, Namdev etc whose works have been included in Guru Granth Sahib. Apart from these, there were also Surdas, Tuka Ram, Gokul Mati, Chaitanya, Narsi Mehta, Mira Bai.

Equally impressive cluster of holy men also shone in Europe during those times. Such names as those of St. John of Cross, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Ignatius, Avarez de Fez, Olier, St John Endes and Molinos are outstanding among them.

Even in the Islamic world, during that era, such famous dervishes and theologians as Maulana Jalal ud Din Rumi, Abdul Qadar Jilani, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Mashish, Ibn Tainiya, and in the Punjab, Farid Sani and Mian Mir shone brightly.

It is apparent that the spirit of those times was one of global spirituality. Such a large cluster of holy men was not seen ever before nor even afterwards.

Guru Nanak made four odysseys in the four different quarters. During these odysseys (*udasis*), he imbibed liberally of the spirit of his times. Wherever he went, he held intimate dialogues with the religious leaders of that place. He met Hindu bhaktas, Buddhist monks, Jaina priests, Yogacharyas and Siddhas. He met Muslim Hajis, Sufi dervishes, qalandars and fakirs of various denominations. In Baghdad, he also, very likely, came in contact with some Jewish rabbis.

Whoever came in contact with him, was impressed with his urbane civility and cultivated politeness. When he met the Siddhas, they began by addressing him as *bale* i.e. 'little urchin'. But as the dialogue advanced, they began to say, "*ros na kijai uttar dijai*" i.e. "If you don't mind, please answer my query".

He created models for decent inter-faith dialogue.

When he went to Multan, the mendicants of that town presented him a brimming bowl of milk. They were conveying a message, "This town is brimming with mendicants like this bowl brimming with milk. You can't add even a drop to this bowl without spilling it.." The Guru understood the message, but said nothing. He only put a petal of jasmine flower over the milk. The Guru had answered their silent symbolic query with a silent symbolic act that meant, "There is still room in this town full of mendicants for one who would come as lightly as the jasmine petal, demanding nothing, but imperceptibly adding the fragrance of his Truth to the matrix".

He not only held dialogues with them, he even acquired such of their works as impressed him as genuinely God-inspired. This he seems to have preserved in a book that he must have carried on his person. When he visited Mecca, the Hajis, it is reported, noticed his book and asked him, "Pray, open your book and tell us whether according to it Hindus are better or Muslims?" And the Guru replied, "Bereft of good actions both will only repent!" These are some of the examples of the Guru's dialogues with leaders of various religious groups. Thus he not only imbibed the spirit of the times, he, without any stir, also added his own distinct fragrance to it.

The book containing his own works as well as his collection of the spiritual works of various religious dignitaries, he passed on to his successor, thus providing the nucleus of what in due course came to be the Guru Granth Sahib.

## 2. The context of religious traditions

In the eyes of Guru Nanak, all revelations of God were respectable. He said:

ਸੂਰਜੁ ਏਕੋ ਰੁਤਿ ਅਨੇਕ। ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਤੇ ਕੇ ਕੇਤੇ ਵੇਸ।  
Just as the one sun yields many seasons,  
So the One Creator gives us many revelations.  
– S.G.G.S. p.12

Yet he knew that in organised religion, spirituality gets fossilised. Hence he proclaimed:

ਮੰਨੈ ਮਗਾ ਨ ਚਲੈ ਪੰਥ। ਮੰਨੈ ਧਰਮ ਸੇਤੀ ਸਨਬੰਧ।  
A man of faith does not follow specific pathways or bye lanes;  
He owes his allegiance to *Dharma* (Righteousness) alone.  
– S.G.G.S. p. 3

He therefore concentrated more on spirituality, the common core of religious life, and rejected those aspects which are seen to perform a divisive role. Among these, he found formalism and ritualism at the top. So he rejected these altogether. An event of the life of Guru Nanak illustrates how he did this.

Travelling by stages, during his odysseys toward the east, the Guru reached Hardwar, a pilgrimage spot by the river Ganges. There he found a big crowd of devotees standing in the river and tossing handfuls of water towards the east to propitiate the spirits of their ancestors who, they believed, lived on the sun. The Guru also went into the river but started throwing water towards the west. People laughed at him and asked him what he was doing. He, in turn, asked them to first tell him what they were doing. They said, “We are trying to quench the thirst of our manes living on the sun. But what are you

doing?” “I am trying to water my fields in Kartarpur.” “But, foolish man, how can your water reach Kartarpur which is some hundred miles away?” “If yours can reach the sun that is millions of miles away,” said Nanak, “why can’t mine reach Kartarpur which is only a few hundred miles from here?” The people realized that he was no ordinary man and stayed on to listen to him. It had become clear to them that their priests were not just exploiting them but also enslaving their intellect.

The two major cultural traditions during the time of the Gurus were the Aryan and the Semitic. The Gurus tried to respond to both of them. Kabir, much of whose work is in the Guru Granth Sahib says:

ਬੇਦ ਕਤੇਬ ਕਹਹੁ ਮਤ ਝੂਠੇ ਝੂਠਾ ਜੋ ਨ ਬਿਚਾਰੇ।

Do not consider the Vedas and the Semitic scriptures as false

False is he who does not contemplate on them --S.G.G.S. p.1350

The Gurus, however, could accept only some of their assumptions and concepts of those books but could not empathise with many others. From the Vedas and Upanishads, they could accept the concept of *Pranava* or *Omkara* but not polytheism, formalism and ritualism as also propitiation of the gods especially through sacrificial rituals.

An example of Guru Nanak’s major reservations was about the concept of *Purusha*, the Cosmic Person (*Purakh* in Punjabi). One comes across the earliest image of *Purusha* in the *Purusha Sukat* of Rig Veda. The *Purusha* there lends implicit sanction to *Varanashbham*, the caste system. “From the head of this *Purusha* came the *Brahmins*,” says this *sukat*, “from his limbs, the *Kshatriyas*, from his trunk, the *Vaishyas* and from his feet the *Shudras*.” This hierarchical division of one class of people from another, to which the Vedas seemed to lend divine approval was distasteful to the mind of Guru Nanak. He considered all men to be equal in the eyes of his God and so equally dear to him. Guru Nanak could not brook any thought or action that estranged man from man. The caste system, in his view was one such rigorously institutionalised system that he would not approve of. On the top of his voice, he said,

ਫਕੜ ਜਾਤੀ ਫਕੜ ਨਾਉ। ਸਭਨਾ ਜੀਆ ਇਕਾ ਛਾਉ।

Despicable are the differences of caste and name.

(Important it is to know) that all living beings

are safely protected under the same divine shade. – S.G.G.S. p.83

The other major concept of *Purusha* is that one comes across in *Sankhya-Yoga* system of Indian philosophy. This philosophy posits two primal powers, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. *Purusha* is conscious and so sentient, but inactive, *Prakriti* is dynamic but insentient. It is only when the two come together that any creative activity becomes possible. Either of them alone is barren. However, the *Purusha* (*Purakh* in Punjabi) that Guru Nanak conceived is fully potent in every respect and hence creative on its own. So the Guru designated Him as *Karta Purakh*.

For Guru Nanak there is only one God, an omnipotent one, not dependent on any other agency for carrying out what He desires. . The Guru could not empathise with the pantheon of the Vedic religion. The Semitic religions were all monotheistic. In accepting that, the Guru might not have had difficulty, but he could not accept a jealous God, not even a Trinitarian one. Guru Nanak's God could not be a tribal God, nor could He be one who was against non-believers. For Guru Nanak even non-believers were God's own children and that the loving God looks after even those who are infidels and even criminals. Bhakti is also monotheistic, but the Guru's Deity was the Formless One

(*Nirgun Nirankar*). His *Sagun Bhakti*, pertained to *Kudrat* (Created Nature) because it is pervaded by its Creator. It did not refer to *avatarvad* as set forth in Bhagavad Gita. He detested even the thought of believing that God has ever to occupy a womb. He said,:

ਸੇ ਮੁਖ ਜਲਉ ਜਿਤੁ ਕਹਹਿ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਜੋਨੀ।

Burnt be that mouth which says that

our Lord is subject to birth through a womb. – S.G.G.S. p. 1136

From Bhagavad Gita he found Bhakti and dutiful action to his taste, but could not accept that duty was to be conditioned by one's

caste. Duty is a moral concept and belongs to the realm of universal morality.

He also found Islamic zeal to proselytise and bring everyone into the fold of Islam even by force, distasteful to his liberal mind.

All invidious discriminations were unacceptable to him, not just that of caste. He decried gender inequality and strove to give women their rightful place. Social justice was his unexceptional agenda. Apart from praise of God and spiritual discourses, if there is any other topic that receives a prominent place in Guru Granth Sahib, it is social justice.

### 3. Context of Divine Revelations

Guru Granth Sahib is a work of Divine Revelation. This has been vouched by all the Gurus. An important event in Guru Nanak's life has been described as follows:

One day he went for his ablutions to the river and no trace of him could be found anywhere for the next three days. His *Janamsakhis* all declare that during that time he had a profound mystical experience in which he was wafted to the Divine Presence. There, it is said, the Lord God asked him, "Do you discern me?" Nanak nodded in the affirmative and then proceeded to pronounce what he had discerned of the Lord:

ੴ Ik Oankar	The One! Supreme Reality
ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ Sat Nam	Existence cum Essence
ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ Karta Purakh	The Creator indwelling
ਨਿਰਭਉ Nirbhau	Sans any Fear
ਨਿਰਵੈਰ Nirvair	Without any malice
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ Akal murat	Eternal Entity
ਅਜੂਨੀ Ajuni	Unbegotten
ਸੈਭੈ Saibhang	Self Effulgent
ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ Gur Prasad	With Sovereign Grace

The Lord, it is recorded, nodded his assent to Nanak's proclamation, blessed him and commissioned him to propagate His Name ( *Nam*) in the world. The above enunciation of the essence of

God made by the Guru, befittingly, occupies the opening of the Guru Granth Sahib and is popularly called the *Mool Mantra*.

Also recorded in his *Janamsakhis* is the fact that after that Guru Nanak, along with his bard friend Mardana left on his odysseys. Time and again during his travels he asks Mardana to tune his rebec as *Bani*, the Revealed Word was descending on him. He would then sing what descended on him from the Lord. All that he sang is preserved in Guru Granth Sahib. Its revelatory nature is testified by the Guru himself when he says:

ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੋ॥  
As comes to me the Lord's Word, So I deliver it O Lalo.  
— S.G.G.S. p.720

Such revelation did not stop with Guru Nanak. It continued to descend on his successors as well who are all believed to be one in spirit.. So the third Guru, Amar Das testifies:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣਹੁ  
ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਮੁਹਹੁ ਕਢਾਇ॥  
Know ye the Word of the True Guru as Truth,  
The Creator Lord Himself makes me transmit this.  
— S.G.G.S. p. 308

In the same vein, Guru Ajan Dev, the fifth Guru says:

ਹਉ ਆਪਹੁ ਬੋਲਿ ਨ ਜਾਣਦਾ ਮੈ ਕਹਿਆ ਸਭੁ ਹੁਕਮਾਉ ਜੀਉ॥  
Myself I know not how to speak,  
I utter only what the Lord commands me to utter.  
-- S.G.G.S. p.763.

There is thus copious internal evidence of the Granth Sahib being of the nature of Divine Revelation. Does this revelation take place actually clothed in words or is it essentially of the nature of an experience and the Guru clothes it in appropriate verbal

expression? In this context Guru Nanak gives us some indication, when he says:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਵਿਚ ਆਪਿ ਰਖਿਓਨੁ ਕਰਿ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਆਖਿ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ।  
He (the Lord) established Himself in the Guru  
The Guru, in turn, revealed Him and declared it abroad.  
– S.G.G.S. p.466

From this statement, it appears that the nature of the Divine Revelation to the Guru was experiential, which the Guru made public by clothing it in appropriate verbal expression. However, the Guru being ever in tune with the Lord, even his verbal formulations may be considered Divine not only in spirit but also in letter.

#### 4. Politio-historical context

There was a change of ruling dynasties in India during the life time of Guru Nanak. The Lodhis had become tyrannical, unjust and corrupt. Guru Nanak himself portrayed their despotism as well as corruption. As recorded in Guru Granth Sahib, the Guru says:

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ। ਜਾਇ ਜਗਾਇਨਿ ਜਾਗੇ ਸੁਤੇ।  
The kings predate like tigers and their officials like dogs.  
They spare neither those who are awake, nor those asleep.  
-- S.G.G.S. p.1288

He further said:

ਤਖਤਿ ਰਾਜਾ ਸੋ ਬਹੈ ਜਿ ਤਖਤੈ ਲਾਹਿਕ ਹੋਈ।  
He alone should occupy a throne who is worthy of it.  
– S.G.G.S. p.1085

The people of India had become sick of the Lodhi rulers, yet had become so accustomed to being slaves that instead of throwing off the invaders' yoke, they preferred to invite another invader to replace the one that misruled them. It was the Mogul chieftain Babur who on such an invitation invaded India. He made several invasions till he

succeeded. Guru Nanak was a witness to the kind of devastation that his invasions wrought. Guru Granth Sahib preserves what Nanak said about it:

Kurasan Ksmana kIAa ih;wustanu draieAa .  
 Aap{ w}su n w[eI krta jmu kir muglu czaieAa .  
 ਖੁਰਾਸਾਨ ਖਸਮਾਨਾ ਕੀਆ ਹਿੰਦੁਸਤਾਨੁ ਡਰਾਇਆ॥  
 ਆਪੈ ਦੋਸੁ ਨ ਦੇਈ ਕਰਤਾ ਜਮੁ ਕਰਿ ਮੁਗਲੁ ਚੜਾਇਆ॥  
 ਏਤੀ ਮਾਰ ਪਈ ਕੁਰਲਾਣੇ ਤੈਂ ਕੀ ਦਰਦੁ ਨ ਆਇਆ॥1॥  
 ਕਰਤਾ ਤੂੰ ਸਭਨਾ ਕਾ ਸੋਈ॥  
 ਜੇ ਸਕਤਾ ਸਕਤੇ ਕਉ ਮਾਰੇ ਤਾ ਮਨਿ ਰੋਸੁ ਨ ਹੋਈ॥1॥ਰਹਾਉ॥  
 ਸਕਤਾ ਸੀਹੁ ਮਾਰੇ ਪੈ ਵਰੈ ਖਸਮੈ ਸਾ ਪੁਰਸਾਈ॥  
 ਰਤਨ ਵਿਗਾੜਿ ਕੁਤੀ ਮੁਇਆ ਸਾਰ ਨ ਕਾਈ॥  
 ਆਪੇ ਜੋੜਿ ਵਿਛੋੜੇ ਆਪੇ ਵੇਖੁ ਤੇਰੀ ਵਡਿਆਈ॥2॥  
 ਜੇ ਕੋ ਨਾਉ ਧਾਰਏ ਵਡਾ ਸਾਦ ਕਰੇ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਣੇ॥  
 ਖਸਮੈ ਨਦਰੀ ਕੀੜਾ ਆਵੈ ਜੇਤੇ ਚੁਰੈ ਦਾਣੇ॥  
 ਮਰਿ ਮਰਿ ਜੀਵੈ ਤਾ ਕਿਛੁ ਪਾਏ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਵਖਾਣੇ॥3॥5॥39॥  
 You protected Khurasan, O Lord. and terrified Hindustan.  
 You take no blame Yourself,  
 hence sent the Mogul as the agent of death.  
 So much was the slaughter  
 and devastation that he brought that the people screamed.  
 Did You not feel any pain, Lord ? || 1 ||  
 O Creator Lord, You are the Master of all.  
 If a powerful one strikes another powerful one,  
 no one feels any grief. || 1 || Pause ||  
 Should a powerful tiger attack a flock of sheep to kill,  
 its master becomes answerable.  
 This priceless country has been defiled by dogs,  
 and there's none to care for the dead.  
 You Yourself unite, and You Yourself separate;  
 I can only gaze upon Your Greatness. || 2 ||  
 One may give oneself a great name,  
 and revel in the choicest pleasures,  
 In the Eyes of the Lord, he'll just be a worm,  
 even for the corn that he eats.

One who dies to his ego while yet alive,  
would find himself blessed  
by chanting the Lord's Name. || 3 ||39||  
-S.G.G.S. p.360

Guru Nanak felt sorry for his countrymen's lack of morale. He resolved to enable them to throw off the yoke of slavery and to achieve courage and be free of fear. In his eyes, one of the important attributes of the Creator as he propounded it in *Mool Mantra* was that He was *Nirbhau* or fearless. He believed that

ਜੇਹਾ ਸੇਵੈ ਤੇਹਾ ਹੋਵੈ ਜੇ ਚਲੈ ਤਿਸੈ ਰਜਾਇ।  
One becomes like the One he worships,  
If one moves according to His Will. – S.G.G.S. p.549

Yet, the Guru thought people would not become unafraid through precept alone. Someone has to play the role model of fearlessness before them. The Guru thought of providing such a model if an occasion arose. An occasion soon arrived.

During one of his invasions Babur mounted an attack on Saidpur where Guru Nanak, along with Mardana, had gone to meet his friend Bhai Lalo. Babur's forces plundered the town, slaughtered thousands; and thousands they took captive. Guru Nanak and Mardana happened to be among those taken captive. They were put in a concentration camp and as to all other captives, they were also given corn to grind on a hand-grinding mill. Guru Nanak, in stead of obeying the captors' command, resorted to civil disobedience. He asked Mardana to play on his rebec and himself started singing God's praise. He was an exquisite singer and Mardana, a skilful rebec player. The two kept the entire audience including the officials supervising them, entirely spell-bound. No one moved. When the Guru concluded his song, the fascinated officials informed Babur of what had happened. He wanted to meet that extraordinary man. The Guru was taken to him. Babur apologetically told him, "Had I known, there was such a God-inspired man as you in this town, I would never have invaded it." He further told the Guru that he had invaded India because the people of this

country wanted him to free them from the unjust rule of the Lodhis. The Guru told him that if he also behaved as unjustly as the Lodhis, he would also meet with the same fate. Guru Nanak had displayed his model of fearlessness – not with the power of weapons but with his undaunted spiritual and moral power.

Guru Nanak's next successor, Guru Angad Dev, also got a similar occasion when he humbled Humayun, who defeated by Sher Shah came to see the Guru, but irked by a long wait in attracting the Guru's attention, put his hands to the hilt of his sword. The Guru noticed him then and told him: "How chivalrous for a king to flee from the battle-field and vent his wrath upon men of God"

Akbar the Great called on the third Guru Amar Das at Goindwal. He was told that the Guru has issued a command that whoever, high or low, wanted to see him must first partake of the sacramental food from the charitable common kitchen (*langar*). Akbar was a man of broad sympathies and gladly partook of the food served there. Everyone could see that the Guru's writ was binding even on Akbar the great Emperor of India.

It was during the time of Akbar that Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, got the first recension of the Granth Sahib prepared. It was then called *Pothi Sahib*. Slanderers reported to Akbar that the Sikh Guru had created a book in which Islam had been vilified. Akbar issued orders that the book be brought and random portions thereof be read out to him. When that was done, he could not find anything objectionable in it. On the other hand, he was appreciative of the catholicity of the contents of the holy book. He made sumptuous offering to the book and also sent gifts for the Guru.

But this relationship was not destined to last long. Akbar's successor Jehangir was a man of constricted loyalties. He was peeved at the growing popularity of Guru Arjan Dev – particularly because a good number of Muslims also came under his fold. He also became influenced by some fundamentalist Muslim leaders who could not tolerate an upcoming religion to have also become possessive of a holy book (*Ahal-e-kitab*). They dubbed this book as a false one and its propagators as running a shop of falsehood. Jehangir summoned Guru Arjan Dev and gave him choice between conversion to Islam

and cruel Yasa death. The Guru chose the latter without any fear. The Guru fearlessly choosing death taught his Sikhs, how to ridicule death and humble the arrogance of even the kings.

Guru Har Gobind eleven year old son of Guru Arjan Dev became his successor. He was also arrested later and incarcerated in the fort of Gwalior. Then, unafraid, the Sikhs organised protest marches from Amritsar to Gwalior. All the way the marching Sikhs kept chanting the hymns of Granth Sahib. Eventually Jehangir relented and ordered that the Guru be released. The Guru, however, declined to be released unless other political prisoners in that fort were also released. Jehangir, by then had been moved by the piety of the Guru and agreed to release other imprisoned chieftains as well. Since then the Guru has been called "*Bandi Chhor*", i.e. emancipator of the captive.

Aurangzeb, continued with the intolerant policies of Jehangir towards Sikhism. He summoned Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru to bring Granth Sahib so that he could satisfy himself that there was nothing in it disapproving Islam. The Guru sent his son Ram Rai to represent him cautioning him not to be intimidated by the king and to interpret the Gurus word (*Gurbani*) correctly without fear. However, Ram Rai, in order to please the emperor, altered the meaning of a verse. When the Guru came to know of this, he disowned Ram Rai and made his five year old younger son to succeed him in stead of Ram Rai.

The eighth Guru reigned for three years and then got afflicted with a mortal attack of small pox. In his last moments he indicated that his successor was in Bakala village. On hearing this, twenty two claimants suddenly mushroomed in that village. But a devout Sikh was able to discover the real Guru who was not among those claimants, but was found meditating away from the crowds in complete isolation. This was Baba Tegha, who was then acclaimed by the Sikhs as Guru Tegh Bahadur.

One among those fallacious claimants was Dhir Mal, a grandson of Guru Har Gobind and so nephew of Guru Tegh Bahadur. He considered himself as the legitimate heir of the Gurus seat. He could not tolerate Guru Tegh Bahadur to have 'usurped' his right. He despatched a band of his men to make a murderous assault on Guru

Tegh Bahadur and loot his property. One of them aimed a gun at the Guru, but though he wounded him, the injury did not prove fatal. The assaulters also looted his movable property. Some of the infuriated Sikhs made a counter attack on Dhir Mal and recovered all that his men had looted. They also recovered the original volume of the Granth Sahib that Dhir Mal had kept with himself. When the Guru came to know of it, he disapproved this retaliatory action of his Sikhs and bade them to return everything to Dhir Mal including the volume of the Granth Sahib. That original volume still continues to be with the descendents of Dhir Mal at Kartarpur.

While Guru Tegh Bahadur was in the Guru's seat, Aurangzeb had ordered aggressive conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. The most aggressive conversion was taking place in Kashmir. In response to a deputation of Pundits of Kashmir, Guru Tegh Bahadur decided to court martyrdom to stem the tide of forcible conversion of Hindus by the Moguls. The Guru was arrested and on his refusal to be converted to Islam, was executed in public. This is perhaps the only martyrdom offered for the freedom of faith -- not one's own faith, but for the faith of others..

Guru Gobind Rai sensed that a community of fearless people had come to emerge by then. Then, through a highly dramatic ceremony he initiated a new order, the Order of the Khalsa - God's own knights-at-arms. Thus the mission that Guru Nanak had taken upon himself, namely, to create a community of people who were undaunted even in the face of death, came to be accomplished.

The Hindu chieftains of the neighbouring states resented that the Guru was making even the low caste people pick up arms which was the prerogative of the Kshatriyas only. They attacked him several times, even with the help of Mogul army but every time the Sikhs proved more than a match for them.. That infuriated Aurangzeb so much that he ordered the Governors of Lahore and Sirhind to march their entire troops on Anandpur. They laid siege of Anadpur which appeared to linger on. However on assurance of safe exit (on which they subsequently went back) the Guru left Anandpur and after several skirmishes on the way and wading a lonely course through desolate forests, the Guru reached Talvandi Sabo, where he could spend more

than nine months. During his sojourn there, he produced the final recension of Guru Granth Sahib. This he did for two reasons. One, that the Original recension prepared by Guru Arjan Dev was now with Dhir Mal and he had made it his personal property depriving the Sikh community from it. Two, that in the new recension he could also include the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Four copies of this final version were prepared. One was retained at Talvandi Sabo and one each despatched to three other important centres of the Sikhs. It was in this form that Guru Gobind Singh, before he breathed his last, installed the Guru Granth Sahib as the *eternal Guru* of the Sikhs.

### 5. The aesthetic context

Guru Granth Sahib is a work of highly inspired poetry. Mystical truths are known to be ineffable. They, at best, may be communicated through poetic symbols – especially those that yield multilayered meanings. They may then be understood not only at the superficial level but also at various levels of spiritual profundity. From the multiplicity of expositions of the text of this holy book, it has become clear that it lends itself to explication at various levels of spiritual depth. Thus, the commoners as well as the spiritual elite can benefit from it at their respective levels.

Its language is also close to folk language, and its imagery also dwells on common images of folk life. The script in which it has been scribed is also a modification of the prevalent folk script modified to make it more systematic as well as pragmatic. It is now recognised that it is a scientifically systematised, comprehensively serviceable and yet a very simple script.

Barring *Japu* the opening metaphysical *bani* and the concluding short section including *shlokas*, the entire text is meant to be sung. Hence it has been arranged under different *ragas*. These are classical *ragas* so modified by the Gurus as to suit both the elite musicologists as well as folk singers. Many a folk tune has therefore been indicated under different *ragas*. Some of the classical Indian *ragas* (such for instance as *Deepak*) are of excitatory temper. These being incongruent with the peaceful temper of the verse, find no place in this holy book.

One of the *ragas* that Guru Nanak employed most copiously is *Asa*. Yet, the Guru modified it to make it softer compared with the classical Indian *Asa* to suit the spiritual temper of the text. He was fond of this *raga* because it can be sung around sunrise as well at sunset, the two most suitable timings for meditation. That is, perhaps, why the Guru explored maximum possible modifications of this *raga* moulding it on sixteen out of the total seventeen possible tone-centres (*ghar*).

While other scriptures are to be read (e.g. Bible) or chanted (e.g. Vedas or Koran), the content of Guru Granth Sahib is primarily required to be sung, though it may as well be chanted.

In the eyes of the Gurus, music being the most facile inroad to the human soul, it can be the most valuable instrument for cultivating unity of minds. Since the Gurus aimed at forging unity of mankind, there couldn't have been a better medium than music.

The use of classical *ragas* as also folk tunes was made to suit at once the adept musicologists as well as the untrained, unsophisticated, folk singers.

## 6. The context of apocrypha

Apocryphal insertions in works of renown have been a common phenomenon in Indian literature. Such insertions in the works of Tulsi, Kabir, and Waris Shah are very well known. Reasons for apocryphal adulterations can be variable. Some minor versifiers may be able to produce one short stanza or two that imitate an eminent author's work and can fit into the context of that work. Such authors get the vicarious satisfaction of having produced some work that is indistinguishable from the work of a renowned author. In fact, the most popular stanza of Waris Shah's *Hir* is a similar insertion made early in the twentieth century. Many of Kabir's *dohas* are known to be apocryphal. Many stories in Bala's *Janamsakhi* are apocryphal. Even many quotations therein purported to be words of the Guru are also of the same nature.

Another reason for such action might be to create an imitational work in the style of the original that may discredit the author of the original work for ambiguities and contradictions, although these

indeed were the polluting handicraft of the imitator. Such apocryphal insertions had begun to take place in *Gurbani*.

The works of Guru Nanak had assumed great popularity in the Punjab. Both kinds of apocrypha had come to be produced copiously especially by those who aspired to occupy the Gurus' legacy but were not selected for it. By the time of the third Guru such imitations had become so common that he had to caution the Sikhs about it. He said:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਬਿਨਾ ਹੋਰ ਕਚੀ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ।  
 ਬਾਣੀ ਤ ਕਚੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਬਾਝੁ ਹੋਰ ਕਚੀ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ।  
 ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਕਚੇ ਸੁਣਦੇ ਕਚੇ ਕਚੀ ਆਖਿ ਵਖਾਣੀ।  
 Apart from the Gurus' hymns all other songs are false.  
 False are those who utter them,  
 And false are those who hear or recite them. – S.G.G.S. p.920

Those responsible for such apocryphal productions were according to his estimate, motivated by considerations of benefits of *maya*. So he indicted them by saying”

ਚਿਤ੍ਰ ਜਿਨ ਕਾ ਹਿਰਿ ਲਇਆ ਮਾਇਆ ਬੋਲਨਿ ਪਏ ਰਵਾਣੀ।  
 They, whose mind has been lured by Maya, recite their songs mechanically. – S.G.G.S. p.920

By the time of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, this invidious practice had become quite rampant. His elder brother Prithi Chand had been disappointed in not having been selected his father's spiritual heir. He did not sit idle but started producing a spurious book in which were included the works of the four Gurus, to which he added his own works under the eponym 'Nanak' the same way as was the practice with the Gurus. It was on account mainly of such abundantly growing apocryphal imitations of genuine *Gurbani* that Guru Arjan Dev thought of creating an authentic comprehensive anthology of genuine works of the Gurus and the Bhaktas. That is how the work of compiling the Adi Granth was undertaken. The Guru exhibited great editorial skill in classifying the compositions, arranging them in a

systemetised order, and lending it such a calligraphic economy as would not permit polluting insertion of even a single letter, leave alone a whole verse. The words were joined together without leaving any space between them. This was done to prevent the risk of vicarious insertion even though it made the reading of the text somewhat uncomfortable.

Not just this, all the stanzas of a verse were given serial numbers. Serial numbers were next given to all the verses in a given section and their total was indicated at the end of each section.

The same design was preserved by Guru Gobind Singh when he produced the second recension of the Granth in which he had also included the works of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur.

That has preserved the authenticity of the Guru Granth Sahib to date and promises its preservation for all times.

## 7. In the context of scriptures

It has sometimes been asked, "Is Guru Granth Sahib a scripture?" It really is more than what a scripture is, but let us presently concede that it is at least a scripture. The term 'scripture' is a derivative from *script* which means 'thing written'. Guru Granth Sahib surely satisfies that definition of 'scripture'. It certainly is a holy text; and so has to be considered in the context of scriptures.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith says, "One may deem it delinquent for us not to plumb the role of this sacred collection in the corporate life and personal piety of this remarkable (Sikh) community."

Again, the same author observes, "for a work to be scripture means that it participates in the movement of the spiritual life of those for whom it is so"<sup>2</sup>. Guru Granth Sahib has participated in the spiritual life of the Sikh people quite intensely. They do not consider it merely a scripture, but hold it as the living spirit of their Gurus. That is why they designate it as *Guru Granth Sahib*. It is reckoned as embodiment of the Guru-Wisdom. It is ever being invoked for spiritual guidance.

## 8. Response of the people

In spite of the fact that Vedas, Shastras and Puranas had held the religious field of India for millennia, Guru Granth Sahib came to be

readily accepted by people. It has never been criticised adversely. Guru Granth Sahib being a text of inter-faith dialogue does not prescribe proselytizing. Conversion is contrary to inter-faith amity, hence completely disregarded by this holy book.

On the contrary, the reformatory tenor of this holy Granth seems to have inspired a number of emulative reform movements (such as Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj) within the corpus of Hinduism.

The influence that this revered book had on shaping the temper of the Sikh community has been enormous. It has made them fearless and courageous. They are ever ready to sacrifice their life to uphold an ideal. The spate of personal sacrifices they made for wresting their Gurdwaras from the stranglehold of unscrupulous priests has been an honourable saga in the history of religions. Mahatma Gandhi chose cleverly to designate it as the first battle of the Freedom Movement of India. The sacrificial contribution of the small community of Sikhs during the Freedom Movement of India has been incomparably more enormous than that of all the other communities put together.

The inspiration for comprehensive freedom issue from Guru Granth Sahib. This holy book dynamically inspires every aspect of their corporate as well as personal life of the Sikhs.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith gives his own impressions about the role of this "Honourable Book" in the life of the Sikh community. It presides over their services in the Gurdwara. It leads their processions. It is consulted in times of distress for a commandment (*hukam*) to comply with for the purpose of obtaining solace."

In the days when the Sikhs were being hunted as wild animals, and had been compelled to leave their homes as nomads, they carried their Guru (Granth Sahib) with them. They couldn't do without *him*. While they were being pursued ferociously, if they managed to find respite even for a couple of days, they would try to complete the reading of the whole of Guru Granth Sahib by relays. If they succeeded in completing the full reading, they would hold a special prayer of thanks. Completed relayed reading of Guru Granth Sahib came to be called *akhand path* which has become a favourite service of the Sikhs even during peace time, particularly on formal and festive occasions.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith observes, "Among overt and observable aspects of the special treatment accorded to it (Guru Granth Sahib) are the little shrines or separate rooms that in recent times many Sikhs have come to maintain in their homes, wherein the scripture is decoratively and reverently housed. An outsider can hardly but be struck by the devotion and engagement evinced in the Sikhs' turning to these, regularly opening them each day and worshipping God before them. Similarly in group services, reading from Guru Granth Sahib is of course central."<sup>3</sup>

W. Owen Cole observes, "... the Sikhs (became) a people of the book to an extent and in a manner which is not found in any other religion."<sup>4</sup> "That seems to be how the people who adhere to it envisage its significance.

A work to be scripture means first of all that its reading is considered an invariable responsibility by those for whom it is intended. This holy book came to be read not only by the Sikhs but also by multitudes of people in Sind and west Punjab who continued to profess their ancestral faith. They would not only read this holy book and sing its hymns as a part of their daily routine of life, but also try to shape their lives according to its precepts. They came to be designated as *sahajdharis* i.e. those who had imbibed *sahaj* or spiritual equipoise from this book. Interestingly, this term also acquired another meaning. The Sikhs began to interpret it as 'those who were gradually (*sahaje*) trying to become full members of the Sikh community. It is true that thousands of them eventually came to enrol themselves as full members of the Khalsa Panth.

This is also true that some Hindu families had vowed to make one of their offspring a Sikh. This practice continued for long in large numbers, and is occasionally seen even now. Such families, by and large, lived according to the tenets of Guru Granth Sahib. Such inter-faith amity had become possible due to the generous catholicity of Guru Granth Sahib.

Arnold J. Toynbee, a renowned world historian of the modern age writes:

"Mankind's religious future may be obscure; yet, one thing can be foreseen: the living higher religions are going to influence each

other more than ever before, in these days of increasing communication between all parts of the world and all branches of the human race. In this religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scripture the Adi Granth will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world.”<sup>5</sup>

### Notes and References

1. William Butler Yeates in a letter written ... shortly before his death quoted by Wilfred Cantwell Smith: *What is Scripture?* Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993 p.230.
2. Smith, Wilfred Cantwell: *What is Scripture?* Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993, p.36.
3. Ibid p. 196.
4. Cole, W. Owen: *The Guru in Sikhism*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982.p.56.
5. Arnold J. Toynbee: in Foreword to *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*; UNESCO, 1960 p.9.

# Guru Granth Sahib Among World Scriptures

W. Owen Cole

## introduction

Some months ago I was asked to present a brief paper on the subject of a book that had influenced me considerably. Unhesitatingly, I chose to speak about the Guru Granth Sahib. No wonder Max Arthur Macauliffe was reading the Japji as he lay dying and Arnold Toynbee, Pearl Buck and similar figures have praised it. It is a scripture waiting to be discovered by the world at large, despite the UNESCO anthology of 1960. That is why I was pleased to be associated with the Sacred Literature Trust project that resulted in Professor Nicky Guninder Kaur Singh's *The Name of my Beloved*, an anthology comprising many of its most important passages. It is beyond my comprehension that the Sikh scriptures and the Sikh religion itself are so little known in the non – Sikh world. However, that is not the subject that I have been given to discuss in this study so I must leave it to others, unless I can return to it at some other time.

What I will do is ask the Panth to address the world through its local sangats and perhaps give copies of Professor Kaur's anthology as a *siropa* to honour non-Sikhs. The recipient will then have a version that is in readable modern everyday English that does not impose any of the demands of translations that are Shakespearian or of the time of King James I and give the impression of something that is out of date. Scriptures are examples of living spirituality and translations should convey the vibrancy and vitality of the original.

As I turn to my subject I must thank my great friend of long standing, Dr Mohinder Singh, for inviting me to speak to this conference on this subject.

It is a common practice for people to talk about the Guru Granth Sahib as a unique scripture. I do not intend to do this for the very simple reason that each and every scripture is unique. The term I prefer to use is 'distinctive'.

A survey of all the world's great scriptures would be far beyond my competence and would imbalance this paper to the point where its primary focus, the Guru Granth Sahib, might scarcely receive a mention. Instead, I will consider some scriptures that impinge upon the primary Sikh source of revelation. Some members of my audience may be critical of my omission of the Dasam Granth. I will leave it to them, in one way or another, to compensate for this short coming.

Oldest of all scriptures must be the *Rig Veda*. Its origins lie in an oral tradition dating back at almost four thousand years, and transmitted orally for some three millennia. The *Vedas* are indeed phenomena! Along with their sanctity, however, grew up a tradition of exclusiveness. The sacred language, Sanskrit, was not to be taught to men, (and certainly not to women) other than Brahmins, and only Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were allowed to sit at their feet to study it. It was not even read in the hearing of Shudras or those completely outside the varna system. This, of course does not represent the situation today or at all times. There is evidence in the Upanishads of women possessing Vedic knowledge and Valmiki, the guru of Rama and his brothers, and author of the Ramayana was a so called low caste.

Judaism coincidentally also went through a process as a result of which the language, Hebrew, that Moses and the slaves who escaped from Egypt spoke as their everyday mother tongue, became the esoteric property of the priesthood and religious teachers known as rabbis. Increasingly the language spoken in shops and homes became that of the place where particular groups of the Diaspora lived. This does not mean that Judaism became static, frozen in some particular historical milieu. That certainly never happened, any more that it took place in Hinduism, and both religions and their scriptures have always been and still are vibrant expressions of spirituality and morality.

If one were to attend a synagogue two thousand years ago it would be customary to hear the prescribed scripture passages read by men who had mastered Hebrew and then to listen to a sermon or exegesis given in Aramaic, the language of the people. In Alexandria, Athens, or Rome, for example, a Greek translation, the Septuagint, might be used, to be followed by a sermon in colloquial Greek or, in later times, Latin. If I took you to our local synagogue in Portsmouth, most of the service would be in Hebrew apart from the homily, in English, and the prayer for the Queen and the United Kingdom.

### **The inclusion of scriptures of one faith in the sacred texts of another**

The first Christians were Jews; in fact the word Christian was coined to focus attention upon their fundamental core belief that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised deliverer in whose imminent coming many believed. 'Christ', 'Christos' is the Greek translation of the Hebrew 'Mashiach', anglicised into 'messiah'. When the missionary Paul wrote that 'all scripture is inspired by God' (2 Timothy 3:16), he was not referring to the Bhagavad-Gita or the Samhita, of which he had never heard, but to his own holy book and that of his readers, the Torah. Only gradually, did the collection known as the New Testament, almost accidentally, come into existence. It is highly unlikely that St Paul thought he was writing scripture when he addressed his two letters to the young Christian community in Corinth. In fact, scholars have suggested that he refers to another two letters. If they are correct then two documents that might later have been thought worthy of inclusion in the Bible, were lost. Clearly the people who received them did not consider them to be holy writ. For theological and practical reasons, the Hebrew scriptures became part of the Christian Bible. They were called the Old Testament, though not for about 150 years after the life of Jesus. What is important, however, is the manner in which Christians interpreted them. They were seen as pointing to the ministry of Jesus and to his work of salvation. The word 'testament' is a translation of the term 'covenant'. In Christian usage it means that the 'old' covenant, made through Moses with the Jews at Mount Sinai, has been replaced by a 'new' one based on faith in Jesus. In the Hebrew

Bible, for example, there is an episode where some Jews were dying after being bitten by serpents, (Numbers 21:8); Moses was told by God to make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten by the snake, who looked at it, would be healed. In the New Testament, Jesus said, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him should have eternal life' (John 3:13). Most important of all, in the New Testament, is the belief that the death of the first human being, Adam, was caused by his failure to obey God; eternal life was the gift that Jesus obtained for the whole of humanity by his obedience, even to the extent of dying. As St Paul wrote: 'As in Adam all sinned so in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Corinthians 15: 22).

As Christianity keeps the Jewish text and incorporates almost all of the Tenach in its Bible, but ensures through the New Testament, that it is refocused on Jesus, the Guru Granth Sahib includes the bani of some non-Sikh bhagats, the most eminent being the Sufi Sheikh Farid, Kabir the weaver, who objected to being given any religious label, Namdev, a calico printer, and Ravidas, the outcaste, chamar, or cobbler. Unlike, the Christian inclusion of the Torah, in every case the Sikh Gurus exercised a degree of editorial discretion before including this material. Some bhagats, for example, wrote devotional poetry to Krishna and Radha, such as the *Ramacaritamānas* of Tulsidas. These were not included. It would be interesting to examine the complete bani of such sants as Kabir and Ravidas and try to discern why certain compositions were excluded from the Guru Granth Sahib. It might help us to understand even more fully the theology of the Gurus.

As for who began the reinterpretation of the Hebrew Bible one is inclined to believe that it was Jesus himself when one reads such a verse as:

'He, (that is Jesus), said to his disciples, "This is what I meant by saying, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Torah, and the prophets and the psalms was bound to be fulfilled". Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures'. (Luke 24: 44).

Scholars debate who was the Guru responsible for the inclusion of the bhagat bani in the Sikh scriptures. My own inclination is to attribute the decision to Guru Nanak, following Sahib Singh. Certainly he knew the writings of Sheikh Farid (Cole & Sambhi 1995 p.47/8) and the Mohan Pothia are evidence for them being compiled before the time of Guru Arjan.

### **Sacred languages**

Sanskrit, and to a degree Hebrew became sacred languages. Not so Arabic, the day to day language of Muhammad and the umma. When the revelation he had been given was gathered together in the Holy Qur'an, it was carried throughout the Muslim world and became a strong influence in the development of near and middle eastern languages as far as the borders of the ancient Persian empire. In Africa it has dominated tribes and countries north of the Sahara, despite the presence of European imperial rule.

Latin almost became the Christian sacred language. In the fourth century CE Christianity was accepted as a legal religion, though not yet the state religion. Greek, in the west, was ousted by Latin and this came to be the language of the Church in this part of Europe. There is evidence of some congregations having to have the Bible, still in Greek, having to be translated to a Latin speaking community. Eventually, various inadequate Latin translations were replaced by the Vulgate of Jerome, (about 405 CE), the edition that, by the seventh century proved most acceptable and popular. However, Latin gave way to regional languages, such as Italian, French, and English, and Latin was left as the ecclesiastical vehicle. Eventually a situation obtained in which only clerics and a few educated laymen could follow acts of worship. The scriptures, originally written in the language of the people became as it were the exclusive property of the priests. Various groups of Christians, and individuals, began to criticize the religious authorities; Wycliffe, an Englishman, began a translation of the Bible into his mother tongue, and in Bohemia John Huss was influenced by his ideas but paid for questioning the status quo by being burnt to death. In 1536 another Englishman, William Tyndale was strangled before being burnt, mainly for translating the Bible

into English, and in 1521 Martin Luther translated the Bible into German. German, English, and Welsh, are at least three languages that have benefited from their translations of the Bible. William Carey, in India, and many missionaries in Africa, were the first to produce copies of the scripture in regional languages.

### **The content of sacred books**

This was not necessary when the American Ludhiana Mission began its work in Punjab in 1834. Although Guru Nanak used the oral word to spread his message, wisely recognising that poetry and song are more easily memorised than written prose, nevertheless, before he relinquished the gaddi to Guru Angad, his compositions existed in written form and the embryonic Adi Granth was already in use. Sikhs were on the way to becoming a People of the Book, just like Jews, Christians and Muslims.

We have not yet considered the content of scripture. It is here that there is probably most difference. The Samhita contains sublime philosophical passages and verses in praise of the gods. We read, for example of Aditi, the Mother, of Agni, god of fire, Aryaman, god of the ancestors, Dyaus, god of the sky, the Maruts, or storm deities, and Yama, god of death. Mitra and Varuna are guardians of *rta*, the cosmic order. Whatever stories Hindus may tell about gods who play tricks upon one another and human kind, the Vedas describe a universe of order, not chaos. Varuna punishes the evil doer but forgives the penitent and protects those who worship him aright. One hymn, number 85 in the fifth mandala reads:

What sin we have ever committed against an intimate, O Varuna, against a friend or companion at any time, a brother, a neighbour, or a stranger, free us from it O Varuna.

If, like gamblers at play, we have cheated, whether in truth or without knowing, free us from our guilt, O God. So may we be dear to you, O Varuna.

No wonder Radhakrishnan, the great twentieth century philosopher and late President of India, often preferred to talk about the sanatana dharma, the Eternal Law, rather than Hinduism, a sometimes geographically confined religion. (I was once asked where

I learned about Hinduism. When I replied that I knew British Hindus, I was told this could not be. Hindus could not cross the *kale pani*, the ocean, without suffering pollution that would render them unable to keep and fulfill their dharma).

Perhaps it is worth pointing out, here, that the Rig Veda is monotheistic or monistic. I was visiting a mandir in Leeds one evening when a young woman asked how many gods Hindus believed in. The President of the Community replied, 'One', to which the girl responded by gesturing towards pictures of Jesus, Guru Nanak, Gandhi, Valmiki, Ravidas, Rama and his brother, and Sita, and many others, and to idols of Ganesha, Hanuman, Kali, and other deities. The President asked; 'How many human being do you think there are in the world?' the young lady said; 'Many billions'. The Hindu said; 'Yes, and in each one of them there is God, so, there is one God and billions at the same time'. The Rig Veda states: 'To that which is One, sages give many a title; they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan,' (RV 1,164,46). The Yajur Veda affirms: 'For an awakened soul Indra, Varuna, Agni, Yama, Aditya, Chandra, - all these represent only one spiritual power and spiritual entity' (32, 1).

The shrti texts, including the Upanishads, of course, are profoundly philosophical and provide the basis for the six orthodox schools, the Astika Mata. Their purpose, unlike much western philosophy, is to enable the attainment of *moksha*, spiritual liberation. The Smrti texts tend to present God as more accessible, the source of liberating grace. Though the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Bhagavad Gita are immensely popular many educated Hindus would regard them as potent mythology rather than historical accounts.

Some historical aspects of the Vedic period can be discovered from a study of the Samhitas but for significant historical content it is necessary to turn to the Jewish scriptures and the Qur'an. Of course, the Torah, the main historical section of the Hebrew Bible, is also included in the Christian Bible, but it is the Psalms and the books of the Prophets to which Christians usually turn. In these they find material for use in worship and spiritual and moral guidance.

Much of the material found in the Torah is also present in the Qur'an and Muslims would state, as an article of faith, that the Biblical

episodes are found most accurately in the Qur'an. It was revealed to Adam, Abraham, and Moses, but for one reason or another, it became distorted. The Torah and Bible contain only a corrupted or incomplete version of the truth which is accurately and purely contained in the Qur'an.

It is then, the Abrahamic or semitic scriptures that one must turn to for historical and biographical content. From these texts we can learn much about Abraham and Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. In fact, almost all that historians know of Jewish history before 70 CE, or the life of Jesus and the beginnings of Christianity, or the life of Muhammad and the first years of the umma come from the sacred texts of the three religions.

This is not true of the Guru Granth Sahib. Western students, especially those from the Abrahamic tradition may be surprised, but the focus of Sikhism is the scripture, not the human: Gurus, however important they are and however revered. Those wishing to read accounts of the lives of the Gurus must turn to such literature as the *janam sakhis* and *sau sakhis*. The Sat Guru is Parmeshar, God, the Vahiguru, not the men through whom the message of spiritual liberation was preached. True, they were sent as God's emissaries to the *kalyug* but as Guru Nanak said, he had no words of his own to speak. Until he was inspired to utter the *shabad* he remained silent. (AG 722). That revelation invariably took the form of poetry. There is, of course, one immensely important biographical passage in the Guru Granth Sahib. It is to be found on page 150. It is the verse in which he describes his calling.

'I was once a worthless minstrel then the Divine Being gave me employment. I received the primal injunction: 'Sing divine glory night and day!' The Sovereign called the minstrel to the True Mansion: I was given the robe of honouring and exalting: I tasted the true ambrosial Name. Those who through the Guru feast on the Divine food win eternal joy and peace. Your minstrel spreads your glory by singing your word. Nanak says, by exalting the Truth we attain the Absolute One'.

## Scriptures and Worship

It is in worship that scriptures probably play a most important role. This is certainly true of the Guru Granth Sahib. It is surely not too much to say that congregational worship depends upon it. A gurdwara is a place where the scripture is installed. It may be a room in a domestic dwelling or the lavish and ornate Harmandir Sahib. The location scarcely matters. It is the Guru Granth Sahib that makes a gurdwara, not the building that makes the Guru Granth Sahib! In the early days of the Sikh Diaspora in Britain Sikhs met in small private houses, the simple homes that were all they could afford. On Sunday, the only day when they were free from serving their employers, they would crowd into the largest room, heads covered and shoes removed, and sit cross legged in the presence of a copy of the sacred volume. They might have a *chaur* and a *chanani*, just the bare essentials. Back to basics, they remembered what mattered. Of course as the *sangat* grew more affluent, this simplicity was replaced by something more elaborate but one hopes and believes that the pioneer Sikhs never forgot their priorities. Sikh worship takes place in the presence of the gurbani, it consists of singing or reading the gurbani, and in sermons that are proclamations of the gurbani. No religion of which I have some knowledge is more focused on its scripture. The emphasis can be just as great in the home. When, in 1973, I first visited Amritsar, my host was the late Professor Parkash Singh and his wife. One day he told me that he was going into the city to buy a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib and when I came back from my sight seeing he would have installed it in its special room in his new house. Previously there was nowhere suitable place to accord it due respect. That evening I sat in front of it while he read from it. I still remember the occasion and his obvious pleasure and deep piety. Later, I heard a lady singing sweetly in the garden. It was his wife, and the words were the supplicatory prayer, Sodar Rahiras. The focus of Sikh personal devotion is the gurbani. In theory, at least, Sikh women may act as *granthis*, as *panj piare*, and perform any function; none is reserved only for men. Tradition and residual attitudes to gender, however, are sometimes inhibiting. Indian and other societies have been male dominated for thousands of years, unSikh concepts of ritual purity

and pollution, as well as caste still persist within the Panth, so there are gurdwaras where women are denied the equality that the Gurus preached and practised.

Of course, scripture is important in the worship of other religions. The main wall of a synagogue faces Jerusalem. In that wall is set a cupboard which contains handwritten scrolls of the Torah. These will be taken out and processed around the synagogue during services. Every Sabbath set portions are read and on the festival day of Simhat Torah the annual round is completed and the new one, beginning with the opening verses of the Book of Genesis, starts. The festival means, rejoicing in the Torah. The major festivals are biblical, especially the weekly one, Shabbat. On that day many devout Jewish men will give most of their time to studying the Torah. Recent developments in Judaism have given women more place in worship than they traditionally enjoyed. Women will now study the Torah and may become ministers and rabbis in some of its branches. In others tradition and concepts of ritual impurity associated with menstruation are still to be found.

The tradition of the separation of men and women in worship is very strongly observed in Islam but at home families will pray together and girls and women can be encouraged to read and learn the Qur'an though in some communities reliance may still be on the hafiz who may well have learned the scripture by listening to some other man reciting it from memory. In Britain, however, one may often come across quranic classes attended by boys and girls. It would seem that Muslim women have to struggle against tradition, not theology.

The Qur'an is quoted or held in the mind during prayers, especially on Fridays when the *khutba* or sermon is often based on it. Formal prayers are brief, private devotion, is important and frequently involved reading the Qur'an meditatively. During Ramadan, the month of fasting, especially, men spend long periods in the mosque reading the Qur'an. Lailat-al-Qadr, the Night of Power, when the Archangel Gabriel began the revelation of the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad, falls on the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month. There is a verse of scripture that says:

'If my servants ask about me, I am near, and I answer the call of the caller who calls upon me'. (Sura 2:183).

In Islam, as in all the religions, God is not far away from the believer, he is nearer to us than our jugular vein! (Sura 50:16)

At this time, in particular, men and women will be conscious of these verses.

Christianity nowadays almost always gives the Bible a prominent place in worship. In medieval Europe the Bible had often become neglected in services, being replaced by Mass Books, or Missals, that included some Bible passages. An important Protestant emphasis was upon the Bible so that it was translated into a country's mother tongue to enable anyone to read it. The lay out of a church often conveys the place that the Bible holds in the worship of a denomination, as does the central, focal position of the Guru Granth Sahib among Sikhs. In many Protestant churches it is also central, placed on a cushion on a shelf, in the pulpit. (My father was a Congregational minister. In one church an attendant carried the Bible up the pulpit steps and placed it on its cushion, and then my father followed to begin the service. Everyone stood. I thought it was out of respect for him! It wasn't until many years later when I saw everyone stand as the Guru Granth Sahib was installed that I realized that it was the Bible, not my father, who was the object of respect). In Roman Catholic and Anglican churches the Bible is placed on a reading desk to the right of the chancel. The focus is the altar. The service of Holy Communion or the Mass is the most important observance, hence the altar's central position. This may not be true of The Religious Society of Friends, also known as Quakers, who stress personal and corporate experience above scripture. In ministry men and women may quote the Bible or refer to it but it may not be physically present. In their meetings they sit in a circle or rectangle facing one another as they believe that God is within everyone.

By way of contrast one may go into a mandir and not find the Vedas or any scripture present. But though there may be no physical form the priest conducting the service will be using essential elements of the scriptures, reciting them as he conducts the ceremony. Some years ago a Hindu philanthropist gave a copy of the Vedas to those British mandirs existing at that time. As far as I can ascertain, they were kept respectfully but not read.

### **The treatment of scriptures**

I have mentioned the respect given to the Bible in some churches. Reverence is also demonstrated by the way it may be bound in vellum or ornately printed. In medieval times manuscripts of the Bible were frequently decorated. Examples are the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells.

Muslims and Sikhs in particular are often astonished at the way in which Christians treat Bibles. They may underline passages, leave them lying on the floor, and, when they are worn out, throw them away. Once a Muslim school boy saw a teacher put a pile of Bibles on the floor, and turned in horror to his Muslim teacher, a friend of mine. This kind man tried to be helpful to Christianity. He said, 'Ah, those were only translations of the Bible, they are not in the original language, so I don't suppose it mattered to him!' Sadly, he was wrong. There is a long Christian tradition of arguing that what matters is the content, not the physical book, so the way it is treated is unimportant. Should a Bible be damaged and rendered unusable a Christian might burn it, bin it, even bury it, or just put it in the back of a cupboard.

How different is the case with Islam. A Muslim boy was asked to talk about Islam in the school assembly. Just before it was time to begin he disappeared. His non-Muslim teacher thought that he was nervous and ran away from school. No, he was in the wash room. He explained that as he was going to handle the Qur'an his hands must be clean. After the assembly he wrapped the Qur'an back in a cloth and asked the headteacher to place it on a high shelf where she would not turn her back on it. At the end of the school day he collected his Qur'an and took it home. The teacher had learned more about the attitude of Muslims towards their holy book that a whole series of lectures could have taught her.

The Qur'an is the recited Word of God. When a copy of the book containing these words has to be discarded it may be burned and the buried, or simply buried, perhaps in the grave of someone whose funeral is taking place.

The Torah and other books containing the Divine Name, and other artifacts, such as mezuzahs, are buried, often with a member of the community who is being interred.

Sikhs also treat a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib with respect, cremating it and placing the ashes in a river, perhaps at Kiratpur. Hindus would also ask that a copy of a scripture should be disposed of respectfully.

### **The authority of scripture**

The critical issue with regard to all scriptures is that of authority which leads to a consideration of how a sacred book should be interpreted. Many years ago now someone made a compilation known as *The Bible to be Read as Literature*. Portions were selected and translated into elegant early Twentieth Century English. But the emphasis was not upon the message but the quality of the prose or poetry. There are still many English speaking Christians who treasure the language of the King James Bible, (also erroneously known as the Authorised Version, of 1611). For many young people or the public at large, it is incomprehensible. For almost everyone it is no longer challenging. In the nineteen fifties I read a translation called, *Letters to the Young Churches*, by JB Phillips; it came at me like a well directed bouncer smacking me between the eyes! I realised what mixed feelings Christians in Corinth, for example, must have had when they were told that another letter had arrived from Paul.

The authority of a scripture lies in the belief that it is divinely inspired. (Here I leave Buddhism on one side, with no intention to slight it, but pleading ignorance on my part and lack of time). If, as I can, I say that the Guru Granth Sahib is inspired scripture, just as the Bible, the Torah, and the Qur'an, and Hindu texts are, I am expressing my belief not stating a fact that is open to verification. Or I can be asserting that, as a specialist in the study of religions, I find them important documents that I must understand if I am to be as conversant as possible with the religions they represent. If that is the approach my faith need not come into it, but of course, the attitude of the believer towards his/her scripture, must.

### **Interpreting scripture**

Here we come to something that can affect believer and atheist alike, the question of interpretation. In apartheid South Africa I might not

be interested in its theological basis but if I were a black or a white liberal I would be oppressed by it. Religion impacts upon people of faith and disbelievers. The Constitution of the Republic of India rejects caste discrimination and opens places of worship to anyone, but restrictions still exist and have affected me in that I have been denied access to some mandirs because, being white, I am thought to be a meat eating *mleccha*.

In religious circles there is conflict between those who regard scripture as an ethical text book and those who say that it must be interpreted as a whole. The Bible, for example, condemns homosexuality in many places but its clear principle is that one must, not should, but must, love one's neighbour. In this context how are we to relate to gay men and *lesbian* women. The Bible nowhere condemns slavery but eventually Christians came to accept the principle that God's love means that no human being should be treated as a chattel to be bought and owned and sold at will. Muslims and those of us who live in the United Kingdom are faced with the issue of suicide bombers. Is their behaviour Islamic or not? Muslim scholars denounce their conduct but it will not cease until Muslims read the Qur'an as a whole and not as a collection of proof texts. Examples are many, especially where the texts of the Abrahamic faiths hold sway, but Sikhs should not display a sense of superiority! One occasionally comes across articles using the Guru Granth Sahib to argue the case for uncut *keshas* or for wearing the turban. These are of a similar nature to the examples I have given from other traditions. With respect I suggest that they are equally guilty of using the Guru Granth Sahib as a book of proof texts instead of a revelation of the Divine and an offer of gracious, unconditional love. For religious believers the great scriptures describe, as far as they can, the wonderful ineffable nature of God. The Sikh scripture seems to contain very little that comes between the disciple, of whatever religion, and the Guru of Gurus.

### **Attitudes to other religions**

The fascinating topic of the Guru Granth Sahib and other religions is someone else's subject and I must avoid trespassing upon that territory, but I cannot help addressing it briefly as my subject

necessarily includes them.

It was of concern to Jews especially when they were made captive by the surrounding empires which appeared so great and implied that their religion was unsophisticated and despicable. They were not challenged by monotheistic faiths but by the worshippers of man made images and cults whose temples housed many deities, male, female and animal. These were in no way comparable to the idols of Hinduism. They rejected such images scornfully while finding a place in their own religion for people who were attracted by their ethical monotheism. Yet they never encouraged converts and do not now. Some people do become Jews but they may be told that it is sufficient to gain eternal life for them to follow the great commandments of loving God and one's neighbour (Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18).

The first Christians were Jews. They tended to hold two beliefs about their parental faith. One was that Jesus had come to fulfill the Torah, to establish a new covenant with God. The second was the view that the old order was replaced by the new age introduced by Jesus, as the new wine replaced the old and new garments those that were worn out. This is very much a theme in John's gospel where Jews are often portrayed as alien and hostile to Jesus. But in his letter to Christians in Rome Paul envisaged a time 'when all the house of Israel would be saved' (Romans 11:26) and within a generation or so of Jesus' ministry non-Jews were admitted into Christianity.

Faced with strong Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian communities, Islam responded by regarding them as people of the Book but asserting that the Book was the Qur'an, the eternal Word of God, the kalamu'llah. This was revealed to Abraham, the first monotheist, and other prophets but both the Torah and the Christian scriptures were recorded imperfectly so it was necessary for Allah to reveal his message again, this time to Muhammad who preserved it faithfully. Consequently, though Muslims respect the other writings and Jesus and the prophets they cannot accept their scriptures as the final Word. Islam, like Christianity, is a missionary religion.

Guru Nanak is regarded as God's messenger to the Kal Yug, the fourth kalpak in which dharma is least observed and spiritual darkness

dominates. His mission was not to create yet another religion but to witness to the truth that could exist in other forms of faith but might be obscured by their formalism or emphasis on ritual. As a Guru he was called to be the one through whom the *Gurshabad*, the eternal Word was revealed again to an age that had forgotten it. The Guru is remarkable for his validation of other forms of religion. It may be difficult to be a Muslim (AG: 53: 141) or a Hindu (AG:731, 832, 1353), he may be critical of Jain practices and their atheism, but he can also be respectful (AG: 356). His attitude is one of critical universalism to a degree not found in other scriptures. Sikhs have no need to convert people of other faiths to Sikhi, but they have a responsibility to witness to the light that they have received through the message of the Guru Granth Sahib, and to practice the life style exemplified by the Panth at Kartarpur.

## Conclusion

This paper should not be regarded as a eulogy. There is no place for such an approach in a serious academic seminar. What is true of all the scriptures that I have mentioned and of all others of which I am aware is their authority for those who believe in them. For all theists their particular scripture is for them, in some respect, the Word of God. Some adherents will take it literally, others may emphasise the importance of metaphor. Only when they lose their faith will it become a work of purely literary worth or even a dead letter belonging to a bygone age but having no relevance to the present or future.

If the scripture is the eternal Word of God, the Shabad Guru as Sikhs express it, then people of faith to discover how to live up to it as those did to whom it was originally revealed. This is much easier for some religions than others. Here, the Guru Granth Sahib provides a good example because, as already stated, there are few historical references to attach it to a particular age or culture. Somehow the Gurus were liberated from pronouncements upon such specific matters as the treatment of slaves, polygamy, or vegetarianism. Why was this? I suggest that it was essentially because their message was one of spiritual liberation. When they had to pronounce upon community issues they successfully distinguished them from matters of *zat* and

got, for example. They were not unique in this respect. Jesus was constantly harassed by men who asked him about religious observer, keeping special days such as the Sabbath, and ritual cleanliness, and he tried to argue that these were of no concern. By and large his followers adhered to his views, as have many Muslims and Jews, as Sikhs have kept to those of the Gurus.

I will end with a story about Guru Nanak and, fittingly, I hope, a verse by Guru Arjan. When the first Sikh Guru went to Multan he was met at the town gate by a group of citizens carrying a bowl of milk. This was to symbolize their view that Multan was overflowing with holy men. The Guru took a jasmine flower and floated it on the top of the milk to show that his presence would only add flavour and sweetness to what Multan already possessed. That is what I believe Sikhs have brought to the lands of the Diaspora.

Writing of the Adi Granth, as it then was, Guru Arjan said:

In the platter are placed three things, truth, contentment, and meditation. The nectar-name of God, the support of all, has also been put therein. If someone eats this food, if someone relishes it, they are emancipated. This cannot be forsaken so keep it enshrined in your mind always. Falling down at God's feet the dark world ocean is crossed. O Nanak, everything is an extension of the One.  
-S.G.G.S., p. 429

For believers Mundavani speaks of a bounty extended by God to all humanity, to be enjoyed by everyone.

## Meeting of Minds as envisioned in the Sikh Faith

J. S. Neki

Mind is the subtlest thing – so subtle that nobody has ever seen it. Yet, we act the way it wills, and observe only to what it points its finger. Ordinarily, no two minds are identical. They are more different than even two faces. You and I may be standing next to each other but your eyes do not see what I behold; nor does your heart stir with the emotions which touch my soul. Yet, it is our mind that, for us, creates the world around us. We have no means of knowing what the world is actually like. We only know it as presented to us by our senses, and perceived by our mind. And that is replete with diversity.

Diversity has its own attraction. So long as our minds revel in this diversity, they stand apart from one another. They find it difficult to meet. Behind this bewildering diversity stands the process of individuation that creates our ego. The sense of separation springs from our ego. Yet, it is also our mind that makes men out of Homo sapiens. Order and reason, beauty and love, compassion and benevolence are among the conceptions that are solely associated with the human mind. It is only when the mind transcends individuation and turns inwards towards the One Reality that abides inside every one that it can meet another mind blessed likewise.

Meeting of minds is one of the spiritually most rewarding experiences. But authentic meeting takes place between minds that are open. When men and women with closed minds happen to get together, they remain bigotedly bound to their beliefs and impervious to all influences that they reckon as alien. Their minds remain shut

within their rigid cocoons and resist any penetration from without. In such a case, minds can hardly be thought to have met. They can meet only if they can break open their cocoons and harmonise with that which throbs in every soul. Guru Angad Dev affirms:

Meeting is not just getting together.

Authentic meeting is being welded together.

He alone unites who harmonizes in spirit with the one he meets<sup>1</sup>

When minds really meet, separate identities dissolve and spiritual identification sprouts.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith travelled for decades to have meeting of minds with men who could transcend their exclusive denominational faiths. In his eyes, it is genuine quest that is really meaningful. The least important for him was debating. 'It is quest,' he said, 'that is productive; debating is merely destructive'.<sup>2</sup>

'Mind is of the nature of light'<sup>3</sup>, said Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru, and counseled all to explore its spiritual origin. However, this is hardly possible without experience and meditation. Experience fertilizes mind, and meditation enriches its acquisition and enhances its range. The greater the intensity of our search into the mind, the greater becomes our recognition of the Great Wisdom that designed and shaped it. It simply leads us into the realms of wonderment and awe.

Three categories of minds

In the field of spirituality, minds can be classified into three categories:

Primally receptive,

Secondarily receptive, and

Potentially receptive.

The Primally receptive minds are those unto whom 'Prima! Truth is revealed first hand. They live in tune with the Infinite. With every breath, they practise the presence of God. With every morsel of food they feel filled with gratitude to His Grace. They brim with the praises of the Lord. Of these spiritually endowed individuals, some are commissioned to inspire others and are equipped with the ability to lead them on the spiritual path. These are recognised as the Guru-minds.

The Secondly receptive minds are those who listen to the Guru-minds, pay heed to their counsel and precept, and obediently carry out the instructions given them. These are the Disciple-minds, the Sikh-minds. Guru Nanak affirms that

Discipleship lies in heeding the Guru's teachings<sup>4</sup>

Disciples are individuals with genuine spiritual quest and desire ardently to be guided forth on the path of righteousness.

All the rest are only potentially responsive minds. These initially are minds of ego-oriented individuals, carrying out only monotonous mundane routines. About such a person, the Guru says:

He runs about, variously chasing the fleeting objects of the world  
Like an ox around the oil-press

They have little interest in spiritual pursuits and are content in following the direction of their worldly desires. Yet, even they have the potential to become spiritually receptive.

### Primal reception of Divine Revelation

The primally receptive minds not only imbibe Divine Truth first hand, they also influence other minds, hearts and souls and try to put them in contact with the revealed Truth. They have tremendous impact in the present and are able to influence the future as well. It is such specially blessed minds that generate the core spiritual dicta for humankind. Such minds tend to appear over and over again. Guru Nanak confirms this when he says:

Just as there is but one sun, but causes many seasons,  
So too, there is one Creator who casts many revelations<sup>6</sup>

One of the ways the Creator reveals Himself is through His Creation. When Guru Nanak saw Him reveal Himself in Nature, he exclaimed:

Sacrifice I am unto You, Lord, whom I find revealed in Nature.  
Your limit can never be known<sup>7</sup>.

He travelled over 48,000 miles, mostly on foot, spending nearly thirty years of his life looking for such individuals whose mind and soul had received Divine Revelation first hand. During his odyssey to the North, he is known to have met *Siddha*<sup>8</sup> Yogis atop Mount Meru. They asked him as to what had propelled him to undertake such a

long arduous journey. He replied

I have undertaken to be a wayfarer in search of God-inspired men<sup>9</sup>.

During his journeys he delivered no lectures or discourses. On most occasions, he simply sang. He was an exquisite singer, and his life long companion, Mardana, was a remarkable rebec player. Together the twain sang the praises of God. His songs attracted people to throng to him and gave him a chance for identifying any God-oriented men from among them.

### The genre of dialogue

Whenever he came across a God-oriented soul, he held a dialogue with him. Such dialogues mark a pattern of his encounters. As an example, one day, he came to know that the *Siddhas* were going to celebrate the festival of *Shivaratri* in the town of Achal Batala, a short distance from Kartarpur where he had finally settled down after his travels. There, at a little distance from the *Siddha's* pavilion, he made himself comfortable under a tree, and began to sing the praises of God. People flocked to hear him, even vacating the pavilion of the *Siddhas*.

That infuriated the *Siddhas* who came out to discourse with him. Guru Nanak, later, preserved the essence of his conversation with them in the genre of dialogue. The politeness with which that dialogue took place in spite of the resentment of the *Siddhas* is evident from what one of the *Siddhas* said during the dialogue:

Please don't be annoyed (with our questions),  
Pray, be kind to furnish us with your considered answers.<sup>10</sup>

—S.G.G.S. p. 930

### Preserving the revealed Word

The Guru transcribed into language the Divine intimation (*Logos*) that welled up in his consciousness as a non-verbal mystical experience. He himself preserved his poetic outpourings in a book that he used to carry on his person. An indication that such a book was always with him is found in the Odes (*Vars*) of Bhai Gurdas who avers that when the Guru was in Mecca, some elite Mohammedans asked him:

Pray, open your book and tell us, who are better, the Hindus or the Muslims?

And the Guru replied:

Bereft of noble actions, both shall grieve<sup>11</sup>.

The book referred to here was in all likelihood the book of his personal compositions. In it, the Guru, possibly, also recorded works of some other like-minded God-oriented men he met or whose successors he met.

This book, the Guru passed on to his disciple Lehna when the Guru installed him as his successor. The latter is believed to have transmitted it on to his successor, Guru Amar Das, along with his own *shlokas*. Guru Amar Das preserved the compositions of his two predecessors along with his own in the form of two *pothis* scribed by his grandson Sahansar Ram. In his *pothis*, he also preserved the works of some more like-minded holy men. These *pothis* are known to have remained in the possession of Baba Mohan, the elder son of Guru Amar Das.

By the time of Guru Amar Das, apocrypha of *Gurbani* (the Gurus' compositions) had begun to appear. This happened because *Gurbani* was becoming popular with the masses. Guru Amar Das designated the apocrypha as *kachchi bani* (immature imitations of the *bani*) and cautioned the Sikhs against reciting or hearing the same<sup>12</sup>.

Preparation of authentic collection of *bani*

By the time of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, *kachchi bani* seemed to have multiplied much more abundantly. So, the Guru decided to bring into one authentic volume all the Gurus' authentic compositions. He acquired the aforementioned two *pothis* from Baba Mohan as the first step and called upon the Sikhs to bring to him any breviaries or manuscripts of *Gurbani* that they might have with them. He would examine their authenticity and include in the proposed volume whatever composition he found to be genuine. In that volume, he proposed also to include the works of his father, Guru Ram Das, as well as his own. As mentioned already, the *pothis* that came to him from Baba Mohan, included apart from the compositions of the Gurus, those of a number of other holy men – Hindu as well as Muslim. Guru Arjan Dev included them all in his book and also

added selections from a few more bhaktas and bards. Thus it was not to become an exclusive scripture of the Gurus' works, but an inclusive work of many God-inspired minds representing the devotiona<sup>l</sup> lection of the Aryan as well as the Semitic spiritua<sup>l</sup> traditions.

This volume, thus, presented a *virtual* meeting of minds some of whom would never have met in life but came together only in that holy book. The book thus signified meeting of God-oriented minds of full five centuries – from the birth of Jaidev and Farid (1172/1173) to the demise of Guru Tegh Bahadur (1675).

### Inclusion criteria

Guru Arjan Dev must obviously have had some criteria for the material that was to be accepted for inclusion in the proposed collection. We do not know for sure what those inclusion criteria actually were. One of them obviously must have been the Guru's personal acquaintance with the authentic works of the Gurus. However, if one carefully deciphers what kind of commonality prevails in the contents of the book, one can form at least some idea as to what could have been the inclusion criteria the Guru might have kept in his mind.

The core inclusion criterion must obviously have been conformity with the thought of Guru Nanak Dev. Of that, the foremost seems to have been uncompromised monotheism. The numeral '1' that marks the very beginning of Guru Granth Sahib clearly signifies this. It represented at once the *Brahman* of Vedanta, *Rama* and *Hari* of Bhaktas and *Allah* and *Khudai* of the Musiims<sup>13</sup>. Guru Arjan Dev says:

We are neither Hindus nor Muslims.

Our body and soul belong to *Allah-Ram*<sup>14</sup>. – S.G.G.S. p.1136  
And

Says Nanak, the Guru has removed my doubts:

(Now I know) *Allah* and *Parbrahm* are the same<sup>15</sup>.

– S.G.G.S. p. 897

Besides this unitary Supreme Being, the Gurus recognised no god or godlings. Kabir watched a sculptor chiselling the image of a god. He laughed and said:

The sculptor chisels the stone and carves it into an idol,  
Placing his feet on its chest.

Had this stone god been true, it would have devoured the sculptor  
(for that insult)<sup>6</sup> . -- S.G.G.S. p.479

The monotheism of the Gurus, however, is specially distinctive. First of all, the Supreme Being is *Nirankar* (Formless) hence is not an object of the senses. He is the Creator, and is immanent in the Creation *qua* spirit; yet, also transcends the creation – just as in a vessel immersed in the ocean, the ocean is immanent in it as well as transcends beyond it. This, to be precise, can be termed panentheistic monotheism. The Gurus have emphasized time and again that God is *Nirankar* (without form) as well as *Sakar* (with form); *Sargun* (with attributes) as well as *Nirgun* (without attributes).

It was believed that

The Lord especially hungers for the sentiments of love and devotion<sup>18</sup> .

As such, they accepted for inclusion into their collection only those works wherein such sentiments stood out prominently.

Another major criterion appears to have been that the author should have been a first hand recipient of Divine Revelation. How does one distinguish the pretender from the real in this context? One to whom God has revealed Himself is a 'nothing surrounded by God, indigent of God, capable of God, filled with God.'

Yet another criterion seems to have been that the author believed in equality of man. Those works in which invidious distinction on the basis of creed, caste, class, gender etc. had been made could not be accepted into the holy collection. The Gurus also made no such distinction among the saint-authors they selected for inclusion. These authors included Hindus as well as Muslims, princes as well as mendicants, and Brahmins as well as the so-called 'low-caste' bhaktas. In fact, the latter far outnumbered the high caste Brahmins. Respect for the egalitarian principle was thus a likely outstanding inclusion criterion.

The Gurus seemed to believe that while genuine religious experience would unite people, rituals were always divisive. Hence works to be accepted were bereft of ritualism as well as superstitions.

Finally, another important criterion was literary elegance. All the works that the Gurus chose to include in their collection consist of exquisite verses with high aesthetic quality, astounding lyricality and enormous prosodic multiformity. Almost all of these were set to *ragas* whose mood was concordant with that of the text of the verse. Simplicity of diction appears to be an additional outstanding characteristic of the works included. The language employed was *Sadhukri* the lingua franca of the medieval Bhakti Movement in North India.

### Exclusion criteria

While the book was being compiled, it became known all around in literary as well as mystical circles that it was going to include not just the compositions of the Sikh Gurus but also of a good number of like-minded Hindu bhaktas and Muslim fakirs. Many poets and saints became desirous that their works should find a place in that great book. Some of them actually came with their works with a request for their inclusion in the forthcoming collection. They were Kahna, Chhajoo, Shah Hussain, and Piloo. When they entered the Guru's Court, the *ragis* (Court Singers) were singing the following verse of *gurbani*:

O fascinating Lord, pray pay come to my home.  
I'll act in pride, and perk up is my utterance  
Though full of faults, replete with failures,  
I am yet hand-maiden Yours<sup>\*</sup>. (S.G.G.S. p. 1209)

Hearing that, all the four visitors looked at each other in disbelief, not having expected such a wonderful verse. Although they sensed that their work will not come up to that standard, they nonetheless felt like trying their luck. So, Guru Arjan Dev asked each one of them to recite to him a representative sample of his work.

Kahna was the first to come forward. He brought out one of his his compositions.

It started thus:

I am He, He I am —

Whom sing the Vedas and the Puranas,

But none can His extent scan<sup>19</sup>.

Since in the Gurus' house utter humility reigns, hence this blasphemous deification of himself by the poet could not be accepted.

Chhajoo (d.1639)<sup>20</sup> came after Kahna. Only a few of his shalokas have survived for us<sup>20</sup>. However, according to the Sikh Chronicle *Gur Bilas Patshahi* 6, the composition he presented was the following:

Do not look upon a woman, even the one cut out of paper.

Like a plundering band of Baloches, she will take you away and put you to death<sup>21</sup>

This too was rejected as being derogatory to women who were looked upon with great esteem in Sikh thought.

Shah Hussain (b.1539) came forward next. He was a well known Sufi poet of the Panjab who had defied the specific dictates of his sect, donned bright red apparel and lived a licentious life. He presented the following sample of his composition:

There is no necessity, O my friend, for speaking;

Within and without us is the one Lord,

To whom we must address ourselves?

The one Beloved pervades every heart;

There is nowhere a second.

The humble faqir Hussain says,

I am a sacrifice unto the true Guru<sup>22</sup>.

Guru ArjanDev, however, rejected his composition on the ground that it was the duty of holy men not to conceal the message of God but to proclaim that to one and all.

Piloo was the last to present his verse. It ran thus:

They who died right at their birth are far better than us;

They thrust not their feet into the mire and are not befouled on that count<sup>23</sup>.

In the Gurus' precept, however, they alone win honour, who struggle in the world and make their life profitable. One who quits right at the outset is of no use to anyone. Piloo's work, therefore was rejected also.

An important event in this context was the trial of Bhai Gurdas who was the scribe of the holy Granth Sahib and whose compositions the Guru had often applauded. The Guru invited him to bring some of his own compositions for insertion into the Granth. By then, Bhai

Gurdas must have become conversant with the Guru's inclusion and exclusion criteria. So, in all humility, he said that his work was not worthy of such honour – possibly because he knew that his work was mainly expository in nature while the Guru was collecting works of real original spiritual experience. The Guru complimented him on his modesty and said, "Your works shall be the expositional key to the holy Pothi Sahib".

It can thus be appreciated that the Guru applied his criteria rather discretely to ensure that his collection should reflect not only conformity of thought, but also be uniformity of elegance in style and diction.

### Annotations

The Guru employed yet another device to avoid any conceptual ambiguities in the holy book. Wherever the works that had been accepted provided even a modicum of conceptual doubt, the Gurus inserted an annotational verse on the relevant spot to dispel doubt. Such annotational insertions were initiated by the third Guru and carried forth by the fifth Guru. Here are a few examples of such annotations:

Sheikh Farid, in one of his shlokas said:

Says Farid, those who did not enjoy their spouse when their hair was black,

How shall they enjoy Him when the hair turns grey?

So, keep your love with your Lord alive

So that your colour remains ever new<sup>24</sup>.

To this the third Guru suffixed this annotational verse of his:

Whether one's hair is black or grey,

If one remembers the Lord, the Lord is always found to be present<sup>25</sup>. –S.G.G.S. p. 1378

In another place, Kabir says:

Says Kabir: whatever I wish for, happens not at all.

What can I accomplish, then, by merely wishing?

The Lord does whatever He wishes,

It is not upto me at all.<sup>26</sup>

To this shloka, the third Guru added the following annotation:

God Himself makes us feel anxious, and Himself relieves our anxiety.

Says Nanak: praise be to the One who takes good care of all<sup>27</sup> –  
S.G.G.S. p. 1376.

To it, the fifth Guru chose to add another annotation:

The mortal does not remember the Lord,

He wanders about engrossed in greed.

Committing sins, he dies and his life terminates instantly<sup>28</sup>.

At some places, instead of appending an annotation, the Guru modifies the original verse of a bhakta and creates a verse authored together with him. An example of this is found in the holy book like this:

Gauri Kabir ji ki, co-authored with the Fifth Guru<sup>29</sup>.

– S.G.G.S. p. 326.

Thus, by the various devices that we have enumerated, the Gurus forged for the seekers an authentic text signifying virtual meeting of great minds to whom the Divine had primally been revealed. To that volume the tenth Guru later added the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru and enthroned the thus finalised version of the holy book as the perennial Guru. The Adi Granth since then has become Guru Granth Sahib. Thus it became a distinctive scripture for the benefit of the entire mankind.

## Secondary receptivity

We have seen how the works of those, on whom Divine revelation had first hand descended, had been collected in the volume called Guru Granth Sahib. That pluralistic holy book became the manual of spiritual instruction for genuine seekers who thus became secondary recipients of Divine Revelation. Such secondary recipients constituted the *sat-sangat*, the holy congregation.

The holy congregation, in the Sikh faith, is considered the school of the soul where divine virtues are studied and imbibed:

The *sat-sangat* of the True Guru is the school of the soul

Where the Glorious virtues of the Lord are studied<sup>30</sup>.

Not just a school; the holy congregation is also believed to be the abode of the Lord Himself.

Joining the *sat-sangat*, I seek the path to God.  
In that congregation the Lord Himself resides <sup>31</sup>.

In such a congregation, the mind is polished and acquires angelic lustre. Ignorance vanishes and enlightenment dawns.

Joining the congregation of the saints, the mind is cleansed  
And one dwells on the *Nam* Divine.

Ignorance is dispelled and the lotus of one's heart blossoms forth <sup>32</sup>.

In the holy congregation,

Men of virtue meet their like

And profit in the glory of the Divine *Nam* <sup>33</sup>.

In such a congregation, wicked intention melts away and shabby thoughts disappear. No one appears alien, and everyone really seems a friend:

Ever since I adopted the *sadh-sangat*,

I've been rid of jealousy.

None is now my enemy, none appears a stranger;

I get along well with everyone <sup>34</sup>.

In the holy congregation the devotees sing together to get in tune with the infinite. The melodies as well as rhythms of music open the portal of their spirit and unity becomes easier to attain. Praying together and for each other, nay, even for one and all, cements the unity further.

Thus through the holy congregation, the seeker, step by step, makes moral as well as spiritual advancement. In the holy congregation, works of the accomplished souls are expounded, instructions of the Guru are followed, praises of the Lord are sung, and prayers offered to Him. Every seeker feels inspired to meditate on the Divine *Naam*. Thus, the holy congregation is the college for secondary reception of the Divine Revelation.

It is through the holy congregation, that a seeker might well eventually graduate to become a primary recipient of Divine Revelation. Guru Angad Dev, the second Guru, and Guru Amar Das, the third Guru are known to have graduated that very way.

Potential recipients

All others are potential recipients. Any individual at any time can feel attracted to the holy congregation and start visiting and

participating in it. Thus, there is hope for everyone -- even for the agnostic, the atheist and the infidel. When minds meet and cross fertilise, wonders may happen.

## Conclusion

becomes easier to ensure spiritual progress. Looking after a really sound mind is one that can embrace with equal ease great things as well as small. Then in human relations well, facilitates better relationship with the Divine. Above, we have looked at the Sikh concept of 'meeting of minds' that provides hope for everyone. Anyone who enrolls himself in the Guru's school can graduate right up to the summit. Getting together to achieve the 'Unity of Minds' requires soaring above the apparent differences, to be wafted into the higher realm of the unitary experience where words recede, and the silence before the words, between the words and within the words becomes infinitely more meaningful.

## Notes and References

1. ਮਿਲਿਐ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਨਾ ਮਿਲੈ ਮਿਲੇ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਜੋ ਹੋਇ। ਅੰਤਰ ਆਤਮੇ ਜੋ ਮਿਲੈ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਕਹੀਐ ਸੋਇ॥੩॥ (ਸ੍ਰ. ਗ੍ਰ. ਸਾ., ਪੰ. ੭੯੧)  
By meeting alone, one only meets but not united; he alone unites, who really gets united. If one unites deep within his soul, then is one said to have been united.3. S.G.G.S. p.791
2. ਖੋਜੀ ਉਪਜੈ ਬਾਦੀ ਬਿਨਸੈ...। - ਮਲਾਰ ਮ. ੧, ਪੰ. ੧੨੫੫  
The seeker prospers, dehater perishes -S.G.G.S. p.1255
3. ਮਨੁ ਤੂ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪ ਹੈ ਅਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥ - ਆਸਾ ਮ. 3, ਪੰ. 441  
O my mind you are the embodiment of the Divine Light-recognize your real source -S.G.G.S. p.441
4. ਸਿਖੀ ਸਿਖਿਆ ਗੁਰ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ। - ਵਾਰ ਆਸਾ ਮ. 1, ਪੰ. 465  
Contemplating the Guru, I have received this instruction. -S.G.G.S. p. 465
5. ਧਾਵਤ ਕਉ ਧਾਵਹਿ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਤੀ ਜਿਉ ਤੇਲੀ ਬਲਦੁ ਭਰਮਾਇਉ॥੨॥ - ਟੋਡੀ ਮ. ੫, ਪੰ. ੭੧੨  
He runs around in worldly chase, in many ways, like the ox around the oil press. 2 -S.G.G.S.p.712

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6. ਸੂਰਜੁ ਏਕੋ ਗੁਣਿ ਅਨੇਕ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਤੇ ਕੇ ਕੇਤੇ ਵੇਸ॥ - ਆਸਾ ਮ. ੧, ਪੰ. ੧੨  
Just as many seasons originate from the one sun; so the One Creator has many revelations. -S.G.G.S. p.12
7. ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵਸਿਆ॥ ਤੇਰਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਲਖਿਆ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥ ਆਸਾ ਮ. ੧, ਪੰ. ੪੬੯  
I am a sacrifice to You who pervade in Your Creation  
Your limits cannot be known.1.Pause -S.G.G.S.p.469
8. The Siddhas, a sect of Yogis, blended Yogic practices with the observances of Tantric Buddhism.
9. ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਖੋਜਤਿ ਭਏ ਉਦਾਸੀ॥ - ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ. ੧, ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ ਪੰ. ੯੩੯  
I became a wandering traveler in search of the God-men. -S.G.G.S.p.939
10. ਰੋਸੁ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ਉਤਰੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਕਿਉ ਪਾਈਐ ਗੁਰ ਦੁਆਰੇ॥ - ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ. ੧, ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ ਪੰ. ੯੩੦  
Don't be annoyed - please tell us: How can the Guru's Door be found?" - S.G.G.S.p.938
11. ਪੁਛਨਿ ਖੋਲ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੂੰ ਵਡਾ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੋਈ। ... ਬਾਬਾ ਆਖੇ ਹਾਜੀਅਂ ਸੁਭ ਅਮਲਾਂ ਬਾਝੇ ਦੇਵੇ ਰੋਈ। ਭਾ. ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਵਾਰ ੧-੧੩
12. ਬਾਣੀ ਤਾ ਕਚੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਹੋਰ ਕਚੀ ਬਾਣੀ! ਕਹਦੇ ਕਚੇ ਸੁਣਦੇ ਕਚੇ ਕਚੀ ਆਖਿ ਵਖਾਣੀ॥ - ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ. ੩ ਪੰ.੯੨੦  
False are the songs not from the True Guru; all alien songs are false.  
The speakers are false, the listeners are false; those who narrate and expound are false -S.G.G.S.p.920
13. Besides these, there are many other names of God in the content of Guru Granth Sahib that were prevalent among the many sects of the major religious systems.
14. ਨਾ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ॥ ਅਲਹ ਰਾਮ ਕੇ ਪਿੰਡ ਪਰਾਨ॥ -ਭੈਰਉ ਮ. ੫, ਪੰ. ੧੧੩੬  
I am neither a Hindu, nor a Muslim.  
My body and breath of life belong to Allah-Ram: (the God of both). -S.G.G.S.p.1136
15. ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰਿ ਖੇਏ ਭਰਮ॥ ਏਕੋ ਅਲਹੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ॥੫॥੩੪॥੪੫॥ - ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ. ੫, ਪੰ: ੮੯੭  
Says Nanak, the Guru has rid me of doubt.  
The (Muslim God) Allah and the (Hindu God) Paarbrahm are one and the same -S.G.G.S.p.897
16. ਪਾਖਾਨ ਗਢਿ ਕੈ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਕੀਨੀ ਦੇ ਕੈ ਛਾਤੀ ਪਾਉ॥ ਜੇ ਏਹ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਸਾਚੀ ਹੈ ਤਉ ਰੜ੍ਹਨਹਾਰੇ ਖਾਉ॥ -ਆਸਾ ਕਬੀਰ ਪੰ. ੪੭੯  
The sculptor carves the stone and fashions it into an idol, placing his feet upon its chest.  
If this stone god was true, it would devour the sculptor for this (insult)3. - S.G.G.S.p.479

17. ਜੇ ਮੁਖੁ ਜਲਉ ਜਿਤੁ ਕਹਹਿ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਜੇਨੀ॥੩॥ -ਭੈਰਉ ਮ. ਪ, ੧੧੩੬  
 Burnt be that mouth which says that God is subject to birth.3 -S.G.G.S.p.1136
18. ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਭਾਉ ਭਗਤਿ ਦਾ ਭੁਖਾ। - ਭਾ. ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਵਾਰ ੧੦-੭
19. ਓਹੀ ਰੇ ਮੈ ਓਹੀ ਰੇ ਮੈ ਓਹੀ ਰੇ ਮੈ ਓਹੀ। ਜਾ ਕਉ ਬੇਦ ਪੁਰਾਨਾ ਗਾਵੈ ਖੋਜਤ ਖੋਜ ਨ ਕੋਈ।
20. In shabd shaloka, a publication of Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, Patiala.
21. ਇਉ ਕਾਗਦ ਕੀ ਪੁਤਰੀ ਨਾਰੀ, ਜਿਉ ਕਰ ਮਾਲ ਬਲੋਚਾਂ ਧਾੜੀ।
22. ਸਜਨਾ ਬੋਲਣ ਦੀ ਜਾਇ ਨਾਹੀ। ਅੰਦਰ ਬਾਹਰ ਇਕਾ ਸਾਈ ਕਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਆਖ ਸੁਣਾਈ।  
 ਇਕੋ ਦਿਲਬਰ ਸਭ ਘਟਿ ਰਵਿਆ ਦੂਜਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਦਾਈ।  
 ਕਹੇ ਹੁਸੈਨ ਫਕੀਰ ਨਿਮਾਣਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਤੋਂ ਬਲਿ ਜਾਈ।
23. ਪੀਲੂ ਅਸਾਂ ਬੀ ਉਹ ਭਲੇ ਜੰਮਦਿਆਂ ਜੋ ਮੋਏ। ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਚਿਕਤ ਪਾਉਂ ਨ ਬੋਝਿਆ ਨਾ ਆਲ੍ਹਦ ਹੋਏ।
24. ਫਰੀਦਾ ਕਾਲੀ ਜਿਨੀ ਨ ਰਾਇਆ ਧਉਲੀ ਰਾਵੈ ਕੋਇ॥  
 ਕਰਿ ਸਾਂਈ ਸਿਉ ਪਿਰਹੜੀ ਰੰਗੁ ਨਵੇਲਾ ਹੋਇ॥੧੨॥ -ਸਲੋਕ ਸੇਖ ਫਰੀਦ ਪੰ. ੧੩੭੮  
 Says Farid, those who didn't enjoy their Spouse when the hair was black-hardly can they when it turns grey.  
 So be in love with the Lord, so that your color may ever remain new.12. - S.G.G.S.p.1378
25. ਫਰੀਦਾ ਕਾਲੀ ਧਉਲੀ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਸਦਾ ਹੈ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਚਿਤਿ ਕਰੇ॥  
 ਆਪਣਾ ਲਾਇਆ ਪਿਰਮੁ ਨ ਲਗਾਈ ਜੇ ਲੋਚੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਇ॥  
 ਏਹੁ ਪਿਰਮੁ ਪਿਆਲਾ ਖਸਮ ਕਾ ਜੈ ਭਾਵੈ ਤੈ ਦੇਇ॥੧੩॥ - ਮ.੩, ਸਲੋਕ ਸੇਖ ਫਰੀਦ ਪੰ. ੧੩੭੮  
 Saus Farid, whether one's hair is black or grey, our Lord is always here should one remember Him.  
 Love to the Lord does not come by one's personal effort, though all may long for it. This cup of love belongs to the Lord, He gives it to whomever He likes.13. -S.G.G.S.p.1378
26. ਕਬੀਰ ਜੋ ਮੈ ਚਿਤਵਉ ਨ ਕਰੈ ਕਿਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਚਿਤਵੇ ਹੋਇ॥  
 ਅਪਨਾ ਚਿਤਵਿਆ ਹਰਿ ਕਰੈ ਜੋ ਮੇਰੇ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ॥੨੧੯॥ -- ਸਲੋਕ ਭਗਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਪੰ. ੧੩੭੯  
 Says Kabir, whatever I desire does not happen.  
 What can I accomplish through my desire?  
 The Lord does whatever He wishes; it isn't up to me at all.219. -S.G.G.S.p.1376
27. ਚਿੰਤਾ ਭਿ ਆਪਿ ਕਰਾਇਸੀ ਅਚਿਤੁ ਭਿ ਆਪੇ ਦੇਇ॥  
 ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋ ਸਾਲਾਹੀਐ ਜਿ ਸਭਨਾ ਸਾਰ ਕਰੇਇ॥ -ਮ. ੩ ਸਲੋਕ ਭਗਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਪੰ. ੧੩੭੯  
 God Himself makes the mortals anxious,  
 and He Himself makes them anxiety-free.  
 Says Nanak, praise the One, who takes care of all.220. -S.G.G.S.p.1376
28. ਕਬੀਰ ਰਾਮੁ ਨ ਚੇਤਿਓ ਫਿਰਿਆ ਲਾਲਚ ਮਾਹਿ॥  
 ਪਾਪ ਕਰਤਾ ਮਰਿ ਗਇਆ ਅਉਧ ਪੁਨੀ ਖਿਨ ਮਾਹਿ॥ -- ਮ: ੫, ਸਲੋਕ ਭਗਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਪੰ. ੧੩੭੯

Says Kabir, the mortal does not remember the Lord, but wanders around in greed. Committing sins, he dies, and his life in an instant ends.221. - S.G.G.S.p.1376

29. ਗੁਰਿਜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਨਾਲਿ ਰਲਾਇ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਮਹਲਾ ੫॥ - ਪੰ. ੩੨੬

Gauri, Kabir Ji, With writings of the Fifth Mehal. -S.G.G.S.p.326

30. ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਚਟਸਾਲ ਹੈ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਸਿਖਾ॥ -- ਵਾਰ ਕਾਨੜਾ ਮ. ੪ ਪੰ. ੧੩੧੬

The True Congregation of the True Guru, is the spiritual school, where the Virtues of the Lord are studied. -S.G.G.S.p.1316

31. ਮਿਲਿ ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਖੋਜੁ ਦਸਾਈ ਵਿਚਿ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਵਸੈ ਜੀਉ॥੨॥ - ਮਾਝ ਮ. ੪ ਪੰ. ੯੪

Joining the True Congregation, I enquire about the Path to God.

In that Congregation, the Lord God abides Himself.2. -S.G.G.S.p.94

32. ਮਿਲਿ ਸੰਤ ਸਭਾ ਮਨੁ ਮੰਜੀਐ ਭਾਈ ਹਰਿ ਕੈ ਨਾਮਿ ਨਿਵਾਸ॥

ਮਿਟੈ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਅਗਿਆਨਤਾ ਭਾਈ ਕਮਲ ਹੋਵੈ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ॥ - ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮ. ੫, ਪੰ. ੬੩੯

Join the Society of the Saints to cleanse your mind, O Siblings, then dwell on the Name of the Lord.

The darkness of ignorance shall be dispelled, O Siblings, and the lotus of your heart shall blossom forth. -S.G.G.S.p.639

33. ਗੁਣੀ ਗੁਣੀ ਮਿਲਿ ਲਾਹਾ ਪ੍ਰਾਵਸਿ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਨਾਮਿ ਵਡਾਈ॥ - ਭੈਰਉ ਮ. ੧ ਪੰ. ੧੧੨੭

The virtuous meet with the virtuous, and earn the profit; as Gurmukh, receives the glory of Nam. -S.G.G.S.p.1127

34. ਬਿਸਰਿ ਗਈ ਸਭ ਤਾਤਿ ਪਰਾਈ॥ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮੋਟਿ ਪਾਈ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ॥ -ਕਾਨੜਾ ਮ. ੫ ਪੰ. ੧੨੬੯

I have totally forgotten my jealousy of others,

Since I found the Company of the Holy.1. Pause

No one is my enemy and no one a stranger. I get along well with everyone.1. - S.G.G.S.p.1299

# Guru Granth Sahib as Eternal Guru

Balwant Singh Dhillon

The internal as well as external evidence points to the fact that numinous experience of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, forms the very core and basis of Guru Granth Sahib. Whenever Guru Nanak felt inspired by God, he composed hymns into various *ragas* and metres. Bhai Gurdas, the St. Paul of Sikhism, informs that during his tour to West Asia, Guru Nanak possessed a *pothi* (*Varan Bhai Gurdas, var 1, pauri 32*) which was nothing else but a collection of his hymns including those of the medieval Sufis and the Bhakats that he had collected over the years. The Sikh sources confirm that during his spiritual ministry at Karatarpur Guru Nanak commissioned his successor Bhai Lehna to collect his hymns into a volume, which he bestowed, on him on his succession to guruship. The sacred writings of Guru Nanak provided a powerful stimulus to his successors to add new hymns to the received text and preserve its originality. Sources at our disposal indicate that in order to prevent the interpolation into the Sikh scriptural writings as well as to provide the Sikhs with their own Scripture, Guru Arjan took the gigantic task to compile and canonize into a volume which is popularly known as the Adi Granth. The final canonization, according to the Sikh tradition, occurred at Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo, District Bathinda in 1706, when Guru Gobind Singh put his seal of authenticity on the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur and incorporated them into the scripture. He also discarded once for all the extraneous writings that had crept into the various recensions in the post Adi Granth period. The tradition

holds that it was the Damdama version which was invested with guruship by Guru Gobind Singh before his death in 1708 at Nanded in Maharashtra.

Ever since its first canonization in 1604 and subsequent installation in Darbar Sahib Amritsar, the Sikh Scripture has been looked upon as the most authentic repository of the Holy Word. It includes the sacred hymns of Guru Nanak and his five successors along with the writings of the thirty other medieval Hindu Bhagats, Muslim Sufis and God-oriented persons who belonged to various castes, creeds and regions of India. Though a number of authors have contributed to the Sikh Scripture, yet the whole literature enshrined in it is essentially spiritual in nature. It is the part and parcel of the same socio-religious and meta-physical concerns that Guru Nanak had sought to impart. It enjoys an unparalleled reverence and significance in the Sikh way of life. The Sikh community time and again has turned to it to seek guidance whenever confronted by contentious secular and religious issues. Therefore the Granth is not merely a scripture but a perpetual Guru for the *Sikh Panth*.

The idea and institution of guruship has played a vital role in the development of Sikh community. Literally, the Guru means a teacher who dispels the darkness of ignorance and instructs one to the path of enlightenment. However in Sikhism the traditional Indian notion of guruship has found a new meaning and dimension. In Sikhism the status of Guru has strictly been assigned to (i) God, (ii) Guru Nanak and his nine successors and (iii) the *sabad* or *bani* as enshrined in the Sikh Scripture. Though a personal Guru was always at the head of Sikh community till the demise of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, yet the nature of guruship was essentially impersonal in character even then. An analysis of Guru Nanak's hymns reveals that neither he was a disciple of any Saint or *Bhagata*, nor any of the gods or goddess of the Indic tradition inspired him. Besides many other attributes, Guru Nanak addresses his one God as *Satiguru*, the True Guru. On being questioned by the Yogis once as to who his Guru was, Guru Nanak replied that the Transcendental Lord, the Supreme Essence is the Guru that he had met. It is a fact that Guru Nanak did not have any earthly guru to guide him on the path of Truth. His Guru was the Almighty

Lord from whom he had got the enlightenment. Guru Nanak unequivocally proclaims the infallible character of God while everyone in this world is subject to error. We can very safely vouchsafe that for Guru Nanak, God alone is the perfect Enlightener. Speaking in a similar vein, Guru Arjan adds another dimension to the Sikh idea of Guru and says, 'I salute the Lord who was Guru in the beginning and the Guru before ages began, Who appeared as Satguru and also appeared as Gurudev (Guru Nanak)' <sup>1</sup>. Therefore according to the Sikh Scripture besides the God, Guru Nanak holds the status of a Guru guide.

The legitimacy of Guru Nanak's mission rested on his claim that he had been commissioned by none else but by God himself. The earliest self understanding of the status of Guru Nanak and his faith (that has come to us in the form of *Janamsakhi* tradition) affirms that Guru Nanak was a Divinely appointed Preceptor. While describing Guru Nanak's encounter with God, the author of *B40 Janamsakhi* remarks 'You are Nanak and your *Panth* will flourish ... I shall bless your *Panth*. Inculcate people's devotion towards me and strengthen their obedience to Dharma' (*B-40 Janamsakhi*, p.20, ed. W.H. McLeod). Significantly Guru Nanak himself has very explicitly stated his role as the Divine Preceptor. He considered himself the divine minstrel whose chief avocation was to sing the glory of God. He made the divine Will known through the medium of *bani* which is also known as the *sabad*. The term *sabad* means the word and represents God's Word which is present everywhere in this universe. On being asked by the Siddhas about his spiritual mentor, Guru Nanak had replied that *sabad* was his Guru. (Guru Granth Sahib, p.943) According to Guru Nanak, this *sabad* is the Guru and the Pir. (Guru Granth Sahib, p.635) It is a deep and profound entity without which the world is lost in its sense.

Guru Nanak made the Holy Word known through the medium of his *bani*. The *bani* is not merely a product of poetic imagination but is related to the revelation of God. While denouncing Babar's invasion on India and its subsequent death and destruction, Guru Nanak proclaimed, "As the *bani* of the Master comes down to me so I proclaim the knowledge".<sup>2</sup> The Sikh sources reveal that the Sikh

liturgy that had come into vogue under the guidance of Guru Nanak at Kartarpur, was based on the sacred hymns composed by him. Guru Angad underlines the character and significance of *bani* in comparison to the Hindu texts. He stresses upon the fact that the *bani* is 'like nectar, and it reveals the essence of God's purpose. It has come through the God-oriented Guru to be understood by Guru-oriented persons. Only the blessed praise it and meditate on it. Guru Angad's emphasis on the spiritual value of *bani* laid down doctrinally the requirement of compiling the Sikh Scripture. Guru Amar Das, the third Master highlights the status of *bani* to remark that the *bani* of God-oriented Guru is God Himself.<sup>3</sup> According to him it is for the enlightenment of the world. He exhorts "Oh dear Sikhs come and sing the true *bani* of the True Guru which is the highest kind of revelation."<sup>4</sup> He underlines the eternal character of *bani* that it resounds in the four *yugas*. It is the genuine voice of Truth. Even he elevates the *bani* to the status of formless God. He equates God, Guru, *bani* and the *sabad* in such a way that identification of *bani* with Guruship seems to be patent. Guru Ram Das reiterates "O Sikhs believe in the truthfulness of the *bani* of True Guru as God himself had put it in the Guru's mouth". According to him "He who had created the whole world utters this Word" Early Sikh literature informs that public reading of *gurbani* was an essential part of Sikh liturgy that had evolved during the time of Guru Ram Das. Even the modern day practice to take command (*vak*) i.e. to read the first hymn when the scripture is randomly opened, had come into practice by then. Interestingly Guru Ram Das assigns the role of Guru to *bani* in such a manner that investiture of the Scripture with Guruship looks not far away. Following in the footsteps of his predecessors Guru Arjan proclaims "I do not speak<sup>5</sup> on my own, i utter what has been ordained by my God, the Creator of the world." He explains "the *bani* that descended from the Primordial source has extinguished all anxieties" His words, "the *pothi* (collection of sacred hymns) is veritably the abode of God"<sup>6</sup>, foretells the role that the Sikh Scripture was going to play as the perpetual Guru of the Sikhs. On the basis of above evidence we can conclude that the sacred writings enshrined in the Sikh Scripture hold the status of the Holy Word that had its origin from God and enjoyed

the status of Guru among the Sikhs.

A close perusal of the Sikh Scripture makes it abundantly clear that Guru Nanak and his successors considered themselves to be an instrument of God. They certainly acted like the mouthpiece of God through whom the Holy Word came to be revealed in the form of *bani*. Though after Guru Nanak his nine successors succeeded him one after another, yet they were one in Spirit (*jyoti*). The institution of Guruship that Guru Nanak established to carry on his mission embodied the 'Spirit of Nanak' which was passed on from one Guru to the next. The religio-spiritual authority of Guru Nanak came to be vested in them on their succession. The nature of succession to the office of Guruship was spiritual and the successor was not necessarily a descendent of the predecessor. Initially the hereditary principle was not given any weightage, however in time largely because of the schismatic developments, succession, but not always lined, tended to become the rule. But the criteria of devotion, service, ability, humility and above all allegiance to serve the Sikh mission were never overlooked. The legitimacy of the successor was that he had shared the religious experience of the 'Spirit of Nanak' in its totality. The bards at the Guru's court whose writings are enshrined in the Sikh Scripture and Bhai Gurdas, very emphatically and repeatedly affirm that though the Sikh Gurus are different in physical form yet they possess the same Spirit.<sup>7</sup> As a lamp lights another lamp similarly the 'Spirit of Nanak' has become enshrined in the successive Sikh Gurus. Even the Sikh Gurus while translating their spiritual experience into hymns did not make use of personal names instead they called themselves 'Nanak', a fact observed by non-Sikh contemporary writers also. The principle of Spirit was the central unifying factor between Guru Nanak and his nine successors.

Guru Nanak in his person was an embodiment and vehicle of the 'Spirit' which came to be invested in his successors one after another. In this way the idea of the unity of Guruship was established and the spiritual authority of Guru Nanak was extended and invested in his successors. Guru Amar Das remarks about the indivisible and continuous nature of Guruship and says "*there is One bani (revealed Word) that had come through One Guru (Nanak) and it contemplates*

*on the One Word*".<sup>8</sup> From this point of view the whole Sikh Scripture is the self-expression of the 'Spirit of Nanak'. It helped to establish the idea of unity of Guruship which later on became the corner stone of theoretical expression of Sikhism. The idea, 'Spirit of Nanak' assigned an important status and role to the Gurus in the line of Guru Nanak. Therefore in Sikhism the word Guru is reserved only for ten Sikhs Gurus, Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh.. Thus, the principle of 'spirit of Nanak' was not only the central unifying factor between the Sikh Gurus, it also worked as a bulwark to prevent the disruptive forces that aimed to disturb the unity and cohesion of Sikhism.

*Sri* Guru Granth Sahib derives its authority from the Eternal Truth and unfolds the path to realize it. It opens with an invocation which states Guru Nanak's perception of the God, Who is One and beyond any form, birth and death.<sup>9</sup> Every hymn of the Scripture focuses on Impersonal, Self-illuminating, Transcendental and Omni-present God on whom the whole of universe is dependent for its existence. The 'Unity of God, His sui-generis and Eternal character are the important features which have been repeatedly emphasized. In fact the whole Sikh Scripture communicates knowledge about God and describes His acts of grace. One way of knowing God is the awareness or intimate knowledge of His sacred presence everywhere and at all times. It is an extra-ordinary experience that belongs to the spiritual realm. It can be encountered directly and personally but is beyond any empirical and rational verification. The experience of the Holy provides deep comfort, contentment and spiritual solace. It generates a sense of love towards the Creator and His creation which results in a sense of wonder and joy. A sick soul is turned into a healthy one. It is a journey of crossing over from the mundane sphere to the spiritual plane. The mundane sphere is a state of separation, sufferings and mortality whereas the spiritual sphere is benevolent, blissful and eternal. Therefore the chief motive of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib as a Guru is to orient and attune the human beings to God and help them to realize Eternal bliss.

Though personal Guru was always at the head of Sikh community up to 1708, yet, the nature of Guruship was spiritual and impersonal

in nature. The line of personal Guruship came to an end when Guru Gobind Singh conferred upon the Granth Sahib the Guruship for all times to come. In this manner, the Holy Word, the very origin and source of the Sikh Scripture, was elevated to the status of perpetual Guru. This proved to be a defining moment in the history of the Sikh *Panth*. As long as the Sikh community continue to survive, the Guru Granth Sahib would continue to command the same honour and reverence that had been enjoyed by the Sikh Gurus. No Gurdwara can be called the Sikh place of worship if it has not installed Guru Granth Sahib in it. Similarly no Sikh religious assembly has any religious sanction unless it is held in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Much of the personal and congregational devotion in Sikhism focus on the Guru Granth Sahib. Very interestingly, the 'Holy Word', the base of this holy book, is employed to address and supplicate before it.

The message of Guru Granth Sahib is the living Guru from whom the Sikhs seek guidance to formulate their response to the secular as well as spiritual affairs. It is the principal fountain-head from which the Sikh concept of life social, religious, cultural, intellectual etc. derive its meaning and authority. It has left an indelible imprint on the genesis of Sikh institutions such as *Sangat*, *Pangat*, *Langar*, Gurdwara, *Miri-Piri*, *Sarbat Khalsa*, *Gurmata* etc. These institutions not only express the fundamental values and ideas that have been underlined in Guru Granth Sahib but also provide the mechanism to put its message into practice. It is the Supreme canon which discriminates good from evil, right from wrong, virtue from vice in no uncertain terms. The distinct identity that the Sikh community has come to enjoy is in direct consequence to its allegiance to the Guru Granth Sahib. Its uncommon characteristics coupled with extensive reverence to it, have conferred upon it a distinctive status among the scriptures of the world.

The finality of Guru Granth Sahib, the epitome of Sikh revelation has never been in doubt. The Scripture as well as historical sources reveal that the Sikh Gurus did not allow even their dear ones to tamper with the text of Sikh Scripture. The extreme care with which Guru Arjan handled the material to prepare the Granth and the veneration he attached to it on its installation reflect the profound honour,

reverence and sacred aura it enjoyed among the Sikhs. The Sikh Gurus took every care to transmit the Text accurately and enjoined upon the Sikhs to recite it correctly. The Text that was approved by Guru Gobind Singh in the form of Guru Granth Sahib has since been accepted as the final spiritual authority by the Sikhs.

### Notes and References

1. S.G.G.S., p.262
2. S.G.G.S., p.722
3. S.G.G.S., p.982
4. S.G.G.S., p.920
5. S.G.G.S., p.763.
6. S.G.G.S., p.1226.
7. S.G.G.S., p.966
8. S.G.G.S., p.646
9. S.G.G.S., p.!

# The Notion of Egalitarianism in Guru Granth Sahib

Rajesh Gill

The notion of egalitarianism, is celebrated around the globe as a gift of modernity. However, it is deeply enshrined in the text of Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred book of the Sikhs. This paper makes an effort to demonstrate how this holy *Granth* denounces any discrimination on the basis of ritual purity and pollution, besides birth, caste, gender and so on. The text quoted in the paper brings out the criticism levelled by the Sikh Gurus and bhaktas belonging to the so called low untouchable castes against the prevalent social practices of Brahmanism. It has been vehemently argued in the Guru Granth Sahib that purity of mind and soul is not the prerogative either of Brahmins or only of men. The whole notion of impurity, upon which *varna* and caste distinctions had been based, was redefined and reconceptualized, making it absolutely dependent upon the purity of thoughts, deeds and actions. While the holy scripture boldly rejects any kind of justification for practising discrimination on the basis of caste, colour or gender, yet, the author expresses her anguish against a continued celebration of caste distinctions, by the Sikhs of all classes. It is a pity that such a powerful spiritual literature, enjoying the most pious stature, has failed to be translated into practice by those who swear by it.

Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, so designated by the tenth Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh, as the only Guru to be reckoned by Sikhs thereafter, is a compilation of the *bani* not only of the Sikh Gurus, but also of the bhaktas, Sufis and Bhatts belonging

to different religious and caste backgrounds. This fact itself has most often been taken to signify the strong egalitarian essence enshrined in the *Granth Sahib*. In fact, any interpretation of the *bani* in this text must refer at the same time to the social-political environment that had incited the Gurus, particular Guru Nanak Dev, to protest against the extremely rigid, inequalitarian, superstitious and backward social and religious practices. All this was coupled with the well established supremacy that the Brahmins claimed for themselves as the custodians of God, or gods, while the common Hindu had no direct access to God, but had to go through the institution of Pundits. I have used the word 'institution' because the whole process of worshipping of God, as well as solemnizing of various auspicious and inauspicious occasions in the family had been extremely ritualized, in fact institutionalized in such a way that Brahmin had become an inevitable part of the Hindu's life. Such a system of ritualism itself produced an enormous structure of hierarchies, which went on from generation to generation, hardly leaving any space for social or political mobility, especially upward mobility.

More importantly, such an institutionalization of social stratification, primarily on the basis of ritual purity, a rigid terminology. Some of these have not only been systematically debunked, but also reconceptualized in Guru Granth Sahib. For instance, the terms such as *Brahman*, *Jati*, *Dev*, *Sutaka*, *Grihasthi*, *Saint* and so on, have been reinterpreted in the Guru Granth Sahib, giving an altogether different progressive meaning to each one of these. The greatest contribution of *gurbani* lies in the fact that it simplified the conception of 'religious' from a world that was mysterious, transcendental and beyond human reach, to the one, that was real, in flesh and blood, within human reach, where man had a direct access to God, provided he chose to live the life of a *Gurmukh*, instead of a *Manmukh*. The whole of *gurbani* consists of a continuous dialogue describing a prescribed way of life for a Sikh. This way of life draws strength from the practice of egalitarianism, humility and devotion to God.

Before proceeding further, let us define the term 'egalitarianism'. Given the kind of socio-religious and political structure of the period which the Gurus lived, the two most important bases on which society

was hierarchically structure were caste and gender. Let us take these one by one.

Throughout the text of *gurbani*, one finds a consistent critique of caste hierarchy, and the dominance of Brahmin. In fact, I have found the indirect critique of caste hierarchy and Brahmanism even more interesting, effective and enduring than even the direct. First let me take up the direct attacks on caste system. Guru Nanak writes:

The caste and name are but raiillery, next live under the one shade of God<sup>1</sup>

Rejecting the distinctions between men on the basis of birth and caste, Guru Nanak emphasized the idea of brotherhood and equality. He rejected the very notion that an individual gained his/her status by birth into a particular caste and that it was not possible ever to change that ascribed status. Guru Nanak on the contrary argued that the individual could achieve a higher status by practising righteous behaviour and it did not matter which caste or economic level he came from. The very narrow conceptualization of a "Brahmin", had caused enormous exploitation of the low, especially the untouchable castes. Not only Guru Nanak, but different contributors to the text of the holy Granth rejected the notion that Brahmin had been born with any purity and thus deserved a higher status, no matter what his deeds were. Kabir very eloquently questions the self proclaimed authority of the Brahmin in the following verses:

There is no caste or creed inside the womb! God is the only source of life.

O Pandit, when did you acquire a high caste status?

Do not waste your birth reaffirming yourself as a Brahmin.

If you obtained the high caste status by getting born out of a Brahmin mother

Why couldn't you be born through some other passage?

You call yourself pure and us impure (low caste), are we made of blood and you of milk?

Kabir says that he who recites His Name is the only Brahmin for us!<sup>2</sup>

Kabir does not mince words while making an assault on the caste system and the domination imposed by the Brahmins. *Gurbani* does

not merely present the verses uttered by Kshatriya Gurus on caste inequality, but more importantly, it brings out the discomfort experienced by the members of lower castes in their own words. Here, one finds this in the words of Bhagat Namdev:

I came to your doorstep happy and playful, but during prayers I, Nama, was forced to quit.

My caste is low and impure, O Yadav King!

Why was I born into a calico-printer's family? <sup>3</sup>

One must not feel arrogant about one's caste, only His blessings make one pure.

O fool! Do not take pride in caste since such pride is a source of several evils.

Every body talks of four varnas;

All the four Varnas have been born out of Brahman (God)! <sup>4</sup>

The message is that there is only one source of birth in this world for all individuals and it is foolish to exhibit pride and arrogance of one's caste status. The above verses very clearly question the proclaimed superiority of Brahmin. Bhagat Namdev then draws God's attention since he is condemned in the name of caste:

O God! Please do not forget me or distance me from yourself.

The authorities are all prejudiced against me and angry with me.

They kick and push me calling me impure, I rely only upon you, my Father, my saviour <sup>5</sup>

Apart from such direct criticism of caste hierarchy, particularly against the institution of Brahmins, there are numerous verses in the Guru Granth Sahib, which indirectly question the supremacy of certain castes over others. These are even more effective and let me categorize them for a better understanding. I could identify the bold attacks on the important notion of ritual purity, which constituted the basis of the caste hierarchy. The very notion of ritual purity and pollution is directly critiqued in the Guru Granth Sahib in the following verses:

If we believe in impurity, every thing in the universe contains that!

Even cow dung and fuel harbour varied forms of life

There is no grain of corn without a living being inside

Even water that sustains all life, is itself not without many forms of life in it

How to keep away from this supposed impurity,

Since it is there in every crumb one consumes?

Nanak, the notion of impurity so foolishly held,  
cannot be wished away.

True knowledge alone can expel such a notion <sup>6</sup>

This impurity cannot be washed away, it can go only with true knowledge. Questioning the claims of purity by the Pandit, Kabir says:

Contaminated is water, contaminated is the earth.

Yea! The whole creation is contaminated.

Our birth is contaminated, as is our death.

Yea! the whole world is infected by contamination.

O Pandit! Tell me then, who at all is Pure? <sup>7</sup>

The notions of impurity whatever be the forms are rank superstition.

Belief in these is much like being embroiled in duality.

Birth and death are in Lord God's Will.

Food and drinks, that Lord God bestows on us are all pure.

God-conscious beings such as have realized this truth

Are, verily, O Nanak, free of impurity <sup>8</sup>

Actually, the very notion of purity has been reinterpreted, redefined and reconceptualized. The growing cravings of individual are referred to, stating how while indulging in sex, one never bothers which caste the partner belongs to.

The inequalities legitimized on the basis of physical purity has therefore been rejected in the following words:

Every thing and every human being is impure including mother and father and their progeny!

One enters into this world and leaves this world in impurity.

O Pandit! Which place is pure- the one where you eat?

All parts of body are impure including the tongue which utters impurity. So too eyes and ears.

The fire, water, everything is impure, even the kitchen where you cook is impure.

The utensils in which food is served, the cowdung with which the fire is made are all impure

*Kabir says he only is Pure who has pure thoughts*<sup>9</sup>

Further, the physical purity does not depend upon bodily appearance. It actually comes out of good deeds and proximity to God:

Pure is the body wherein abides the Lord's True Name<sup>10</sup>

It is repeatedly suggested throughout the text that impurity is a perpetual part of our lives and while it is easier to cleanse the physical impurities, it is much more difficult to remove the mental impurities, which cannot be washed away even by a holy bath. This actually is a direct critique on the very idea of untouchability based upon ritual purity. The following verses signify this:

Piles upon piles of treatises may one scan

Yea, one may read boat loads of volumes,

And may fill up cellars with books thus read

Indeed, one may read ceaselessly for months,

Nay, even for years and years,

Even for a whole life time unto one's last breath

Yet all this is an exercise in vain.

Nanak one thing alone matters with the dear Lord:

It is the love and sweet remembrance of His Sublime Name

For all else is sheer prattle of the vain<sup>11</sup>

Impurity and arrogance can neither be got rid of by taking holy baths, thus rendering the very notions of Pandits helping one wash away the sins, are meaningless and ridiculous.

The second critique of inequalitarian caste system, Adi Granth rests in the notion of a uniform humanhood. Each person, whether rich or poor, Brahman or Shudra, is governed by the same God, has been prescribed a similar way of life and is destined to meet the same ultimate end in death. Any social distinction is thus rendered meaningless. Such notions indirectly negate any kind of social hierarchies. The following verses bring this out:

All distinction of castes and colours, Hindus and Muslims

Animals and birds, and all the species

And all that appears in a vast expanse,

And all forms will pass away.<sup>12</sup>

The membership into these *varnas* is not permanent according to the Gurus. It is up to God to enhance the status of a person if He so desires.:

“If the Lord Blesses one caste, the other caste likes it not  
but He in His Hands, has all the Glory and He Gives to  
whomsoever He Pleases.

He Makes His Will work, without a moment's delay.<sup>13</sup>

It is clearly stated that this caste inequality is man-made and has no meaning beyond this world:

If the seeker cries out and begs at the Lord's Door,  
the Lord hears him;

Whether He Blesses him or curses him,  
man must revel in His Glory,

Identify the Light within each person, and ask not his caste  
For in the Hereafter the caste is of no avail.<sup>14</sup>

It is further emphasized that the distinction between a genuine and a fraudulent person is never based upon caste or birth. Consequently, God does not determine the genuineness of a person on the basis of his caste:

The false coins are not sent to the Treasury  
they see not the Guru-God.

The False ones have no Station, nor Honour  
for no one wins them through Falsehood.

They who trade in Falsehood, come and go without Honour<sup>15</sup>

Any individual, whatever his social status, can attain the highest place in the eyes of God, only by remembering Him and following His instructions.

Material wealth and wordly pursuits cannot enhance the status of an individual. A person, who has lots of money but is crooked at heart, cannot be a favourite with God. The following verse mirrors this critique.

The ugly woman, without Merit, bedecks herself with beautiful  
clothes  
but her mind is impure  
for she Walks not in the Way of the Spouse

and likes her own command to run.

He, who walks in the way of the Guru, all his pain goes,  
For, no one can erase the Writ that the Lord wrote since Eternity.<sup>16</sup>

The rigidity of caste system in the name of religion is criticized vigorously with the same logic. That mobility is not only possible, but one could attain the highest position in the world by repeating His Name honestly:

The wretched one whom no one knows  
contemplating the Lord's Name he is acknowledged all over  
I seek Thee, O God, Bless me with Thy Vision.<sup>17</sup>

True worship of God has no relation with caste or *varna* status. Actually the true status is achieved only by establishing the deeds. Therefore, in the words of Nanak, he would fall at the feet of any one who truly remembers the Lord, irrespective of whether he was a Shudra or a high caste man:

He alone is high minded, he alone is a Vaishnava,  
he alone is Wise and Rich,  
And of high Caste and Mighty who worships the Lord,  
the Builder of our Destiny.

The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishas, the Shudras  
And even the low wretches are all Emancipated through  
Contemplating their Lord.

He, who knows his only Lord, Nanak, supplicates before him.<sup>18</sup>

The second basis of inequality, apart from caste, is gender. There is difference between 'difference' and 'inequality'. While man and woman are different from each other biologically, there is no hierarchy. But tradition has hierarchized men and women, the tasks done by them and the attributes possessed by them are ranked as superior and inferior. Woman was considered physically impure because of certain biological functions, and hence, she was excluded from important religious rituals and social ceremonies.

It is remarkable that *Gurbani* debunks such stigmatisation of women. Since impurities are a necessary part of human life, woman must not be discriminated against for that.

*Gurbani* discounts the notion of physical impurity, both in men and women, and especially the so called physical impurity during

menstruation and child birth in women. This has been effectively protested against in *Gurbani*, as in the following words:

They deem a woman defiled for her menstrual flow every month  
but a similar impurity abides in the mouth of a liar  
for which he suffers disgrace ever and anon.

Pure are not the ones who regularly wash their bodies  
pure are in fact those in whose hearts ever abides the love of the  
Lord.<sup>19</sup>

Impurity is present in every one irrespective of gender. It clearly states that the discrimination between man and woman on the basis of purity is only the result of ignorance:

The Qurran calls Allah alone to be True  
who is neither a man nor a woman  
but, reading and re-reading the Book, you know Him not  
*if your heart feels not His Presence*<sup>20</sup>

However, throughout the text, the analogy of complete devotion, commitment and faith of a wife towards her husband. Even man, with a similar kind of devotion and faith, can attain God. It is stressed that all the effort of a woman in making herself pretty goes waste if her husband does not look at her:

“Through the Guru,  
one enjoys eternally the pleasure of Wedded Life  
as one wears the Lord in one’s heart.  
For he, who speaks sweetly, and is humble in his ways  
Enjoys the Bed of the Spouse.

That Bride alone is praiseworthy who loves her Lord intensely.<sup>21</sup>

*Gurbani* fervently pleads for an honourable status for women and looks down upon any effort to denigrate them.

It is the woman who gives birth, with whom one marries.

Woman is made a companion and a friend.

if she dies one looks for another woman, because there is no substitute for her.

Then why curse the one who gives birth even to the kings.<sup>22</sup>

The rejection of unequalitarian patterns, then prevalent in the socio cultural life strikes one in the *Gurbani*. It is asserted that it is not money, or wealth, or caste, or *varna*, that grants a higher status to an

individual. It is humility that truly makes one great:

Having earned a thousand, one longs for a million

He's never satisfied even if he had a trillion.

He engages in many an evil deed.

He lives and dies without his craving appeased.

Without contentment you have no esteem

All your efforts are like an empty dream.

The ecstasy of the Name brings absolute peace.

It is the fortunate few who have this treat.

He does and Himself creates those who,

Says Nanak, Him alone woo<sup>23</sup>

The *Bani* does not merely attack inequality. It also offers an alternative life style, with a different prioritization. Here, the attainment of God is brought within one's reach, within one's home, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or gender. Arrogance on any account, because of material pursuits, or beauty or knowledge, is to be condemned.

While we recite the *gurbani* every morning, reminding ourselves that one's status has nothing to do with birth or wealth; the moment we step out of that sacred ambience, we assign status to people on the basis of caste or how much wealth they possess and so on. I can see the whole effort of the great composers of the *bani* going waste when our younger generation too takes pride in displaying their caste names on the windscreens of their cars, making a mockery of the rich message of egalitarianism in the most liberal religion of the world.

## Notes and References

੧. ਫਕੜ ਜਾਤੀ ਫਕਤੁ ਨਾਉ ॥ ਸਭਨਾ ਜੀਆ ਇਕਾ ਛਾਉ ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਵਾਰ ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗ, ਪੰਨਾ ੮੩)
੨. ਗਰਭ ਵਾਸ ਮਹਿ ਕੁਲੁ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਤੀ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਬਿੰਦੁ ਤੇ ਸਭ ਉਤਪਾਤੀ ॥ ੧ ॥  
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੩. ਹਸਤ ਖੇਲਤ ਤੇਰੇ ਦੇਹੁਰੇ ਆਇਆ ॥ ਭਗਤਿ ਕਰਤ ਨਾਮਾ ਪਕਰਿ ਉਠਾਇਆ ॥ ੧ ॥  
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(ਭੈਰਉ ਨਾਮਦੇਉ, ਪੰਨਾ ੧੧੬੪)
੪. ਜਾਤਿ ਕਾ ਗਰਬੁ ਨ ਕਰੀਅਹੁ ਕੋਈ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਬਿੰਦੇ ਸੋ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਹੋਈ ॥ ੧ ॥  
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੫. ਮੇ ਕਉ ਤੂੰ ਨ ਬਿਸਾਰਿ ਤੂ ਨ ਬਿਸਾਰਿ ॥ ਤੂ ਨ ਬਿਸਾਰੇ ਰਾਮਈਆ ॥ ੧ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥  
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੬. ਜੇ ਕਰਿ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਮੰਨੀਐ ਸਭ ਤੈ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਹੋਇ ॥  
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੨. ਜਲਿ ਹੈ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਬਲਿ ਹੈ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਸੂਤਕ ਓਪਤਿ ਹੋਈ ॥  
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੧੧. ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਗਡੀ ਲਦੀਅਹਿ ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਭਰੀਅਹਿ ਸਾਥ ॥  
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੧੩. ਵਰਨਾ ਵਰਨ ਨ ਭਾਵਨੀ ਜੇ ਕਿਸੈ ਵਡਾ ਕਰੇਇ ॥  
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੧੭. ਜਿਸੁ ਨੀਚ ਕਉ ਕੋਈ ਨ ਜਾਨੈ ॥ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਤ ਉਹੁ ਚਹੁ ਕੁੰਟ ਮਾਨੈ ॥ ੧ ॥  
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ਭੰਡੁ ਮੁਆ ਭੰਡੁ ਭਾਲੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਬੰਧਾਨੁ ॥  
ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥  
(ਵਾਰ ਆਸਾ ਮ.੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੪੭੩)
੨੩. ਜਿਸ ਕੈ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਰਾਜ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥  
ਸੋ ਨਰਕਪਾਤੀ ਹੋਵਤ ਸੁਆਨੁ ॥  
ਜੋ ਜਾਨੈ ਮੈ ਜੋਬਨਵੰਤੁ ॥ ਸੋ ਹੋਵਤ ਬਿਸਟਾ ਕਾ ਜੰਤੁ ॥  
ਆਪਸ ਕਉ ਕਰਮਵੰਤੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ ॥ ਜਨਮਿ ਮਰੈ ਬਹੁ ਜੋਨਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਵੈ ॥  
ਧਨ ਭੂਮਿ ਕਾ ਜੋ ਕਰੈ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥ ਸੋ ਮੂਰਖੁ ਅੰਧਾ ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ॥  
ਕਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਜਿਸ ਕੈ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਗਰੀਬੀ ਬਸਾਵੈ ॥  
ਨਾਨਕ ਈਹਾ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਆਗੈ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਵੈ ॥ ੧ ॥  
(ਸੁਖਮਨੀ, ਪੰਨਾ ੨੭੮)

# Guru Granth Sahib

## A World View

Swami Swaroopananda

Our life experiences are according to our view of the world. When we have a wrong perception of things, beings and situations then our expectations are false and our judgements wrong. Where there are false expectations disappointment is natural. When there is wrong judgement and improper decision then there is wrong action with its consequences. The result of all this is undesired fear, anxiety and sorrow.

Therefore it has been observed by Shri Guru Nanak Sahib:

*Nanak dukiya subh sansaar*<sup>1</sup>

O'Nanak the whole world is miserable

*Tan dhar sukiya koi na dekha; jo dekha so dukiya hoi*

I have not seen even one embodied individual happy; who ever I have seen is sad.

Then is this world a house of misery? Was the world created for suffering? How then should we view the world and live our life reaching the goal of supreme happiness?

*Shri* Guru Granth Sahib embodying the teachings of many realized saints gives us a view of the world that can transform our lives full of sorrow to a fruitful life of productivity, peace and happiness enriched with our love for the One in the many.

### **There is only One God**

The main theme of *Shri* Guru Granth Sahib is in its very first expression which is a numeral *Ik*, One. There is only one Truth or

God and this God alone is. There is nothing other than it. Ever existing, timeless and changeless therefore its name itself is *Sat*, changeless existence.

Since Truth alone is and there is nothing other than it then it alone can be the cause of all creation, the world. For every creation there has to be an efficient or intelligent cause the Maker and the material cause from which it is made eg. Pot-maker and the clay. As far as the creation of the world is concerned the One alone is both the Intelligent Maker as well as the material from which the universe is made. Thus he is *Karta Purukha*. *Karta* means the doer or the creator. *Purukha* means the conscious principle. Therefore the Truth is not an inert cause but Intelligent cause. *Purukha* or *Purusha* also means one who fills up everything or pervades everything just as water pervades the waves and gold is in all the ornaments.

*Puri puri basantaa sa purukhaa.*

One who resides in all cities (as well as the nine gate city of this body) is *Purukha* or *Purusha*

*Ghat ghat mein har ju basai santan kaheo pukar,*<sup>2</sup>

Saints have proclaimed that Hari dwells in every place, in every being.

*Khaalak khlaak, khalak me khaalak*<sup>3</sup>

The creator is in the creation and the creation in the creator.

Thus God is both creator and the material from which the creation manifests.

How can one be a creator as well as the created at one and the same time? Just as in a dream I alone am the creator and I am alone the creation. Hence I the one pervade the entire dream. I alone become the dream I alone create it and I alone become the person in the dream who enjoys or suffers. Hence the creation cannot be real it is just like a dream. The world of plurality is superimposed on the One due to ignorance and delusion.

### **The world is like a dream**

Why is the world like a dream? Reality or Truth is that which is present at all times and can never be negated in any period of time or state. In simple words it is changeless.

*Ad sach jugad such hai bhi sach Nanak hosi bhi sach*<sup>4</sup>.

True in the beginning, true through the eons, true in the present, He shall be true in the future.

That which changes or is negated in any state cannot be present at all times hence it perishes. Dream is that which we experience; however, in reality it is not there because it perishes on waking and is not present in the waking and deep sleep state. In the same way the world we experience in our waking state which we consider as real is constantly changing, perishing and is negated in the other two states namely; the dream and deep sleep.

Unreal is that which never exists nor is experienced such as the horns of a man. Real is that which is always present such as gold in the ornaments. The ornaments may change in shape and usage, the gold remains the same. There is a third category which is experienced (-) however it constantly changes and perishes therefore in reality it is not there. This is called as a false appearance or an illusion eg. a mirage or a dream. They are experienced but in reality are not there. This is called *Mithya*.

*Shri* Guru Granth Sahib beautifully expresses these ideas.

*Nanak kahat jagat sub mithya jiu sapna rainaen*.<sup>5</sup>

Nanak says the entire world is false like the night dream.

*Jag rachna sabh jhuth hai jani leho re mit*

*Kahi Nanak thiru na rahai jiu balu ki bhit*.<sup>6</sup>

This entire creation of the world is unreal. Come to know this O my friend.

It will not remain, says Nanak, just as a wall made of sand.

If the world is like a dream then what should we do?

If everything we experience is changing, perishing and therefore unreal, everything from all our possessions to our relationships, our achievements and our status then there is nothing to be proud of and vain about. Our ego is based on false pretence and is therefore false. **Knowing the illusory nature of the world one must give up attachment and the false ego.**

*Juthe man kaha kare jagu supane jiu jan*

*In me kachu tero nahin Nanak kahio bakhan*<sup>7</sup>

Why do you assume a false vainglory? Know that this world is like a dream. Nothing of this is yours. Proclaims Nanak.

### **The creation is the Creator's will.**

The entire creation with its many dimensions, galaxies, worlds and beings manifests spontaneously from the one Infinite by His mere will. One word and out flowed the entire stream of creation.

*Kita pasao eko kavao tiste hoe lakh dariao*<sup>8</sup>

One word did you utter and lo the vast expanse sprung forth. Out of it hundred thousand came flowing.'

Since he is the one cause of the Creation every name and form is dependent on Him for its existence and function. He binds all as the common thread that holds all the pearls together as one necklace.

*Sagal samagri tumre sutar dhari Tum te hoi so agyakaai*<sup>9</sup>

Every thing is strung in you (like pearls on a string) and since everything is from you it remains in obedience to you.

Just as the ornament is the creation of the goldsmith, conceived, designed and fashioned in a certain way for a certain use and therefore remains in his will; a ring to be worn in a finger, a necklace to grace the neck and a bracelet to adorn the wrist. In the same way the world remains in total abidance to his will. This will is the law under which the entire world revolves in harmony. It is by this law that all is created and maintained. Everything and being is in this law; no one can transgress it.

*Hukmi Hovan akar.....*

*Hukmai andar subh ko bahar hukam na koe*

*Nanak Hukmai Je bujhai ta humai kahe na koe*<sup>10</sup>

By his will things manifest.....

All are subject to his will. None is outside his will. If one were to realise his will he would not talk in terms of the ego.

By His will, command or law everything happens. No one can transgress hence if one recognizes that nothing is possible without His grace and presence, such a person does not suffer from any ego.

*Shri* Guru Granth Sahib points out the way to Truth and peace, God realization is by giving up one's ego.

This is when we realize there is only One, so no one is high and no one low. The apparent differences we see are not real. The essence is one and same in all.

*Aval Allah noor upaya kudarat ke subh bande  
Ek noor te sabh jag upajia kaun bhale ko mande*<sup>11</sup>

In the beginning God created light and from that light all beings manifested therefore everyone is His. Who then are good and who bad?

Ego is when we recognize distinctions. Since there is only One there are no distinctions hence there should be no ego. We are all one.

Ego also arises when one becomes proud of one's possessions and achievements. When we view the world as a dream wherein nothing really belongs to us as all fade away as mist on awakening at dawn. Everything perishes; nothing is mine.

Ego is the sense of being a doer. Every ability, every possibility, and everything that is happening is in his *Hukam*, law or will. Surrender to His will. There is no ego and anxiety there but only peace joy and Truth.

*Kiv sachiara hovi ai kiv kurai tutai pal  
hukam rajai chalana Nanak likhya nal*<sup>12</sup>

How does one attain truth? How can one remove the veil of ignorance?

Live in joyful surrendering to His will, His law that He has written.

*Shri* Guru Granth Sahib gives us a view of the world in which there is oneness and where the Lord's will or law reigns supreme. Where there are no distinctions of high and low, caste and creed, gender and race, gods and religions. Where there is the vision of oneness, there is love. Where there is surrender there is peace. The ego ends in the vision of oneness by surrendering to His will.

### **What is the obstacle?**

That which keeps us away from this grand vision is none other than our mind with its blinding ignorance, delusory imaginations, clinging attachments and constant forgetfulness due to distractions.

The mind with it's imaginations itself is *Maya*, the mighty delusory power at play

*Man maya me phad rahio bisario Govind Nam*<sup>13</sup>

Trapped in the *maya* of the mind one forgets to remember the Lord's Name

This *Maya*, the mind, makes one dance, pant and grunt after sense objects leading one from birth to death, life after life in various embodiments and worlds experiencing joys and sorrows as the consequences of one's egocentric actions.

Who then can be free from sorrowful world of transmigration and be happy? Sant Kabir says

*Sant sukhi man jiti hoi*

Only saints who have conquered their mind.

Shri Guru Nanak Sahib says

*Man jeete jag jeet*<sup>14</sup>

One who has conquered the mind has conquered the world.

### **How to conquer the mind and conquer the world?**

Sincere devotion to the one Lord who is the Guru, abidance in his teachings or words and constant remembrance of His name which reminds us of the grand vision of oneness, the truth.

*Mat vich ratan javahar manik je ik gur ki sikh suni*<sup>15</sup>

In the mind precious stones, jewels and gems if one were to follow even one teaching of the Guru.

*Simar simar sukh pavauh*<sup>16</sup>

Remembering, Remembering I find happiness

Then is the world to be rejected?

### **The world is a means of worship**

The teaching of Guru Granth Sahib does not encourage rejection of the world or give instruction that encourages escapism.

The Guru, in fact, points out that the entire world is to be viewed as a means of His worship. It is to remind us of the One Infinite Lord and to revel in the divine vision of the whole world worshiping dancing and singing His glory.

*Gagan mein thal Rav Chand dipak bane  
Tar ka mandal janak moti.  
Dhup malayanlo pavan chavro kare  
Sagal banrai phulant joti. (1)  
Kaisi arti hoi bhav khandna teri arti.  
Anahata shabad vajant bheri.*<sup>17</sup>

Space is the salver, the sun and moon are the lamps  
The myriad stars stud the heavenly sphere like jewel pearls.  
Fragrant sandalwood is the incense, the wind the wafting whisk.  
All the verdure of creation offers adoration to the Lord. (1)  
Wonderful is the aarti of the One who sunders the cycle of rebirth  
The cosmos sings His glory with unstruck sound, not drums and bells.

When the world is seen in this manner every object in the world is seen glorifying Him singing His praise. The whole world then becomes an offering to the Lord. Everything reminds us of Him and directs our mind to Him. One begins to see that common thread, that common cause that binds everything and everyone together in unison.

The world is a means to serve

The worlds revolve in harmony and are supported by a mighty force. What is that mighty force that upholds the countless worlds?

*Dhaul dharam daya ka put  
Santokh thap rakhia jin sut.  
Je ko bujhai hovai sachiar  
Dhavlai upar keta bhar  
Dharti hor parai hor hor*<sup>18</sup>  
*Tis te bhar talai kavan jor*

*Dhaul*, the fabled bull said to be supporting the earth is the divine law of duty which is the offspring of mercy. On law, mercy and contentment beaded together rests the earth in equipoise.

He who realises, what a heavy load is on the bull, becomes true.

Many worlds lie beneath this world and beneath them still many more. What is that power underneath that supports their weight?

The word dharma has in it volumes of meanings. However the essence of dharma, righteousness or duty, is in sacrifice and service. It is this dharma, selfless service born of compassion that sustains in

harmony the entire world. Without it the cosmos would be hurled into chaos.

Thus *Shri* Guru Granth Sahib beseeches us to live a life of sacrifice and service producing more than what we consume and giving more than what we take. It was this ancient *Vedic* spirit of *yagna* or sacrifice that *Shri* Guru Nanak Sahib reintroduced as *langar* or community kitchen - the joyful spirit of sharing. Sharing with love not only creates harmony in the world and brings about productivity but the one who serves frees himself from his binding attachment to eventually get liberated.

*Jin sevia tin paiya man* <sup>19</sup>

Those who served gained glory

Mighty wars and destructions take place when people identify and stress differences and become selfish. However if a person sees the things of the world as means to the Lord's worship rather than just a pleasure to indulge one's wild senses with and sees every person as the image of God Himself then there is Dharma, The law of harmony and being.

*Har jan har antar nahin Nanak sachi man* <sup>20</sup>

Says Nanak, truly there is no difference between god and man of God.

Service of the people is the service of the Lord.

One may gain pride in one's giving and sharing. However if one only remembers all that one has received is from God through his many manifestations as things and beings in the world, one will remain indebted. The one giver goes on giving we get tired receiving, as our receiving heart is small. Yet He does not stop giving. Everything that we have has been given by Him. Open the heart wide, give and watch the more you give and become empty the more he fills you up with his bounties.

*Jagat bikahari phiratu hai subh ko data Ram*

*Kahu Nanak man simaru tih puran hovahi kam* <sup>21</sup>

The entire world a wandering beggar, the Lord is the sole giver. Let your mind dwell on the Lord so that your work may achieve fulfilment, says Nanak.

*Denda de lende thak payen juga jugantar khahi khahie*<sup>22</sup>

The giver gives, we get tired receiving. The entire word seems to endlessly devour yet he never gets exhausted.

Thus view the world as a gift of God to serve all.

We are one big family

The world view of *Shri* Guru Granth Sahib is summarised in the following *Shloka* by *Shri* Guru Nanak Sahib in conclusion to the Japji Sahib.

*Pavan Guru Pani Pita.*

*Mata dharat mahat*

*Divas Rat doe dai daia*

*Khelai sagal jagat.*

*Changiaian buriaian*

*Vache dharam hadur*

*Karmi apo apni*

*Ke nerai ke dur*

*Jinni Nam dbiaia*

*Gae musakat ghal*

*Nanak te mukh ujale*

*Keti chuti nal*<sup>23</sup>

With air as its *Guru*, water its father, the great earth its mother and day and night its two nurses plays the entire universe.

Actions good and bad are read out by *Dharma Raja* – The king of justice in the Holy Presence. By their own actions some are near and some are far.

They, who worshiped the divine Name, have departed fulfilling their hard toil. Such are the faces that shine in resplendent beauty, O' Nanak ! They are free and many others along with them are saved.

Follow the Air as your *Guru*. Ever free, purifying everything wherever it goes, the very breath of life serving every minute yet remaining humbly unacknowledged. Everything has a price however the most essential of all air is ever free. Learn from *Pavan* the *Guru*: freedom with responsibility, dynamism with purity and service with humility.

Consider Water as your Father, refreshingly sweet, the provider and nourisher. One who quenches the thirst, the greatest of all distress.

Know that the all-loving Mother is the Earth from whom all are born and on whose breast we remain nourished and loved, ever abundant, ever giving, ever forgiving.

See how day and night nurse us and the passage of time nurtures and watches over us as we play in the world carefree.

We are all children of the same parents disciples of the same Guru and nursed by the same day and night. Let there be love.

Even though the world like a dream is an illusion yet as in the dream it has its laws, the law of action and reaction. Grace is for everyone. Yet according to our actions we become more open or closed. We get closer or move away further from the Truth. Take responsibility for your action and attain the glory.

The purpose of this temporary seemingly futile life is to attain immortality and free ourselves from this ignorance born limitation and finitude. Those who constantly contemplate on the Name of the Lord get purified and liberated. Not only they attain the greatest glory but many, many more are liberated along with them.

### **The vision**

The grand worldview of *Shri* Guru Granth Sahib is to see a world of no distinctions. It acknowledges that the world is full of varieties and differences however there should be no distinctions of high and low, or discrimination due to gender, caste race etc. To abide in the divine consciousness and live in the awareness that there is only One in the myriad forms eradicating all distinctions, loving and sharing with everyone, remembering the One always at all times in devotion, is the grand vision of the Guru.

## Notes and References

1. Guru Granth Sahib, p.954
2. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1427
3. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1350
4. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1
5. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1231
6. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1429
7. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1428
8. Guru Granth Sahib, p.3
9. Guru Granth Sahib, p.268
10. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1
11. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1349
12. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1
13. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1428
14. Guru Granth Sahib, p.6
15. Guru Granth Sahib, p.2
16. Guru Granth Sahib, p.262
17. Guru Granth Sahib, p.13
18. Guru Granth Sahib, p.3
19. Guru Granth Sahib, p.2
20. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1428
21. Guru Granth Sahib, p.1428
22. Guru Granth Sahib, p.2
23. Guru Granth Sahib, p.8

# The Bhagavata Purana : The Text as God

Shrivatsa Goswami

## **Bhagavata Purana : the prakasha of the text at prabhasha**

We are gathered here to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> Prakash Utsava of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib at the Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar. At this most auspicious occasion, I am reminded of an interesting story of the manifestation of another very important and popular holy book of India. I request you to travel with me to the north western coast of Gujarat some five millennia back.

The Great War is over. So also for Sri Krishna, the main conductor and *sutradhara* of that war, it is all over. Every single member of his Yadav family is dead. Quietly he leaves his palatial Dwaraka for a nearby forest. After ages, he is resting with his feet up and playing on his favourite flute. His feet shining (*bhasita*) like a deer's eye attracts a hunter's deadly arrow and the restful melody attracts his long standing friend, confidante and minister the wise Uddhava.

He could guess that Sri Krishna is prepared to leave this world for His *Dhama*. The worried Uddhava requested Sri Krishna to give him a hearing before departing. Having achieved the tasks of your devotees, you want to leave. It's okay. But, my worry is that the terrible Kaliyuga will strike as soon as you leave, then, even the good people will become wicked and cruel. The earth will not be able to take the burden of sins and no other protector appears in view except you, O Govind!

Sri Krishna continued playing his flute. Uddhava again pleaded, “you are affectionate to the devotees! Have mercy on your beloved devotees. Bereaved of you how would they survive? So please do not leave. Sri Krishna asked, “Uddhava it should do no harm. Rather you should be happy that by being unmanifest in this world I shall become *Nirguna* and *Nirakara*. In fact you had tried hard to sell this *Nirguna panth* to the Gopis!” Uddhava realizing his mistake said, “though you are a formless being and pure consciousness, still you take a form assuming excellences for the sake of devotees and there is a great difficulty in worshipping *Nirguna* God (*nirguna upasane kastram*). Hence think over a little.”

Uddhava's appeal on behalf of the *bhaktas* made Sri Krishna ponder to himself “What can be done by me for supporting my devotees? They need me in my fullest form and always. Separation from me is not welcome to them. Hence, I need to leave my complete image eternally available to them”. Sri Krishna first installed his essential potency Sri Radha (*svakiya teja*) in the *Bhagvata*, then having concealed himself from the world he entered and abides in the ocean called *Bhagavata*. Hence this *Bhagavata* is now the verbal image (*vangmayi murti*) Sri Krishna himself. If rendered service to it, heard, recited or even simply seen, it removes all the sins.

This gift of God, a corpus of words as his own image, revealed to humanity in Prabhasha Kshetra, the Sacred Land of Enlightenment, was a metaphysically smart move. A word or sound (*shabda*), the property of space (*akasha*), is of eternal (*nitya*) and all pervasive nature (*vibhu*) only. No other physical image of God could have sustained in time and space like His word-body. Epistemologically too, the *shabda* or the revealed word dominates over various means of valid knowledge, accepted and explored by Indian philosophical tradition. These can be enumerated as *arsa* (authority), *upamana* (comparison), *arthapatti* (presumption), *abhava* (absence), *sambhava* (inclusion), *aitihya* (tradition), *cesta* (gesture), *pratyaksa* (perception), *anumana* (inference) and *shabda* or *shruti* (revealed word).

The *shruti* is popularly identified as *Veda*, which can be understood in two ways. *Veda* as ‘the Universal Knowledge, unmanifest, infinite’ and also ‘a name for a specific body of words, physical and limited’

with its four-fold division as *Rik*, *Yajuh*, *Atharva* and *Sama*. These *Vedas*, originally *shrutis* (oral/heard word), available as printed books, do not form a central *shastric* authority. Traditions like Charvaka, Jaina, Bauddha and others born out of the Vedic context, would outright reject *Vedas'* superhuman origins and authority.

However, it is more interesting to note that their absolute authority, as established by the hermeneutical and ritualistic systems like Mimamsa, gets gradually watered down, specifically in the religious and spiritual traditions respectful to the four *Vedas*. Why?

Because, the absolute and eternal knowledge and truths of the *Vedas*, can best be understood through knowledge systems relative to historical, social and cultural context of a seeker. This hermeneutical process opens the possibility of various interpretations and meanings. New traditions and their *shastras* are born. For example, *Vedantic* Systems, also called the Later *Mimamsa*, focused not upon the absolute necessity of four *Vedas*, but the Three Books of Departure,—the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutra* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. With the later members of the *Vedantic* family, the *Puranic* and the *Agamic* literature also became authoritative.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533) and his *Acintya-Bhed-Abheda School of Vedanta*, established by his followers, do not even care to comment upon the *Prasthan Trayi*!! Then, what is their Word (*Sruti*) and Book (*shastra*) ? “Those who want to know the highest goal of life should consider *Bhagavata Purana* alone as *shastra par excellence* in Kali Yuga. It is divided into 12 *Skandhas* (sections), spread into 335 *Adhyayas* (chapters), having total of 18,000 verses”.

Bhagavata Purana : dipped in nectar from Sukadev's mouth<sup>2</sup> P.1.1.3

As told earlier the Caitanyaite Vaisnavas would swear by this text. When they were establishing their own identity as a separate school in the *Vedic Vedantic* tradition, they chose to define *Chaitanya Mata* by centrally depending upon the canons of *Bhagavata*, without being disrespectful to others (*shraddham bhagavate sastre, anindam anyatra eva hi*). They extensively commented upon it. The very first in the series by Srinatha Chakravarti was named *Sricaitanya Mata Manjusha*. Its invocatory verse defines the system:

### 1. "Sri Krishna the son of Nanda, is the *aradhya*"

The subject of this text (*sambandhi tattva*) is the absolute reality which "the knowers of *tattva* (reality) declare it to be non-dual knowledge. It is also variously designated as *Brahman*, *Paramatman* and *Bhagavan* etc."<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the *Bhagavata* prefers to use an epistemological category *advaya* of Buddhist liking in place of the metaphysical *advaita* for the Absolute Reality! Here the Caitanyaites draw upon the Upanishadic idea of reality as *sat*, *cit*, *ananda* and emphasise that the non-dual reality appears in many ways due to difference in the competence (*yogyata*) of the seeker.

The *tattva* is realised as Absolute *sat*- *Brahman*- to cognitive (*jñani*) seekers, as Absolute *cit*, *Paramatma* to conative (*yogi*) *upasakas* and as Absolute *ananda*- *Bhagavan* to emotive (*bhakta*) variety. In reflective analysis we find that *per se Brahman* is objective, *Pramatmana* is subjective and *Bhagavan* is an experience relating subject to an object. The subject and object are unreal respectively in the first two cases and thus there is no occasion for any relation between the subject and object. Whereas the Absolute as *ananda* includes and transcends the *sat* and *cit*. *Ananda* is a "thicker" Absolute, to use Prof T.R.V. Murti's term.

"Sri Krishna alone is the *Bhagvan* Himself"<sup>4</sup> The Ultimate Being is the base for all the activities of the *jivas*, yet it remains transcendental (*sarvam atyatikramya-apasraya*).

### 2. His eternal abode (dhama) is Vrindavana

The Vrindavana known to us today is the gift of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, who during his journey to this region 1515 identified the hunting grounds of the invading armies on the Dehi Agra highway as Sri Krishna's playgrounds.

Caitanya toured the country extensively for six years in which he selected his team of followers to resurrect Sri Krishna, his place, and the connected literary, aesthetic, religious traditions. In the legendary group of six Gosvamis, three Sanatana, Rupa and Jiva were practically Muslims working in high positions in the court of Hussein Shah in Bengal, Raghunath Bhatta was guru of the Amer Rajputs, Gopala Bhatta was son of the chief priest of Srirangam in South India, and

Raghunatha Dasa was rich landlord of the lowcaste. All were men of power, well versed in spiritual, ritualistic, literary, artistic as well as the political creativity.

In the resurgent Vrindavana, they worshipped the image of Govindadeva, foremost. Krishna dhama is beautiful gift of a robust Hindu-Muslim dialogue. The GD Temple architecture was needed to create a space for holding performances of the *rasalila*, which the Caitanyaite believed to the highest *lila*.

The temple had another unique image on the central throne and that was of Sri Radha. She is not manifest by name in the *Bhagavata* nor present in any other temple before GD.

### **3. The best mode of worship (*upasana*) is the devotion as practised by the *Gopis* of Vraja-Vrindavana**

In *Bhagavata Purana* *jnana*, *yoga-karma* and *bhakti*, all three paths are discussed and presented in detail, but *bhakti* alone is accepted as the means *par excellence* for the ultimate realisation. "As the same object is perceived differently depending upon the variety of sense organ, the Absolute Reality is seen differently through different viewpoints (*shastras*), But if the path of *bhakti* to *Bhagavan* is intensely practised, it immediately generates desirelessness and knowledge which lead to the realization of *Paramatman* and *Brahman* respectively."<sup>5</sup>

The means (*abhidheya*) is only service (*bhajana*) to Him,— such as *sravana*, *kirtana*, *smarana* etc., of his name, form, *dhama* and *lilas*, which will generate love for Sri Krishna. The Caitanyaite take the supremacy of *kirtana*, the *geya aradhana* (musical offerings in fullest manifestations of song, dance and drama) over the rigid ritualism of the Vedas.

### **4. The undisputed means of valid knowledge is the *Bhagavata Shastra***

Bhagavata Purana : The ripe fruit of the vedic tree P.1.1.3

Gopala Bharta Gosvami and Jiva Gosvami, the main canonisers of the Caitanyaite or the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition, collaborated in preparing the main philosophical treatise called *Bhagavata Sandarbha*,

an elaborate hermeneutical tool! on the *Bhagavata Purana*. Let us hear what they say:

The Vedas are the source of all mundane and spiritual knowledge, being beginningless word are free from defects of human agency, handed down in *parampara*. (TS10). Quoting *Vedanta Sutras* 1.1.3, 2.1.11 and 2.1.27, they argue that logic cannot provide final proof of anything, least of the *Parmarthika Tattva*, where Vedic *sastra* alone is helpful. However, it is difficult to study Vedas in their entirety, difficult to understand their true meaning, and commentators often take conflicting views, therefore one should study only *Itihasas* and *Puranas* as the valid source of knowledge. They supplement the Vedas, being Vedic in essence, as both Veda and *Purana* have no human author and present similar knowledge systems. They differ only with regard to intonation and their word order (TS12). *Itihasa* and *Purana* are in fact the Fifth Veda. *Br.Up.*2.4.10, *Bh.P.*1.4.20, 3..12.37, 39, *M.Bh. Moksadharma* 340.21. (TS13). The *Purana* is more important than the Veda as it firmly establishes all the Vedic meaning, thus removing the fears that the *alpa-sruta* (half-knowledgeable) will distort the meaning of Veda

The *Puranas* pose a difficulty as they establish supremacy of various gods and goddesses and are classified thus: *sattvika* glorify Krishna, *rajasika* Brahma, *tamasika* Siva, Durga and Agni rituals, whereas the *Puranas* of the mixed kind glorify Sarasvati, ancestors etc. Amongst these only the *sattvika Puranas* could lead the knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Referring to *Vedanta Sutra* would be of no use, as they are 'terse and extremely esoteric, hence subject to various interpretations',<sup>8</sup>

Therefore the Gosvamis agree with the *Garuda Purana* conclusion that

"the *Bhagavata Purana* is the most perfect *Purana*, because  
It is the natural commentary on the *Vedanta Sutra*,  
it establishes the meaning of *Mahabharata*,  
it is a commentary on *Gayatri*,  
it explains and expands the meaning of the Vedas,  
it is the *Sama Veda* of the *Puranas*,

it was spoken by the Bhagavan Himself  
and was available throughout the land in its complete form having  
12 *skandhas*,  
335 *adhyayas*, and 18,000 verses”<sup>9</sup>

Bhagavata Purana : A sun arisen in kaliyuga for persons of lost  
intellectual vision<sup>10</sup> P.1.3.45

At the beginning of creation, in Brahma's meditations a sound  
(*nada*) arose in his heart. From that *nada* arose *Om* or *Pranava*  
consisting of three *matras*, *a*, *u*, *m*.

The unmanifest *Om*, as the special index of the Absolute Reality,  
became audible in the cavity of heart, and produced the speech (*vak*)  
called the *Vedas*.

These three sounds, *a*, *u*, and *m* severally contain the triads of *guna*,  
*Veda*, sphere (*bhuh*, *bhuvah*, *svah*), states of consciousness and the  
full range of alphabets. Then, Brahma, through his four mouths,  
expressed four *Vedas* along with *vyahrtis* (*bhuh*, *bhuvah*, *svah*), rituals  
and duties.<sup>11</sup>

Equipped with *Om*, *Gayatri* and the *Vedas*, Brahma began to  
consider the procedure of creating the universe, but failed to get the  
insight. After long *tapasya* the Absolute Bhagavan appeared to him.  
granting friendship to Brahma, the Lord spoke:

“Receive from Me the knowledge, the science and all the secret  
doctrines. Then only you shall have full comprehension of the reality  
as to my dimensions, my real nature, my attributes and actions as  
actually they are.”

“Before the creation, I alone was in existence. After creation of the  
universe what exists, is I. What remains after *Pralaya* is myself.

“This worldly manifestation, where on account of my *maya* the  
non-existent appear and the existing reality does not. *Atma* is the  
object of such misapprehensions.

“I am both inside (as effect) and outside (as the material cause)  
the five gross elements and the universe created from them.

“Those desirous of knowing reality should understand, through  
the logic of committance (*anvaya*) and discontinuance (*vyatireka*), that  
*Atma* is eternal and all pervasive.

Along with these four verses of *Bhagavata Purana* 2.9.32-35, well known as *Catuh Sloki Bhagavata*, Bhagavan spoke the elaborate version as well, where the constituent topics detailed are:

1. Subtle creation (*sarga*) 2,3
2. Gross creation (*visarga*) 2,3,4
3. Sustenance through law (*vrtti, sthana*) 3,7,11
4. Protection—welfare for all (*poshana, raksha*) All over
5. Cause or lust from *karma* (*uti, hetu*) 3, 11
6. Periods of Manu (*manvantara*) 8
7. Accounts of Divine Deeds (*ishanukatha*) 4, 9
8. Annihilation (*nirodha*) 11, 12
9. Liberation (*mukti*) 11, 12

10. The last support, the ultimate reality (*ashraya*) who is Krishna Himself hence 10<sup>th</sup> *skandha* is central to text

Brahma then expounded *Bhagavata* to his dear inheritor Narada.

Narada then transferred it to Vedavyasa, a divine incarnation born to Parashara and Satyavati. Vyasa had rearranged Vedas in four books, and for those deprived of Vedic wisdom, he composed *Mahabharata and Puranas* including the *Bhagavata Purana*, yet he felt unaccomplished and distressed. Narada suggested that even purest of knowledge and *karma* will not deliver if devoid of *bhakti*. Therefore, you should recollect in *samadhi* (meditate) the blissful pastimes of Sri Krishna and write them.<sup>12</sup>

Thus instructed by Narada, Vyasa reworked upon *Bhagavata Text*, focusing on the *lilas* of Sri Krishna and taught it to his son Sukadeva (*sa samhitam Bhagavatim krtva anukramya catmajam/ Sukam adhyapayamas..*)<sup>13</sup>

It is well known that Sukadeva narrated the completed *Bhagavata Purana* to King Pariksha. Suka and Pariksha are the central narrator and listener duo of this text.

During Sukadeva's telling of this *katha*, Suta Romaharsana was also 'allowed to hear it', who, later on in Naimisaranya, retold this text to the sages led by Saunaka.

**Bhagavata : The essence of vedantic tradition**<sup>14</sup> P.12.13.15

Shankara vouched for *Advaita* doctrine, yet his heart lay in the Divine pastimes of Sri Krishna, hence he composed hymns like

*Govindastaka* and commented upon the *Vishnusahasranama*.<sup>15</sup> Madhvacharya, although a disciple in Sankara's tradition, wrote *Bhagavata-tatparya*, a gloss on *Bhagavata Purana*, expounding *bhakti*.<sup>16</sup> All other vedantic schools have accepted its authority.

In deciding the *summum bonum* a synoptic understanding (*paurvaparya avirodha*) of *Bhagavata* text is sufficient. The Caitanyaite even used the commentary by an Advaitin Shridhara Swami (13<sup>th</sup> cent.) when his views accord with the *shuddha vaisnava siddhanta*.<sup>17</sup> Works of Ramanuja are welcome. Works of Madhva and his followers are used as resources for Vedic and Puranic citations.

Bhagavata Purana : Pratyaksha Krishna eva hi

The twelve *skandhas* are identified with Sri Krishna's various limbs.

The written/printed text is worshipped through ritual befitting Sri Krishna.

There is an elaborate discipline of its ritualistic recitations for spiritual, ritualistic and worldly purposes.

The *summum bonum* is loving service, the *prema bhakti*.

The *summum bonum* (*prayojana*) is the blissful love for Sri Krishna, leading to attachment and loving relationship with Him.

Who is **eligible** to hear this text? "Not the persons of evil, arrogant, immoral, hypocrite, greedy and un-devoted nature. "It should be taught to faithful devotees who are modest, disciplined, not jealous, friendly to all beings, enjoys serving others, non-attached to worldly pleasures, and has loving devotion to God. Such a person who even once faithfully hears or narrates this text of *Bhagavata* to others with mind focused on Bhagavan, definitely attains divine abode."<sup>18</sup>

When I sing this glory of *Bhagavata* I am more than curious at the number of inter-textualities emerging in the contexts of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Guru Granth Sahib's installation. I hope this intellectual *Khalsa* of the Guru will enlighten me.

## Notes and References

1. Padma Purana—Uttara Khanda 195/54-62
2. Bhagavata Purana, 1.1.3:-
3. Bhagavata Purana, 1.2.11.
4. Bhagavata Purana 1.3.28.
5. Bh.P. skandha 3, adhyaya 25-32.
6. Bh.P.1.1.3
7. TS16.
8. TS18.
9. TS21.
10. Bh.P. 1.3.45
11. Bh.P.12.6.37-44.
12. Bh.P. 1.5.13.
13. Bh.P.1.3.40, 2.7.8; TS14.2
14. Bh.P.12.13.15
15. TS23.
16. TS24
17. TS27.
18. Bh.P.3.32.39-43

## Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagavat Purana

J. S. Neki

Bhagavat Purana and Guru Granth Sahib are two outstanding Bhakti texts. But both are mutually quite distinctive in form as well as content. Bhagwat Purana is a great encyclopedic work of Vaishnava philosophy, theology, piety, and lore. It has a unique position in the devotional literature of Vaishnavites. It came into being somewhere around the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. It seems to have attained popularity pretty soon because a spate of commentaries came to be written about it. The Bhagvata itself attributes its authorship to Vyasa, the legendary compiler of the Vedas and the author of Mahabharata. But this might have been an effort by its real author to give his work an antique authenticity. It looks possible that its author was in fact a South Indian (possibly Brahmin) because of the mention in its text of Alvars that hardly received mention in any North-Indian work. Its language is un-Paninian Sanskrit which is consistent with the effort to promote de-Sanskritization of the *bhakti* religion. Its script is Deva Nagri. It is a work in the Pauranic genre. Traditionally, the Purana is defined as *pancha lakshana*, having five characteristics - creation, recreation, geneology of the gods, the Manu-periods of time and the history of dynasties. In its literary style the Bhagvata uses the device of question and answer which results in narrations within narrations. For example, Suta relates what he heard from Shuka who heard it from Vyasa; or Suta relates Krishna's conversation with Uddhava, and so on.

The Bhagavata is a combination of discursive teaching and narratives about the manifestations of Bhagavan. Its cosmology is based on the Sankhya system of creation. It also contains many legends, typical of the Pauranic genre, about Bhagvan's manifestation and ancient dynasties. It describes Lord Krishna's life in great detail. It also dwells upon the problem of the transcendence and immanence of Bhagvan.

The Guru Granth Sahib is first of all not the work of a single author. It altogether had 36 contributors<sup>1</sup>. Its first manuscript, which was called *Pothi Sahib*, was compiled under the supervision of Guru Arjan Dev in 1604 AD. Later, the tenth Guru, added to it the compositions of the Ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, designating that recension, before his demise in 1704 AD, as the Eternal Living Guru. It is held in great esteem by the Sikh people as their distinctive devotional source which provides the guiding spirit to the Sikh religion.

Its language is *Sadbhukri*, a lingua franca of the North Indian Bhakti literature during the mediaeval times. Yet, some of the compositions in this Granth are in chaste Punjabi. For example, Sheikh Farid's works are in the Western Punjabi and those of Guru Angad Dev in Central Punjabi. It is quite close to folk idiom, and hence people understood it far more easily than Sanskrit. It has been written in the Gurmukhi script, a folk script, modified and updated by Guru Angad Dev.

Its genre is devotional verse. Much of it is in the form of lyrical hymns. A variety of other folk forms, such as odes, acrostics, 'twelve-months', 'seven-days', 'dates', epithalamiums, dirges, puzzles etc. also embellish it. Barring a few short portions of it, almost the entire work is set to music and is supposed to be sung. Three kinds of music characterise it: the classical music to which almost the entire work has been set; the folk music the tunes of which are indicated in many places; and the linguistic music characterised by the rhythm, the rhymes and the alliterations etc in its verse.

It is not Pauranic or mythological in its literary style. Very occasionally, it does employ Pauranic examples from Hindu sources to serve as metaphor for illustrating some relevant concepts.

Its devotion is directed not to any god or super god, or even a

pantheon. The object of worship designated in it is the One, unique, and the only God who is non-sectarian and universal, and who is not only immanent in His Creation, but also transcends it. All the gods, even super gods like Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, are His creation.

Unlike the Bhagavat, it does not contribute to the doctrine of avatars. In fact it rejects it by saying:

Burnt be that tongue that declares that the Lord God takes birth from a womb<sup>2</sup>.

It employs the various names of God that have been current in Hindu and even Muslim sources. However, it demythologises some of those mythic names that might have been chosen as metaphors. The name 'Rama', for example, is employed not to mean the son of King Dasratha, but as the One God who pervades (*Rama*) everywhere. Bhagat Kabir has made this explicitly clear in one of his shlokas:

Kabir, employs the word 'Ram', only to speak of the All-pervading Lord.

You must make that distinction.

One 'Rama' is pervading everywhere,

while the other is contained only in himself. -S.G.G.S. p.1376<sup>3</sup>

The same applies to 'Murari'(Krishna) and 'Hari' (Vishnu) as in the following lines:

Kabir, what are you doing sleeping? Why not rise up and meditate on the Lord (Murari)? -S.G.G.S. p.1370<sup>4</sup>

The Lord (Hari) is just as He is. I dwell in delight, singing His Glorious Praises. || 122 || -S.G.G.S. p.1370<sup>5</sup>

Then there is the concept of Purusha. The Purusha in Bhagavata, as in Sankhya, is not an independent Purusha. It is dependent upon Prakriti to be able to create. The Purakh (Purusha) in Guru Granth Sahib is sovereign as well as omnipotent. It is *Karta Purakh* or Creative Purusha, fully potent by Himself to create. Prakriti is no independent verity, it is only a creation of the Purakh. The Purakh of Guru Granth Sahib is *Niranjan* – unsullied by Maya, and *Agam* or transcendent. It is

*Adi Sach* -- Existent in the very Beginning,

*Jugadi Sach* – Existent when Time began,

*Hai Bhi Sach* -- Existent even now,

And

*Hosi Bhi Sach* - shall exist always.

It is in history as well as beyond history just as the ocean is inside a vessel immersed in it as well as beyond it.

Bhagvata Purana, in its Mimamsa-sutra defines *dharma* as 'that good which is determinable only by the Vedic commands'<sup>6</sup>. However, *dharma* in Guru Granth Sahib does not derive its authenticity from Vedic commands. On the contrary, it rests on a resolute acceptance and fervant practice of the eternal Truth<sup>7</sup>.

Even according to the Bhagavata, the essential (*svarupa*) definitive nature of God is said to be Truth (*satya*). Truth is used here in the sense of reality; and it is held that by virtue of this supreme reality even the false creation appears as real. On account of this abiding reality the entire world of appearance attains its character of reality. Such inherently *true* nature of the phenomenal world is also underlined even by Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak Dev, in Asa ki Var says:

This world is the cabin of the True Lord; within it is the dwelling of the True Lord.<sup>7</sup> - S.G.G.S. p. 463.

In the Bhagavata, God is called by different names, e.g. Brahman, Parabrahman, Bhagavat and Parameshvara. Guru Granth Sahib not only employs all these names but also goes beyond the Vaishnava domain and employs names of Shaivite origin; nay, it goes even further and employs names current in Islam. Thus, while the Bhagavat carefully preserves its sectarian nature, Guru Granth Sahib makes its God universal.

In the Bhagavat Purana, it is held that those who perform sacrifices and make offerings to gods and forefathers pass after death to the lunar world whence they return to the earth again<sup>8</sup>. Sri Guru Granth Sahib prohibits worship of anyone else apart from the One Supreme God. No gods or ancestors are to be worshiped. No sacrifice is to be performed. Only self-sacrifice (i.e. sacrifice of one's ego) is the currency in the game of love.

If you desire to play this game of love with Me,  
then step onto My Path with your severed head resting on your palm.

As you step on to this Path,

give your head, and do not bother about public opinion.

—S.G.G.S. p. 1412<sup>9</sup>

This was not merely said. This sacrifice was actually demanded, and the demand did not go in vain. Volunteers came forward to offer their head in response to the call made by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi day of 1699. Meditating upon the *Nirbhau* (the Fear-free Lord), people had become free of fear of any kind<sup>10</sup> — even of death. Thus devotion came to have higher value than life itself. It became not only the reality of the devotee, but also of the Guru and of God Himself.

In the Guru Granth Sahib, a true Vaishnava has been thus described:

Thus Infinitely invaluable is that Vaishnava who renounces corrupt practices. —S.G.G.S. p.199<sup>12</sup>

If, however, one is only nominally a Vaishnava, but his deeds are conditioned by his ego, his life-function is as fruitless as pounding husk<sup>13</sup>. This, the Guru says not only about the Vaisnavas, but also about his own Sikhs as well.

He alone is a Sikh, a friend, a relative and a sibling, who walks in the Way of the Guru's Will.

*One who walks according to his own will,  
O Siblings, suffers separation from the Lord,  
and is punished.* — S.G.G.S. p.601<sup>14</sup>

The Guru has this to tell both of them :

*A Vaishnava as Gurmukh lives the righteous life of dharma.*  
— S.G.G.S. p.258<sup>15</sup>

## Notes and References

1. They include: Gurus Nanak Dev, Angad Dev, Amar Das, Ram Das and Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Bhagats Jai Dev, Namdev, Trilochan, Beni, Ramanand, Permanand, Dhanna, Sain, Pipa, Ravidas, Kabir and Surdas, Fakirs Sheikh Farid, Sadhna and Bhikhan, Bards Mardana, Satta, Balvand, Kalashar, Nali, Mathura, Gyand, Kirat, Jalap, Bal, Salh, Bhikha, Harbans, and Bhal, and the great-grand son of Guru Amar Das, Sunder by name.
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6. Mimamsa-sutra 1.1.1.
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9. iii.32.
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ਇਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਪੈਰੁ ਧਰੀਜੈ ॥ ਸਿਰੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਕਾਣਿ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ॥ ੨੦ ॥ -ਪੰਨਾ ੧੪੧੨
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ਆਪਣੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਜੋ ਚਲੈ ਭਾਈ ਵਿਛੁੜਿ ਚੋਟਾ ਖਾਵੈ ॥ -ਪੰਨਾ ੬੦੧
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# Sikh Monotheism

I. H. Azad Faruqi

It would be proper to start a discussion of Sikh Monotheism by considering the *Mool Mantra*. Standing at the very beginning of the Sikh scripture, it contains the basic creed of Sikhism in a very succinct form. An English translation thereof (*Hymns of Guru Nanak*, Patiala Languages Department, Punjab, 1972) it runs as follows:

There is but one God  
True is His Name, creative His Personality  
and immortal His form. He is without fear, sans enmity,  
unborn and self-illuminated.  
By the Guru's grace He is obtained.

This can be appreciated as a pristine statement of an uncompromising monotheism. But as it unfolds itself in the rest of the Guru Granth Sahib, it adopts stances, hues, and emphases, which appear specific to Sikhism.

Monotheism can be said to be a characteristic of many religious traditions of the world. Judaism and Islam are obvious examples. Zoroastrianism may be included with some reservations. Some religions believe in the incarnation and manifestation of One True God. Christianity, Vaishnavism and Savism, fall into this category. But as the case is with the religious traditions themselves, so we find differences of emphasis in their concepts of, and approaches to, Monotheism as well. Although almost all the basic truths and aspects of religious life are represented in each of the religious traditions,

each of them tends to emphasize certain dimensions of religious experience more than others. And these accentuations are the factors which appear to determine the special distinctiveness of these traditions. Similarly, the belief in One True God, with all His myriad qualities and attributes, is not the same in all its aspects in the traditions who claim or can be assigned to the belief in Monotheism. Each of these traditions, in spite of sharing some common elements, characteristic of a monotheistic belief, appears to be special with regard to some other particular points in its approach and emphasis in its spiritual vision.

Judaism, for example, in the description of its monotheistic belief, often uses anthropomorphic descriptions of God with a stress on His extreme spite of the gods and goddesses of other nations. This sensitivity, as described in the Old Testament, often results in severe consequences for the Israelites. This image of Almighty God is quite different in contrast with His representation in Christianity with an overflowing love for mankind. Similarly, the emphasis on the transcendence of Allah, and He as Creator being wholly other and on a different level than the creatures, which is the usual case in the description of the Divine in the Holy Qur'an, is unlike in the immanence of the Holy as highlighted in the monotheistic traditions within Hindu culture.

Sikhism, while in its rejection of the incarnation or appearance of Divinity in any material manifestation, is close to Islamic belief in monotheism; in some other respects, in this regard, it has its own individual approach. The spiritual Truth of the monotheistic belief, as described in the holy scripture of Sikhism, is essentially in the form of a Person with sublime attributes. References to Him, nonetheless, in the form of Absolute Truth, beyond qualities, are also to be met. The words "Ek Onkar" are particularly said to refer to that state of Godhead beyond attributes. In the terms of Indian philosophy these two aspects of the Ultimate Truth would be designated as *Sarguna* and *Nirguna Brahman*. It is in its *Sarguna* form, and that also personified as One Single True God, with His immanence, closeness and accessibility, equally emphasized, which is the common parlance to point at the Supreme Being in *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib. The

laudation and singing the praises of the Supreme Reality in this personified form, is a major theme of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. There is however the concept, special with Sikhism, of the “visible form of Divine Essence” as the *Gur-Shabd* embodied in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. According to late Professor Gurbachan Singh Talib in his introduction to the English translation of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Bhai Nand Lal in his *Rahitnama* has explained the Sikh belief on Divine being in three forms. Two are the same as mentioned above and the third is the *Gur-Shabd*. Hence the centrality of *Guru Granth Sahib* in worship of the *Akal Purukh*, as well as, in the whole religious system of the Sikh tradition.

The general approach towards the Supreme Being adopted in the *Granth Sahib* is that which falls in the tradition of *Bhakti-marga* as prevalent in Medieval India, in its various shades and hues. There are a number of compositions, in this holy book, which are filled with an attitude in *Bhakti* called *Dasya-ras*; this can also be said to be the general approach towards the Almighty in the Holy Qur'an. This attitude of *Bhakti* is said to involve servant-Master or slave and Master relationship with God. In this attitude a respectful distance between the *bhakta* and the Object of *Bhakti* is implied. But more common in *Granth Sahib* is the attitude, which involves a love relation between the *bhakta* and the Divine Beloved. For this type of relationship with God, and for the expression of its various moods and aspects, both *bhakta* saints and the holy Gurus have often utilized the similes of the husband and wife or lover and beloved between the devotee and the Supreme Object of veneration.

Now, there are a host of titles derived from Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian sources which have been employed in *Granth Sahib* while referring, beseeching or addressing the Supreme Being. This indiscriminate use of the titles of the Supreme Being, drawn from various traditions, not only point to the various noble qualities of the Supreme Being and exhibit different aspects of His Person, but, these also highlight a basic element of the spiritual vision of *Guru Nanak Sahib* and imbibed in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The *Janam Sakhi* of *Guru Nanak Sahib* and the contents of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, leave no doubt that in their spiritual vision, the attainment to the Ultimate

Truth, the favour of the Supreme Being, is universally available to all mankind, irrespective of the distinctions of caste, creed, race, gender, community or any other limitations human beings may have erected between them. It is very clear from the teachings propounded in *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib that in its eyes the distinctions between various religious traditions like Hindu or Muslim or social groupings of caste system, have no meaning. The only distinction, which *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib admits is that between a God-oriented person, a *Bhakta* or *Gurmukh*, and a person who has made the material world or the gratification of sense pleasures as the goal of his life (or *Manmukh*).

Here there is an important aspect of the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, which can easily be missed in a discussion about its monotheistic belief. This is that the demand of Guru Granth Sahib, from man, like that of the holy Qur'an, is not so much an adherence to the idea of One True God, which was never a totally unheard of notion, but, that they should take on to it most sincerely and earnestly. They should make Him as the one true object of their lives and to attain to His pleasure and union with Him as their supreme passion. The pre-Islamic people of Arabia were well acquainted with Allah as a Deity, and even, as internal evidence in the holy Qur'an speaks, they admitted Him as the controller of the natural forces in the universe and benefactor of all favours. Similarly, the medieval Indian society cannot be said to have been ignorant about the idea of the One Supreme Object of worship. But the case in both the above situations was, that the majority of the people, barring exceptions, were paying only lip service to this belief. In the medieval society of India, like even today, both the Hindus and the Muslims were adhering to their religious beliefs very superficially, as almost a part of their inherited culture only. The call of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib, to mankind, is that not only the people should accept the concept of monotheism, but also they should drench their whole life with the Divine consciousness. They should make the remembrance of God as their ruling infatuation and should consider the dissolution of one's individuality in Him as the Ultimate Goal of life.

It should be clear, that according to this scheme of things, as preached in Guru Granth Sahib, man's ultimate destiny, the highest

goal of his life is spiritual not material. His true self or his soul justly belongs to the realm beyond the physical world and beyond the material objects. Man's physical existence, his life in this world with all the different relationships it involves, and all the paraphernalia such an existence requires, have significance because they provide means to realize his spiritual destiny. If these means happen to be taken as the goal of life in themselves, and the pursuits of a person remain limited to chasing the worldly things only, then according to these scriptures, these means have turned into snares and trappings which keep him away from the realization of his true destiny, the spiritual goal described above.

It is true that by favouring the path of *Sahaj*, *Gurbani* rejects the concept of the utility of harsh austerities for spiritual advancement, and encourages the standard of God-realization without discarding the performance of social and other duties. Still, there is a vast difference between performing the worldly duties with a God-oriented consciousness, as a result of *Simran* and *Bhakti*, and being engrossed in the quest of the worldly ambitions as the sole object of man's life. There are numerous verses in *Gurbani*, which belittle the pleasures of sensual gratifications in comparison to the bliss of *Simran* and performance of *Bhakti*, which leave no doubt about the true object of human existence in its point of view. Today, after observing some of the devastating results of the one-sided materialistic approach in the societies of Europe and America, one can take lessons, and hold fast to the true spirit of *Sahaj* in the teachings of *Gurbani*, or to similar concepts in the scriptures of other religions. This will allow one to be benefited by the positive aspects of the modern culture without doing injustice to the spiritual ideal set for man by Sri Guru Granth Sahib and other religious scriptures.

## Notes and References

1. Purakh is often translated as person, but it has other connotation as well. It signifies, first of all 'cosmic consciousness'. It also means that which is in movement.

# Guru Granth Sahib and Upanishadic Thought

Jodh Singh

*Vedas* are generally believed to be the earliest literary record of the Indo-European race. The great thinkers like Max Mueller and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, in order to bring them in the ambit of History, have supposed their dates to be 1200 BC and 4000 BC respectively. By and large the Hindu mind believes that either the *Vedas* were taught by God to the sages or they were themselves revealed to the seers in the unknown remote antiquity. Historically, India underwent many a change in her socio-political and religious life but the *Vedas* have always remained as the highest authority for almost all sections of Hindus at all times. So much so that even today all the obligatory ceremonies and rituals to be observed at birth, marriage death etc are performed according to the old *Vedic* ritual.

Apart from polytheistic, monotheistic and monistic under-currents in the *Vedas* the 'Sacrifice' and other entailing complications of rituals grew elaborately. Rituals and their details developed so much so that the gods got relegated to a relatively unimportant position. The offerings at a sacrifice, as says Dasgupta, 'were not dictated by a devotion' as we confront in the later *Vaishnavism* but were offered to raise the dignity of the magical characteristic of the sacrifice as an institution which without the grace, mercy or love of the deity could give the desired fruits themselves. The slightest discrepancy in observing the minutest ritualistic details or mistaken accent of a single word could be sufficient to spoil the whole sacrifice. In fact sacrifice

came to be supported as the core of Vedic law of Karma which took no note of the grace of God or gods and produced by itself the desired result. Sacrifice came to be known as almost the only kind of duty and it was also called *Karma* or *Kriya* (action). Whether they were for good or bad, moral or immoral objectives they were supposed to produce their effects. *Brahmana* portion of the Vedas laid stress on sacrifice (*bali*). As says Professor Macdonell 'They (*Brahmanas*) reflect the spirit of an age in which all intellectual activity is concentrated on the sacrifice, describing its ceremonies, discussing its value, speculating on its origin and significance. *Mantras* (*Samhitas*) are highly elevating poetical works whereas *Brahmanas* are in prose elaborating the complicated ritualism of the Vedas and further 'deal with the rules and regulations laid down for the performance of the rites and the sacrifices.'

From *Brahmanas*, The Vedic lore further moves in the shape of *Aranyakas*, which, generally known as 'forest treatises' for their compositions in the forest, mark a very important transition from the ritualistic to philosophic thought. May be the elaborate systems of sacrifices in the *Brahmanas* filled the people's heart and mind with so much awe that the seers thought it in the fitness of things that mystic interpretation of the Vedic sacrifices is the need of the day. The value in *Aranyaka* thought, of actual sacrifices started transferred to symbolic representations and particularly the meditations. For example, the horse (for sacrifice) now became the dawn, the sun, became the always moving mind etc. Now these became the objects of meditation for receiving the benefits as were accrued through the actual sacrifices of different animals. The external world was not the only store house for choosing symbols 'but even arbitrary alphabets were taken up and it was believed that the meditation of these as the highest and the greatest was productive of great beneficial results'. Not only this, in *Aranyakas* one finds a great desire of the seers for finding out some unity among the visual contents of the world. The translation of *Aitareya Aranyaka* done by A.B.Keith holds:

"Then comes the origin of food. The seed of Prajapati are the gods. The seed of gods is rain. The seed of rain is herbs. The seed of herbs is food. The seed of food is seed. The seed of seed is creatures.

The seed of the mind is speech. The seed of speech is action. The act done is this man, the abode of Brahman.”.

Now the knowledge about the *Brahman*, the cause of all causes became the centre of attraction and meditation for the seers and thence started the growth of *Upanishads*.

Max Mueller and Deussen point out that word *Upanishad* means ‘secret’ or ‘secret instruction’ to be given to the student who by his supreme moral restraint and noble desires proves himself deserving to hear them. However, to quote C.D.Sharma, the word *Upanishad* means ‘the sitting down of the disciple near his teacher in a devoted manner to receive instruction about the highest reality which loosens all doubts and destroys all ignorance of disciple. Gradually the word came to signify any secret teaching about Reality and it is used by the *Upanishads* in this sense (*Rahsyā* or *guhya vidyā*). The number of the *Upanishads* is generally known as 108. It is held that by 500 B.C. many of these had been compiled but ‘they continued to be written even so late as the spread of Muslim influence in India.’. However, *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Mundak*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chandogya* and *Brahadaranyaka Upanishads* have been commented upon by great Shankaracharya and hence they are held as authentic and most important. The subject matter of the *Upanishads* differs much inter se and besides laying great stress upon the monistic doctrine of the Self as the only reality they deal with the practice of yoga, asceticism, the cult of Lord Shiva, Vishnu and the anatomy of the body.

Being end portion of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* are aptly termed as the *Vedanta* System further known as *Sharirakasutras* or *Brahmasutras* of Badarayana. These *sutras* were of so abstruse a nature that they amply produced divergent interpretations (-) each one claiming to be the only faithful one. The students of different teachers were brought up devoid of independent view and their thinking almost remained confined to the views of their respective teachers. Freelance thinking could not grow and such situation remained as such from generation to generation creating schisms and defending the earlier masters against the attacks of other rival schools. Original ideas were given by the great seers of *Upanishads* but soon their writings

found the chain-reactions under the names of various commentaries leaving aside the original formulations. S.N. Dasgupta summarizes the situation by saying that *Vatsyayana bhashya* was produced of *Nyaya-sutras* which on being sharply criticised by Buddhist Dinnaga, to defend *Vatsyayana bhashya*, Udyotkara wrote a commentary on this commentary called the *Bhashyavattika*. With the passage of time as the original force of this commentary faded out Vachaspati Misra wrote a commentary on this under the title of *Vartika-tatparyatika* which further became instrumental in bringing forth another commentary *Nyaya-tatparyatika-parishuddhi* by the great Udayana. This commentary had another commentary called *Nyaya-nibandhag-prakasha* written by Vaddhamana, the son of the illustrious Gangesha. This again had another commentary called *Vardhmanendu* upon it by Padmanabha Misra and this again had another, named *Nyaya-tatparyamandana* by Shankar Misra. Professor Dasgupta further laments that "The names of Vatsyayana, Vachaspati and Udayana are indeed very great, but even they contented themselves by writing commentaries on commentaries, and did not try to formulate any original system. Even Shankar, probably the greatest man (philosopher) of India after Buddha, spent his life in writing commentaries on the *Brahma-sutras*, the *Upanishad* and the *Bhagavadgita*"<sup>1</sup>

### **Basic Ideas in the Upanishads and the Guru Granth Sahib.**

The unchanging reality underlying the visible change of the world is the target of the seers who were earnestly searching the teachers competent to instruct them about this Reality. This Reality Brahman, earlier to Upanishadic period was known as Prajapati, Vishvakarman, Purusha etc. In the *Vedas*, and the *Upanishads* the sages felt assured of the existence of supreme controller of man and the universe and were further curious about the nature of the *Brahman*. The *Upanishads*

are findings of the various sages in this regard. However, they found that the ritualistic worship of sun, moon, lightening, ether, wind, fire water etc is of no avail for the purpose, though it may be the first step of the ladder taking them towards *Brahman*. Man will

have to leave it for higher steps leading him to the infinite Self. In *Chhandoaya* Upanishad Narada tells Sanatkumara-

I know the Rgveda, sir, the Yajuh, the Sama and with these I know only the Mantras and the sacred books. I do not know the self... I have heard from persons like you that only he who knows the self goes beyond sorrow.'

In the *Mundaka* Upanishad the seer is bold enough to enumerate two kinds of knowledge, the higher(*paravidya*) and the lower (*apara vidya*). 'The lower knowledge is that which the Rk, Sama, Atharva, ceremonials grammer give.. but the higher knowledge is that by which the immortal *Brahman* is known' In the *Gita*(2.45) also the Lord asks Arjuna to rise above the three *gunas*, telling him that the Vedas deal with the three *gunas* and that he who has known *Brahman* has little to do with the three *gunas*.

That supreme Reality, *Brahman*, has been accepted by Guru Nanak as Truth, the universally unifying factor which is formless, unapproachable and imperceptible Lord. In Siddha Gosti it is that *Anahat Sunya Nirguna*, unmanifest force which itself turns to be *Saguna*. *Saguna* and *Nirguna* are not different from each other, rather one is interwoven into the other, and becomes manifest through the true *Shabda*.

The author of *Kenopanisad* realised the incapacity of man for describing Brahman. He says that the eye does not go there, nor speech nor mind. We do not know Brahman to be such and such and hence we are not aware of any process of instructing about it<sup>2</sup>. Worldly wisdom is attained through the lower knowledge comprising the *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sama Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, the science of pronunciation, the code or ritual, grammar, etymology, metre and astrology etc. Then there is the higher knowledge by which is realised the immutable<sup>3</sup>.

This higher knowledge is considered as higher reason by Sri Aurobindo. This higher reason alone can have an all-embracing knowledge of the world as of the Absolute. As Prof. R.S. Misra puts it:

The World experience can be grasped fully by a reason or consciousness which looks at in the background of and in relation to

the Absolute. If the Absolute is admitted to be at the root of the world process, then the latter cannot be adequately comprehended and explained unless the former is fully known and realised. One can realise the Absolute only when one's consciousness becomes one with the Absolute. It is only then, that, one can also adequately comprehend the nature and the relations of the world experience as well. It means that our finite reason fails not only to grasp the nature of the Absolute but it equally fails to grasp fully and adequately the nature of the world process as a whole. Only a higher reason, a higher consciousness can enable one to know the Absolute as well as its manifestation, the world.<sup>4</sup>

Two doctrines by Sankara concerning knowledge as lower and upper are enumerated in the introduction to *Mundaka Upanisad* and we have already discussed lower knowledge. But the higher knowledge is that through which that 'Imperishable' is known:

The invisible, intangible, unoriginated, colourless, without eyes and ears, without hands and feet, the eternal all-pervading, omnipresent, very subtle, the unchanging which the wise know as the womb of beings. As the spider puts forth the threads and draws them back again, as herbs grow up upon the earth, as from a living man the hair grows on head and body, so from this Imperishable arises all the world.<sup>5</sup>

Higher reasons, or superconsciousness is required to understand this eternal and Imperishable as mentioned above. Guru Nanak in the closing verse of '*Sidh Gosti*' says,

"O God, your extent and dynamism, only you know as who else can dare explain that, You Yourself are both unmanifest and manifest and You are the enjoyer of all the stages<sup>6</sup>.

He alone can know His state and extent and He alone can appraise, His worth. He is unperceivable, incomprehensible and Unapproachable, discerned through the Guru's instruction<sup>7</sup>.

He is indescribable like the relish of the sweet eaten by dumb man<sup>8</sup>.

Many listen to and utter about God, but by uttering and hearing, none can know the limit of the Lord<sup>9</sup>.

Lower knowledge perceived and cultivated through physical eyes is not competent to quench the thirst of the soul. Those inner eyes (of higher knowledge) are different, with which the beloved Lord is beheld<sup>10</sup>

### **What is Brahman the Absolute**

Dr. Paul Deussen defines Brahman as the cause, from which proceed, the origin or subsistence and dissolution of this world which is extended in names and forms. This omniscient and omnipotent cause is Brahman<sup>11</sup>.

From Him originates the vital force as well as the mind, all the senses, space, air, fire, water and earth that supports everything<sup>13</sup>.

Now from the above given description of the Absolute Brahman and His relation with the world, it is obvious that the world is not independent of God but is sustained and animated by Him. Undoubtedly God is there in the world but it should not be taken to mean that he is completely lost in it, rather He also rises above it.

This Absolute Reality unveils itself to our consciousness in its supersensuous, superamental, superintellectual transcendental state, in which the subject-object relation vanishes and consciousness realises itself as perfectly identified with the Absolute Reality. The Absolute Reality is thus experienced as Absolute consciousness in which all time and space and all existence in time and space are merged in perfect, and the one infinite undifferentiated changeless self-effulgent consciousness shines as the Ultimate Reality. As this Absolute consciousness is above intellect, the intellect cannot form any true conception of it and cannot describe its nature except in negative terms; but still it tries to conceive it in relation to and as the ground of this world<sup>12</sup>.

Guru Nanak says that

even a fragment of His will can cause tigers, hawks, falcons to eat grass and those who eat grass may be made to feed on meat. He has the power to exhibit mounds in rivers and deserts into unfathomable oceans. He may appoint worm as king enabling him to reduce an

army to ashes. It is the breath which is the base of life but not against His wishes. He, as He pleases gives sustenance to all<sup>14</sup>.

He is the great Master of unfathomable depth, an ocean full of excellence. None knows how much and how great his expansion is<sup>15</sup>.

He is the immortal Lord without death over His head. He is the ineffable, inaccessible and detached Lord. He is true, content and very cool and through Sahajabhava, one is attuned to Him. He is the inner knower and the beings are His. He is the beneficent Absolute Lord and we are his slaves<sup>16</sup>.

He is from the very beginning and the commencement of the ages, sustaining the beings. Though, He is the compassionate lord of incomparable beauty and is contained in all the hearts<sup>17</sup>, yet according to Guru Granth Sahib, He remains unmanifest<sup>18</sup>.

Telling about His efficient and material cosmic power Guru Nanak considers that God does not need to have the support of other causes for the creation and sustenance of creation. He Himself is sufficiently competent to have the causes in His own hands. He himself is the controller of all the causes and sustains their power<sup>19</sup>. God is immanent and transcendent due to the fact that he is efficient and material cause of the whole of creation. *Saguna Brahman* personified becomes *Isvara*. There is not much difference between the two conceptions except that the former is impersonal and the latter is personal.

Thus, *Isvara* is both the material and the efficient cause of the world (*Abhinna Nimitta Upadana Karna*). If he were only the efficient cause then He would have to depend on some primeval matter which is an independent reality. Such an independent reality would diminish the Omnipotence of *Isvara*. His Will will be limited by the constitution of matter and He would not be able to fashion the world as He desires. Since *Isvra* is the material and efficient cause in one He is both immanent and transcendent. He is in the world and also above it<sup>20</sup>. In traditional Indian Philosophy both these aspects of the same Brahman have been defined elaborately. Though *Isvara* or *Saguna Brahman* is supposed to be the subject matter of ancient epics and *puranas* yet the dominating tone and substance of traditional Hinduism pertains to *Nirguna Brahman*, who is the primeval source of *Saguna* and His further incarnation or forms.

As a matter of fact in the words of M.K. Venkatarama Iyer it can be said that there is no transition from *Nirguna Brahman* to *Saguna Brahman*, because what is beyond name and form and consequently 'sui generis' cannot descend to a lower plane and acquire qualities. Since there are no internal differences within the Absolute and He is eternally perfect and there is no urge for it to undergo any modification. It is however, our intellect which breaks up the original unity into a knowing subject and a known object. The Absolute of which we are conscious comes within the relational scheme, when we descend to lower level and view the Highest Reality through the intellect. Now it is no longer a pure spirit but spirit in association with matter. This matter is the last reality of this physical world and this matter requires to be revealed by the spirit. Matter is not therefore, the sole reality but matter in relation to spirit. If this matter is taken in its entirety and is viewed in relation to the spirit, we get the conception of *Saguna Brahman*<sup>21</sup>.

*Upanisads* talk about God as *Saguna* and *Nirguna* by describing which cannot be seen, nor seized, which has no family and no caste, no eyes or ears, no hands or feet, the eternal, the omnipresent, indestructible, that which is imperishable, that it is which the wise regards as the source of all beings is *Saguna* and *Nirguna* both.<sup>22</sup> This passage defining both aspects of the *Brahman* makes it evident that fundamentally no difference between *Saguna* and *Nirguna* is accepted by the olden seers. *Brahman* is without and within beings, unmoved and yet it moves indeed. It is too subtle to be seen and it stays far away and is near also<sup>23</sup>. Fools, without understanding the higher essence of Him, consider Him revealed whereas He is unchanging and Supreme<sup>24</sup>.

This unchanging and Supreme reality is called *Bhagvat* by some, *Brahman* by some and *Paramatman* by others. On the basis of *Sat Sandarbha*, S.N. Dasgupta says:

When this reality which is of the nature of pure bliss, is experienced by sages as being identical with their own selves and when their minds are unable to grasp its nature as possessing diverse powers, and when no distinction between itself and its powers is realized, it is called Brahman. In such experiences

this reality is only grasped in a general featureless way in its abstractness. But when this reality is realized by the devotees in its true nature as being possessed of diverse powers in their distinction from the former He is called by the name Bhagvat(the Sagun Brahman). So when the reality is conceived in its fullness in all its proper relations, it is called Bhagvat: whereas when it is conceived without its specific relations and in its abstract character, it is called Brahman<sup>25</sup>.

The Supreme reality is free from all determinations and yet it is the source of all determinations. We do not conceive the coming into being of the ether, the air and yet they have their originating source, and they are modification of something else. Since Brahman is pure being so His origination cannot be taken as pure being, because by taking it as such we cannot find any difference between the two. And moreover, from modifications, other modifications arise and there is no necessity for the Brahman also to be a modification, for, were this so, then we should come to no primordial nature (*Mulaprakirti*) but should have regressus ad-infinitum(*Anavastha*). What is assumed as the primordial nature, just that is our Brahman<sup>26</sup>.

In 'Siddha Gosti', Guru Nanak believes that His exact estimation is known by the Lord Himself and none else can narrate anything about it. He Himself is both unmanifest and manifest and enjoyer of all the pleasures<sup>28</sup>. He is Nirguna Brahman because He is unknowable, infinite, Unapproachable and Imperceptible Lord, without being subject to death and destiny. He is casteless, unborn, self-illuminated, without colour and features, and He becomes manifest through the true 'Shabad'. He, the Nirguna Brahman the infinite and the Illimitable Lord was seated in trance for ages long. The Lord was 'Dhundukar' or mist or like self illuminating fog, before His expansion into the worldly fog of creation<sup>29</sup>. For countless ages there was utter mist without creation of earth and sky. The infinite Lord was there pervading in the form of pure Will (Hukum). He was in the shape of profound trance and no day, night, sun and the moon were there<sup>30</sup>. From that infinite truth since the times immemorial emanated ether, water and the cosmos, essentially having in themselves the light of the primordial Light.<sup>32</sup> According to Guru Granth Sahib that

Unmanifest Brahman then permeated all the hearts<sup>31</sup> and became manifest or the 'Sarguna (as it is called in the *Granth Sahib*)<sup>33</sup>. But essentially, He remains the one and the only one like a thread in all the beads. Guru Arjan Dev also confirms this tenet of Guru Nanak by saying that the unmanifest Lord becomes manifest of His own will and none can evaluate the worth of His powers. He is deep, profound, unfathomable infinite and incomputable nothing but One and the only One<sup>34</sup>. Under the strain of intense spiritual urge generally the unmanifest Brahman becomes the subject of man's feelings and Guru Nanak being a devoted Bhakta and a warm hearted mystic has undertaken the Nirguna Brahman as the prime concern of his soul. But he is not a passive *Nirgunvadin* having no concern with the turmoil and strife of this corporeal world. At this stage his *Nirguna* becomes *Saguna* essentially having the same light and force in it. He invokes that *Saguna Brahman* always when he witnesses the people of India flooded by the tyranny of the invaders<sup>35</sup>. We find that the main burden of the hymns of Guru Nanak is Nirguna Brahman, which essentially should not be considered as without any quality rather *nirguna* Brahman should be taken as above all the qualities. However, Guru Nanak in order to express his devotional feelings, attributed many qualities to Nirguna Brahman.

Guru Nanak's *Brahman* is *Saguna* and omnipresent in the sense that he never wanted to conceive God as a mere subject for the intellectual approach rather his God is to be realised through devotion, surrender and deep faith. Even a layman may feel His presence everywhere and develop himself morally and spiritually. Guru Nanak is wonder-struck not only when he thinks about the beginning of creation<sup>36</sup> he is equally amazed to think about God's mansion and His abode on the gate of which stand gods and goddesses to recite His praises. In Puranas also the Lord is described as occupying his throne in *Vaikuntha* in His resplendent robes. This transcendent heaven (*Vaikuntha*) is non-spatial and non-temporal. Since it is non-spatial and non-temporal, it is the manifestation of the essential powers of God and as such it is not constituted of the *gunas*, which form the substance of our spatio-temporal world. Guru Nanak shows Him residing in 'Sachkhand' (Abode of Truth) where He, in eternal bliss, is

constantly at work<sup>37</sup>. The 'Sachkhand' is non-spatial, hence it is just as true to say that God exists in 'Sachkhand' as to say that He Himself is 'Sachkhand'. Mythological stories were so much prevalent among the common people that the belief regarding God as having particular form, dress, ornaments, associates etc. deeply influenced the thinking of the Bhaktas. They did not care much to think that these representations could be interpreted mythically-allegorically or otherwise. They regarded all these intensely anthropomorphic descriptions as if they were literally true. It may be said that a God with hands, feet and dress would be destructible. To this the explanation is, that God's forms, abode etc, were conceived as constituted of non temporal substance<sup>38</sup>. God in all His grandeur and mystery constitutes an unfailing source of fascination to the devotees and they are blissfully drawn towards Him. In Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak calls Him *agam*, *agocar*, *alakh*, *nirguna* etc. which express His supreme mystery infinity and power.

Guru Nanak believes that the Supreme power which is already omnipotent can not gain any feather in its cap when it is personified and described as killer of Ravana or Kansa<sup>39</sup>. He is rather a Sultan who is being called as a mere chieftain by Nanak and Guru Nanak being too humble realises this lapse on his part<sup>40</sup> and calls Him Guru of all the Gurus<sup>41</sup>.

Guru Nanak very frequently used the terms then in vogue for God. He is not hesitant in calling God as *Bhagwant*, *Gosai*, *Jagannath*, *Gopal*, *Gobind*, *Narayan*, *Rama*, *Vasudeva* etc. But he did not believe in (*Avatar*) incarnation of God. Gods and goddesses did not fit in to the way of life which, as per to Guru Nanak, required a cohesive mutual effort for upliftment as well as for liberation, from bondage and ignorance, duality, hatred and sectarian jealousy. He, in the very beginning of his divine song 'Japuji' gives the call of 'Ek Onkar' or the only one God who is nothing but the Truth in all the ages and even the ages began. All other deities have been considered by him in the normal categories of men and creatures created by Him. He shows Shiva, Brahma, Indra, as singing the praises of Lord at His door<sup>42</sup>. He considers them among those millions who are bewailing to know the invisible and the infinite Lord<sup>43</sup>. God is so transcendent that *Vedas*

do not know His greatness and even many Brahmas can not realise His secrets. Avtaras do not know His limits<sup>44</sup> and they all have been deluded by mammon<sup>45</sup>.

Narad or Sarada have all been deemed as servants of God<sup>46</sup>. In 'Japuji', three disciples (Trinity of Brahma Visnu Mahesha) of God are said to have been created through Maya. As is His order and as it pleases Him so does He make them work. Now the greatest wonder is that he beholds them but they are unable to see Him. Further more, these gods are not immune from death. Brahma entered the lotus and searching the nether regions could not find the Lord's limit<sup>47</sup>. Brahma uttered the *Vedas*, *Siva* abandoned *Maya*, *Siddhas* became recluses for the sake of the true name of the Lord in order to become truthful and able to swim the world ocean<sup>48</sup>.

Further more we see in the hymns of Guru Nanak that he hardly ever described God in the gross form capable of being grasped by the senses. Secondly, he had no intention of analysing the concept of God from intellectual viewpoint because he was primarily a devoted *Bhakta* actively engaged for the welfare of the fellow beings. Due to his deep love for God, he cultivated many relations with God and made Him *Sakara* from *Nirakara* but where-ever he got the opportunity of discussing of the Supreme Lord, he clearly called him *Nirguna*, *Nirakar*, *Niranjana*, detached etc.

Guru Nanak realises God as *Karata Purakh* in the Mul Mantra in the very opening lines of Guru Granth Sahib. Looking around, it is impossible to think of anything without its creator. It is quite unreasonable to think of the self-creation of the things or their creation out of nothing. Though man is supposed to have great and wonderful intellectual powers and has succeeded in taming nature to a great extent, yet he has not claimed to be the originator of this universe. Far from creating the universe, he himself is one of the creatures of the universe. All thinkers directly or indirectly are conscious of some great unknown force behind the universe. This creative force or the Creator has been called *Karata Purakh* by Guru Nanak.

Looking at the vast immensity of the universe and everything comprising it, this *Karata Purakh* ought to be the repository of a *Virat* force or He must be an extremely powerful being. Not only

this (-) the complex and the wonderful order, perfection and organisation of this universe hint towards the fact that, this *Karta Purakh* must already be possessing supreme knowledge everything He creates. This *Karata* aspects of the supreme reality inspires us to be very much active, alive, and resourceful in order to maintain clock-like regularity, precision and control in our life similar to that of the great Creator, sustaining and governing the universe.

The very fact that this universe is created by a Creator shows that the universe once did not exist and that the Creator existed eternally. When God has the ability to create the world he has also the power to cause any catastrophic change in this universe. He has that power to make all life extinct and to revive it again. It likewise shows that this Creator is perfectly independent of this created universe, while the universe is totally dependent on its Creator. Thus the universe itself proves the existence of its Omnipotent, Omniscient, Self-willed, Alive, Active, Merciful, Wise and Eternal, *Virata Karata Purakha*, who is none other than *Brahman* Himself, whom Guru Nanak has described as a Being with thousands of eyes and yet without eyes, with millions of feet and yet without feet. He is that Virat Purusha who is being continuously worshipped by the universe through the salver of sky in which the sun and the moon are lamps, and stars are studded pearls. The fragrance of sandal-wood is incense for Him and wind His fan.<sup>49</sup>

However when we go through the Guru Granth Sahib we find that much stress has been laid on truth and truthful aspect of God. About 45 times Guru Nanak has called God as truth or truthful entity in a comparatively small hymn 'Sidh Gosti' of seventy three stanzas. Guru Nanak indirectly asks us to be truthful if we wish to be the real followers of God. Only by following truth in our actions can we merge in the eternal *Purusha* and get liberated from the bondage of transmigration.

As Said above, in the Upanishads the detailed study of the nature of *atman* and the *Brahman* has been put forth. For listening to the Guru the disciple is required to prepare well to become *adhikari* of the doctrine and has to undertake *tapas* for a sufficient period to delve deeper into one's own self. No doubt that knowledge replaced the *Karmakanda* but somehow people started becoming oblivious

to their duty bound *karmas* as well. Consequently a variety of spiritual descriptions sprang up and the temporal duties were relegated to the back seat. Already disintegrated in the name of rigid caste system the Indian Society could not withstand the onslaughts of external invasions, especially from the north-west borders of India. The earlier invaders were somehow assimilated in Indian society but with Muslims the case was different. They along with their culture thought it fit to settle down here and made India their second home. The spiritual heights attained by Indian ethos crumbled like a pack of cards because the hard earned spirituality could not sustain the burden of heavy and crucial responsibilities of such a tyrannical temporal world. Guru Nanak travelled far and wide to have first hand knowledge of the sufferings of the people and we find him lamenting in one of his hymns recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib, wherein he says that 'this land was a jewel but the dogs have spoiled and devastated it; none will be there to weep for them— *ratan vigadi vigoe kutin muia sar na kai* .<sup>50</sup>

Guru Nanak did not feel satisfied by mere theorizing the great doctrines such as the Fatherhood of one God and Brotherhood of mankind, equality among one and all and no distinction on the basis of caste, colour or creed. He took special care to give people an applied philosophy of spirituality and to translate these doctrines into action he created institutions of *sangat* and *pangat* which further put on the impetus later on for the creation of Khalsa in which equality and freedom were the cardinal pillars. Guru Nanak has nowhere tried to prove the existence of *atman* and *paramatman* and accepting them as they are put much stress upon the Truth aspect of the Brahman and devised the down to earth ways and means for becoming truthful—truthful to one's own self, truthful to one another and then truthful to humanity. His concern for 'truth' is immensely delineated in all his works and the sole reason for such a concern is that the probing into the Truth transforms man into a self-respecting person, consciously awakened towards his duties; enquiries into the nature of the abstract Brahman, as was done in the earlier centuries, push him decrying the way of repudiation of the world. Guru Nanak introduced the perfect example of interfaith dialogue and intra-faith

dialogue when we find him collecting the voices of truth from all the nooks and corners of India which ultimately reverberated in the shape of Guru Granth Sahib.

### Conclusion :

The *Upanishad*, were produced by rishis who lived in seclusion from the world. Sri Guru Granth Sahib was produced by the *Guru* and *Bhaktas* who were house holders. That is why, while the *Upanishad* mainly concern themselves with spiritual matters, Guru Granth Sahib devotes itself as much to reforming the mundane life of *people*. *Upanishad* say will to decry the *varanashra* while Guru Granth Sahib does so with great ease. In fact, Guru Granth Sahib decries all kinds of inequalities and strongly pleads for promulgation of social justice. While the *Upanishad* revolve around intellectual understanding of *Brahman* and *Ishwar*, Guru Granth Sahib establishes an emotional affective (*bhakti*) relationship with the *Nirgun-Sargun Brahma-Ishwar* but also identifies in nature and finds it immanent in His creation. Hence He can be served by serving mankind. This concept of service replaces the *tapas* of the *Upanishad*. The *Upanishads* are self-contained closed systems while Sri Guru Granth Sahib open system that employs inter-faith dialogue in order to understand other points of view and give them respect. *Upanishads*, in spite of their departure from the intense ritualism of *Vedas* have not been able to rid themselves fully from ritualism. Guru Granth Sahib, however, removed all ritualism from its discourse. In fact, most *Upanishads* are in philosophic prose learning a few like *katha* that are in verse. Guru Granth Sahib is entirely in exquisitely inspiring verse and further, has been set to a musical system in which the spirit of the *raga* is in concordance with the spirit of the *shabd*.

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# Some Linguistic Aspects of Guru Granth Sahib

Prem Singh

*Sri* Guru Granth Sahib is not in one language, as we understand language today, but in many languages and styles. On the whole, we can say that the language of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib is Braj based/ Sadhu language. I am saying it is 'Braj based' but grammatically quite different from Braj. The Braj Bhasha does not attest gender as a grammatical category and also it does not attest ergative construction. Thus, Braj based should be understood as Braj, other things being equal. As it is well known Braj was a lingua franca of the time and hence Sankara in Jorhat (Assam) and Nama Deva in Pune wrote in a kind of Braj with local features such as preterite in -b-, and future marker in -L- among others. Braj does not have -L- preterite and -b- future.

Another feature fundamental to the language of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib is that it shows many residues of the *Apbhramsha* and *Prakrits*. For instance the use of -u- as a marker of, mostly, masculine Nominative form or -i- as in Japu (ਜਪੁ) or -i as a marker of instrumental plural as in Sikhi (ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਸੇ ਬਾਨ ਭਾਲਿਆ). Similarly, variety of form in absolutive/adverbial construction- the so-called (ਪੁਰਬ-ਪੁਰਣ ਕ੍ਰਿਦੰਤ) of Punjabi grammarians. It has many forms and I shall deal with the development of this. I shall look at the formation of future forms in -s which go back to Vedic Sanskrit and Indo-European.

Finally, I shall deal with the grammatical problems of Sahaskriti Shalokas. This has not been adequately understood. We may see Sahab

Singh and Kahan Singh Nabha. Recently Prof. Shackle has dealt with problem in more scientific manner (BSOAS 1978). We take his analysis further. I must add that Principal Teja Singh understood this problem, while Prof. Sahab Singh and Bhai Kahan Singh treat the language of Shalokas as Sanskrit (which it is not). Principal Teja Singh's remarks are more pertinent and historically correct. He says

ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੁਰਾਣੇ ਜ਼ਮਾਨੇ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਦੇ ਮੁਕਾਬਲੇ ਤੇ ਸੰਸਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਸੀ ਤਿਵੇਂ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਵਕਤ ਪ੍ਰਾਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਬੋਲੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਮੁਕਾਬਲੇ ਵਿਚ ਇਕ ਬਣਾਉਟੀ ਜਹੀ ਬੋਲੀ ਪ੍ਰਚਲਤ ਸੀ ਜਿਸਨੂੰ ਰਾਥਾ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਸਕ੍ਰਿਤੀ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਹਨ। ਇਹ ਮਾਧਾਂ ਸੰਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਡੇਰਿਆਂ ਉਤੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਹਿੰਦ ਵਿਚ ਸਮਝੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਸੀ। ਇਹ ਵਧੇ ਵਧੇ ਸੂਬਿਆਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਬੋਲੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਵਿਆਕਰਣਕ ਵਖੋਵਿਆਂ ਤੋਂ ਆਜ਼ਾਦ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਸੀ। ਮਸਲਨ, ਕਰਤੇ ਹੈਂ, ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ ਆਦਿ ਪ੍ਰਾਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਦੀ ਥਾਂ ਕਰੰਤਿ ਹੀ ਕੰਮ ਦੇ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਸੀ।” (ਪੰਨਾ-1353, ਸ਼ਬਦਾਰਥ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ, ਪੋਥੀ ਚੌਥੀ)

Principal Teja Singh is right as far as it goes, but I do not think that he understood the problem in its totality. Take the following line :

ਨਿਹ ਫਲੰ ਤਸ ਜਨਮਸ ਜਾਵਦ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਨ ਬਿੰਦਤੇ ਸਾਗਰੰ ਸੰਧਾਰਸ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ  
ਤਰਹਿਕੇ।

Nihphalam Tasya Janamasya Javad Braham Naa Bindte  
Sagram Samsarasya Gura Prasadi Tarahike.

Notice in first line, Tasya is masculine form indicating with Janma but here, Janmasya is grammatically not correct, it should have been janma. Similarly, look at Pujasi. Here the form is second person singular but the subject, not expressed at the surface structure, is third person singular. Further more, in line 5 we read Jaanasi and the subject is Je Koi. The form Jaanasi is second person singular. Moreover, in *hovanti Agya*, *Bhagwan Purakh* the subject is third singular but the verb form is third plural. The entire corpus of Sanskrit Shlokas attest this kind of syntactic irregularities. If Principal Teja Singh is right, then the syntactic irregularity should have been confined to the finite verbs. But irregularities are attested in all inflectional categories. The question is how to explain historically, such a phenomenon? The one explanation is that the writers of such poetry did not care for the grammatical rules, if it is true then there should have

been other irregularities like a post position being placed at the beginning or the end of clause or a sentence or a post position being placed after a verb but nothing like that happens. Secondly, we may assume that the Gurus were not well versed in Sanskrit, if so then what was the motivation to write in *Sahskriti*. We know that Guru Arjan Dev was a master editor and was very meticulous about the grammatical rules as it is evident from the use of u or i and grammatical rules. Compare, (ਧੋਲੁ ਧਰਮੁ) Dholu Dharmu Daya Ka Putu. Notice Dholu Dharmu Putu all show U in the final position. All these forms agree as they are nominative singular masculine forms. The form Dholu is an adjective and Putu is predicative position and syntactically with Dharmu as well as Putu. (ਇਹ ਭੀ ਦਾਤਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਦਾਤਾਰ) Notice *ehi Bhi Dati Teri Daatar*. ehi is a pronominal adjective modifying Dati. Dati being feminine form, hence ehi form of pronominal adjective. Thus, to say that Guru Arjan Dev did not know grammar, would be wrong.

Let us go to history, such syntactic irregularities are fairly common in the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. We may mention in passing that almost all Mahayana Buddhist text were written in this language. Compare some form from these texts. Aham Avocat (Lalit Vistara, Page 296). I, the Buddha said. Notice the subject is first person while the verb is third person singular as Edgerton rightly remarks “there is a wide spread confusion of person and number, usually in that third singular forms are used for any person and either number.”

It is equally possible that the break down of the old inflectional system due to phonological changes, there was confusion in the inflectional system of the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit and its use by the wandering Monks brought into existence the kind of structure attested in the Sahaskriti Shlokas. Whatever may be the reason, the Sahaskriti Shlokas are linguistically very interesting.

Now, we come to another construction in the language of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib and that is gerundive/ adverbial/ absolute construction. All these terms are used in literature. Pay attention to the following forms of gerundives in Gurbani. (ਗਾਵੈ ਕੋ ਸਾਜਿ ਕਰੇ ਤਨ ਖੇਹ) Gaveh Ko Saaji Kare Tanu Kheh. Some sing/praise having decorated, they deform the body.

ਨਾਮੁ ਵਿਸਾਰਿ ਦੇਖ ਦੁਖ ਸਹੀਐ -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੧੦੨੮

Namu Visari Dokh Dukh Sahiai. Having forgotten the Nama people undergo almost a pain. Sometimes, the gerundive form is repeated.

ਸੁਣਿਐ, ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਮਾਨੁ -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੩

Sunyai Pari Pari Pavehi Manu. One hears and having read again and again receives honour. In the above lines, the gerundive form Suffix is i . This ( f ) is realised as and when the root ends in a vowel: compare the following examples :

Root Dhiya ਧਿਆਇ ਧਿਆਇ 'ਭਗਤਹ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ' -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੨੮੪  
having thought and thought the Bhagat attain bliss. ਖਾਇ ਖਾਇ 'ਕਰੇ ਬਦਫੈਲੀ' -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੧੦੫ Having eaten and eaten one indulges in misdeeds. Sometimes, ( i ) becomes/ is realised as e. ਜੇਵਡੁ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਤੇ ਵਡ ਦਾਤੀ, ਦੇ ਦੇ ਕਰੇ ਰਜਾਈ-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੧੪੭ As great the Lord so great is his gifts, having given and given he satiates.

Sometimes, this element i is attested as i and ii.

ਤਿਉ ਜੀਵਹਿ ਸਾਕਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਬਿਸਾਰੀ -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੨੩੯

ਤਿਉ ਹਰਿ ਜਨੁ ਜੀਵੈ ਨਾਮੁ ਚਿਤਾਰੀ -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੧੯੮

Tio hari janu jiwai.

Thus live the word of God by having concentration on Nama.

This element

ਜ ਅ ਜ ਕ ( ਿ, ੀ, ਇ) is realised as -i as in (ਲੇਇ)

- le, (ਦੇਇ ਦੇ) etc.

We also find auxiliary verb kari kare and kai (ਕਰਿ, ਕਰੇ, ਅਤੇ ਕੈ) with the main verb and reflects the use of (ਕੇ) in modern Punjabi or Kar in modern Hindi. Notice the following examples:

1. ਪਾਖਾਨ ਗਮੜਿ ਕੈ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਕੀਨੀ Pakhan gadhi kai murati kini.  
Having chiseled the rock, he made a stature.

2. ਸੁਨਿ ਕਰਿ ਬਚਨ ਤੁਮਾਰੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ, ਮਨੁ ਤਨੁ ਮੇਰਾ ਠਾਰੁ ਥੀਓ

-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੨

Sunikari bachan tumhare satiguru, manu tanu mera thar thio.  
Having heard you discourse, my mind and body became cool (satiated)

The above data can be classified into two categories, synthetic and analytic. Thus the forms in I - IV are synthetic and the forms in V may be called analytic. This historical aspect in I - IV (i.e. synthetic forms is very interesting; all these forms are derived from the proto-indic Suffix-ya. Thus Suffix-ya in the gerundive is found in the Vedic text in complex and not in simplex. Now this -ya becomes -e in Pali i, or i in various *prakriti* and *Apabhramsha*. Thus the history of the gerundive forming Suffix -ya goes back to the Rigveda and even Indo-European. The analytic suffix *ke, kai kari* is recent addition to old Punjabi. What is the purpose of the above discussion? We could say that it is not the purpose. Our aim is not only to situate the language of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib, a great religious text but even far more significant is the use of language/languages in this great book. It is a store house or a veritable museum of linguistic forms. Notice also that the forms in -i, i, etc. represent many residues of the late Indo-Aryan stage (the *Apabhramsha*). Moreover, the forms in -u, -i etc. are also from the late stages of Indo-Aryan. The forms in -u as in *Japu, Namu* represent nominative sg. forms of Vedic ar...-as which is realised as o in early middle Indo-Aryan. The attachment of -u in *Namu* is understandable. The multiplicity of *devas* type where -o and -u are in *Situ*. Notice that a form in (ਸਿਖੀ) *Sikhi* as in

ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਸੇ ਥਾਨੁ ਭਾਲਿਆ

Gursikhi so than bhalia -S.G.G.S., p. 450

'the Gursikhs located that place' gursikhi is form from *framo* gursikh is the instrumental plural form - gursikh / gursikhi. In the same line we read (ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਕੀ ਘਾਲ ਥਾਇ ਪਈ) *Gursikhan ki ghal thae paayi*. (The efforts of the gursikhs came to a fruition Here -sikha represent old genitive plural form (-nam).)

Similarly, (ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ) - *jan(a) is namu dhi (y) a* could represent *ji(n) bhis nama (a) dhyapata*, by whom the Nama was contemplated upon'. Hence again *jini* represents of old and instrumental plural and this construction is the ergative construction or the (ਨੇ) construction in modern Punjabi.

Now, I turn to the formation of future tense in the language of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib, it is varied and far more complex. At the sur-

face level the following elements are added to the root to form the future text. These are :

1. u, u , o
2. a
3. ai t
4. sa, st, si
5. he, hai
6. hi hu + -ga, -gi, giya.

Now this kind of situation is really disturbing. Now the elements in 1, 2, 3 are attached to the roots and these elements are vowels.

Compare the following examples :

ਨਹੀ ਛੋਡਉ ਰੇ ਬਾਬਾ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੧੧੯੪

Nahi chhodau re baba ram nam

I will not give up reciting ram nam.

ਜਉ ਤੂ ਕਰਹਿ ਸੁ ਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਵਾ

Jo tu karhi su kar kamawa.

What ever you do, I will perform the same deed'

ਤੋਉ ਨਾਮਾ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਹਰੈ

ਗੰਗ ਜਮੁਨ ਜਉ ਉਲਟੀ ਬਹੈ

Even when Ganges and Jamuna flow backward

to nama hari karta rahae

Even if the Ganga and Jamuna will flow reversly

Even then Nama will continue worshipping Hari'.

ਧਰਮ ਰਾਇ ਜਬ ਲੇਖਾ ਮਾਰੈ dharam rai jab lekha mangae'

When Dharam Rai will ask for accounts (of your deeds).

(ਉ ਓ) etc are in reality due to the phonetic changes from old personal ending as

ami - aum - a

asi - ahi -ai - e -i

ati - ai -e

Thus we can explain the historical aspect. In reality, these represent old sulyuntive and optative forms and these forms are synthetically indicative of future.

Now, we give two forms in -s -h- etc. -s- as forms :

ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਤੈ ਹੂੰ ਭੇਵਸਾਂ ਮੈ ਮਾਰਗ ਦੇਹੁ ਬਤਾਇ ਜੀਉ। -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੭੬੩

ehu manu tai ku devesa, mai marag dehu batae jio.  
I shall gift this mind to you, but show me the path.

ਜਾਸਹਿ ਜਨਮੁ ਹਾਰਿ

Jasahi janamu hari.

You will depart wasting this life'.

The form 'jasahi' represents -asi, 2nd person say whose vsv -vhr.

In the above lines, I have given a brief historical account of the future tense and its use in *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib. I also want to emphasize that this great anthology reflects various aspects of the development of Indo-Aryan languages. It is important not only from linguistic point of view, but stylistically, it represents the best of classical and folk tradition. The folk genres that are used in this anthology are amazing, (tko) *Var, alahniyan, ghorian, sawaiye, sabda* among others. This kind of genres and linguistic variations are not found in any other Indic language and the great Greek Anthology pales into insignificance before this anthology. However, it needs to be mentioned that the entire text is in Ragas, there are exceptions like Japu, Slokes of Farid, Kabir and Guru Tegh Bahadur, of the *Adi Granth* influenced by the tradition of the Sramana (Jains, Buddhist, the Carvakas), there is no piling of simile upon simile, metaphor on metaphor as in the classical Sanskrit literature. We may just mention Kalidasa, Kumara Sambhawa. (Vth Kanda). In short, it is primarily literature of the people, but also further intellectually advanced. We may look at (nkosh) (Arti), it transforms the traditional Arati into an aesthetic experience. In this context, I want to mention the very first lines of *Sri Raga*.

ਮੇਤੀ ਤ ਮੇਦਰ ਉਸਰਹਿ ਰਤਨੀ ਤ ਹੋਹਿ ਜੜਾਉ

ਕਸਤੂਰਿ ਕੁੰਗੁ ਅਗਰਿ ਚੰਦਨਿ, ਲੀਪਿ ਆਵੈ ਚਾਉ -ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁ. ਗ੍ਰੰ. ਸ. ਪੰਨਾ ੧੪

In these two lines, Guru Nanak sums up the various materials used in traditional workshop.

I could go into some details of aesthetics and stylistics of the language of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib, but there is limitation of time and space.

# Poetics of Guru Granth Sahib

Gurbhagat Singh

Poetics today refers to the general laws of literary production. These laws include hermeneutics of life that vary from culture to culture according to its history; and the conventional as well as contrived devices used for articulation and communication. The devices carry the burden of interpretation. Since all the poets of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* share the hermeneutic of life and devices, it is possible to talk about the poetics of this *Granth*. The variations of the poets are only details of their shared repertoire.

In the West, the debate about Poetics was systematized by Aristotle<sup>1</sup> in his work entitled *On the Art of Poetry* in which he distinguished poetry for its plot or mythos and defamiliarized metaphoric diction. When Aristotle was establishing the specific devices of poetry, he was answering Plato who had understood the cosmos as a large ensemble of eidos that can be intuited rationally. The poetry that did not help in this rational intuition was castigated by Plato in his *Republic*. To further differentiate poetry Aristotle in his work *On Interpretation* distinguished between propositional or apophantic and non-propositional or non-apophantic speeches<sup>2</sup> (Eskin, 2004: 577-78). The clash between the two kinds of knowledge has continued in the West even in the writings of Wittgenstein<sup>3</sup> (1889-1951). His *Tractatus* accepts “propositions” containing basic simples as ultimate to know the world, even to know what is “unsayable.” Roman Jakobson<sup>4</sup>, a prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century theorist of poetics, in his essay “Linguistics and Poetics” theorizes the structure of poetry as focussed on the

message for its own sake (Jakobson, 1975: 167). In other words, a poem does not push any propositional truth, it is ‘hesitant’ about it in its poetic specificity. Todorov<sup>5</sup> in his *Introduction to Poetics* extends poetics to linguistics and semiotics to assert the difference of poetical laws.

The poetical laws that organize the sacred poetry of Guru Granth Sahib are free from the Western kind of philosophical and schizophrenic problematics. Its central experience and interpretation of cosmic life is in *Sahaja* that can be translated into English as cosmic balance or cosmic spontaneity. The ultimate purpose of human life in the Guru Granth Sahib is to realize and practice *Vismad* or cosmic wonder originated and epitomized by *Wahiguru*, literally meaning the Guru of Wonder. One has to be in a *Sahaja* relationship with Him and then reorganize interpersonal relationships, politics, society, and economics in that cosmic wonder. But what is significant about this message is that the *Vismad* or *Sahaja* state is not bifurcated into knowledge and non-knowledge, propositional and non-propositional.

In Rag Dev Gandhari Guru Nanak Dev says:

Only she pleases the Radiant who is enlightened.

The one absorbed in Love dwells in *Sahaja*. -S.G.G.S. p. 459<sup>6</sup>

Love and enlightenment are simultaneous in *Sahaja*, without any conflict. In Rag Bhairi Kabir says: “My being is Ecstatic, the mind has gradually begun to absorb in *Sahaja*”<sup>7</sup> -S.G.G.S. p. 1158.

The form that the poets of Guru Granth Sahib have invented for revealing the Guru of Wonder and His illumined but problematic creation has been named as *Sahaja Katha*. It can be translated into English as narration (*Katha*) in cosmic spontaneity. *Katha* is also exegesis. The words story/plot/mythos are quite inadequate because those are shaped by the imaginary and are structured in the cause-effect relationship. At least that is the Aristotelian sense. But *Sahaja Katha* is not a tightly structured logical discourse. It cannot be so because of its overarching theme and presence of *Nadar/Karm* or Divine Grace and Kindness.

Kindness is a gift, it can come without any chain of cause and effect. It gives the *Sahja Katha* a quantum characteristic. Physicists Max Planck and Niels Bohr<sup>8</sup> had established in 1901 and 1913 that

the universe is constituted by moving material radiant objects that do not follow any cause and effect linearity, they move in “leaps,” The leap theory is not very far from *Nadar* that defies any calculation. Some of the lexical and syntactic aspects of the *Katha* time to explode into *Anhad Nad* (Unstruck Symphony) disturbing the movement of the poetic line to create a higher harmony.

In Rag Suhi Guru Arjan Dev says:

*Sahaja Katha* of the radiant is very sweet.

Only rare ones visualize it.

It exceeds with song, sound, play and meetings.

It is beyond life 's sounds and pleasures.

It is a rain of the True Quintessence's Nectar.

This *Katha* is learnt from the Guru. -S.G.G.S. p.739<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that *Sahaja Katha* is quintessential, in elaborating the higher abstraction of life. It could be like a mathematical construct at one level and at another abandon of “song, sound, play and meeting.” Some postmodern theorists of poetical laws like Derrida, Lyotard influenced by Wittgenstein's “game” theory of language, have given significant importance to the role of play. Through the play of opposed signifieds or conceptual images of signs, one dimensionality of a sign is annulled, the sign becomes multidirectional or multisignifying. The poets of the *Granth* have used this tensorial play, especially to redefine or re-articulate their major sign: Akal Purakh or Wahiguru. For instance Wahiguru commands or places everything in *Hukam*. In *Japuji* Guru Nanak Dev says:

It is due to *Hukam* that beings take forms.

All function within the Commandment, none is outside.

-S.G.G.S. p. 1<sup>10</sup>

But at the same time the same commanding Guru of Wonder also has countless musicians around who play musical instruments and sing the Lord's praise (Ibid., 6)<sup>11</sup> The commanding character appears to be at variance with the fluidly musical character. The play makes the sign more complex and paradoxical.

The *Katha* of Guru Granth Sahib has been distinguished from the *Katha* of the Vedas. In Rag Sarang Guru Angad Dev says in a powerful tone that the Vedic *Katha* is shaped by the thoughts of charity

(*punn*): and sin (*pap*), consideration of heaven and hell, the deceptive caste-hierarchy (Ibid., 1243)<sup>12</sup>. *Sahaja Katha's* ground and shaping thought are different. This *Katha* is “ambrosial, quintessential, enlightening and contemplative” according to the Guru. In Rag Maru Guru Arjan Dev says that the narration is about the non-narratable or *Akath*, and it is narrated by He Himself, (Ibid., 1056)<sup>13</sup>. In other words the identity of the poet disappears. It becomes one with the Guru of Wonder, the Timeless Person. Rather than annihilation of identity as is in Buddhism, it is enlarged and integrated with the Light and becomes *jot mah jot*. We can also say that *Sahaja Katha* is the narration of Wahiguru by Wahiguru Himself. It is also *Gohaj Katha*<sup>14</sup> (Ibid., 739) which means about the mystery of what is.

In Rag Gauri Guru Arjan Dev has said; “*Sahaja Katha* is a pool of Nectar, the one who gets it is relishfully filled” (ibid., 186)<sup>15</sup>. Whereas the Aristotelian mythos balances and therapeutically treats a lack, the *Sahaja Katha* positively fills, it gives even literal joy and peace or “sukh”. The one who constructs *Sahaja Katha* or is the narrator attracts “vairagis” day and night. *Vairagi* in the conventional sense is one who is detached but in the Guru Granth Sahib it means a disciplined person who is also yearningfully in love with Akal Purakh who Himself is “Rasik Bairagi.” In Rag Gauri, Guru Arjan Dev says that meeting with the “Rasik Bairagi”—the relishfully detached,” is pre-inscribed. The narrator of *Sahaj Katha* articulates his/her meeting with the Rasik Bairagi. In other words, *Sahaja Katha* is the narration of “Rasik Bairag.” It is a different kind of emotive experience that cannot be described with the dictionary language of English or in the known Indian idiom. “Rasik Bairag” is the emotive experience that is so very unique about the poetry of the Guru Granth Sahib.

How to express the unique emotive experience of “Rasik Bairag”<sup>16</sup> in the *Sahaja Katha*? The accomplished articulation of the Guru Granth Sahib is the answer. Obviously to theorize the meeting of the seemingly opposed emotions of Rasa or relish and Bairag or detachment, the Indian Rasa poetics was not adequate. If we combine the Rasa theory of Bharat, the Dhvani theories of Anandvardhana and Abhinavgupta, they come to an integral notion of Rasa Dhvani, the suggested *Camatkar* meaning crossing the boundaries of denotative

(*abhida*), contextual (*tataparya*) and implied (*lakshana*) meanings. The relish or Rasa that arouses from the *Dhvani* or suggested meaning will be *alaukik* or supernatural but will not preserve the co-presence of Rasa and Bairag. The signs appear to be contradictory but in the emotive experience of Guru Granth Sahib they are dialogical. In simple words, the “Rasik Bairag” that constitutes the *Sahaja Katha* has both the components in it: Relish (Rasa) and Enlightenment (Gyan). Kabir says in Rag Gauri “The one who is Ecstatic of Sahaja drinks the divine rasa along with knowledge and contemplation”<sup>17</sup> (Ibid., 326).

Another feature of the *Sahaja Katha* is that it makes happen the luminous opening of lotus in the interior of the listener/devotee. The blossoming lotus is a symbol of ancient Buddhism, enthusiastically used by the Sahajyani Buddhist yogis contemporary to the Bhakti movement. With the arrival of the nirvanic moment the lotus opens luminously. The *Sahaja Katha*, through its several devices, makes this opening happen in the reader’s/seeker’s mind. A contemporary theorist Derek Attridge calls this kind of happening an “event.”<sup>18</sup> (Attridge, 2004: 654)

In Sri Rag Guru Nanak Dev says: “The lotus has luminously opened inside, filling to the brim with Nectar” (*antar kamal pargasya amrit bharya aghai*)<sup>19</sup> (Shabdarth, 26). The Guru further says: the lotus has luminously opened, *Sahaja* contemplation has begun.”<sup>20</sup> (Ibid., 26). In Rag Sorath, Guru Amar Das has said “When the lotus luminously opens, it absorbs in the Beloved’s Love, the Unstruck *Sabda* is played”<sup>21</sup> (Ibid., 602). In fact the verb used is in the past tense: *vajaya*, indicating that the *Unstruck Sabda* has been experienced. Further, “The body and mind have become pure and absorbed in the Truth of the True.” The *Sahaja Katha* is not only a witness but also transformational. If transformation has not occurred, the lotus has not opened in the heart, according to Bhagar Trilochan in Rag Guri, “there is no justification for becoming a monk” (Ibid., 525)<sup>22</sup>.

For articulating and combining witness with the transformational effect, the *Katha* has used several devices. The most vital one is the poetic line of excess. The poetic line of excess here means sound-combinations that cross all semantic and paradigmatic boundaries. The words are border-crossers or border shatterers. For instance in

*Japuji* when Guru Nanak Dev says in Pauri 10: "Hearing Him equals the bathing of sixty eight holy places/Hearing Him gives the concentration of *Sahaja*"<sup>23</sup> the Guru's Hearing exceeds its meaning, it also clashes with several paradigms related to Brahmanical and yogic beliefs. The excess is further extended by repetition. Repetition substantially adds to excess when in Pauri 10, infinity is invoked through the word "Countless:"

Countless (Your) Names, countless dwellings  
Inaccessible, inaccessible are Your countless spheres<sup>24</sup>  
(S.G.G.S., p. 4)

In Punjabi, the words used are *asankh* and *agamm*.

Repetition is a very powerful device of the *Sahaja Katha*. Now we know from Nietzsche's philosophy of "eternal recurrence" that it is "continually creative"<sup>25</sup> (Nietzsche, 1968, 545-46). In every moment repetition reveals an undisclosed aspect of the Other. A Jewish French philosopher Levinas calls the undisclosed aspect of being as *ipseity*, it is love vibrating over and over. Gilles Deleuze, another French philosopher, considers repetition as "singular." it is private, meditational and universal<sup>26</sup> (Deleuze, 1994: 27).

Another distinctive feature of the expression-system of this *Sahaja Katha* is that it is set to several kinds of music. For instance Guru Ram Das's *Karhale* are a representative example of this kind of experimental hybridity to reveal excess. *Karhalas* were the songs of haunting tunes sung by some alien traders usually riding camels. The hymns composed by the Guru are also assigned to Rag Gauri Purabi of contemplative consciousness and awe. The music of Punjabi language, the tune of *Karhale* and Rag Gauri Purabi's notes have been combined in a symphonic structure. When the Guru addresses the mind as *Karhala* with the restlessness of a camel and asks it to discipline itself for meeting the Beloved, this asking in three kinds of music produces a complex semiotic, integrating emotion discipline and immediacy. The sign *Karhale* is transformed into a sign expressing cosmic restlessness in a haunting phonology.

The various signs used by the poets of the Guru Granth Sahib are also historically mediated. When meeting with the Divine Beloved occurs, energy begins to flow unchecked, but it is expressed through

signs that are based in historical consciousness, sensitive to what was going on. When Guru Nanak Dev says in Rag Majh: "You alone are the Banker, the rest of the world is a trader" <sup>29</sup> (Ibid., 140) and Guru Arjan Dev utters in Rag Asa: "The True Guru is the Banker and disciples are traders, Capital of the Quintessence and account the cumulated Truth" <sup>30</sup> (Ibid., 430), the signs are conscious of exchange and capital transactions not only in India but also in the other continents. The distinction of this sign usage is that its signifieds are being transferred. The trade that was profit oriented and became the base of modern capitalism, has been given the Guru's ideal or "ought" related meanings extending to the Divine Beloved and a higher ethics. Guru Arjan Dev in Rag Majh (Ibid., 134) and Guru Nanak Dev in the same Rag (Ibid., 140) use the sign "bohitha" or ship.. "The sea, waves, anxiety of the world are crossed in the ship of the Guru." Travels through the oceans, boarding ships had become quite intense in the times of the Gurus. Explorations of Asia and Africa were already shaping European Imperialism and Empire. An Arab traveller Ibn Batuta visited India in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A Portuguese Vasco Da Gama came in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The historical sensitivity of the signs of the *Granth* makes its narrative mediated although when meeting with the Guru of Wonder occurs it is direct leaving behind all mediations. The constant burden of mediation and directness gives these signs a specificity that can be interpreted by combining historical and phenomenological disciplines

Another marked feature of the *Sahaja Katha* of the *Granth* Sahib is that it never forgets its concern for reconstructing the present and the future. For that reason it is deadly about its criticism of those who are "suckers" and blocking the flow of the Divine Beloved into social networks. Guru Nanak Dev's severe criticism of the "blood suckers of humans" is in Rag Majh <sup>31</sup> (Ibid., 140). Bhagat Parmanand's disapproval of the "violent" who have not purified themselves by the mediation of saints <sup>32</sup> (Ibid., 1253) are very representative example of the socially conscious signifiers that function with the utopia of constructing the "pure" or *nirmal* mind to be fully human and to be with the Divine Beloved.

Certain signs that had become symbols of false and decadent beliefs degrading women were given alternate concepts. In *Asa di Var* Guru Nanak Dev explodes the myth of *Sutak*, birth time impurity. The Guru calls mental greed and false speech as *Sutak*. Birth and death are understood as happening within the Divine Beloved's commandment<sup>33</sup> (Ibid., 472). Guru Amar Das in Rag Suhi redefines *Satis* as those women who do not burn themselves on the pyres of their husbands. He says that *Satis* are those who are hit by the separation of the Beloved<sup>34</sup> (Ibid., 787).

This paper suggests that to construct the poetics of *Sri* Guru Granth Sahib interdisciplinary efforts are to be made. The poetical laws that emanate from the *Granth*, especially from its original form *Sahaja Katha*, need insights from quantum physics, literature, music, philosophy anthropology, psychology and semiotics. The poetics of the *Granth* may have to be named as *Transpoetics*.

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# Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Namdev

Indra Nath Choudhuri

Guru Granth Sahib is a multilingual text containing 5894 hymns of Guru Nanak and some other Sikh Gurus and compositions of fifteen Bhagats which either mean devotees or worshipers, who practice *bhakti* or it specifically refers to historical figures such as Kabir Namdev, Ravidas, Jaidev and others. In the *Jappi*, Guru Nanak employs the term *Bhagat* as follows:

“O Nanak! The devotees (*bhagat*) flower and flourish forever.

On listening to the music of the divine word sin and sorrow disappear”<sup>1</sup>.

There are many terms such as *bhagat*, *sant*, *gurumukh* or *gurusikh* which appear synonymously in the *Adi Granth*. *Bhagat* or *sant* is a seeker of truth and liberation, pursuer of one's objective by means of such activities as “association with other devotees, regular participation in singing of *kirtan*, the individual practice of *nam-simran* and pure living”<sup>2</sup>.

Hymns of these poet saints are included in *Guru Granth Sahib* particularly consonant with the doctrine of the universal *bani* that appears perpetually in all ages in the works of the *bhagats*<sup>3</sup>. After Kabir, Namdev has the second largest number of *banis*, totaling sixty-one verses, in *Guru Granth Sahib*. Namdev belongs to *Nath Panth*. The word *Nath* is analysed as one who realises (-*Tha*) *Brahman* through *Nada* (*na*). They all believe in reaching the highest stage where some kind of music or divine melodist is heard. The most revealing thing of the text of *Guru Granth Sahib* is that it is not arranged subject-

wise but according to the musical measure in which a hymn is meant to be sung. There are thirty-one such *ragas*, which bring harmony to the whole text.

The rhythm of the music supplements the ideas of unity and proportion in the writings of so many poets in so many languages and dialects.

Music gives a dynamic harmonious character to the text and builds a world of spirituality and establishes ever-new rhythmic relationships of notes, which reveal to us the universal mystery of the Divine, *Ek oankar*. The divinity of the word (*shabad*) is brought out by song and music. Music creates the power of concentration so that unstruck melody (*anahat nada*) that lies hidden in the external sound (*ahdnadau*) is heard internally.

When we hear the *shabd* then like a flash the meaning of the divine poem dawns on us and we realise that there is an empire within us, a vastness, a sky and in that vastness the truth of one reality becomes apparent to us. So explains Guru Nanak : The ultimate one who is Truth

One reality, Truth is only one  
The waves are many,  
the ocean only one.  
but we see the unity, the oneness  
of the ocean,  
we shall continue, wandering.

One can hear its echo in the hymn written by Namdev :

एक अनेक बिआपक पूरक जत देखउ तत सोई  
सभु गोबिंदु है सभु गोबिंदु है, गोबिंदु बिनु नहीं कोई।  
सूतु एकु मणि सम-सहस जैसे ओतिपोति प्रभु सोई।

There is one God of various manifestations  
Contained in and filling everything;  
Whither so ever I look there He is.

Everything is God, everything is God,  
 There is nothing but God.  
 One string holdeth hundreds and  
 Thousands of beads; God is  
 The warp and woof.<sup>4</sup>

Sant Namdev was born in 1270 A.D. at Pandharpur, the famous holy place of pilgrimage in Maharashtra and lived till 1350 A.D. The period of Namdev is very significant. During that time throughout India Sant poets were laying the foundation of the path of devotion both iconic (*saguna*) and non-iconic (*nirguna*) and giving the people a proper direction as how to live a life of devotion, peace and supreme bliss. This poetry of devotion is like a stream of flowing oil, *tailadhara*, from vessel to vessel, from verse to verse, from mind to mind, from God to devotee. It was a revolution that took the imagination of the people by storm.

Indian ethos always believes in double experience. It does not accept a monolithic structure of one theory, one idea, one vision, and one existence. Adi Shankaracharya, who followed the path of vedanta accepted the existence of just one, who pervades the whole world but in the last days of his life he too composed poetry as a devotee to express his belief in the existence of both God and devotee or in other words in duality. Similarly sant poets like Namdev who believed in Alakh (invisible) Niranjana (absolute) were also *bhagats* and wrote poetry in the name of their god, Lord Krishna and established the existence of two. Namdev says:

धनि-धनि और राम बेनु बाजै॥  
 मधुर-मधुर धुनि अनहत गाजै॥  
 धनि-धनि मेधा रोमावली  
 धनि-धनि बन खंड बिन्द्रावनां  
 जह खेलै श्री नाराइणा

Happy, happy that flute which Krishan played!  
 A very sweet unbeaten sound issueth from it.

Happy, happy that blanket which Krishan wore.  
 Blest, blest the forest glades of Bindraban,  
 Where Nama's God Narayan sported<sup>5</sup>

Giving credence to plurality means you love everybody, you do not hate any one, you find the supreme residing in everybody and that supreme and the self live in unity.

Adi Granth does not speak of monism, but monotheism not one of advaita but of unity with God. God as conceived by Guru Nanak is the Formless Absolute (*fujdkaj czge*) but also with noble attributes, (*ljxqu*) and therefore Guru Nanak's *bhakti* (devotion) is directed to the personified Absolute with attributes. Ek Oankar, He is one, has at the same time the attribute of *sat*, i.e. ever existent. This is the philosophy of the content structure of Adi Granth. Namdev follows the same philosophy when he says:

राम नाम बिनु जीवनु मनहीना॥  
 नामदेव सिमरनु करि जानां।  
 जग जीवन सिउ जीउ समानां॥

O my soul, without God's name man's life is vain.  
 Namdev knoweth God by keeping Him in mind.  
 My soul is absorbed in Him  
 Who giveth life to the world  
 One must consider that God is  
 Present in every being.<sup>6</sup>

This is the distinctiveness of the philosophy of India. The *Bhagat Bani* in the Adi Granth is historically linked with a genuine experiment of religious pluralism in India in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>7</sup> Harold Coward perceptively remarks that the creative tension that the pluralism generates has often been the catalyst for new insight and religious development.<sup>8</sup> He further argues that religious pluralism provides the opportunity for spiritual self-judgement and growth.<sup>9</sup>

The distinction arises from the fact that from the earliest times the subcontinent has been aware that its eminence lies in its diversity, in its plurality, in man's or devotee's union with God. Whether we view the Infinite as *nirgun*, non-iconic or quality less "that" or as personal God or iconic *sagun* with qualities, we get a transcendental sense of unity. The Sikh Gurus call it *brahmagyan* which is realisation of the transcendental sense of unity and so says Guru Nanak:

Everyone says God is one,  
Through intellectual reflection and pride;  
He alone understands the Oneness  
of his presence  
Who realizes the One God,  
Within and without.

For Namdev the invisible God is visible in the form of the whole world. He is visible in the form of nature whose lamps are the sun and the moon.

The idea of the complementariness of the opposites is very crucial for Guru Nanak, Namdev, Kabir and other saints. The one supreme, God is absolute yet personal. He is both immanent in His creation and beyond it. He is both *saguna* (personal and merciful) and *nirguna* (eternal one). He is the principle of continuity between opposites and differences. God out there in the universe also resides in the *shabad* of Guru Granth Sahib, as well as in the devotee's heart. For Guru Nanak spirituality is complementary to earthliness and *grihastha* (family life) to *sannyas* (renunciated life) and therefore he picks up small things of earthly life like seed, irrigation, peasant and tree from agriculture and uses them as metaphor to explain the intricacies of *nirvana* and create a spiritual revolution. Kabir picks up *chunari* (scarf) and *chadar* (bedsheet) and Namdev refers to milk, molasses and clarified butter or ghee, pulse-sweepings, shoes and other household things to create a paradigm of devotion.

*Sri* Guru Granth Sahib is a divine text. It upholds the creed of synthesis as against exclusiveness of form, symbols and ideas. It does not accept all these as alien and therefore cannot be a part of a particular

religious movement. This is the revolutionary uniqueness of Guru Granth Sahib. Because of the all-embracing philosophy of the Gurus it unhesitatingly incorporates the scriptural writings of other religious movements into its own body. Gurus intended to commend and develop the Sikh *Panth* (community) as widely as possible by including the Bhagats in the Adi Granth and historically contextualize it so that a prehistory to Sikh Panth is created implying a sense of continuity. Nirmal Dass is of the opinion that the fifteen saints are not merely adjunct to the Adi Granth, nor are they marginal to the teachings of the Gurus; rather they are the inter-textual ground from which Sikh piety itself springs. In brief, Nirmal Dass beautifully puts it that the words of the gurus complete the utterances of the various saints; the old flows into the new, and the new encompasses the old both receive and perfect each other.<sup>10</sup> As said, it is a new Veda for the Sikh community because with the inclusion of Bhagat Bani it has become a part of the larger Indian spiritual tradition. This openness, this all-inclusive and all-embracing universal characteristic of spiritual devotion of Guru Granth Sahib has given a very laudable and independent identity to Sikhism.

There is no doubt that the *Bhagat Bani* and the mystical experiences of the Sikh Gurus have an essential likeness despite their cultural and linguistic diversities and the selection of the *Bhagat Bani* is made on the principle of conformity with the Sikh teachings and hence it is rightly conjectured that Guru Amar Das and Guru Arjan Dev must have edited the *Bhagat Bani* wherever it was needed to bring it in line with the universal vision, humility and deep humanitarianism that is characteristic of the Guru's teachings. But at the same time Guru commented on the verses of the *Bhagats* to register clear disagreement with the view of the Bhagats on certain important issues and hence it is not always the 'likeness', 'similarity' criterion used for including the writings of the *Bhagats*. For instance, the Gurus differ from both Kabir and Shaikh Farid on the issue of the primacy of divine grace over personal effort in spiritual progress. The Sikh view of divine grace requires one to believe that the whole of one's spiritual progress is a matter of divine grace, not of one's efforts alone.

Namdev is distinguished from other Bhagats because of his visits

to Punjab. He made two visits to Punjab. The first was with Dnyanadev and second time he came alone and worked in Punjab for about 10 years. The Hindi verses of Namdev, as says M.A. Karandikar,<sup>12</sup> were written probably when he went to Punjab for the second time. It is a tribute to Namdev's works, a measure of his popular preaching that these verses became a part of Guru Granth Sahib.

There is a great emphasis in Adi Granth on the *bhakti* of the Lord. This is the devotion through love, therefore, it is known as *bhae bhakti* or *prema bhakti*. Sikhism is rightly called the religion of love and service. Guru Nanak says that

He who has not known love,  
Nor the beatitude of the Beloved,  
Is like a quest visiting an empty house,  
He departs disappointed as he comes.

Without love man is an empty shell, which will crumble into dust (*andar khali prem bin dheh dheri tan char*).<sup>13</sup> This devotion of *Prema bhakti* is given preference over other types of devotion by the saint-poets or *bhagats*. The saint-poets whose verses are included in Adi Granth, practiced this type of devotion:

The mind of Namdeo was absorbed in Govind,  
The Valueless calico-printer became a gem worth lakhs,  
Kabir left his occupation of weaving  
And was imbued with love of His feet,  
The low-caste Weaver became  
Lustrous with virtues.  
Ravidas, the carrier of dead animals,  
Renounced maya,  
In the company of the saints he realised  
God and became famous  
Saina, the barber and common servant,  
Was known in every house,  
The supreme Brahma reside in his heart  
And he was counted as a Bhakta.

Listening to these stories, I, a farmer  
 began to practise Bhakti  
 And I (Dhanna) was fortunate,  
 Because the master of the  
 World was realised (Asa Dhanna)<sup>14</sup>

Without devotion one is like an animal. He is like a stone in the water. *Bhakti* is not a show. Dancing in the shrine is not the real *bhakti*. Real *bhakti* lies in dying in the Name of the Lord. Incorporating it in Adi Granth did not make cannonization of a selection of the *Bhagat Bani* on the basis of any caste consideration. One should not forget that there are also four Brahmin saints – Jaidev, Ramanand, Parmanand and Surdas whose verses are incorporated in the Adi Granth. As said by Gurus the caste system is to be condemned and should not be used as an institutionalized discriminatory agent. Guru Nanak, for instance, proclaims: ‘Recognize the divine light within all and do not inquire into one’s caste as there is no caste in the next world’<sup>15</sup> It is the spiritual enlightenment (*Jot*) and not the caste (*Jati*), which gives distinction to a man.

Bhakti or devotion is the poetry of connection, which connects the devotee with God. Love is the connecting factor, and hence, bhakti is love. It is a joyful openness to an unparaphrasable reality. It is said in Adi Granth that the state of bliss and joy at the feet of the Lord is inexpressible. The saint meditates on the feet of the Lord. He meditates on Him because of the exuberance of Love in his bosom for the Lord whom he considers as his beloved. He feels no comfort without Him<sup>16</sup> and hence Kabir says, “*mai Ram ki bahuria*, I am wife of Ram” and Namdev says, “*mai bauri mera Ram bhataru*, I am a mad woman and God is my spouse”. It is for him I decorate myself elaborately. Meera imagines herself as the wife of Krishna, the Lord. *Bhakti*, in fact, is a divine play (*lila*) but it is worldly *lila* and hence the symbolism of marriage is a strong poetic device in this poetry. It seems to follow that, when a human falls in love with the Divine, the language of love cannot be any different from that which is applicable to mortals. A.K. Ramanujan explains this in his book, ‘Hymns for the Drowning’<sup>17</sup>. He says that in Tamil love poetry, the flowering

tree, the rain, the anxious beloved and so forth were all signifiers for the erotic mood, which becomes the signified. Now, any sign is a union of signifier and signified. In *bhakti* poetry the entire erotic tradition becomes a new signifier with *bhakti* as the signified. Ramanujan, using Roland Barthes', 'elements of Semiology: Staggered Systems' presents this as a diagram:

Signifier 1 (rain, flowering tree etc.)	Signified 1 (the erotic mood)
Signifier 2 (the entire tradition)	Signified 2 erotic ( <i>bhakti</i> )

The signifiers of love poetry are enlisted for a new signification i.e. *bhakti*. The changes are subtle only a name or a context can change a profane poem into a sacred one. The *bhagat* is a sign, which is a union of the signifier, the entire erotic tradition, and signified i.e. *bhakti*. The signature line (the name of the poet in the poem) is used to differentiate between worldly love and divine love. To give an example from Namdev.

My body and soul are for my beloved God.  
I hold no idle discussion with any one;  
I sip with my tongue the elixir of Rama.  
Now I know in my heart that such  
an arrangement hath been made.  
By which I shall meet my Gopal  
With banners and music

Up to this, the poem looks like a worldly love poem and then comes the signature line; "says Nama, I have met my Laxmi-pati". The signature line turns the whole love poem into a poem of divine love.

Bhakti is love, faith and humility, as opposed to discourse. Discourse is the practice of power that keeps society stable by delimiting a field, marking off its boundaries, legitimizing norms and

perspectives. But there comes a point when such a world is felt to be radically insufficient. The heart, disturbed by love, moves towards a point outside the given boundaries and challenges discourses and then devotional poet like Kabir, Nanak, Meera and Namdev cross the boundaries of rules and authority and wander from place to place as they sing the love of God. Namdev, being a follower of Nath panth and also of *Varkari* sect of Maharashtra acted as a great wanderer and went on pilgrimage or did a *vari* and brought about a synthesis in the way of knowledge and the way of devotion and democratized the devotional approach which was previously considered limited to upper caste and therefore exclusive. Guru Nanak made four great journeys in India and outside India to emphasize the value of love, truth and truthful living. This is the unparalleled unmatched philosophy of Guru Nanak described in Adi Granth:

“Truth is above everything,  
but higher still is true living”<sup>18</sup>

It brings the idea of Truth and Truthful living to the forefront of modern consciousness, which has been an important idea for millennia, undergirding Indian morality. The basis of spiritual life is ethical conduct. The pure in heart will find God. Through the Guru ever repeat the Pure Name, and then alone will your inside become pure. Shun greed; give up calumny and falsehood, then you will be rewarded through the Guru's teachings. Guru Nanak says:

Keep me in the way that please Thee,  
O God! Thy servant Nanak will glorify Thee through the word”  
(Sorath)

Truthful living means to go for *nam marg*, to go on taking the name of Ek Oankar Sat, the one ever-existent unchanging Reality, the ontological Reality. When this mantra *Ek Oankar Satnam* penetrates your being, where is fear or pain? there is none. Taking the name of *Ek Oankar Satnam* or repeating it, in fact, is called meditation or remembrance of the *One Supreme*. The word *nam* (divine Name)

along with its cognates occurs 5999 times in the Adi Granth that evidently refers to its centrality in the teachings of the Gurus<sup>19</sup>. It is quite well known that the Formless Absolute cannot be assigned any name but in order to express their spiritual experience Gurus and Bhagats call it with some name and both Hindu and Muslim names are employed like Ram, Govind, Allah, Khuda etc. which are symbols of total reality. Among all the saints of Maharashtra, we find a perpetual insistence on the significance and efficacy of the Name of god; and of all these saints, we may say, Namdev's insistence upon the Name is the strongest. Namdev says:

"If I were to leave meditation.  
On Thy feet even for a while  
My life breath will vanish instantly"<sup>20</sup>  
He further says:

"The divine Name is the support of life in much the same way as a 'guide-stick' (*Khund Kara*) is to the blind"<sup>21</sup>.

Infact, as says Pashaura Singh, one of the most significant criteria for the inclusion of the Bhagats in the Adi Granth was that they experienced a vision of *Akal Purakh*. ('The Timeless One', God) by following the interior discipline of *nam-simran* (the remembrance of the Divine Name)<sup>22</sup>.

Nanak while giving us a practical framework of the poetics of devotion, says that God is one, *Ek Oankar*. Oankar is not a word but a resonance, the resonance of the melody of the Being of Existence. He is one and is *sat*, ever existent. One should go on remembering the name *sat* i.e. *Satnam*. The remembrance of the divine Name or *nam-simaran* is designed to bring oneself into harmony with the divine order (*Hukum*). In fact, the whole universe moves at his *hukam* and the cosmic law *rita* operates. Guru Nanak further says that to understand that order one has to say, good-bye to "I" and only then desirelessness is achieved and you realise the existence of God. When one empties oneself of ego and desire, only then the *pahun* (guest or lord) comes to fill you up (*sune ghar ka pahuna*). One's love for *pahun* or the Lord is not the same as worldly love, which binds one into

temporality. The love of *bhakti* unbinds one from the worldly state and leads to eternity. Guru Nanak then says to meditate on this *Sat*. This is *dharam* or duty of one who is seeking *nirvana*. Performing the '*dharam*' gives one compassion or *daya* and also satisfaction or *santosh*. *Daya* and *santosh* bring balance into life. Ultimately one has to dedicate oneself to the mercy of Lord, which leads to *nirvana*.

Now one can draw a graph of this practical framework, which gives the true meaning of *dharam*, or what one can say 'truthful living':

Sat	Hukum	Satnam
Mannai (Manan)	_____	Daya & Santosh
Harmony in life.		

Namdev also gives us a framework of the poetics of devotion.

First, he says God is immanent. "Understand this thing perfectly that God is present in all."<sup>23</sup> Then he equates *nama* with God:

"The *nama* of God is the form of God and form of God is the *nama* of God. There is none other except the *nama* of the Lord and anybody who says there is another, is a fool"<sup>24</sup>. Namdev further says:

हरि हरि करत मिटे सभि भ्रमः।  
 हरि को नाम लै उत्तम धरमः।  
 हरि हरि करत जाति कुल हरी।  
 सो हरि अंधुले की लाकरी॥

By repeating the name of God all doubts are dispelled – Repeating the name of God is the highest religious exercise<sup>25</sup>.

It is said in *Adi Granth* that through a harmony of *raga* and *nada*, songs and instrument transcendental realisation is attained as if by itself – naturally in the *sahaj* way. After enlightenment in the West, the Divine was relegated to the background and man occupied the central stage and tried to force its own will on existence and as a result he was filled with anxiety and tension. Guru Nanak says, live the way He wants you to. If He has brought you sorrow there must be a reason behind it, some mystery. But in sorrow let one tune play incessantly

within you: I am happy the way you keep me. Your command is my life. Just let things happen by themselves. Do not swim, float. This is the philosophy of *sahaj*. The result is that eternal joy begins to manifest itself slowly and steadily by itself (*sahaje*). The Sikh Gurus emphatically declare, "He alone meets the Lord, who meets Him in a *sahaja* way".

Just by thinking of Divine, a song will arise in you. Just singing that you will be united with the Divine. Thus *Shabd* is the creative power of God, the logos, the Divine wisdom realised through rhythm of music.

Now both these terms *Sahaj* and *Shabd* are very close to the philosophy of Nath panth and Namdev belongs to that Panth.

Like so many terms and concepts, which were popularised by the *siddhas* and the *Nathas* and incorporated by the *sants* in their doctrines, *shabd* and Anhad Shabd perhaps occupy the foremost position<sup>26</sup>. Namdev also used this terms. *Sat*, the supreme reality is the material cause of the world and has identity with the divine sound (*shabd*) from which all things spring. Says Namdev, the word is one but the voices are many:

लौग एक अनंत वाणी.<sup>27</sup>

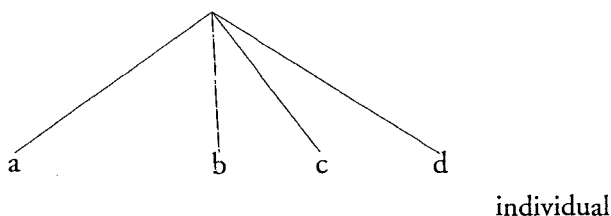
Similarly Namdev says that I am wrapped in the state of *saha*<sup>28</sup>. The ultimate goal is the creation of the state of *sahaj*, which is one of great blissfulness.

In this framework the place of Guru is highly important. Through his *Guru* Namdev has obtained discernment and rendered his life profitable:

सफल जन्म मोकड गुरु कीना।  
दुख विसारि सुख अंतर लीना॥

"The Guru hath made my life profitable. I have forgotten pain and obtained joy within me"<sup>29</sup>. Bhakti includes devotion to one's Guru (teacher). A.K. Ramanujan says that there are three types of explanation of the Guru to be found in Indian religious thought:

In Gita the Lord is awesome and omniscient Guru and the relation between God and man is a one-to-one relation, which has hierarchical structure. Salvation is individual, a fight of the alone to the Alone :



In contrast in Buddhism the initiates are bound to each other in *sangha*, a community, all related to compassionate Buddha, more Guru than God:

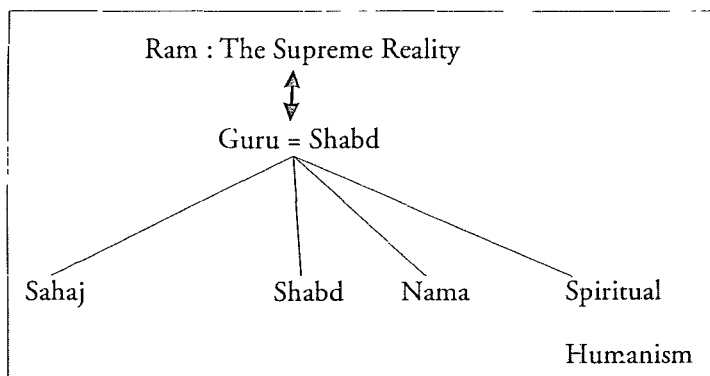
with each other

Individuals bound

In Adi Granth the *bhagats* are envisioned as a part – whole relation with reference to God. Devotees become members of a congregation (*sangat*), which in turn related to a Guru. Directly or indirectly through a Guru, one worships and seeks for the Lord and the Guru's word (*shabd*), then, leads him to Lord:

Guru Nanak regarded the Guru as essential for the realisation of God. In fact, the Sikh Gurus have repeatedly mentioned that the Guru and God are one and inseparable. "The true Guru is the field of *sahaj*, whosoever loves it, sows in it Nama, there is an abundant crop of Nama and one merges in Nama"<sup>30</sup>.

It is now possible to draw a graph of Namdev's framework of the poetics of the Divine:



Namdev performed a double function in the field of popularizing philosophy through poetry. He built a bridge between the path of knowledge and path of devotion, between the language of the mystic yogis and the rustic masses, between Maharashtra and Punjab<sup>31</sup>. By including his Bani in Adi Granth, the Sikh religion provides an excellent example of catholicity, mutual respect for each other's religion, tolerance for diversity of belief and practice and also a poetics of love and unity with God.

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# Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Ravi Das

Dharam Pal Singhal

Guru Granth Sahib is a precious reservoir of spiritual knowledge to illumine mankind. It is a panacea for the ailing humanity. The word 'Sahib' is a term of special significance in the title itself. Sahib means the Lord, the teacher, the guide, the beckoning light. 'Sahib' is the Guru. Hence, the Guru Granth Sahib is the teacher, the Guru and the Lord Himself. Coronated as the Sacred Guru of the Sikhs by the Tenth Nanak Himself, Guru Granth Sahib is the principal scripture and religious teacher as believed by the Sikhs.

Guru Granth Sahib contains revelations from God given through a number of religious teachers. Although this holy book contains teachings of Sikh Gurus as well as Muslim and Hindu mystics, the sacred writings are not a pastiche of teaching from different sources reflecting the context in which Sikhism developed. Rather, it embodies inspired teachings from God Himself who is beyond religious denominations or sects. Guru Granth Sahib breaks the barriers of narrow religion. It rather gives a universal eternal appeal. Its relevance is felt even in the current world scenario. This is the essential character of Guru Granth Sahib. It is quite distinct from any other scripture of the world.

The living Guru of the Sikhs, the personified Book, is held in great reverence by the Sikhs and treated with utmost veneration. Sikhism casts off idol worship, so Guru Granth Sahib is not worshipped as an idol. Emphasis is rather laid on the absorption and propagation of its teachings through the spread of *shabad*. The Granth

is revered for the message that it contains and which being the Guru's word is considered revealed word from the Lord Himself.

Guru Granth Sahib is not merely a collection of devotional hymns which, of course, proclaims God, lays stress on meditation on 'Satguru', the True Guru (God), and lays down moral and ethical rules for development of the soul, spiritual salvation and unity with God. However it is considered be a living Guru who propagates the '*karni*' of the thought and wants his disciple to hush that thought into practice. It provides the tools for meditation leading to reunion with the Lord from whom our souls have separated since long. The super most form of meditation is '*naam simran*' i.e. the meditation on the Lord's Name.

Guru Granth Sahib was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev and installed in the Golden Temple in 1604. At the time of its first compilation, it contained the hymns of only the first five Gurus and those of the Bhagatas (mystics) of medieval India. When the original copy of this holy book fell into the hands of Dhir Mal, the grandson of the sixth Guru, Har Gobind, and when Dhir Mal refused to pass it on to the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur, the tenth Guru had to recompile it. Guru Gobind Singh, therefore, dictated the whole book once again to his devoted follower Bhai Mani Singh at Damdama Sahib in 1706. He also included in it the hymns written by the Ninth Guru. Before his demise Guru Gobind Singh ordered his Sikhs to regard Guru Granth Sahib as their eternal Guru and enlightener after him. The entire text is in Gurmukhi script. The languages used are Panjabi, Braj, Prakrit, Hindi, Persian, Gujrati, Marathi, Sindhi and some other dialects of North India. Wherever we find the reference to Islam, some Arabic words have naturally crept in. The writers come from different corners of India and belong to different castes and creeds signifying the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious and egalitarian character of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The whole Granth is in sublime poetry and the hymns have been arranged according to 31 immersial modes (*Ragas*). It is an excellent record of social, political and religious thought in India from the 12th to the 16th centuries. It also provides some historical references to the contemporary period. This scripture is unique in that it is the authentic record of the Guru's words free from

any unauthentic interpolations. The best comment about the nature and contents of Guru Granth Sahib comes from the Fifth Nanak himself when he writes:

“In this platter are placed three things, Truth, Contentment and meditation. These are seasoned with the Nectar-Name of the Lord, Who is the Support of all. Those who partake of this dish and relish it will be saved and emancipated.”<sup>1</sup>

We note from the literature of the Gurus' times that the people had fallen a prey to mental energies and an environ of sin, corruption and injustice. “So much sin was let loose on the world that the mythic bull which lifts the earth on its horns wailed day and night.”<sup>2</sup> It was period of utter darkness and the need of the hour was arrival of some great light to remove that darkness that surrounded the world. Some torch-bearer was required to morally uplift the downtrodden. People needed the miraculous touch of some ‘Messiah’ to revitalize them with energy through ‘nam-simran’. “God, the Giver listened to the call and sent Guru Nanak in 1469 AD to the world”<sup>3</sup> as a great sun to illuminate the earth.

Then the world was illumined as if a sun had risen, the stars gone into hiding and darkness disappeared.”<sup>4</sup>

The arrival of Guru Nanak is the arrival of a great soul which first journeyed from place to place in India to collect contemporary spiritual thought. With Guru Nanak came not merely the propagation of God's Name, which people had forgotten, but its propagation in every nook and corner of India. Negativities started declining. “The lamp has been lit in the darkness and the whole earth is saved by the one creed of God's Name. The man of God, Nanak, has arrived in the world as a Spiritual Master.”<sup>5</sup>

Among Guru Nanak's contemporaries, we find many spiritual stars as in the galaxy of that time. The arrival of the Guru is symbolic of the arrival of an ascending force of truth. The darkness is symbolic of the prevalence of the forces of lust, greed, pride, anger and attachment. Successive invaders had caused much carnage and destruction. Picturising the state of affairs at the time of Babur's invasion, Guru Nanak says:

"Both wealth and youth which once added colour to their lives have become their enemies. The soldiers dishonored them and took them along as per the orders given to them. If it pleases the God, He gives the honour; if it wills Him otherwise, He gives punishment."<sup>6</sup>

The Guru records that the contemporary rulers were drenched in sensuality when he says, "Losing their conscience, the rulers revelled in sensual spectacles and merry-making. Babur's order was proclaimed and no prince could eat his food."<sup>7</sup>

Calling Babur's bloody invasion as a "marriage-party of sin", the Guru says, "He (Babur) has rushed from Kabul taking a marriage-party of sin and asks for bride as gift. O, Lalo! Both religion and modesty have hidden themselves and have stopped functioning and falsehood has become the chief that moves freely O, Lalo! The 'Qazis' and Brahmins have lost their say and the devil recites the marriage rites, O, Lalo!"<sup>8</sup>

The Guru is moved to see the inhuman cruelties and makes a call to God for compassion. "After owning Khurasan, Babur has terrified Hindustan. God does not take the blame on Himself and has sent the angel of death in the form of the Mughal invader. So much of cruelty was inflicted that the people cried in pain. Did Thou feel no pity, O, God?"<sup>9</sup>

The Indian spiritual galaxy is studded with many stars who brought with them the great force of God's Name which when injected in the minds of the people worked wonders. That great force started giving moral, mental and social courage to people even in the midst of political, social, cultural and moral upheavals. It was the wonder of 'Nam' that pierced into the hearts of people and provided essential spiritual energy required to confront contemporary forces of evil. They practically injected truth in the minds of people. It was the force of truth, which fought and won because only the force of truth is permanent. Falsehood exhausts itself automatically. Only truth prevails ultimately, remains for ever.<sup>10</sup>

Guru Granth Sahib contains a very deep understanding of the cultural diversity. Guru Nanak undertook four odysseys (*udasis*) and he met with varied forms of life during his travels culminating into

synthesis of the spiritual and temporal. Pluralism was grafted on Bhakti thought by Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Nanak in his visit to the Holy places had encounters with Siddhas, Sufis, Sants, Qazis, Bhaktas, Brahmans whose references we find in Guru Granth Sahib. Bhagat Ravi Das was one of them.

Bhagat Ravi Das is one of those great spiritual masters of India whose *Bani* sparkles like the pole star in the great galaxy of the contributors to Guru Granth Sahib. It verily adds to the spiritual beauty of Guru Granth Sahib and is completely in consonance with the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Ravi Das are so much in each other that the two appear inseparable. The Guru is within the Bhagat and the Bhagat is with the Guru.

The incorporation of the Bani of Bhagat Ravi Das gives practical shape to the teachings of the great Sikh Gurus. It coronates Bhagat Ravi Das and makes people bow at the feet of a great saint whose caste was characterized as untouchable by Manu Smriti and the so-called 'pundits' of the times.

Guru Nanak during his 'udasis' met Bhagat Ravi Das in Banaras in 1498 A.D. Manohar Das Meharban Sodhi in *Puratan Janamsakhi* makes a mention of the Guru singing the verses of Bhagat Ravi Das. Bhagat Ravi Das was born in 1433 Vikrami Samvat and died in 1584 V.S. at the age of 151. We find a mention of Bhagat Ravi Das first by the Fourth Guru in Sri Guru Granth Sahib: "Ravi Das who was a shoemaker by caste sang in praise of the Lord for a moment because of which his lowly caste became supreme and all the four castes came to prostrate at his feet."<sup>12</sup> Bhagat Ravi Das himself makes a mention about his caste and birthplace in Guru Granth Sahib: "My caste with which I am distinguished is that of a shoe-maker, O fellow citizens! I meditate on God and remember His attributes.... I am of Kutband! a caste who always carry carcasses around Banaras. Now when Ravi Das has become Thy slave and has surrendered to Thy *Nam*, even high caste Brahmans bow and come to pay him their obeisance."<sup>13</sup>

We find that the various themes tackled by Bhagat Ravi Das in his *bani* are in marked consonance with themes of others in Guru Granth Sahib. Bhagat Ravi Das like the Sikh Gurus starts with the importance of human birth which is precious and which is obtained after

meritorious deeds in the previous life. To quote Bhagat Ravi Das: "Human birth which is rarest of the rare and is obtained because of virtuous deeds (in previous births), goes waste due to lack of contemplation. Say in which record will come a palatial home and a throne like that King Indra without worship and meditation to God?"<sup>14</sup>

The themes of God, '*satgur*', search for God within, '*Nam*', love, '*sadh sangat*', agony of separation, longing for the Lord, truth, '*karma*', mind, condemnation of the rituals, futility of outer display, caste, cycle of birth and death etc have been tackled superbly by Ravi Das in accordance with the teachings of other contributors to Guru Granth Sahib. Actions are supreme in life. "Wherever the living creatures are born, they are drawn by their deeds ('*karmas*' of previous births). They are subject to unbreakable shackles of death and there is no remedy for them. Eschew (such) doubts O other worldly slave Ravi Das and heat (purify) thyself in the austerities of knowledge bestowed by the Guru, the spiritual master. Help us O Supreme Comfort Giver and remove the fears of Thy beloved devotees,"<sup>15</sup>

We find a great emphasis laid on the meditation of the Lord's *Nam* in the *bani* of Bhagat Ravi Das.

"Thy *Nam* is my '*arati*' and ablution O Lord. Without God's *Nam* all religious paraphernalia is false. Thy *Nam* is my prayer-mat, Thy *Nam* my saffron-grater. And Thy *Nam* is the saffron which I sprinkle on Thee. Thy *Nam* is the water, Thy *Nam* the sandal-wood, and the repetition of the *Nam* is the rubbing thereof, This is the sandal paste which I take to anoint Thee. Thy *Nam* is the lamp, Thy *Nam* the wick, Thy *Nam* is the oil which I pour therein. With Thy *Nam* I have kindled the Light, With its illumination my entire home is bright. Thy *Nam* is the string, Thy *Nam* the garland of flowers, defiled are the eighteen loads of leaves. How may they be offered. How may I offer Thee what Thou Thyself hast created? Thy *Nam* is the whisk (chawar) which I wave over Thee. The whole world is involved in the eighteen Puranas, and the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage, It rotates within the four forms of living beings. Thy *Nam* is the '*arati*', sayeth Ravi Das, And Thy true *Nam* itself is offered, O Lord, as the ceremonial food to Thee. "<sup>16</sup>

With the stairs of 'Nam', we get chance to ascend to what Bhagat Ravidas describes as Begampura. Herein we as much ascend to the 'Sachkhand' of Guru Nanak and 'Agampura' of Bhagat Kabir. When we dive deep into Begampura we find that Begampura is not just an ordinary poetic expression. It is not a utopia of the saint as some people have tried to put it. It is not even the idea of a city-state or a political ideology, which some others have endeavored to prove. It contains the hidden mystic meaning of Bhagat Ravi Das' philosophy of life. One will have to open the inner eyes to know the great mystic concept of Begampura. Bhagat Ravi Das has given us clear hints of the limitations of the intellect to understand and experience the spiritual realms. The concept of Begampura has a deep inner meaning that goes beyond the layers of intellect and forms the inner kernel of the mystic philosophy of Bhagat Ravi Das.

It is exactly what the First Master Guru Nanak Dev says in *Japuji*, "That much higher if someone ascends, one comes to know the Highest One."<sup>17</sup>

#### **A City Without Sorrow :**

Begampura<sup>18</sup> is a city without sorrow. There is no agony, anguish or anxiety there. It is city of bliss and joy. It is marked by characteristic happiness.

It is a city without any fear or tension. There is no worry of giving any tax. There is no fear, sin, pity or dearth in Begampura.

The ever-stable sovereignty and ascendancy of the Lord is permanently established there. It is a wonderful place where nobody is high or low. All are equal. It is an ever-popular dwelling place. Completely satisfied, spiritually satiated and large-hearted mystics are already living there. It is a place where there is no restriction of any kind. All are free to move the way it pleases them. The Lord of the house does not detain anybody in the palace. Ravi Das says that he has got freedom from the bondage of life and death. Every citizen of my city is my friend.

Ravi Das is very happy at the discovery of Begampura. He says that he has discovered his own original city within his home only and adds that "My mind always likes to know that place".

Discovery of Begampura:

The word “payia” reveals that it has been discovered by Bhagat Ravi Das. The word “khub” means well. The word “ghar”, though literally means home, here it clearly hints towards human body. “Watan” is his original home, the city from where the soul has actually come i.e. the original home of the soul. Ravi Das says that he has discovered his original home, the city from where his soul has actually come occupy his body. This he has witnessed by opening the tenth door of his being.

Opening of the Tenth Door:

“Ab humm” means ‘now I’. Bhagat Ravi Das says that now I have opened the Tenth Gate within my being. Bhagat Ravi Das appears as the torch-bearer of the Divine Light. He tells his disciples the way to Begampura.

The Beauty of Begampura:

The great saints always open their experiences to their disciples. It is the duty of the disciples to dive deeper and deeper into what the saints unfold to them. Ravi Das’ is highly enchanted by the beauty of Begampura. The name itself contains the hidden beauty of Bhagat Ravi Das’ discovery. It is a city without *‘gam’*. Anguish, sorrow, agony, are not found there.

Highest Spiritual Stage:

Begampura is the highest spiritual stage that a seeker attains through continual practice of meditation. Its meaning in Sant Ravi Das’s bani is the same as the meaning of ‘sachkhand’ in *Japuji*. Let there be no confusion about it. Let us meditate, open the tenth gate, as Bhagat Ravi Das wants us to do and witness the birth of Begampura within our own selves.

The Bani of Bhagat Ravi Das in Guru Granth Sahib covers most of the major themes that appear in Guru Granth Sahib. Remarkable is Bhagat Ravi Das’ description of the role the minds play in our spiritual journey and how love for the Lord and the *‘satguru’* come to one’s rescue and save one from the vagaries of the mind.

“What can I really know, O Lord? I am sold out at the hands of the mind and ‘maya’. The fugitive mind runs in the four directions, And the five senses remain not steady. These senses together have spoilt my mind, And day after day they have erected barriers between

me and you the Lord Divine. Thou art the Lord, the Master of the universe, While I am a lustful person of the 'Kaliyuga'. What good conduct and virtue of mine should I speak of? It is hard for me to deviate from the rest of the world. The great sages and wise men, such as Sanak and Vyasa, Sanandan, Shuk and Narad, reiterate the same truth about Thee; The Vedas, Lord Shiva and Shesh with his thousand mouths, all sing Thy praise. (But I run to the world.) Wherever I go, there is a mass of suffering; we trust it not but, the Saints bear testimony to it. The angels of death have beaten me in various ways, But the shameless mind is still not tired. It remains averse to the Holy Feet of the Lord, and its hopes are never shaken off day by day, therefore, it is robbed by craving. Carrying the load of various kinds of karmas, it hauls me around; How can anyone accuse Thee, O Lord? Only God's Name one has never cared for, one has ever been absorbed in the pleasures of the world. How much can I describe you? Sayeth Ravi Das, Enormous suffering have I borne without the Lord.<sup>19</sup>

Bhagat Ravi Das is one of those great spiritual masters of the world whose *bani* sprouts immense love for the Lord in the heart of the devotee. When we read it, we get the feeling as if great love oozes out drop-by-drop and falls on the heart of the reader and paves the way for greater devotion for the Lord.

"If Thou didst bind me in the snare of delusion, I have bound Thee in the bond of love. Try Thou to free Thyself, I have freed myself by contemplating on Thee. Thou knowest, O Lord, how intensely I am in love with Thee, Why shouldst then Thou make such an effort (to free Thyself)? Man, after catching a fish, sliceth it and cutteth it in to bits, And cooketh it in various ways. Then he eateth it by teasing it to shreds, Yet it forgetteth not the water, (so will I never forget Thee). The Lord is no one's parental property, He belongeth to one who is devoted to Him. The veil of attachment must enwrap the whole world, one who is the real devotee alone is tormented not. Only devotion for Thee wells up in me, sayeth Ravi Das. To whom should I tell this now? (Who in this world will understand it?) Shall I still have to bear that agony, for the removal of which I contemplated on Thee?<sup>20</sup>

Guru Granth Sahib is an ocean of spiritual nectar and Bani of Bhagat Ravi Das gives us its inexplicable sample taste. The drop falls into the ocean and becomes one with the ocean. When we dive into the Bani of Bhagat Ravi Das, we come to understand the vastness of the ocean itself. Bhagat Ravi Das is the beloved scintilla that sparkles with Lord's Grace in the great galaxy in Guru Granth Sahib which will illumine the world for ever and for ever.

## Notes and References

1. ਬਾਲ ਵਿਚਿ ਤਿੰਨਿ ਵਸਤੁ ਪਈਓ ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਵਿਹਾਰੇ॥  
ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਕਾ ਪਇਓ ਜਿਸ ਕਾ ਸਭਸੁ ਅਧਾਰੇ॥  
ਜੇ ਕੇ ਖਾਵੈ ਜੇ ਕੇ ਭੁੰਢੈ ਤਿਸ ਕਾ ਹੋਇ ਉਧਾਰੇ॥  
(ਮੁੰਦਾਵਣੀ ਮਹਲਾ-੫, ਪੰਨਾ-੧੪੨੯)
2. ਵਰਤਿਆ ਪਾਪੁ ਜਗਤਿ ਤੇ ਧਉਲੁ ਉਡੀਣਾ ਨਿਸਦਿਨਿ ਹੋਆ॥  
Bhai Gurdas Dian Chonvian Varan. Pauri 22. 37.
3. ਸੁਣੀ ਪੁਕਾਰਿ ਦਾਤਾਰ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਗ ਮਾਹਿ ਪਠਾਇਆ॥  
Bhai Gurdas Dian Chonvian Varan. Pauri 23. 38.
4. ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਆ ਮਿਟੀ ਧੰਧੁ ਜਗਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਆ॥  
Bhai Gurdas Dian Chonvian Varan. Pauri 27. 39.
5. ਬਲਿਓ ਚਰਾਗੁ ਅੰਧਾਰ ਮਹਿ ਸਭ ਕਲਿ ਉਧਰੀ ਇਕ ਨਾਮ ਧਰਮ॥  
ਪ੍ਰਗਟੁ ਸਗਲ ਹਰਿ ਭਵਨ ਮਹਿ ਜਨੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੫, ਪੰਨਾ-੧੩੮੭)
6. ਧਨੁ ਜੋਖਨੁ ਦੁਇ ਵੈਰੀ ਹੋਏ ਜਿਨ੍ਹੀ ਰਖੇ ਰੰਗੁ ਲਾਇ॥  
ਦੂਤਾ ਨੋ ਫੁਰਮਾਇਆ ਲੈ ਚਲੇ ਪਤਿ ਗਵਾਇ॥  
ਜੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਦੇ ਵਡਿਆਈ ਜੇ ਭਾਵੈ ਦੇਇ ਸਜਾਇ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੧, ਪੰਨਾ-੪੧੭)
7. ਸਾਹਾਂ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਗਵਾਈਆ ਰੰਗਿ ਤਮਾਸੈ ਚਾਇ॥  
ਬਾਖਰਵਾਣੀ ਫਿਰਿ ਗਈ ਕੁਇਰੁ ਨ ਰੋਟੀ ਖਾਇ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੧, ਪੰਨਾ-੪੧੭)
8. ਪਾਪੁ ਕੀ ਜੰਵ ਲੈ ਕਾਬਲਹੁ ਧਾਇਆ ਜੋਰੀ ਮੰਗੈ ਦਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ॥  
ਸਰਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਦੁਇ ਛਪਿ ਖਲੋਏ ਕੂੜੁ ਫਿਰੈ ਪਰਧਾਨੁ ਵੇਂ ਲਾਲੇ॥

ਕਾਜੀਆ ਬਾਮਣਾ ਕੀ ਗਲ ਬਕੀ ਅਗਦੁ ਪੜੈ ਸੈਤਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੋ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੧, ਪੰਨਾ-੭੨੨)

9. ਖੁਰਾਸਾਨ ਖਸਮਾਨਾ ਕੀਆ ਹਿੰਦੁਸਤਾਨੁ ਡਰਾਇਆ॥  
ਆਪੈ ਦੋਸੁ ਨ ਦੇਈ ਕਰਤਾ ਜਮੁ ਕਰਿ ਮੁਗਲੁ ਚੜਾਇਆ॥  
ਏਤੀ ਮਾਰ ਪਈ ਕਰਲਾਣੇ ਤੈ ਕੀ ਦਰਦੁ ਨ ਆਇਆ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੧, ਪੰਨਾ-੩੬੦)

10. ਕੂੜ ਨਿਖੁਟੇ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਓੜਕਿ ਸਚਿ ਰਹੀ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੧, ਪੰਨਾ-੯੫੩)

11. ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ॥ ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੧, ਪੰਨਾ-੧)

12. ਰਵਿਦਾਸੁ ਚਮਾਰੁ ਉਸਤਤਿ ਕਰੇ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਨਿਮਖ ਇਕ ਗਾਇ॥  
ਪਤਿਤ ਜਾਤਿ ਉਤਮੁ ਭਇਆ ਚਾਰਿ ਵਰਨ ਪਏ ਪਗਿ ਆਇ॥  
(ਸੂਰੀ ਮਹਲਾ-੪, ਪੰਨਾ-੭੩੩)

13. ਨਾਗਰ ਜਨਾਂ ਮੇਰੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਬਿਖਿਆਤ ਚੰਮਾਰੰ ॥ ਰਿਦੈ ਰਾਮ ਗ'ਬਿੰਦ ਗੁਨ ਸਾਰੰ ॥ .....  
ਮੇਰੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਕੁਟ ਬਾਂਢਲਾ ਢ'ਰ ਢ'ਵੰਤਾ ਨਿਤਹਿ ਬਾਨਾਰਸੀ ਆਸ ਪਾਸਾ ॥  
ਅਬ ਬਿਪ੍ਰ ਪਰਪਾਨ ਤਿਹਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਡੰਡਉਤਿ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਮ ਸਰਣਾਇ ਰਵਿਦਾਸੁ ਦਾਸਾ ॥  
(ਮਲਾਰ ਬਾਣੀ ਭਗਤ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ-੧੨੯੩)

14. ਦੁਲਭ ਜਨਮੁ ਪੁੰਨ ਫਲ ਪਾਇਓ ਬਿਰਥਾ ਜਾਤ ਅਬਿਬੇਕੈ ॥  
ਰਾਜੇ ਇੰਦ੍ਰ ਸਮਸਰਿ ਗ੍ਰਿਹ ਆਸਨ ਬਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਕਹਹੁ ਕਿਹ ਲੇਖੈ ॥  
(ਰਾਗੁ ਸੋਰਠਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਭਗਤ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ-੬੫੮)

15. ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਜਹਾ ਜਹਾ ਲਗੁ ਕਰਮ ਕੇ ਬਸਿ ਜਾਇ॥  
ਕਾਲ ਫਾਸ ਅਖਧ ਲਾਗੇ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਚਲੈ ਉਪਾਇ ॥੩॥  
ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਦਾਸ ਉਦਾਸ ਤਜੁ ਭ੍ਰਮੁ ਤਪਨ ਤਪੁ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨ॥  
ਭਗਤ ਜਨ ਭੈ ਹਰਨ ਪਰਮਾਨੰਦ ਕਰਹੁ ਨਿਦਾਨ ॥  
(ਆਸਾ ਬਾਣੀ ਭਗਤ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ-੪੮੬)

16. ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਆਰਤੀ ਮਜਨੁ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨੁ ਝੁਟੇ ਸਗਲ ਪਾਸਾਰੇ ॥੧॥  
ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਆਸਨਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਉਰਸਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਕੇਸਰਾ ਲੇ ਛਿਟਕਾਰੇ ॥  
ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਅੰਭੁਲਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਚੰਦਨਾ ਘਸਿ ਜਪੇ ਨਾਮੁ ਲੇ ਤੁਝਹਿ ਕਉ ਚਾਰੇ ॥੧॥  
ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਦੀਵਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਬਾਤੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਤੇਲੁ ਲੇ ਮਾਹਿ ਪਸਾਰੇ ॥  
ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰੇ ਕੀ ਮਾਂਤਿ ਲਗਾਈ ਭਇਓ ਉਜਿਆਰਾ ਭਵਨ ਸਗਲਾਰੇ ॥੨॥  
ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਤਾਗਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਫੂਲ ਮਾਲਾ ਭਾਰ ਅਠਾਰਹ ਸਗਲ ਜੂਠਾਰੇ ॥  
ਤੇਰਾ ਕੀਆ ਤੁਝਹਿ ਕਿਆ ਅਰਪਉ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਤੁਹੀ ਚਵਰ ਖਾਲਾਰੇ ॥੩॥  
ਦਸ ਅਠਾ ਅਠਸਠੇ ਚਾਰੇ ਖਾਣੀ ਇਹੈ ਵਰਤਣਿ ਹੈ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਸਾਰੇ ॥  
ਕਹੈ ਰਵਿਦਾਸੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਆਰਤੀ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਹੈ ਹਰਿ ਭਾਗ ਤੁਹਾਰੇ ॥  
(ਧਨਾਸਰੀ ਭਗਤ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ-੬੯੪)

17. ਏਵਡੁ ਊਚਾ ਹੋਵੈ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਤਿਸੁ ਊਚੇ ਕਉ ਜਾਣੈ ਸੋਇ ॥  
ਜੇਵਡੁ ਆਪਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਆਪਿ ਆਪਿ ॥  
(ਮਹਲਾ-੧, ਪੰਨਾ-੫)
18. ਬੇਗਮ ਪੁਰਾ ਸਹਰ ਕ' ਨਾਉ ॥ ਦੂਖੁ ਅੰਦ'ਹੁ ਨਹੀ ਤਿਹਿ ਠਾਉ ॥  
ਨਾਂ ਤਸਵੀਸ ਖਿਰਾਜੁ ਨ ਮਾਲੁ ॥ ਖਉਫੁ ਨ ਖਤਾ ਨ ਤਰਸੁ ਜਵਾਲੁ ॥੧॥  
ਅਬ ਮ'ਹਿ ਖੂਬ ਵਤਨ ਗਹ ਪਾਈ ॥ ਊਹਾਂ ਬੈਰਿ ਸਦਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਭਾਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥  
ਕਾਇਮੁ ਦਾਇਮੁ ਸਦਾ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹੀ ॥ ਦ'ਮ ਨ ਸੇਮ ਏਕ ਸ' ਆਈ ॥  
ਆਬਾਦਾਨੁ ਸਦਾ ਮਸਹੂਰੁ ॥ ਊਹਾਂ ਗਨੀ ਬਸਹਿ ਮਾਮੂਰੁ ॥੨॥  
ਤਿਉ ਤਿਉ ਸੈਲ ਕਰਹਿ ਜਿਉ ਭਾਵੈ ॥ ਮਹਰਮ ਮਹਲ ਨ ਕ' ਅਟਕਾਵੈ ॥  
ਕਹਿ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਖਲਾਸ ਚਮਾਰਾ ॥ ਜ' ਹਮ ਸਹਰੀ ਸੁ ਮੀਤੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥  
(ਪਦੇ ਗਉੜੀ: ਗੁਆਚੇਰੀ, ਪੰਨਾ-੩੪੫)
19. ਨਾਥ ਕਛੁਅ ਨ ਜਾਨਉ ॥ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਇਆ ਕੈ ਹਾਥਿ ਬਿਕਾਨਉ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥  
ਤੁਮ ਕਹੀਅਤ ਹ' ਜਗਤ ਗੁਰ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥ ਹਮ ਕਹੀਅਤ ਕਲਿਜੁਗ ਕੇ ਕਾਮੀ ॥੧॥  
ਇਨ ਪੰਚਨ ਮੇਰ' ਮਨੁ ਜੁ ਬਿਗਾਰਿਓ ॥ ਪਲੁ ਪਲੁ ਹਰਿ ਜੀ ਤੇ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਪਾਰਿਓ ॥੨॥  
ਜਤ ਦੇਖਉ ਤਤ ਦੁਖ ਕੀ ਰਾਸੀ ॥ ਅਜ' ਨ ਪੜ੍ਹਾਇ ਨਿਗਮ ਭਏ ਸਾਖੀ ॥੩॥  
ਗ'ਤਮ ਨਾਰਿ ਉਮਾਪਤਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥ ਸੀਸੁ ਧਰਨਿ ਸਹਸ ਭਗ ਗਾਮੀ ॥੪॥  
ਇਨ ਦੂਤਨ ਖਲੁ ਬਧੁ ਕਰਿ ਮਾਰਿਓ ॥ ਬਡ' ਨਿਲਾਜੁ ਅਜਹੂ ਨਹੀ ਹਾਰਿਓ ॥੫॥  
ਕਹਿ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਕਹਾ ਕੈਸੇ ਕੀਜੈ ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਰਖੁਨਾਥ ਸਰਨਿ ਕਾ ਕੀ ਲੀਜੈ ॥  
(ਜੈਤਸਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਭਗਤਾ ਕੀ, ਪੰਨਾ-੭੧੦)
20. ਜਉ ਹਮ ਬਾਧੇ ਮ'ਹ ਫਾਸ ਹਮ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਬਧਨਿ ਤੁਮ ਬਾਧੇ ॥  
ਅਪਨੇ ਛੂਟਨ ਕ' ਜਤਨੁ ਕਰਹੁ ਹਮ ਛੂਟੇ ਤੁਮ ਆਰਾਧੇ ॥੧॥  
ਮਾਧਵੇ ਜਾਨਤ ਦਹੁ ਜੈਸੀ ਤੈਸੀ ॥ ਅਬ ਕਹਾ ਕਰਹੁਗੇ ਐਸੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥  
ਮੀਨੁ ਪਕਰਿ ਫਾਂਕਿਓ ਅਰੁ ਕਾਟਿਓ ਰਾਂਧਿ ਕੀਓ ਬਹੁ ਬਾਨੀ ॥  
ਖੰਡ ਖੰਡ ਕਰਿ ਭ'ਜਨੁ ਕੀਨ' ਤਉ ਨ ਬਿਸਰਿਓ ਪਾਨੀ ॥੨॥  
ਆਪਨ ਖਾਧੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕ' ਭਾਵਨ ਕ' ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ ॥  
ਮ'ਹ ਪਟਲ ਸਭੁ ਜਗਤੁ ਬਿਆਪਿਓ ਭਗਤ ਨਹੀ ਸੰਤਾਪਾ ॥੩॥  
ਕਹਿ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਭਗਤਿ ਇਕ ਬਾਢੀ ਅਬ ਇਹ ਕਾ ਸਿਉ ਕਹੀਐ ॥  
ਜਾ ਕਾਰਨਿ ਹਮ ਤੁਮ ਆਰਾਧੇ ਸ' ਦੂਖੁ ਅਜਹੂ ਸਹੀਐ ॥੪॥  
(ਰਾਗੁ ਸੋਰਠਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਭਗਤ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ-੬੫੮)

# Guru Granth Sahib and Baba Farid

Ahmad Salim

Baba Farid (1173-1265 AD) was a theologian who strengthened the humanitarian thought and traditions of Sufism in India. He was a religious leader as well as a Messiah of the masses. He is the first authentic poet in a long and continuous chain of Punjabi literati, also has the distinction of being one of the earliest men of letters in the whole gamut of modern Indian languages. He is believed to have composed poetry not only in Punjabi but several other languages including Persian, the literary language of the Muslim elite of the day. His Persian writings seem to have been lost in the sands of time. No specimen of or reference to his Persian poetry is available. His poetry represents the fusion of the ancient Indian and Islamic cultures. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, incorporated his Punjabi poetic compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib, compiled in 1604AD.

Except few couplets, only those works of Baba Farid are alive today which were preserved in Guru Granth Sahib. Yet there are sufficient reasons to believe that Farid must have written much more than that. These verses, because of their thematic grandeur and stylistic excellence rank among the best of classical masterpieces and indicate his rank as a supreme poet. It is wonderful poetry written in a most beautiful style and expresses a profound mystical experience.

## 1. Common Sikh-Muslim Heritage

Before talking about Guru Granth Sahib and Baba Farid, common Sikh-Muslim heritage with reference to Baba Nanak, the first Guru of the Sikhs, needs to be illuminated here.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539 AD) was in contact with various Muslim divines. In these encounters he is believed to have discourse on the real objectives of human life, the impediments in the way of the achievement of such objectives, and the right and only path to achieve the Supreme End. In all his discourses with the highly esteemed Muslim divines the Guru never gave offence, but won them over with true love and affection expressed in plain terms easily understandable by them.<sup>3</sup>

Islam had an impact on Baba Guru Nanak. He was profoundly inspired by various Muslim Sufis, especially Baba Farid and Bhagat Kabir<sup>4</sup>. According to Sikhism, *Sant-Mat*<sup>5</sup>, the pristine path of Spirituality, can be traced back to Kabir. He appears to work closely with Nanak to fulfill his mission to liberate beings from the clutches of the Negative Power - Mind and Matter and take them back to the region of the pure Spirit, *Sach Khand* or *Muqam-e-Haqq*.

Many expressions, sometime whole lines, are the same in Guru Nanak's<sup>6</sup> as in Kabir. Both assert that conquering the mind is like conquering the world. The idea finds expression in Kabir's Maru and Nanak's Japji. Kabir, in Gauri, and Guru Nanak in Suhi, insist on living pure in the midst of the impurities of the world. The idea that mind is born out of five senses occurs in the works of both the poets. Both of them also insist that a person cannot find the way without the help of true Guru. Some couplets of Farid are also embodied in the writings of Guru Nanak (e.g. 113 and 114).<sup>7</sup>

Guru Nanak believed in the unity of God as it is laid down in the tenets of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He also believed in the doctrine of transmigration. Holding wine and meat unlawful, he abstained from animal food and enjoined against cruelty to animals. Farid denied the doctrines of Halool (direct descent from or incarnation of God) and *Ittihad* (direct union of the All-pervading God with any particular body). He symbolized the socio-religious fusion of Islam and Hinduism or communal harmony. It is said

that Baba Nanak had the rosary of the Muslims in his hand.<sup>8</sup> However Nanak criticized the hypocritical religious practice or formalism.

Muslims and Hindus loved Guru Nanak alike. The legend that after the demise of Nanak a contention arose between the Hindus and the Muslims regarding his cremation or burial, embraces a rich context and concept of the resolution of conflict involved in the *kaleidoscopic persona* of Guru Nanak.<sup>9</sup> In this context it may be argued that Guru Nanak, the Guru Granth Sahib, the institution of the *langar*, the concept of *sangat*, *pangat* and the architectural design of the Harmandir Sahib with its four doors and descending footsteps collectively deconstructed the single-community oriented centrality of a *guru*, a holy book and a particular religious space. Such a holistic discourse widened the space of Guruship in the context of the resolution of religious conflicts tending to create communal spaces. It underlines the spirit of resolution of conflicts.

### 1.1. Nanak's Visits to Sacred Places

Guru Nanak travelled far and wide. He travelled four times to East - up to Assam and Burma; South - up to Sri Lanka where 'Pran Sangli' was written; North - up to Tibet and Mt. Sumeru in the Astral Plane where he met Siddhas and Naths; and West - Mecca, Baghdad, Iran, and Kabul.

During his odysseys (*udasis*) Baba Nanak dialogued with divergent religious scholars and saints and in the process constructed his own discourse on religious thought and practice. Here I would only talk of Nanak's stay at Mecca where he met many Muslim divines of renown including Pir Makhdum Rukan Din of Uch (Bahawalpor State); Abul Fateh Jalali, second of the line of Hazrat Ali Naqi Syed (Pakistan); Pir Sahib Patalia (Patania) of Pattan; Pir Bahawal Din and Pir Laal Jati of Blultan.<sup>10</sup> The discourse which took place between the Guru and the divines is worth presenting in order to appreciate his philosophy of religious practice.

Pir Rukan Din: In your sacred Book who is recorded as superior, the Hindu or the Muslim?

Guru Nanak: The superiority lies only in actions, and not in the

divisions of religions. Either of them or both of them can be superior through good actions only. Neither of them shall be allowed God's grace and blessings without noble deeds. Ram and Rahim are just two different names for God. Indulging in useless discourses and causing ill-will in God's creation by stressing unnatural divisions are the ways of Satan. Without pure and good actions both shall weep.

Pir Rukan Din: Are fasting, reciting namaz, meditation, and charity virtuous deeds?

Guru Nanak: All the above named actions are acceptable if one has control over one's self. One must be free from the pollution of egoism, conceit, fanaticism and ill-will, to achieve some measure of success in such actions. One must rise above the sins of lust and cruelty, and must have complete faith in Divine grace.

Sheikh Ibrahim of Pak Patan: Is it any good reading the Vedas of the Hindus and the Quran of the Muslims?

Guru Nanak: If by recitation of the Vedas and study of the Quran the mind is not tamed, what is the use of such readings? Hear what the Muslim faqir, Kabir, has said in this context:

Recitations of Vedas or Quran are useless if the mind is wayward.

Concentrate your mind on Him to gain His presence.

Guru Nanak explained to them that the world is, no doubt, unreal and temporary, but true prayers with humility purify the self and bring about an everlasting bliss.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.2. Bhai Bala and Bhai Mardana and Babur

With regard to Nanak's odysseys, two points need to be emphasized. First during his missionary tour, he selected one Muslim bard, named Mardana to play on rebeck with him and a jat (a land cultivator) to testify his firm belief in the unity and universality of man. Second, during his odyssey, Guru Nanak's encounter with Babur in 1520 at Sayyidpur, 56 kilometers north-west of Lahore, needs to be further explored and explained in the context of Babur as a conqueror and founder of the Mughal rule in Hindustan and Nanak as a critic of (i) the socio-political scenario of Hindustan under Lodis and of (ii) Babur as an invader.

## 2. Composition of Guru Granth Sahib

For the Sikhs, Holy Granth is the perennial authority, spiritual as well as historical. The followers have and will continue to observe their faith more fully, more vividly, through this scripture. It remained central to all that subsequently happened in the Sikh life. It was and shall remain source of their verbal tradition and shape their intellectual and cultural environment. It would continue to mould the Sikh concept of life. It is from Guru Granth Sahib that the community's ideals, institutions and rituals derive their meaning.

Sikhism, as founded by Guru Nanak, was essentially a religion of the Name. In it the most obvious religious exercise was the recitation or the singing of the Guru's word. Seeing the importance of the practice, many clever persons, like Prithi Chand, the elder brother of Guru Arjan, had begun to mix up their spurious writings with the true compositions of the Gurus and to make them current among the Sikhs.<sup>12</sup> There was a danger of confusion in the creed and the observance; and Guru Arjun, as the leader and organizer of the Sikhs, felt bound to ensure uniformity of belief and practice among them. He undertook therefore to collect and collate the genuine writings of his predecessors and, adding to them his own, to prepare an authentic volume out of them, known as Guru Granth Sahib.

It was arranged in three parts. The first part consists of morning and evening prayers. They comprise Guru Nanak's Japji and other devotional hymns. The second part is the main body containing thirty Ragas. The third part is called Bhog di Bani. It includes panegyrics of the first five Gurus, some additional hymns of Guru Nanak, Amar Das, Ram Das, Arjun and Teg Bhadur, Funhe and Swayyas of Guru Arjan and sayings of Farid and Kabir, and of eleven bards. It concludes with Mundavani, in which Guru Arjun explains the purpose of the Holy Book. The Granth was written in verse in Gurmukhi script. The versus of 15 saints are included in Guru Granth Sahib. These include Baini, Bhikhan, Dhanna, Baba Farid, Jai Dev, Kabir, Nam Dev, Parmanand, Pipa and Sadhna. There are 116 versus of Baba Farid in the Granth.

The 17 bards included in the Granth are: Bal, Bhal, Bhikha, Das, Gayand, Harbans, Jal, Jalap, Jalya, Kal, Kirar, Mathra, Nal, Sadrang,

Sahar, Salya and Talya.

Besides it includes one hymn of Sundar, great grandson of Guru Amar Das and 3 hymns of Mardana, and 3 of Satta and Balwand who sang jointly. The last three were Muslims. The printed Adi Granth consists of 1430 pages, 5894 hymns and 15575 stanzas.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Baba Farid: Life and Times

In the times of Baba Farid, the Indian Subcontinent was on the crossroads. Qutub-ud-din Aibak tried to subdue people through force, but could only create a rift between different communities. However, the Sufi saints from Arabia and other places settled in India to spread their message of love for Allah and promoted an atmosphere of tolerance and greater communal harmony.

Baba Farid Shakarganj (1173 A.D. - 1266 A.D.) was a descendant of Farrukh Shah, who was king of Kabul and kings of Ghazni and other states were subject to him. When Baba Farid was 16 years old he went to Hajj and stayed in the house of Abdul Rahim Ansari. After Farid came back to Punjab, he was sent to Khwaja Qutub-ul-Din Bakhtiar Kaki at Delhi to learn theology. Qutub-ul-din sent him to the shrine of Abdul Shakur of Sarsa, near Delhi to finish his education. The high reputation Farid obtained in Delhi soon became irksome to him. He therefore made his way to Hansi, where he remained for some time. From there he proceeded to Ajodhan, the present Pak Pattan. The manner in which the name of Ajodhan changed to Pak Pattan was that a canal which derived its water from the Sutlej passed near the town. It was usual for all who visited Baba Farid to wash their hands and feet there. The place then became known as Baba Sahib ji da Pak Pattan, or Farid's cleansing ferry.

Baba Farid made Pak Pattan a great center of Sufi thoughts. People from all over India and Middle East would come to see him. He always spoke in Punjabi, the language of common people, even though he was highly learned and educated in Arabic, Persian, etc. All his couplets are written in Punjabi, in Persian script. He could be truly called the founder of Punjabi literature, making Punjabi culture older than Hindi, Urdu and other languages of current times. It was much after him that Kabir, Tulsidas, Mira Bai, etc started using common

language of people of India. Baba Farid's torch of Sufi thoughts was carried by his successor and subsequently several others. For example, Bhagat Kabir and Baba Guru Nanak Dev were affected by the teachings of the great Saint. Baba Guru Nanak Dev's contemporary was Baba Sheikh Farid ji Sani, or the second Sheikh Farid ji, 6<sup>th</sup> in succession of Baba Farid Shaikh Shakarganj.

Guru Nanak incorporated his poetry in Guru Granth Sahib. In addition to Baba Farid, the book contains the writings of saints drawn from all the corners of India – Jaidev, a Brahmin from the east; Kabir, a Muslim born weaver from the north; Namdev, a calico-printer from Maharashtra; Ravidas, a shoemaker from the banks of the Ganges; and Ramanand, a disciple of Ramanuj from the south<sup>14</sup>

### 3.1. Farid's poetry in Granth Sahib

An authentic anthology of Farid's Punjabi poetry is available in the Adi Granth. This sacred Book of the Sikhs contains his 112 shlokas (couplets) and four shabads i.e., hymns. Interspersed between these shlokas are 18 verses of the Sikh gurus composed in the same form and structural pattern, registering their response to Farid's views expressed in the preceding shloka (incidentally, this marks the beginning of literary criticism in Punjabi).<sup>15</sup>

Farid's poetry, while retaining its peculiar individuality, appropriately occupies the initial place in the tradition of Punjabi poetry. Farid's originality rests in his temperament and outlook; his verse can never be mistaken for that of any of the later poets, not on account of a difference in quality but because of a difference of character. And still the later poets will have ample justification in claiming him as their ancestor. The first appearance of those recurring patterns could be seen in his poetry which form the work of other major poets as the manifestations of the working of a tradition. These patterns can be identified in Farid's complete avoidance of the ornamental, in his use of various aspects of technique as parts of the larger whole of meaning, in his confidence in an obviously simple structure to express whatever levels of meanings he has to convey, in his use of the imagery of ordinary experience, in his dramatic economy in spite of a dominantly reflective bent, finally in his unswerving

adoption of the central, the essential as his themes.<sup>16</sup>

According to a legend, Guru Nanak went to see Shah Braham (better known as Farid Sani) and while still on his way met one of his 'dervishes' in the jungle. At their meeting, Baba Nanak and Shah Braham had a poetical dialogue on the life of the soul. Later, Guru Nanak requested him to obtain permission from Baba Farid (of course, through spiritual contact) to include his shloks in the great book he had almost prepared by then. Baba Farid's shloks were later collected by the third Guru<sup>17</sup> and much later published by Allah Wale ki Qaumi Dukan, Lahore.

### 3.2. Similar themes of Baba Farid and Guru Nanak

A new era of classical Punjabi poetry was ushered in starting with Baba Farid and ending with Waris Shah and Bulleh Shah. These poets and thinkers rose in unison against the oppression by the ruling classes. Saints, Sadhus and Sufis came forward and preached a greater law of humanity than the narrow law of the kings, the powerful and of the ruling bureaucrats, preached by the *mullah* and the *pandit*.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the emergence of Punjabi language occurred, co-joined with a popular mass movement of the people of Punjab. These new thinkers found Punjabi an excellent vehicle to propagate their new ideas of equality and justice for all the people, irrespective of their caste or creed. This language spoke directly to people as against the language of the Middle Classes, who always conversed in Arabic Persian dialect.

Baba Farid belonged to the Sufi Chishti school. He participated in the people's struggle for salvation against the ideologies of supremacy of the ruling classes. He built his poetry on simple expressions based on folk traditions, typically being the Dohra or a couplet. Though, simple in form, his poetry disclosed a deep truth about human life.

Farida Kale maindey kapre, kala mainda weis,  
Gunheen bharia main phiran, lok kahin darvesh

Says Farid: Black are my clothes and black my garb  
Full of sins is my life, but folk call me a darvesh.

O Farida! I have taken to  
 Wearing black clothes and my  
 Whole garb is of black phase  
 Full of sins a dress I wear  
 But people call me a dervish.

The fact is that Baba Farid's influence transcends the narrow considerations of caste, creed and faith - even the national boundaries. For, Farid is really a common link between India and some of its neighbouring countries. He belongs to the whole world, to the whole humanity. He is a hope for friendship and amity. The way of life advocated by him is an ideal worth striving for. "Gift me not scissors," he once told a visitor who presented him with a pair, "give me a needle. I mend, I do not rend."<sup>19</sup>

Baba Farid practised ascetic Sufism, believing in a stern law enforced by God, mortifying his body in order to rise to the highest spiritual elevation. His is a terrifying vision of spiritual glory, with his emphasis on penance and mortification. His "dohras" are not only remarkable but also popular. They are characterized by homely imagery and an epical flavour epitomized in two lines of a couplet, which lends discipline not only to the poem but also to the experience. His stern and grim experience found a fit medium in "dohras". The vocabulary is common but rich. Penanceful pietism is the hallmark of his poetry. It reflects his abstinence ('zuhd').<sup>20</sup>

Regarding life, Baba Farid exhorts us to remain humble and concerned with our own salvation. He would like us to be indifferent to the wealth and pleasures of the world. He said:<sup>21</sup>

Farida! Roti meri kath ki lavan meri bhukh  
 Jinnhan khahdi choprii ghanen sehan ge dukh  
 Rukhi suki khae ke thanda pani pee  
 Farida! Dekh prai chopri, na tarsain jee!  
 O! Farid, my bread is one of wood, it assuages my hunger  
 Those who have buttered their bread, they,  
 will undergo great trouble.  
 O! Farid don't torture yourself at the sight of the other's buttered  
 bread

Eat your dry bread and with it drink cold Water.

He advises us to lead an abstemious life just to keep the body and soul together. For him, the greatest joy consists in contemplation.

Baba Farid hits at the source of evil and the struggle between Good and Evil at the same time. It is the world of hypocrisy, of lies and thus is a travesty of truth.

*Farida kannh mussalla, suf gal, dil kati, gur vat*

*Baher disse channa dil andhyari rat*

(O Farid! Praying, mat on my shoulders, and rough cloth hanging from the neck, My heart is dark, though my tongue is sweet. While there is light outside all around. Inside the heart it is an altogether dark night.)

He stressed that fraud and machinations come to nothing.

*Kallar kerī chhapri, ae ulathe hanjh*

*Chunjo boren na pan, uddan sandi danjh*

From the inter-soiled brackish water of the pond, the birds at once fly away, though they come to drink.

The real path to success lies in obliterating the self, and death is the actual goal of life of which we should ever remain aware, without losing a moment.

*Farida! bhanni ghari suvanavi tutti, nagar laj*

*Jo sajjan bhoe in bhar thiye, se kiyo avaen aj* -S.G.G.S., p. 214

O' Farid! You, have wasted golden time (youth) without doing any good deed. The friends who become a burden on the earth can return no more.

Here 'ghari' is symbol for this life. In another verse, he advises himself to keep alert, as does the caretaker of a garden. Till the crop is cut, keep up vigilance and do your duty as a caretaker.

Farid also tackles other themes, for example, he exhorts us to say our prayers; otherwise, the head that does not bow to God be better burnt. Similarly, when he thinks of the social milieu and of the people at the collective level, he says that everybody is suffering in one way or another.<sup>22</sup>

Guru Nanak (1469-1539 A.D.) the founder of Sikhism, who lived some three centuries later, found in Farid a kindred soul. He is understood to have travelled to Pak Pattan and met one of the latter's

descendants. Not only did Guru Nanak himself study thoroughly, and comment poetically upon, whatever of Farid's compositions he found, but also handed them over to his successors for careful preservation. The fifth in his line, Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606 A. D.), gave to it a place of honour in the Scripture which he compiled. The Sikhs to this day respect the word of Baba Farid as they do the teachings of their own gurus.

Guru Nanak saw the invasion of Punjab by Babar, the first Mughal king, and misery of his people as a result. He took up poetry to give a voice of protest against this cruel fate of Punjab. He championed the cause of the weak, the poor and women, and incorporated into his verses a new innovation of poetical form and expression. He composed verses of great beauty about divinity; the human relationship with God and the salvation of individuals through philosophical teaching, which, though simple in appearance, spoke of great profundity. His composition *Jappi Sahib* gives the essence of his teachings and is set in vigorous verses. It is used by the faithful as their daily meditation.

The following extracts are taken from Prof. Puran Singh's translation:

He is One. He is first. He is all that is.  
 His name is Truth.  
 He is the Creator of all.  
 Fearing naught, striking fear in naught  
 His Form, on lands and waters  
 Is Eternity; the One Self-existent.  
 Through the Grace of His servant  
 Continually repeat His name  
 He was in the beginning  
 He is through all ages  
 He shall be the One  
 Who lives forever.  
 Abundant is His mercy, as great as Himself  
 He giveth and giveth, taketh not even  
 A mustard seed from aught else.  
 The great warriors beg their might from Him

and numberless wrecks of sin wait at his Door.

There are others who receive His plenty .

and eating His Bread deny Him

fools think not on His mysteries.

In Thy courtyard die thousands of hunger

and of the ills of flesh.

O Almighty Giver! this too is Thy mercy

this too is Thy love.

By Thy will the chains of the prisoners drop

the bound are freed and the free are bound

who else could divine Thy purpose?

If any dare go against Thy Will

he will know for himself how painful

to him is his pride.

He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Certain similarities manifest themselves between Farid's creed and *Gurmat*. The two schools are indubitably closer mutually than to any other. Like the Sikh Gurus, Farid also believes in the oneness of God enshrined in the heart of man. To realise the Lord *Gurmat* enjoins its followers to cherish *Prema bhakti*, or a loving devotion to God. Occasionally, Farid also follows the path of love. But whereas in Farid this sentiment of love is subdued with the fear of rejection, in Sikh ethos it is marked by an enthusiastic fervour and faith in His Grace.

Their greatest affinity, however, lies in their moral codes. The humanitarian ideals of upright conduct and contentment, forgiveness and forbearance, honesty and humility, service and self-abnegation, as also the higher morality of compassion and fellow feelings have been stressed upon with equal force both by Farid and Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus.

Efforts have also been made, mostly futile, to interpret Farid's emphasis on performing ablutions and offering namaz prayers etcetera as only symbolical and standing for the observance of the religious codes, Muslim or non-Muslim, even Sikh. That, however, is a crude attempt at putting in Farid's mouth what he never meant to say.

Again, in the eighteen shlokas written by the Sikh masters - Guru Nanak, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas and Guru Arjan - and

interspersed between those of Farid's, various beliefs of the latter have been modified, revised or even contradicted. The Gurus who otherwise showed a remarkable tolerance towards other faiths took particular pains to voice the difference of opinion at places where Farid's views, they felt, were in direct conflict with theirs.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.3. Beginning of Literary Criticism in Punjabi

As mentioned earlier, the Sikh Gurus have given their own interpretation wherever they differ with the Slokas of Baba Farid, marking the beginning of literary criticism in Punjabi literature.

Farid says: "Body burns like an oven, bones flame like firewood, when feet are tired, I would still walk on my head with head if I can find God."<sup>24</sup>

But Sri Guru Nanak says:

"He who tortures his body to wither away is not approved."<sup>25</sup>

Sri Guru Arjun Dev says:

"Heat not thy body like an oven, burn not thy bones like firewood. What harm have your feet and head done you; behold the beloved in your own heart."<sup>26</sup>

According to the Sikh Gurus, the ideal is to be attained in a natural way i.e. "*Sehaj Subhai*." *Sehaj* means balance, it is emancipation in a natural way.

The main theme of Farid's hymns is *vairagya* (renunciation). In Sufi terminology it is repentance (*Toba*), patience (*Sabar*), and allied qualities. The poetry of Baba Farid as preserved in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is deeply sensitive to the feeling of pity and compassion the subtle proneness to sin, the inevitable death and the waste of human life owing to man's indifference to goodness. His language is of an extraordinary power and sensitivity, but has subtle appeal. For example, the following hymn of his in Rag Suhi:

"*Berha bandh na sakiyon banden ki vela*" depicts the tragic waste of man's brief span of life in frivolous pursuits, moves him to tender expression of pity and reproach. The following text is recorded in Rag Suhi at P.794 in Sri Guru Granth Sahib:<sup>27</sup>

"Listen, you did not make spiritual practices when it was time, How shall the boat of your life float in the other realm (after death).

Please do not touch the word's pleasures which are like Kusumbha (elusive), and at a mere touch wither away, - Farid says: listen sisters of the soul when the Lord makes the call, Life's Swan (Soul) shall take flight and this body will become a heap of dust."

In response to Farid's Hymn of pessimistic note, Guru Nanak has written a Hymn in the same Rag Suhi and has used the same words, vocabulary and imagery as used by Farid:

*Jap tap ka bandhu berula jitu langeh vahela.*

With Meditation and austerity, equip your boat to find smooth passage: and then for such a boat, the sea will be as though it is not; the tempest will not rise then, and the crossing will be without peril:

Advaita, Bhakti and Sufism have got close resemblance with each other. There is a fusion of the two in Sikhism. Just as there are stages in the upliftment of a Sufi, similarly Guru Nanak also speaks in his 'Japu Ji' of five steps in the spiritual progress of man. Singing of the praises of God, music and free kitchen are some of the common practices among the sufis and the Sikhs.

#### 4. Conclusion

The poetry of Baba Farid is an inseparable part of Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh Traditions. Not only did Guru Nanak himself study thoroughly, and comment poetically upon, whatever of Farid's compositions he found, but also handed them over to his successors for careful preservation. The fifth in his line, Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606 A. D.), gave to it a place of honour in the Scripture which he compiled. The Sikhs to this day respect the word of Baba Farid as they do the teachings of their own gurus.

Sheikh Farid's message was not narrow or sectarian, but had a wide humanitarian base so that, in an age marked by great brutality in its social and political organization, he brought the touch of humanity and fellow feeling to all who came to seek his blessing, or to lay before him the agony of their suffering hearts. It was because of these great qualities that Guru Nanak and his successor Gurus, themselves initiating a great movement of humanity, moral regeneration and peace among warring sects, incorporated the poetic

message of Sheikh Farid in their holy scripture, which they commended for contemplation to their followers. The inclusion of these compositions has been great blessing, since this has not only preserved them from oblivion but has provided - to succeeding centuries - great moral and spiritual inspiration. Besides the preservation of these compensations has also pushed the history of Punjabi Language and its literature several centuries back through Sheikh Farid.<sup>28</sup>

Baba Guru Nanak and the Muslim Sufi poets in Sindhi and Punjabi played a pivotal role in transferring the message of love all over the world especially in the subcontinent. Their philosophy as well as private life illuminated the torch of peace, fraternity, equality and love to all walks of life without discrimination of religion, race, caste, colour or birth. Each may embrace and drink from this divine cup of devotion and dedication to mankind in general. This dispelled the fears of duality, hatred, class distinctions and all discrimination and paved way for sharing affections in all merry & miserable moments, gay and grief common in lot-put together.<sup>29</sup>

Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims of Punjab share a common cultural heritage. Baba Farid Shakarganj, the first Punjabi Sufi saint, paved the way for the Punjabi nationalism, as well as brought peace among Hindus and Muslims.

Although, India and Pakistan are two separate countries now but cherish one unified spirit. The divines and saints hailed from all over India and their teachings spread love and harmony among various communities. Baba Farid's poetry goes deep into the soul, and induces in man the vision of the ideal life and that mood in which a surging emotion leaves the heart purified and converted. His message was not narrow or sectarian, but had a wide humanitarian base so that, in an age marked by great brutality in its social and political organization, he brought the touch of humanism and fellow feeling to all who came to seek his blessing, or to lay before him the agony of their suffering hearts. The inclusion of the compositions of Baba Farid in Guru Granth Sahib, has been a great blessing, since this has not only preserved them from oblivion but provide great moral and spiritual inspiration.

The two thousand years old teachings of History of the traditions and Culture of Indian Subcontinent signifies the evolution of brotherhood and unity among all races, religions and peoples.

## Notes and References

1. Pritpal Singh, *The Mystic Melodies of Shaikh Farid*, (Patiala 2003) p.27
2. Ibid., p.30
3. *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol. III, 1969 ( Part I & II), p.300
4. Saint Kabir (1398): Kabir was 70 years before Guru Nanak. Kabir rejected both the Vedas and Quran and believed in singing the praises of God and living a simple pure life of devotion called Bhakti. He was against all ritualistic and ascetic methods as means to salvation.
5. The path leading to the union of the soul with the Oversoul - *Sat Purush/Sat Nam* or *al-Haqq* is known as *Sant-Mat*, *Guru-Mat* or *Sufi-Mat* of the *Murshid-e-Kamil* perfect Master. *Sants* and *Kamil Murshids* developed their faith and teachings within the cultural ambit of Islam and Hinduism, both of which emphasize the worship of '*Akaal Purush*'. Positive Power and rose to debunk both the *Pandit* and the *Maulvi*. Although non-believers in *Karma-kand* or *Shari'a*- the exoteric method of worship, they often tolerated these practices, while enjoining the esoteric method of worship within the human body-temple. Popular Hindu and Islamic names of God, such as *Ram* and *Allah* were also used by them, while clarifying that their *ishta*- deity was a higher one. Central to the path is the need for a *Sant-Saiguru* or *Kamil-murshid* and contact with '*Nam*' or '*Ism-e-A'zam*' through the practice of '*Surat-Shabd Yoga*' or '*Sultan-ul-Azkaar*'.
6. Guru Nanak (1469): Once emperor Babar wanted to offer him gifts. His reply was "When God is there to give everything, what else can you offer me?" Guru Nanak was born in Ta'wandia, the present Nankana Sahib, Sheikhupura. He was for the purity of heart rather than learning of scriptures. He condemned caste system and stressed a simple life like Kabir. "He is One. He is first. He is all that is; His name is Truth; He is the Creator of all."
7. *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol. XXXV – Part I & II, April/October 2004, p.70-1
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20. Prof. Sddiq Kalim, op.cit., p.26
21. Ibid., p.27-9
22. Ibid., p.27
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28. Talib Gurubachan Singh, *Baba Sheikh Farid* (Patiala: Panjabi University, 1973) p.1
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# Guru Granth Sahib in Comparative Perspective

M. Darrol Bryant

In my office at Renison College in the University of Waterloo, where I have taught for more than thirty years, one finds the following words of a Cree elder:

The wind has many voices.  
It speaks in many languages  
And one can only ponder on what it says in one's own language.  
What it says in other languages one cannot know  
But one need respect those who hear  
And believe.

I have long pondered the wisdom of these words for the study of the world's religious traditions and they seem a fitting way to frame the deliberations that follow.

I had initially prepared this study for an earlier conference in India, but it has since been thoroughly revised.<sup>1</sup> I had recently heard the Guru Granth Sahib being recited at Amritsar (March 2004) and been reading some relevant literature had led me to undertake this study. Moreover, I had recently read Harold Coward's *Sacred Word and Sacred Text* (1988), Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (1993) and more recently Pashaura Singh's *The Guru Granth Sahib, Canon, Meaning and Authority* (2000) and these things conspired to lead me to offer the following reflections on the Sikh scripture.<sup>2</sup> I do so without being an expert in either Sikhism or

the Guru Granth Sahib, nor do I know its languages. Thus I must ask to be corrected when I fail to speak correctly of the Guru Granth Sahib. However, I have long been interested in the dialogue of peoples of faith, and this seemed an important opportunity for me to further my dialogue with people of the Sikh Way. Earlier in my book *Woven on the Loom of Time* (New Delhi, 1999) I had written of the Sikh Way as one of “ecstasy and *seva*,” and had noted the centrality of the Guru Granth Sahib to Sikh devotion and life.<sup>3</sup> And over the past twenty years I have spent considerable time in the Sikh world, visiting the Golden Temple several times as well as Sikh gurdwaras in India, Canada, and England, and studying the writings of Sikhs and of other scholars about the Sikh traditions. Thus this invitation gives me the opportunity to deepen my understanding of the Sikh traditions and the Guru Granth Sahib by looking at this “sacred word/text” in an interfaith context, at least that is my intention. But it is an intention fraught with difficulties since those who regard a particular scripture as their scripture, as their sacred word, often regard the hearing/reading of someone outside their faith community with considerable suspicion and even outright hostility. Whether or not you will find the considerations offered here sufficiently full of the “respect” mentioned above remains to be seen. The other difficulty comes from the fact that I have been shaped by a lifetime of engagement in the study of religion. Hence, I wear the scholar’s hat as well as that of my own Christian Way and many in all traditions find the scholarly study of the world’s scriptures to be deeply threatening. The controversy – often with an appalling lack of civility and thus generating more smoke than light – that has surrounded the scholarly study of the Sikh traditions and especially its scripture in recent years reveals a dangerous minefield that wiser scholars might avoid. But the importance of our topic – and of building bridges of understanding across traditions – leads me to proceed despite the dangers.

## I

Harold Coward’s study, *Sacred Word And Sacred Text, Scripture in World Religions* seeks to recover the oral/aural dimensions of scriptures in relation to “our modern Western way of thinking” of “scripture’ as a written book.”<sup>4</sup> In recent times, Coward observes, little attention

has been given “to its function as spoken and heard sacred word.” “This valuation,” Coward continues, “of the written over the oral-aural experience of language is, however, characteristic of only the most recent period of Western cultural history. Even today it is not typical of the way the experience of the sacred word functions in most of the world religions...”<sup>5</sup> Coward’s study is directed towards “a recovery of the oral experience of scripture” since, he continues, “...the scholarly study of scriptures of the various religions will remain seriously limited and one-sided if it does not become more sensitive to the fundamental oral character of scriptures such as the Veda, the Qur’an, and even the Gospels.”<sup>6</sup> And, we might add, to the sung character of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Coward’s study served to remind me that my first experiences of the Christian scriptures was oral/aural – read in church and retold at home by parents and grandparents. It was these stories, told and retold, that shaped my heart and mind. Years later I was to hear the Qur’an recited in a mosque in New Delhi – and I was deeply moved by it, as I was when I first heard the Guru Granth Sahib when I went with Dr. Mohinder Singh to a Sikh gurdwara for the first time in 1986 also in New Delhi. It was being sung and though I could not understand a word I simply sat and listened and listened. And Coward is right, I think, in claiming that “a recovery of the oral experience of scripture would seem to be crucial if it is to function as a transforming power in people’s lives.”<sup>7</sup> That transformative power of oral/aural Scriptures is what Coward seeks to uncover as he looks at Scripture in the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist worlds. Each of these worlds has of course its own distinctive scriptures, its own ways of formulating the relationship between the scripture and its community, its particular ways of describing the transformative power of God’s word. Thus he concludes that in the religions he has studied,

...the scriptural word is seen as a means of reaching or realizing the transcendent. However this spiritual power is most often primarily located in the oral scripture relationship rather than the written form of the text. It is the spoken sound in a relational context that effectively evokes the Divine. The written word, when read silently, may share

in some of this power if the silent reading results in a relational mental hearing of the words being spoken. A reading of the words for intellectual analytical purposes, with little or no sense of oral reverberation in the mind, seems not to take one to the transcendent. Yet it is through union or communion with the transcendent that one's consciousness is transformed and the deepest religious experience realized.<sup>8</sup>

It is this interior transformation that is central to one's experience of Scripture. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's remark that "the meaning of the Qu'ran as scripture lies not in the text, but in the minds and hearts of Muslims" might well speak more generally.<sup>9</sup> While Muslims speak of the transformative power of the Qu'ran as "guidance," Christians speak of the "good news of the Gospel," and Hindus of "dharma and mantras." Each tradition has its own way of speaking of the transformative power of their Word of God or Wisdom of the sage. But the question here is whether or not that transformative word can be heard across tradition? Or, even, if we should seek to hear that word across tradition? Or if we do hear it across tradition does that lead to a confusion of voices or a syncretism of religious ways? Coward suggests that "hearing God's word in other scriptures stimulates one to creative development within one's own religion."<sup>10</sup> But his meaning here needs further development for it to become obvious or clear. We are here getting into issues and unknown territory that have been little explored and certainly is not yet mapped. But now, with Coward's insights on the oral/aural dimensions of Scripture, we turn to a second set of considerations.

## II

W. C. Smith's study *What is Scripture?* is not always easy going, but it is exceedingly important. It moves in an historical, cross-cultural, and comparative way seeking to understand what it means to speak of certain texts as "scripture." The term "scripture" or "what is written down" was originally used in relation to the Bible. The term "Bible" originally meant "books" in Greek and came to mean "book" in Latin. It only gradually came to have other associations – like holy, sacred, etc. . It was, Smith points out, in the nineteenth century that Western scholars began to use the term *Scriptures* – in the plural, to speak of

a host of different sacred texts in different traditions. It was then that Max Mueller published the fifty volumes of world scriptures entitled “Sacred Books of the East.” Thus today we speak casually – though not always accurately – of the Tao Te Ching as the “scripture of the Taoists,” or the *Vedas* as “the scriptures of the Hindus.” Such ways of speaking reveal the transformation of the specific, the Bible as “what is written down,” to the generic “what is written down” that is important to diverse communities across the world. As Smith observes,

...one fact is clear, and is made vivid from a comparative perspective: that the role of scripture in human life has been prodigious – in social organization and in individual piety, in the preservation of community patterns and in revolutionary change, and of course in art and literature and intellectual outlook. Given the variety, it is not easy to develop a conception of scripture that will not over-simplify. Given the power and the persistence, it is not easy to develop a conception of scripture that will not under-estimate its wide-ranging importance in world history, to the present day. . . part of the thesis advanced...(here) is that to move towards a modern understanding of scripture is to enhance our understanding of what it means ultimately to be human...”<sup>11</sup>

Smith’s project – a modern understanding of scripture – exceeds our purposes here, but it is prudent to bring into our discussion some of his manifold insights.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that any general concept places an umbrella over sacred texts of great diversity and difference in terms of their intention and purpose, something that Smith does acknowledge. It hides, or could hide, for example, the fact that India’s *Vedas* were *shruti* and oral/aural and that the Qu’ran signifies something to be recited. Smith notes that there was ‘fierce opposition’ to the *Vedas* being written down and Muslims continue to recite their Qu’ran, even though it is widely regarded as the Holy Book. Christians lived with their “Scriptures” for centuries before 18<sup>th</sup> century Protestant thinkers began to develop theories of “verbal inerrancy” for their printed Bibles ala Gutenberg and before Fundamentalist Christians of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century insisted that this was a fundamental of the faith. Theirs is still a minority view within

the family of Christian traditions.

Buddhist *sutras* also came to be regarded as “scriptures” even though the range and diversity of texts found here far exceed those of the Bible and the Qu’ran. Buddhist *sutras* are not one nor even a dozen texts, they rather run into the hundreds. Moreover they run in a different direction than the more familiar Scriptures of the so-called Western traditions: more towards wisdom than revelation. Traditionally, Jews, Christians and Muslims had regarded their holy books as revelation, the disclosure of God to humanity. Buddhist *sutras* were written long after the death of Siddhartha Gautama, who died 500 B.C.E. and were considered as the wisdom of the Buddha. Similarly, Far Eastern traditions in China, regarded their sacred texts as the wisdom of Confucius and of Lao Tzu. The Tao Te Ching (Daodejing), for example, was written at the behest of a border guard as Lao Tzu, seated on a water buffalo, was leaving China. And a closer look at the Indian traditions led to our becoming aware that while the Vedas were sacred for many Hindus, Gandhi found his guidance in the Bhagavad Gita and others in that diverse Hindu world and smaller communities clung more devotedly to their own Puranas: the Vaishnavites to their Bhagavad Purana, the Lingayats to their Vacanas. It was consideration of such material that led Professor Smith to the underlying thesis of his study: “...no text is a scripture in itself and as such. People – a given community – make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way.”<sup>12</sup> In this sense, scripture is a relational term: it points to a relationship between a “text” (book, sutra, sruti, writing, recitation) and a “community” (koinonia, ummah, panth, etc.) Smith insists that we not reify scripture, seeing it as a thing in itself, but we should see that scripture is always scripture for someone, for some particular community.

### III

Against the background of Coward’s emphasis on the oral/aural character of scripture and Smith’s recognition of the relational character of scripture – that a scripture is always a relationship between a community of faith and a text – we can turn more directly to the pre-eminent scripture of the Sikh tradition, the Adi Granth or the Guru

Granth Sahib. We begin with Prof. Coward's observation that "while most religions have scriptures, the place and function of Sikh scripture seems unique."<sup>13</sup> Parenthetically, we should acknowledge that those traditions where we don't have "scriptures" as written texts, usually have a sacred oral tradition as, for example, the "song lines" among the Aboriginal peoples of Australia.<sup>14</sup> But what is the uniqueness that Coward sees? He writes that "in no other religion can one find a human Guru founder, followed by a series of human Gurus living parallel with a collection of scripture, ending in a breaking of the human succession and the scripture attaining full authority as Guru."<sup>15</sup> In this long sentence is compacted the whole – complicated, sometimes ambiguous and even contradictory – story of the emergence of the Sikh Scripture into the pre-eminent scripture of most Sikhs. I say 'most Sikhs' since not all Sikhs accept the Guru Granth Sahib as their "Living Guru." Even those Sikhs who believe in presently 'Living Guru' do consider Guru Granth Sahib as their scripture. – Ed. Similarly, there are differences within the Christian world concerning the Christian scripture – Protestant, Catholic/Orthodox versions of the Bible, for example, differ. Moreover, we find that there are different views and interpretations – sometimes radically divergent – of the Bible among Protestants and among Catholics and among Orthodox. Likewise, though all Sikhs acknowledge the same Scripture, do they not all hold the same understanding of it. In much of Sikh writing about the Adi Granth these differences and divergences are not acknowledged.

When Dr. Pashaura Singh turns to "the place of Scripture in the Sikh tradition" in his study of *The Guru Granth Sahib* he quotes Harbans Singh – "The Word enshrined in the Holy Book was always revered by the Gurus as well as their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of the Word..." – and the quote from Harold Coward mentioned above.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Pashaura Singh's volume on the Guru Granth Sahib is perhaps the best scholarly study of the "canon, meaning and authority" of the Guru Granth Sahib. It not only draws upon the best scholarship on Scriptures, it recognizes and unpacks the role of the Adi Granth as Guru for the Sikh believer and community. Although I do not have the competence to critically

assess his work on the “canon” in the Sikh tradition, I have learned much from him, especially in relationship to how the Scripture functions as Guru within the Sikh tradition. Yet some of Pashaura Singh’s earlier work on Sikh scriptures was the object of harsh, often unfair, attacks by some within the Sikh community. As he here observes, “the Sikh scripture is believed to be the actual embodiment of the eternal Guru...” and “the Guru Granth Sahib has functioned as a supratextual source of authority within the Sikh Panth throughout its history.”<sup>17</sup>

But what is this “supratextual source of authority?” It is a collection of hymns/songs/*gurbani*. Nikky Singh observes that the Adi Granth, contains no historical narratives, no biographical details and no obligatory rituals. It is a collection of spiritually exalted poetry carrying only intimations. The theme running throughout is that of the individual’s longing to experience the Transcendent Reality...<sup>18</sup>

G. S. Talib sees the Guru Granth Sahib as “the pivot” of Sikh life and teachings.<sup>19</sup> These hymns/*kirtan* of the Guru’s (and others) run to 1430 pages in the printed text, now found in gurdwaras across the Sikh world.<sup>20</sup> They come from most of the Guru’s in the tradition of the “ten living Gurus,” beginning with Guru Nanak (1469-1539). The opening of the Guru Granth Sahib is Guru Nanak’s “*Jappi*” which is recited by most Sikhs every morning. It is translated by Nikky-Guninder Singh as “*There is One Being/Truth by Name/Primal Creator/Without fear/Without enmity/Timeless in form/Unborn/Self-existent/The Grace of the Guru.*”<sup>21</sup> One of Guru Nanak’s hymns include these words: *Countless are Thy Names,/countless Thine abodes; /Completely beyond the grasp of imagination/ are thy myriad realms; leaven to call them myriad is foolish. /Yet through words and through letters/ is Thy Name uttered and Thy praise expressed; in words we praise Thee, in words we sing of Thy virtues...*<sup>22</sup> Here Guru Nanak expresses that fundamental Sikh desire to move ecstatically and directly to that divine reality that exceeds all names. And yet, paradoxically, it is through these “names” that we praise the One Beyond.

Guru Arjan (1563-1606), the fifth Guru, composed 2218 hymns, the largest number of any of the Gurus. One of his hymns says, “*Who knoweth God dwelleth undisturbed in the love of God, God abideth*

*eternally with the one who knoweth God, the Name of God is the stay of the man who knoweth God, the Name of God is his household and retinue...*"<sup>23</sup> Here as elsewhere, one sees the *nam simran* (meditation on the divine name) that is so central to Sikh teaching. It was arguably under Guru Arjan that the first canonical text was produced in 1604. But in addition to the contributions of the Sikh gurus, there were hymns from non-Sikhs included in the Guru Granth. In addition to Kabir, there are hymns from Muslim and Hindu poets including Shaikh Farid and Mardana, both Muslims (the latter the musician/companion of Guru Nanak) and Hindus like Namdev, Ramanand, and Ravidas. This is quite remarkable.

As hymns, the Sikh scripture is to be sung. Here the scripture becomes *kirtan*. While the Qu'ran is to be recited and the Vedas to be chanted, the Guru Granth is the only scripture I know that is to be sung. Pashaura Singh notes that "in the Adi Granth itself the names of the raga and rhythm to be used in singing are stated at the beginning of each section of hymns."<sup>24</sup> This "singing of Scripture" is a distinguishing feature of the Sikh scripture, yet it has not, it seems to me, received the degree of attention it deserves. Of course it is discussed by Harold Coward and by Pashaura Singh but it needs more attention in terms of its implications for the nature of the Scripture itself and for how it is heard, used, and interpreted by the Sikh traditions themselves. Can, for example, one simply read Sikh doctrine directly from the *kirtan*? Doesn't the sung nature of *kirtan* entail a variety of response and range of meaning? These are questions that are simply raised here and deserve more attention.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, one needs to ask if the singing of the hymns found in the Guru Granth is an essential or accidental aspect of the Sikh scripture. It would appear to be essential, that is, it seems integral to the *gurbani*, to the revelatory character of the Sikh scripture. If it were accidental than it may or may not be sung. But if it is right to see the "singing" of the Scripture as essential, then does that also extend to the form of raga that we find in the Guru Granth – and to the instruments that are employed in the singing of the hymns? Can the hymns be sung without instruments? Or, without the harmonium and the tabla, now the most widely used musical instruments, but

were they the earliest ones? Am I right in understanding that the *rehab* was traditionally used to sing the Guru Granth?

A recent local performance by the DaCapo singers included a musical setting for the “Beatitudes” – the sayings of Jesus that include “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” and “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” -- from the Christian Bible.<sup>26</sup> I found myself moved by that musical presentation in ways that were quite different from reading these words silently to myself or hearing them read in the context of the liturgy. In musical/sung form they had the ability to move me in ways different from silent reading or as part of a liturgy. Marshal McLuhan, Canada’s leading media scholar, remarked that reading leads to reflection, singing moves and involves the heart and the hearer. And I found myself wondering if this is part of why the singing of Scripture is so central to Sikh practice, and why I found myself initially drawn to know and understand more of the Guru Granth. It seems to me that this is another avenue that deserves more study within the Sikh tradition.

It was following Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708) that the Adi Granth was enshrined as the Living Guru for the Sikh community. It thus signalled the end of the tradition of human Gurus and transferred that status to the Guru Granth Sahib. Thus it is not simply a book, nor a collection of hymns but for Khalsa Sikhs it became the “visible body of the Gurus.”<sup>27</sup> The result is the vital and central role that scripture plays in the life and devotion of the Sikhs. Deeply revered by the community, it is daily enthroned in the Golden Temple and is sung each and every day of the year. I have witnessed this reverence at the Golden Temple as the Guru Granth is daily taken into the Golden Temple and retired each night. It is around the Guru Granth that marriages are performed and where Sikhs turn for guidance in their lives. Pashaura Singh summarizes its place and function among the Khalsa Sikhs when he writes:

...the Adi Granth as Guru has inspired Sikhs throughout their history in personal piety, liturgy, ceremonies and communal solidarity. It has given them a sacred focus upon which to reflect and in the process discover the meaning of life as Sikhs.<sup>28</sup>

## IV

In these considerations, we have attempted to move closer to an understanding of the Guru Granth Sahib and its place among those Sikhs that have followed the Khalsa way. We have seen that it became central to the devotion and life of most Sikhs, that it is a scripture which sings the praise of “*Ek Oankar*/One Being/Truth by Name....” Professor Coward’s emphasis on the oral/aural dimensions of Scripture and Professor Smith insights on the relational character of Scripture have helped me to see things about the Guru Granth that I might otherwise have missed. And Sikh Professors like Pashaura Singh, G. S. Talib<sup>29</sup> and Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh have helped me to see the way the Guru Granth lives within Sikh traditions and life. As a Christian I also found that this exploration of the Sikh scripture had two simultaneous consequences: a deepened understanding for me of the Guru Granth and an interior dialogue concerning my own Scripture. Do we Christians hold our scriptures with the kind of reverence we see among Sikhs? How does Scripture function in the Christian traditions? While some Christians regard the Bible as the “Living Word of God,” is that like Sikhs who regard the Guru Granth as the “Living Guru?” I do not have answers yet for these questions, but they are indicative of that internal dialogue that has been prompted in me. Not surprisingly, there are some parallels with how some Christians relate to their Scripture, while there are also deep and abiding differences. Moreover, if one looks across the world’s religious traditions one sees that many are struggling with issues concerning their Scriptures that are similar to those alive in Sikh contexts. Thus it is in dialogue among Sikhs and with people of other faiths that we can build bridges of understanding that will benefit all. Then perhaps we can move towards the wisdom expressed by the Cree elder at the beginning of this paper, for the Spirit, like the wind, speaks in many languages.

## Notes and References

1. was unable to attend the earlier conference, but I was fortunate to be in India for the International Seminar on the Guru Granth and its Context (2005) and it is for this context that I have revised the paper.
2. Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text, Scripture in World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), and Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning & Authority* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
3. M. Darrol Bryant, *Woven on the Loom of Time* (New Delhi: Decent/Suryodaya Books, 1999) pp. 87-90. See also my "Sikhs in the Diaspora: Other Faiths and the Environment" in *The Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. XXXIV, Nos. 1 & 2, Spring-Autumn 2003, pp. 35-42.
4. Coward, *Sacred Word, Sacred Text*... p. ix.
5. Ibid., pp. ix-x.
6. Coward, p. x.
7. Coward, p. x.
8. Coward, p. 174.
9. Quoted in Coward, p. 101.
10. Coward, p. 33.
11. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?* op.cit., pp. ix-x.
12. W. C. Smith, p. 18.
13. Coward, p. 130. This claim by Coward needs to be spelled out since there is a sense in which scripture in every tradition is unique.
14. See Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987)
15. Coward, p. 130.
16. Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 265
17. Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib*... pp. 265-266.
18. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Name of My Beloved, Verses of the Sikh Gurus* (NY: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 1.
19. See G. S. Talib, *An Introduction to the Guru Granth Sahib* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1991).

- 20 See W. O. Cole and P. S. Sambhi, *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1995, 2nd ed.), p. 44ff.
21. Nikky-Gurinder Singh, p. 47.
- 22 *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), p.
39. There is much controversy within the Sikh community concerning the appropriateness of translating their scriptures into other languages. Given my lack of languages, I can only read the translations. I have consulted several translations of the verses quoted here. This particular one is rather archaic in its English, while the ones by Nikky-Gurinder Singh seek to be more inclusive in their language.
- 23 *Selections from the Sikh Scriptures...* p. 164.
- 24 Pashaura Singh, p. 269.
- 25 Another issue that deserves attention is the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib on the world-wide web. What are the implications of this development?
26. Matthew 5:3 ff. The DaCapo Singers are based at Conrad Grebel University College, a Mennonite institution at the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.
27. Nikky-Gurinder Singh, p. 27.
28. Pashaura Singh, p. 281.
29. See G. S. Talib, op. cit.

# Guru Granth Sahib

## Major Social Concerns

Imtiaz Ahmad

The basic question is not about scripture, but about us (Smith, 1993: 242).

It is certain that the Sikhs look upon the Guru Granth as a guide for appropriate behaviour both in relation to God and to fellow beings. This is how scriptures have served the believers. However, this does not mean that scriptures always contain specific guidelines. All scriptures consist mainly of broad, general propositions, chiefly of an ethical nature. Their application to everyday life is an act of interpretation. This task is performed by a category of specialists who claim exclusive privilege to act as interpreters by two processes. First, they claim that the scripture, even if it is accessible to every believer, requires special knowledge which the common believer lacks. Second, they assert, such assertion being based on long-standing tradition about the authenticity of the scriptural text itself, that the interpretation they are offering is the only genuine interpretation that can be legitimately constructed out of the text. Any alternative interpretation is by simple deduction declared to be heretical.

Sikhism is among the newest religions. The history of the inscription of the Guru Granth is not more than a few hundred years old, even if some of the text that came to be integrated into it can be said to go back to earlier times. Unlike as in the case of the Quran, a considerable body of this text was preserved in writing, but a good part was orally transmitted from person to person and from one generation to another. It was Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru,

who initiated the process of inscribing the text of the Guru Granth. The impetus for this was that the Guru's elder brother and others had started passing off some of their compositions as the hymns of the Gurus.

Guru Arjun Dev's compilation, known as Pothi Sahib or Kartarpur Bir, went through a number of vicissitudes during which further additions were made. It is known that in the version known as Banno Bir some of the verses of Surdas and Mirabai, which Guru Arjun Dev had rejected, and a few apocryphal hymns alleged to be by Guru Nanak came to be inscribed. It was against this backdrop that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last Guru, during whose Guru-ship Sikhism underwent substantial transformation, took the decision to inscribe the Guru Granth as we know it today. Other versions of the Guru Granth were at this time available. One of the principal tasks in the face of the simultaneous existence of varied versions was to establish the version inscribed during his time as the authoritative version. Guru Gobind Singh resolved this difficulty of declaring his own version as the canonical version of the Guru Granth.

One can be reasonably sure that the process of inscribing the canonical version of the Guru Granth was not entirely seamless. For one thing, as already indicated, a number of different versions were evidently in circulation at the time of the compiling of the canonical version. Second, the decision as to which verses to include and which to leave out was itself an act of interpretation. With respect to the central text at the core of the entire edifice of Sikhism, as indeed of most other religions, interpretation played a vital but hidden role. However, the role of interpretation in the preservation and inscription of the Guru Granth has not been adequately studied in orthodox Sikh doctrine, and the belief that the text is as it came down in history is itself a tenet of orthodox faith. This is understandable, because the authority and power of orthodox religion depends on its claiming a monopoly of truth and on declaring its version to be absolute.

Guru Gobind Singh brought about two significant transformations in Sikhism. One, he established a single text which was thenceforth to be the Sikh scripture, signifying that whatever was of value had been inscribed in the Guru Granth and this was the sacred voice of

the Gurus. It was to be the spiritual guide for the Sikhs in the future. Second, and this transformation was particularly significant in elevating the standing of the Guru Granth as a scripture, Guru Gobind Singh shifted the locus of spiritual authority from the Guru to the Guru Granth. It is thus that the Guru Granth came to be seen as the principal source of religious and social wisdom and became a point of reference for the Sikhs in matters concerning both this world and the other world. Smith draws pointed attention to this development. He writes:

The Sikh community . . . at a certain point in its relatively short history thus far decided to move on from its tradition of living leaders (Gurus) for the community and to adopt in its stead a new pattern of authority. Retaining those great men's revered memory and indeed perpetuating it, the group chose explicitly to organise their life henceforth, after the death of the tenth Guru, in terms, rather, of an authoritative collection of recognised writings—the cherished teachings chiefly of those leaders, along with pieces from a few other 'saints'. This collection they have called in personalising fashion the Guru Granth Sahib (the 'Honourable Book' Guru).

One may deem it delinquent for us not to plumb the role of this sacred collection in the corporate life and personal piety of this remarkable community. Among overt and observable aspects of the special treatment accorded it or the little shrines or separate rooms that in recent times many Sikhs have come to maintain in their homes, wherein the scripture is decoratively and reverently housed. An outsider can hardly but be struck by the devotion and engagement evinced in Sikh's turning to these, regularly opening them each day and worshipping God before them (1993: 196).

## II

I have surveyed this historical process briefly to make two significant points. One is that the scriptural text that we know today as the Guru Granth has to be understood in the context of the historical process of its emergence as well as the meaning that believers have attached to it in different times and places. As Smith has noted, believers may hold that whatever their scripture has meant or means to them is what is meant by it, but there cannot be any meaning to any text,

religious or otherwise, without a human response to it. In other words, what meaning a people attach to their scripture or to any passage of it is the outcome of their peculiar circumstances in time and place. It is in this sense that scripture is both a human and an historical reality. Of course, to say this is not to deny the possibility of it being divine and absolute.

The other point is that the very act of selection, consolidation, inscription and reading of a scriptural text is an interpretative act and has to be seen as such for analytical purposes even if for the believers it is the word of the Divine or words that those having access to the Divine communicated. This point is central to our concern in this paper. From a historical point of view one can document that the scripture has in reality meant to some degree similar and to some degree different things to different people at different times and places. One can also document what those similar and different things have been and are. Even the links between those meanings and the contemporary influences, the processes of change, the community life, the community pressures and the force of tradition can be traced. The real meaning of the scripture or any part of it is not any one meaning. It is the historical reality of actual meanings over the centuries to actual people, and it is as mundane, or as transcending, or both, as have been the actual meanings in the lives and hearts of person.

This leaves us with two options in discussing the major social concerns of the Guru Granth. One can look at what the Sikhs see to be the social message of the Guru Granth and explore the extent to which their perception of that social message shapes their actions and behaviour. This can be a remarkably fascinating exercise, but it suffers from the limitation that what is actually studied is not what the scripture contains, but what the believers perceive to be the social message and whether or how they translate it in their daily processes of life. Alternatively, one can limit oneself to the text, without going into a consideration of what interpretation of that message has been sanctified and how that interpretation has been perceived and translated into their lives by the believers. Let me clarify before proceeding further that I have followed the second approach. I have gone by the reading of the scripture rather than the imprint it may

have on the Sikhs in social matters or how it may have shaped the social life of each succeeding generation of the Sikhs. This is mainly on account of my lack of knowledge both about Sikhism and the Sikhs. I thought I could elucidate the social concerns of the Guru Granth without bargaining for the embarrassment of saying something about the Sikhs about whom I could hardly claim to be knowledgeable.

### III

A preliminary reading of the Guru Granth does not leave one with the impression that social concerns lie at its core. Unlike many other scriptures that we are familiar with, the Guru Granth does not contain any passages laying down specific prescriptions or prohibitions about any aspects of social life. Its principal concern is with ensuring human happiness through prodding the believers toward a spiritual quest for the Divine. Again and again, the Guru Granth dwells upon the virtues of devotion to God conceived as the creator and as the source of human bliss. It tells the believers 'He cannot be established, He cannot be created. He Himself is Immaculate and Pure.' It is beyond human comprehension to describe him, let alone to fathom his creative powers. 'He Himself knows Himself. The praisers praise the Lord, but they do not obtain intuitive understanding—the steams and rivers flowing into the ocean do not know its vastness.' 'His limits cannot be perceived. What is the Mystery of His Mind? The limits of the created universe cannot be perceived. Many struggle to know His limits, but His limits cannot be perceived. No one knows these limits. The more you say about them, the more there still remains to be said. Great is the Master, High is His Heavenly Home. Highest of the High, above all is His Name.' 'Only One as Great and as High as God can know His Lofty and Exalted State. Only He Himself is that Great. He Himself knows Himself.'

Since God is 'all in All', the believer is exhorted to recognize the power of His Command. 'It is written that you shall obey the *Hukum* of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will. By His Command, bodies are created; His Command cannot be described. By His Command souls come into being; by His Command glory and greatness are obtained. By His Command, some are high and some are low, by His Written Command pain and pleasure are obtained.

Some by His Command are blessed and forgiven; others, by His Command, wander aimlessly for ever. Everyone is subject to His Command; no one is beyond His Command.' According to the Lord's Command, people perform their actions.' 'Before and after, His Command is pervading.' 'One who does not know the *Hukum* of the Lord's Command cries out in terrible pain.' 'There is no power in the hands of mortal beings; the Doer, the Cause of causes is the Lord of all. The helpless beings are subject to His Command. That which pleases Him ultimately comes to pass.' One might say in passing that the entire text of the Guru Granth is replete with allusions to the pervading power of the Divine so much so that the believer is almost reduced to being a powerless agency.

Human happiness in the face of this high degree of powerlessness of the believer lies in spiritual unity with the Divine. Again and again, the Guru Granth reiterates, almost in the manner reminiscent of other major world scriptures, that unflinching adherence to personal piety offers the way out of human powerlessness before God. This piety does not consist in observance of empty rituals. There are any number of passages in the Guru Granth that caricature the Mullah and the Pandit who engage in empty rituals and go round and round in the circle of reincarnation. 'One may have the eighteen Puranaas written in his hand; he may recite the four Vedas by heart and take ritual bath at holy festivals and give charitable donations, he may observe the ritual fasts and perform religious ceremonies day and night. He may be a Qazi, a Mullah or a Shaykh, a Yogi or a wandering hermit wearing saffron-coloured robes; he may be a householder working at his job; but without understanding the essence of devotional worship, all people are bound and gagged, and driven along by the Messenger of Death.' 'You are a Mullah, and you are a Qazi, only when you know the Naam, the Name of God.' 'He alone is a Qazi who renounces selfishness and conceit, and makes the One Name his Support.' 'He alone is a Mullah, who banishes evil; he alone is a saintly dervish, who takes the Support of the Lord's Praise. Always, at any moment, remember God, the Creator within your heart. Let meditation beads be the subjugation of the ten senses. Let good conduct and self-restraint be your circumcision.'

Salvation, understood most broadly as liberation from negative attitudes of the mind, such as egoism, conceit and greed for wealth and material comfort, is achieved according to the Guru Granth through spiritual worship and meditation, and right conduct required to overcome human propensities for wrong-doing. Meditation and Spiritual worship come through devotion to the Guru and recitation of the sacred compositions of the Guru, signifying the accumulated wisdom of those who succeeded in overcoming their self and merged with the Divine. 'He dwells in each and every heart, by the *Hukum* of His Command, by His *Hukum*, we contemplate Him. That soul-bride who lacks the Lord's name acts without virtue, and so she grieves.' 'God is not pleased with clever tricks and commands. You may practice a thousand forms of cleverness, but not one will go along with you in the end. Meditate on that Lord, that Lord, day and night.' 'God Himself is everything; those who are in their ego cannot speak of this. Through the Word of the Guru's Shabad, He is realized, and the pain of egoism is eradicated from within.' 'If one goes through the Shabad, then salvation is obtained, and one finds the Door of Liberation.' 'The Word of the Guru's Shabad is Ambrosial Nectar, drinking it in, thirst is quenched. This true mind is attuned to Truth, and it remains permeated with the True One. In speaking, in saying and in words, remain immersed in the Shabad.'

It is through the Shabad, the repeated recitation of the sacred words of the Gurus, that the right attitude is cultivated. 'You must know in your heart that every thing is temporary. Family, household and siblings are all entanglements. Kings, rulers and nobles are mortal and transitory; only God's Gate is the permanent place. First, is the Lord's Praise; second, contentment; third, humility, and fourth, giving to charities. Fifth is to hold one's desires in restraint. These are the five most sublime daily prayers. Let your daily worship be the knowledge that God is everywhere. Let renunciation of evil actions be the water-jug you carry. Let realization of the One Lord God be your call to prayer; be a good child of God - 'let this be your trumpet.' 'Let what is earned righteously be your blessed food. Wash away pollution with the river of your heart.' 'Let good deeds be your body, and faith your bride. Play and enjoy the Lord's love and delight. Purify

what is impure, and let the Lord's Presence be your religious tradition. Let your total awareness be the turban on your head.' 'After all their reading, the Pandits, the religious scholars, and the astrologers argue and debate. Their intellect and understanding are perverted; they just don't understand. They are filled with greed and corruption. Through 8.4 million incarnations they wander lost and confused; through all their wandering and roaming, they are ruined. They act according to their pre-ordained destiny, which no one can erase. It is very difficult to serve the True Guru. Surrender your head; give up your selfishness. Realising the Shabad, one meets with the Lord, and all one's service is accepted. By personally experiencing the Personality of the Guru, one's own personality is lifted, and one's light merges into the Light.' 'Reflect on your own self, and so practice good conduct; chant the Name of the Lord as your self-discipline and meditation. The Name of the Lord is your Companion, Friend and Dear Beloved; chant it, and meditate on it. . . . Singing the Glorious Praises of the Lord, be happy. Apply the ointment of spiritual wisdom to your eyes. The Word of the Shabad is the lamp which illuminates the three worlds; it slaughters the five demons. Quieting your fears, become fearless, and you shall cross over the impassable world ocean. Meeting the Guru, your affairs shall be resolved. You shall find the joy and the beauty of the Lord's Love and Affection; the Lord Himself shall shower you with His Grace.' This is the promise of the Guru Granth's invitation to spirituality.

#### IV

If the principal thrust of the Guru Granth is spiritual, this does not mean that it is entirely indifferent to social matters. No religious scripture can afford to do this because the very purpose of a scripture is to address the human condition. Most scriptures and the religions of which they are the authoritative guides are founded upon the premise that human nature combines potential for both evil and good. If the potential for evil is allowed free play or becomes ascendant, the human condition has a natural propensity to deteriorate. When this happens, and the presumption always is that this is almost natural to happen unless constraints are placed, all those socio-psychological attributes that incline human beings towards hedonism of one kind

or another take hold of the individual and the society. Both become mired into worldly pleasures and the potential for all kinds of social evils is created which ultimately becomes a serious obstruction in the pursuit of a harmonious and peaceful existence. Life becomes conflict ridden, leading individuals to compete for worldly possessions, ostentatious display of wealth, and social class differences giving rise to social and economic inequalities.

Most religious scriptures as well as the religious traditions that they came in the course of time to represent attempt to restrain this potential and strike a reasonable balance between this and the other worldly concerns. Even the most casual perusal of the Guru Granth leads one to easily conclude that its principal occupation is to introduce a system of checks and balances by seeking to wean away human beings from too strong an orientation toward hedonist living to one oriented toward spiritual pursuit. This is eloquently brought out by two conceptual categories that are repeatedly and frequently used in the Guru Granth. One is the concept of duality. If one reads through the text, one comes across this word quite often. The word has at no point been defined. Nor is it anywhere indicated what meaning should be ascribed to it. However, from the context in which the word is used, it is clear that duality fundamentally refers to the human potential for being simultaneously drawn towards this worldly pleasures and the desire to attain spiritual peace and harmony. This quality which most people would under normal circumstances possess in society is a serious impediment to their self-realisation and attainment of tranquility and peace, not to speak of spiritually elevating themselves.

Many verses in the Guru Granth speak of the effects of duality on the human condition and the virtue of overcoming it through seeking to tread the spiritual path. 'Those who do not understand the nature of sin and virtue are attached to duality; they wander around deluded. Attached to duality, the world is distracted and distressed to death. The mind is polluted by the love of duality. Filthy is that kitchen, and filthy is that dwelling. . . .' 'The world is polluted with the filth of egotism, suffering in pain. This filth sticks to them because of their love of duality.' 'Hypocrisy is not devotion speaking words of duality leads only to misery.' 'In their dreams at night, people wander around

as long as they sleep; just so, they are under the power of the snake Maya, as long as their hearts are filled with ego and duality.' 'Reading and studying, the Pandits and the silent sages have grown weary, but attached to the love of duality, they have lost their honour.' 'There are painted mansions to behold, white-washed, with beautiful doors; they were constructed to give pleasure to the mind, but this is only for the sake of the love of duality.' 'Attached to duality, the foolish, blind and stupid people waste away life and die.' 'Like worms, they live in manure, and in it, they die over and over again.' 'Through the love with duality, no one has found peace. They write falsehood, and they practice falsehood; they are burnt to ashes by focusing their consciousness on falsehood.' 'Some are stuck in falsehood, and false are the rewards they receive. In love with duality, they waste away their lives in vain. They drown themselves, and drown their entire family; speaking lies, they eat poison.' 'One who reads, while attached to duality, does not understand. He yearns for the three-phased Maya. This unstable mind cannot be held steady. Attached to duality, it wanders in the ten directions. . . . It is a poisonous worm, drenched with poison, and in poison it rots away.' 'O Siblings of Destiny, the world is in misery, engrossed in the love of duality.'

The other concept frequently used in the Guru Granth is that of the dichotomy between the *gurmukh* and the *manmukh*. The foundational principle underlying this dichotomy is that there are in the world two kinds of people: those who are given to worldly pleasures and those who have overcome their worldly attractions and taken to the path of devotion. 'The *Gurmukh* knows the Divine Light, while the foolish self-willed *manmukh* gropes around in the darkness. One who sees that Light within each and every heart understands the Essence of the Guru's Teachings. Those who understand are *Gurmukhs*; recognize and applaud them.' 'One who attains perfection as *Gurmukh*, obtains the Immeasurable True Lord.' 'The *Gurmukh* praises the Naam, and the fire of egotism is extinguished.' 'The raging fire within is extinguished; the *Gurmukh* obtains spiritual wisdom.' 'The Lord abides within the mind of the *Gurmukh*, who merges in the Lord's Union, through the Guru.' 'The *Gurmukhs* do not like falsehood. They are imbued with Truth; they love only Truth.'

'Practicing truth, self-discipline and good deeds, the *Gurmukh* is enlightened.' 'The *Gurmukhs* meditate on the Naam; they eradicate selfishness and conceit from within. They are pure, inwardly and outwardly; they merge into the Truest of the True.' 'For the *Gurmukh*, the love of the Name of the Lord is chanting, deep meditation and self-discipline.' 'The *Gurmukhs* shed their ego; attuned to the Naam, they find peace.' 'Through stubborn-mindedness, the intellect is drowned; one who becomes *Gurmukh* and truthful is saved.' 'The *Gurmukhs* dwell for ever in balanced restraint.' So, the Guru Granth advises, 'Become *Gurmukh*, and immerse yourself in the *Shabad*.'

The *manmukhs* are entirely the opposite. 'Anger and egoism are within him night and day; he burns, and suffers constant pain. They babble and tell lies, and keep on barking, eating the poison of love of duality. For the sake of the poison of *Maya*, they wander from house to house, and lose their honour. They are like the son of a prostitute, who does not know the name of his father.' 'The self-willed *manmukhs* are polluted. They are filled with the pollution of egoism, wickedness and desire.' 'Some are lovers of beautiful young women; emotional attachment to *Maya* is very dear to them. The unfortunate self-willed *manmukhs* remain asleep.' 'They are inwardly attached to egoism. The minds and bodies of the self-willed *manmukhs* are filled with darkness; they find no shelter, no place to rest.' 'The self-willed *manmukhs* perform religious rituals, but they are burnt down by their selfishness and conceit. Their births and deaths do not cease; over and over again, they come and go in reincarnation.' 'By ritualistic fasts, vows, purities and self-discipline and worship ceremonies, they still cannot get rid of their hypocrisy and doubt. Inwardly, they are impure, pierced through attachment to *Maya*; they are like elephants, who throw dirt all over themselves right after the bath.' 'The lives of the self-willed *manmukhs* are useless; in the end, they die, regretting and repenting. The husband is away, and the wife is getting dressed up. This is what the blind, self-willed *manmukhs* are doing. They are not honoured in this world, and they shall find no place in the world hereafter. They are wasting their lives in vain.' 'Whosoever associates with the self-willed *manmukhs*, will have his face blackened and dirtied.'

The central social message of the Guru Granth is thus clear and straightforward. 'The pleasures of gold and silver, the pleasures of women, the pleasures of the fragrance of sandalwood, the pleasure of horses, the pleasure of a soft bed in a palace, the pleasure of sweet treats and the pleasure of hearty meals—these pleasures of the human body are so numerous. . . .' 'Humanity is in spiritual darkness, people see things that do not exist.' 'So win the game of life; let your mind surrender and accept death. When the self dies, the individual mind comes to know the Supreme Mind. As the inner vision is awakened, one comes to know one's own home, deep within the self.' This is broadly the social theme the Guru Granth reiterates time and again to exhort believers to give up egoism, self-indulgence and selfishness and launch upon the quest for the Divine. The underlying assumption that forms the basis of this exhortation is that control the common human proclivities for evil—egoism, selfishness, greed, lust, and worldly attachments—brings in social balance as well as personal and social harmony.

One significant question that arises in this context is whether the Guru Granth sees the journey from being a *manmukh* to being a *gurmukh* in terms of a clear-cut dichotomy or as a continuum. At any point of time, believers would be at various stages of this journey. Some would have imbibed all the virtues of being a *Gurmukh*. Others may be seeking to do so with varying degrees of success. Should the characterization as *Gurmukh* be restricted to one who has arrived at the destination? Or, should it also apply to those who have started on that journey without necessarily having arrived at the final destination. If we take the first view, it would seem that there are no intermediate stages of being a *Gurmukh*. Unless one has reached the final stage of the journey, one would continue to be counted among the *manmukh*. An alternate view can be that the important in this context is not where and how far one has proceeded on this journey. What is important is the intention of the believer. If one is fired with the desire to overcome ego, lead a life of purity, and attain unity with the Divine, one is already on the way to becoming a *Gurmukh* unless one meanwhile relapses completely and settles back to a life of attraction for this worldly pleasures. It is by remaining steadfast in one's journey

toward overcoming common human failings that a believer becomes a *Gurmukh*. Thus, the dichotomy between the *Gurmukh* and the *manmukh* should be seen in terms of intentionality rather than the final effect of achieving the status of a *Gurmukh*. Someone who is completely immersed in the pleasures of this world, who is habitually egoistic, who appropriates other peoples' wealth and whose conscience is not troubled by egoism, selfishness and indifference to the Divine is truly a *manmukh*. If one has become aware of the Divine, understands that egoism, selfishness and self-indulgence are undesirable traits, one has already become transformed and has already become a *Gurmukh*.

## V

All religions rest on the premise that human beings are inherently imperfect but can work towards perfection. They are capable of engaging in acts and behaviour that has the potential to destroy peace and tranquility of individual life as well as create conditions of conflict with fellow human beings. Most religions are, therefore, attempts at social engineering, seeking to shape human conduct in a way that man can be at peace with himself as well as fellow human beings. Looked at from this general perspective, religion is individual or personal as well as social. At the individual level, religion seeks to order man's relationship with the Divine and provides a framework for regulation of individual conduct. Notions of good and evil as well as sins and rewards for the pursuit of, and adherence to, the right path are central to most religions. These conceptions are meant to create moral imperatives for the individual to adhere to the right path, the path considered desirable for ensuring personal and social harmony.

The relationship with the divine is conceived in most religions in hierarchical terms. The Divine, conceived and characterized differently in different religions, is placed on a pedestal. On the other hand, man is placed in a subordinate, one can even say subservient, position and is to that extent supposed to be beholden to the Divine. It is thus that man is supposed to seek Divine blessings to ensure peace, harmony and balance in this life and in the life hereafter. Conceptions of heaven and hell are common to most religions and are intended to strike a

fear of the Divine in man to keep to the right path. At the social level, religions seek to create a framework for the individual to live in peace and harmony with fellow human beings. The relationship between fellow human beings is by and large conceived in egalitarian terms. All human beings are projected as equal unto one another. This is not to say that religions do not anticipate individual and social differences. All religions anticipate individual and social differences arising out of differential endowments. However, these differences do not render individuals unequal in the eyes of the Divine. In other words, the equality that religions affirm is the equality of belief rather than that of endowments, whether personal or social.

This is where religions run into serious difficulties. One difficulty is that all religions outline a vision of a future society, but their scriptures also have to account for the ground realities of the societies of their origin. Since the societies in which most religions evolved and took shape were unequal, they could not have taken an entirely unequivocal position on social inequality. On the one hand, they had to deal with and account for social inequalities that existed in society. On the other hand, they had to outline a vision of a social order wherein social equality would prevail. At least this is the case with most world religions with the possible exception of Hindu scriptures whose conception of society is explicitly constructed as a many layered entity. This lends a remarkable contradictoriness to most world religions when it comes to the question of reading social equality into them. There is often a tendency on the part of those who make it their business to interpret these scriptures either to underplay the passages that seem to endorse existing social inequalities or to transpose the passages that propagate the vision of a future egalitarian order and to argue that equality constitutes the real essence of the religion. This tendency is most eloquently illustrated by the interpretations of the Quran. There are many passages in the Quran that would seem to clearly endorse social inequality, but the interpretation that enjoys wide currency, so much so that any attempt to suggest otherwise is seen as sacrilegious, is that Islam stands for social equality (*masawat*). This holds equally for other religious traditions as well.

The Guru Granth's attitude on the issue of social equality is marked by contradictoriness. Passages such as 'By His Command, some are high and some are low' and 'You have so many forms and colours, so many classes, high and low' would seem to endorse social inequality. On the other hand, there are other passages where the inherent equality of human beings is strongly endorsed. 'Everyone says that there are four castes, four social classes. They all emanate from the drop of God's seed. The entire universe is made of the same clay. The Potter has shaped it into all sorts of vessels. The five elements join together, to make the form of the human body. Who can say which is less, and which is more?' 'Do not be fooled by appearances of high and low.' 'Those who believe in high and low social classes, only sing songs and chants of egoism.' One way out of this contradictoriness is to transpose the futuristic vision of the Guru Granth over the other passages and to argue that the Guru Granth's social orientation is remarkably egalitarian. This approach cannot be sustained in the face of the other passages that endorse social inequality or offer a rationale for it. The other option is to recognise that contradiction arises out of the scripture having to deal with existing social inequality and outlining a vision of an egalitarian social order in the future. This perspective has the merit of accounting for the Guru Granth's strong emphasis upon charity and service as religious duties as interim measures designed to ease existing inequalities until the future social order has taken shape and is established.

## VI

The second difficulty relates to the distinction between believers and non-believers. Whereas all religions lay emphasis upon the essential equality of the believers, their attitude toward non-believers differs markedly. The non-believer easily becomes the recognizable 'other' and hence liable to differential treatment vis-à-vis the believer. Some religions allow for incorporation of the non-believer, i. e. the recognizable 'other', through assimilation or conversion. Others deny the possibility of incorporation altogether by creating a clear and unbridgeable dichotomy between believers and non-believers. This dichotomy becomes particularly strong where the non-believer refuses to be incorporated and wishes to adhere to the integrity and solace of

his own faith. Where this dichotomy is salient, and I would argue it is central to most universal religions, the relationship between believers and non-believers has a built-in potential for conflict and breakdown of social harmony.

Considerable evidence by now exists that this conflict and disharmony has been endemic throughout history. On the one hand, it has involved efforts by one set of believers to either kill non-believers or to coerce them to change their faith and become one with the faithful. On the other hand, there are instances where the prospect of conversion was also not afforded. Elimination was the only choice offered to the non-believer. The history of the Crusades illustrates this clearly. The Spanish Christian armies were willing to allow the choice to Jews to embrace Christianity in order to escape death. This possibility was denied to Muslims whose only fate was eventual exodus or elimination. Smith draws pointed attention to this basic reality when he writes:

The devil can cite scripture for his purpose, we were reminded long ago. Gullible devout folk follow. The pious, certainly, can at times cite it with equal damage while fooling themselves, and alas some others, that it is for God's purpose. Historical instances abound. Scripture served as the chief moral justification for slavery among those who resisted proposals to abolish that institution; and indeed as sanctifying many an oppressive status quo against movements for justice. There is the fearsome extent to which scripture has served in outrageous wars to make both sides self-righteous, and all the more fierce. Again, it has served the degradation of women. Many further instances could be cited, from the past and from the present day. Another: the mighty force of a scripture's binding a community together has worked to make sharp, and often relentless, divergence between communities. Especially in the case of the Western triad—Jewish, Christian, Islamic—the scripture-based disparagement of those deemed outsiders has been, and continues to be, disastrous (1993: 213-214).

Critical to a consideration of the distinction between the believers and non-believers in religions is to recognise the close inter-linkage between community and power. So long as considerations of

community and power do not enter into their mutual relations, the believer and the non-believer can co-exist in the same time and place through acceptance and toleration of religious differences and skillfully crafted truce. Medina, symbolizing the possibility of co-existence of different faiths and their adherents within the same territory is often cited, and not without good reason, as an example of this kind of truce. What is often overlooked is that even this kind of a truce broke down once the transformation of the religious communities into political communities began to take place. Once that began to happen, the distinction between the believer and the non-believer, between 'we' and 'they', was an inevitable corollary.

Secularism aimed at transcending the divide between believers and non-believers (of believers following different lines of persuasion within the same religion) by seeking to define the political community in strictly non-religious terms. It proclaimed that religion was not, and could not be, the basis of defining a political community so that even followers of different religions, or even the followers of different lines of persuasion within the same religion, could become equal citizens of a nation-state. The Guru Granth comes very close to this secular dictum, but not because it overrides the dichotomy of the believer and the non-believer. It does so by a degree of eclecticism in the matter of belief:

I do not know what p<sup>l</sup>ease my Lord.  
 O mind, seek out the way.  
 The meditatives practice meditation,  
 and the wise practice spiritual wisdom,  
 but how rare are those who know God!  
 The worshippers of Bhagaauti practice self-discipline,  
 The Yogi speaks of liberation,  
 and the ascetic is absorbed in ascetism.  
 The men of silence observe silence,  
 the Sanyaasees observe celibacy,  
 and the Udaasees abide in detachment.  
 There are nine forms of devotional worship.  
 The Pandits recite the Vedas.  
 The householders assert their faith in family life.

Those who utter One Word, those who take many forms, the naked renunciates,

the wearers of patched coats, the magicians, those who always remain awake,

and those who bathe at holy places of pilgrimage.

Those who go without food, those who never touch others,

the hermits who never show themselves,

and those who are wise in their own minds.

Of these, no one admits to any deficiency;

all say that they have found the Lord.

But he alone is a devotee, whom the Lord has united with Himself.

Avoiding all devices and contrivances, I have sought his sanctuary.

Nanak has fallen at the Feet of the Guru.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of this eclectic ethic is, and remains, a more open question.

## Notes and References

1. Smith, W. C., *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993.
2. ਜਾਨਉ ਨਹੀ ਭਾਵੈ ਕਵਨ ਬਾਤਾ ॥ ਮਨ ਖੋਜਿ ਮਾਰਗੁ ॥ ੧ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥  
 ਧਿਆਨੀ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਲਾਵਹਿ ॥ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਕਮਾਵਹਿ ॥ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਕਿਨ ਹੀ ਜਾਤਾ ॥ ੧ ॥  
 ਭਗਉਤੀ ਰਹਤ ਜੁਗਤਾ ॥ ਜੋਗੀ ਕਹਤ ਮੁਕਤਾ ॥ ਤਪਸੀ ਤਪਹਿ ਰਾਤਾ ॥ ੨ ॥  
 ਮੋਨੀ ਮੋਨਿਧਾਰੀ ॥ ਸਨਿਆਸੀ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਚਾਰੀ ॥ ਉਦਾਸੀ ਉਦਾਸਿ ਰਾਤਾ ॥ ੩ ॥  
 ਭਗਤਿ ਨਵੈ ਪਰਕਾਰਾ ॥ ਪੰਡਿਤੁ ਵੇਦੁ ਪੁਕਾਰਾ ॥ ਗਿਰਸਤੀ ਗਿਰਸਤਿ ਧਰਮਾਤਾ ॥ ੪ ॥  
 ਇਕ ਸਬਦੀ ਬਹੁ ਰੂਪਿ ਅਵਹੁਤਾ ॥ ਕਾਪਤੀ ਕਉਤੇ ਜਾਗੁਤਾ ॥ ਇਕਿ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਤਾ ॥ ੫ ॥  
 ਨਿਰਹਾਰ ਵਰਤੀ ਆਪਰਸਾ ॥ ਇਕਿ ਲੂਕਿ ਨ ਦੇਵਹਿ ਦਰਸਾ ॥ ਇਕਿ ਮਨ ਹੀ ਗਿਆਤਾ ॥ ੬ ॥  
 ਘਾਟਿ ਨ ਕਿਨ ਹੀ ਕਹਾਇਆ ॥ ਸਭ ਕਹਤੇ ਹੈ ਪਾਇਆ ॥ ਜਿਸੁ ਮੇਲੇ ਸੋ ਭਗਤਾ ॥ ੭ ॥  
 ਸਗਲ ਉਕਤਿ ਉਪਾਵਾ ॥ ਤਿਆਗੀ ਸਰਨਿ ਪਾਵਾ ॥ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਗੁਰ ਚਰਣਿ ਪਰਾਤਾ ॥ ੮ ॥ ੨ ॥ ੨੭ ॥  
 -S.G.G.S.p.71

# Political Concerns in Guru Granth Sahib

Prithipal Singh Kapur

Punjab, the land of five rivers, otherwise a tract of Indus basin, provided passage to the hordes of foreign marauders to the Gangetic Doab. This land gained immense reputation only after it gave unto the world a dynamic divine, Guru Nanak, since then it has come to be known as the cradle of Sikhism. The message of Guru Nanak and his successors, enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, is of universal import and embraces humanity in its entirety. Arnold Toynbee has noted: 'this is the most highly revered scripture of all the religions and that it is the Sikhs' perpetual Guru (spiritual guide)'. He calls 'Adi Granth a Catholic anthology' because it includes hymns of Hindu and Muslims seers also and therefore facilitates inter-religious dialogue at a higher plane. This special feature of the Sikh scripture makes it 'a part of mankind's common spiritual treasure.' The contents of the Guru Granth are not addressed to followers of the Sikh faith only but seeks to lay down specifics for an ideal way of living that transcends the spiritual and temporal boundaries. The essentials as explained by the Sikh Gurus and other contributors of the Granth are spiritual but not entirely other worldly. As such, they abound in the concerns of human life. The message carried through the volume of the Granth makes no attempt to persuade the reader to accept Sikhism. On the other hand emphasis is laid on the fact that the Creator or *Kartar* (in the Sikh terminology) is beyond the manifestations of all religious denominations and each individual could approach Him for

upliftment through any one of them. Guru Amar Das; the third Guru, emphasizes this very position when he says:

“Save by Thy grace, the world in flames,  
Save it at whatever portal it may be saved”<sup>2</sup>

Guru Amar Das calls various religions as portals for entry into the Divine realm and the grant of Divine grace. Until then entry into the divine realm had been looked upon in India as the preserve of those who renounced the world or whose primary concern was spiritual pursuits. In other places proximity of a particular prophet to God was looked upon as gateway to salvation by the followers of the faith. Most of such people looked upon this material world as illusion. But, we learn from Guru Granth Sahib that Guru Nanak called the Lord’s Creation, holy and true:

“True and holy are Thy continents and universe;  
True and holy are Thy worlds and the forms created by thee”<sup>3</sup>

And Guru Angad, the second Guru says:

“This world is the holy Lord’s chamber  
In it is His abode.”<sup>4</sup>

The assertion clearly indicates that the Sikh system as explained in Sri Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Nanak, his successors, the other Bhāktas and the Sufis like Farid envelops the study of the universe in its totality. Therefore the Sikh Gurus, at no time kept themselves oblivious of the political happenings and societal concerns. A peep through the compositions contained in the Guru Granth shall reveal that the Gurus and the Bhāktas did not limit their concerns to spiritual aspects of religion only. While deciphering any particular concern out of the corpus of *Gurbani*, the basic fact to be kept in mind is that the central point of the message in the Granth remains religious. Despite this it cannot be denied that the contributors to the Adi Granth were social and political thinkers as well who did express ideas about the ruler and the ruled. There are about ten references<sup>5</sup> which are often quoted to illustrate Guru Nanak’s political concerns but there are numerous other verses which have a bearing on the subject. Before attempting a proper appraisal of the verses contained in the Guru

Granth, it has to be noted that political phraseology in these verses has been used in a metaphorical sense. As such, a clear distinction between literal and metaphorical use can provide an understanding of the political concerns mentioned therein. That is why an accomplished historian like Cunningham misunderstood the position of Guru Nanak regarding political and societal concerns and he concluded that Guru Nanak did not possess "any clear or sagacious views of social amelioration or of political advancement."<sup>6</sup> But if we closely follow the *Bani* of Guru Nanak, we find him deeply concerned about social and political disabilities of the people. He even refers to oppression by the rulers and as a consequence the hapless people aping the foreign rulers in manners, dress and language. Guru Nanak was an eye witness to the sack of Saidpur (modern Eminabad, district Gujranwala, Pakistan) in 1521 during the third invasion of Babar. He even condemned the Lodhi Pathans who could not give protection to the people and defend the country. It is said that he even predicted the rise of a 'brave man' (Sher Shah Suri) who would throw out the Mughals.<sup>7</sup> Many a historian have been so much overtaken by the abundance of these historical references that they treat the Guru Granth as repository of contemporary historical information and look at it as a source of political and social history of the period.<sup>8</sup>

The above brief discussion on the contents of Sri Guru Granth Sahib vis-à-vis, an attempt to decipher the contemporary political concerns narrows down to the point that the central concern or theme of the *Bani* available in the Guru Granth remains religion wherein absolute unity of God, His supremacy and equality of mankind has been kept into focus. The socio-political concerns find mention in metaphorical phraseology but all these references reflect on the contemporary situation which is important for understanding of the Sikh Gurus' and the *Bhaktas'* approach to politics. Apart from these metaphorical references, we come across direct references on political events as well but in general terms.<sup>9</sup>

In numerous hymns of Guru Nanak, we find description of political degeneration, chaos, oppression, corruption and moral degradation among the people.<sup>10</sup> Here it must be pointed out that if we try to find out political concerns in the Adi Granth as defined and

understood in our age, i.e., the twenty first century, then we might meet with limited success. In the sixteenth and seventeenth; the political, social or even economic concerns were yet to be distinctly understood or defined. Moreover, Guru Nanak's concept of God makes total human activity subservient to God's Will. With this premise before us we can proceed to highlight the political concerns as outlined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Those who point towards the importance of Guru Granth Sahib as a source of contemporary history, especially lay emphasis on the fact that Guru Nanak was an eyewitness to the third invasion of Babar and the atrocities committed in the wake of the sack of Saidpur. Giving the details of devastation Guru Nanak says:

"Where are gone those gambols, stables and studs?  
Where the drums and the flutes?  
Where are those swordsmen on chariots?  
Where those warriors in red gowns  
Where are those beauties beholding in hand mirrors?  
nowhere visible"<sup>11</sup>

Such was the meticulous understanding of the turn of political events of Guru Nanak that he makes a pointed mention of the superior weaponry used by the Mughal invader that made his victory possible:

"As the battle between the Pathans and the Mughals was joined,  
On the battlefield were wielded swords,  
One side fired guns, the other made elephant charges."<sup>12</sup>

The above quotations from the hymns of the Adi Granth are often adduced as an empirical evidence. Here, we need to take note of the fact, as pointed out earlier also; that in the age of Nanak all the activities of life taken as a whole, overlapped. The central point that Guru Nanak emphasized was "Realization of Truth is higher than all else, Higher still is truthful living." Guru Nanak sought to bring into focus; a principle of universal applicability, one that could guide human relationship in all spheres – social, economic and political.<sup>13</sup> Viewed from this stand-point, Guru Nanak's political concerns have to be seen in proximity with this idea of a society organized on the basis of justice, equality, liberty and freedom from oppression of all kinds. From the study of *Gurbani* enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, it will

become abundantly clear that the contemporary political and social developments hardly remained out of focus. We can take note of a reference by Guru Arjan to a petty Mughal official Sulhi Khan marching against him but fell into a brick kiln and died. The hymn expressed thanksgiving to God.<sup>14</sup>

The Sikh system gives little importance to the practice of penances, celibacy or renunciation. The Sikh Gurus believe in making this world liveable and this ideal is close to the concept of a welfare state wherein we see the good of the human being as the first duty of a constituted authority. In *Maru raga*, Guru Nanak says:

“Such occupy the throne as for it are fit:

These are such as by the Master’s guidance (or grace)

The five evils annul (*Kam, Karodh, Lobh, Moh, Ahankar*)

And turn God’s humble servants<sup>15</sup>

This statement, in no way can be said to conform to the Divine Right theory as interpreted in Europe. A worthy (*laik*) ruler as conceived by *Gurmat* (or the Sikh system) must be an embodiment of divine wisdom as should always look after the well-being of the people, in other words, God’s Creation. In these terms a ruler is not a master but a servant of the people – a concept closer to the present-day democratic ideal. A wayward ruler loses the mandate of God and his removal may be considered a religious and moral duty. Kabir and Namdev also expect a ruler to tread the path of truth, justice and compassion. Kabir also defines Sultan as ‘the king to aim with two arrows of wisdom and detachment’<sup>16</sup> There are two types of hymns in the Adi Granth that give us sufficient indication as to the duties of the ruler. Firstly; mention has been made in the hymns about licentious behaviour of the kings, their avarice, cowardice, corruption, oppression and neglect of the protection of the subjects. Secondly, it is stated that God entrusts onerous duties to a king who has to be as just as God, must protect his subjects and refrain from exploitation of subjects through arbitrary taxation. Kabir condemns a ruler who cannot guarantee protection and welfare of his subjects in no uncertain terms. According to Sikh tradition, Guru Arjan refused to pay an arbitrary tax, levied by Bir Bal (the then *Subadar* of Lahore) on the residents of Amritsar even in the face of the threat of complete

destruction of the new township.<sup>17</sup> Guru Tegh Bahadur gave the slogan 'Fear not, frighten not' and stressed the guarantee of subjects' liberty by the ruler. In this regard, freedom to profess a faith of choice finds special mention.

We come across many hymns highlighting the false profession of orthodoxy by *Pandit, Mulla, Kazi, Panda*. Their forceful condemnation in *Gurbani* may be referred to here. In fact, the idea of subject's protection by the ruler carries within itself the protection of religion as well. It is obvious that Guru Nanak has no sympathy for discrimination on religious grounds.<sup>18</sup> The words ruler and the ruled have been used in *Gurbani* in an abstract form and wherever the ruler, political rule or kingship has been denounced, it is only in general terms. The point to be noted here is that the Gurus or the *Bhaktas* as such did not show any special regard or respect for the political authority but they had definitely an expectation for certain norms of behaviour both from the ruler and the ruled, legally as well as morally. The sympathies of contributors to the Guru Granth decidedly lay with the ruled cutting across the communal barriers.

It is not indicated in the entire corpus of contents of the Adi Granth as to which form of government the Gurus or the *Bhaktas* preferred. Since they considered the world order divinely ordained they only talked about the ideal for those placed at the helm whatever be the form of government. Guru Arjan however defines the ideal thus:

"Now is the gracious Lord's ordinance promulgated:

None to another shall cause hurt.

All mankind now in peace shall abide --

Gentle shall the governance be<sup>19</sup>

Surely this ideal carries within itself an injunction against arbitrary rule and an ideal that conforms to the present day concept of a welfare state with secular credentials of co-existence and guarantee of basic human rights.

The third Guru elaborates the above position in one of his hymns;

'Let such alone be seated on the throne as are fit therefor

Such alone are true kings as realize righteousness.

Call not these lords of acres kings;

Caught in duality they suffer'<sup>20</sup>

It will be in the fitness of things to state at this stage that the Sikh Gurus and other contributors to the Guru Granth preferred to concern themselves more with the matters divine. They were concerned about the secular life and they carried a definite view that everything even in secular life was subject to the Will of God. Therefore we find only cryptic references in the Adi Granth, on some of the major concerns of secular life. Even the earliest of the scholars, Bhai Gurdas whose competence as exponent of *Gurbani* remains unsurpassed, strictly followed the Gurus in this regard in his *Vars*, a composition that so far remains the most well accepted commentary on the Adi Granth.<sup>21</sup> Under these circumstances, we are constrained to depend more on deductions from the available cryptic references and such other indicators as are found in the Guru Granth. However these references enable us to prepare a reliable account of the political concerns with semblance of the modern political thought and to say with some authority that the Gurus and the Bhaktas of Granth were concerned about the basic rights of the people which they thought had been bestowed upon them by God himself. Absolute equality of mankind and freedom of religion are mentioned as sacrosanct rights which is clear from vehement denunciation of caste system as well as religious persecution of people. Forcible conversion and destruction of places of worship is condemned. Interestingly Bhai Gudas's remark is significant in this regard that Hindus and Muslims quarrel in the name of One God who is indivisible.<sup>22</sup> Kabir and Dhanna also refer to right to life with basic necessities. They address the Almighty to say:

**Kabir:**

'No devotion with starvation is possible,  
Here take back your rosary.  
I seek only dust of the feet of the holy.

---

Two seers of flour I ask;  
A quarter seer of *ghee* with salt  
Half a seer of *dal* I seek  
On this provision feed me thrice daily  
A cot seek I, with four legs in place

---

Nothing have I sought out of greed.

---

**Dhanna:**

I beg for lentils, flour and some *Ghee*  
 Whereby may my heart be delighted.  
 Seek I also shoes and good clothing,  
 And grains grown over well ploughed land  
 A cow and buffalo in milk I seek,  
 As also a good Arab mare  
 Thy servant Dhanna then begs also for a wife,  
 A good houskeeper.<sup>23</sup>

It will be pertinent here to refer to the fact that worldly kings who wielded power have been projected in the Guru Granth, only as transitory authorities whereas God is addressed *Sacha Patshah*. Later the Sikhs began to address the Gurus as *Sacha Patshah*<sup>24</sup> meaning thereby that secular forms of Government were of little significance. What was more important was justice, social stability and welfare of the people.

In Guru Granth, we come across repeated references to social justice, sovereignty of the God Almighty and the entire life being spiritual or divine. Professor Puran Singh rightly says that Guru Granth presents most authentic account of social reconstruction of human society. At another place he says that Guru Granth presents a glimpse of divine humanity whose fundamental principle is Unity that can be realized in feeling and action. The divine plurality of form is more of that Unity than the mere dead concept of Unity. Therefore the idea of "spirituality and earthly aspect of it is more akin to dynamic aspect of life"<sup>25</sup> In such a world, economic inequality is irrelevant. It is God who makes the kings and the subjects and 'Rulers, subjects or nobles shall not last.'<sup>26</sup>

The Word enshrined in the Guru Granth has the expanse and mystery of all space. While, bringing to a close this difficult exercise of delineating political concerns in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, I will like to quote Professor Puran Singh "Intellectual analysis is never right and perception by the soul is never wrong."<sup>27</sup> That is why he calls Guru Granth as most authentic account of Guru's soul.

## Notes and References

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20. Ibid, p. 656 (Trans. G. S.Talib, Vol. III, 1376). See also Narain Singh, *Guru Nanak's View of Life*, 364-70, Amritsar, 1969.
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# Guru Granth Sahib and Religious Pluralism

Dharam Singh

## **Introductory**

For the Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib is not just the holy scripture, a compilation of the holy hymns of the Sikhs, but the Guru-Eternal: they revere it as their living spiritual mentor but do not worship it as an idol on altar. First compiled in 1604 and given the status of the Guru in 1708, chronologically it belongs to medieval times but an in-depth study of it reveals its critical attitude towards the medieval spirit and its relevance to several of the issues facing mankind today. One such issue is that of religious plurality. During the past hundred years or so the infotech revolution and development of fast means of transportation have transformed this wide world into a small global village. As a result, people with different cultural, religious and racial backgrounds are now our next-door neighbours. Different faith-communities inter-penetrate and inter-act with one another on daily basis. Religious pluralism<sup>1</sup> is an attitude which accepts and tolerates the plurality of religions, and also accepts and appreciates the otherness of the other.

## **Attitude towards other Faiths**

Religious plurality is the stark social reality today. Gone are the days when man lived in his own tiny, isolated religious camp blissfully ignorant of who existed or whatever happened outside. Today people of different religious denominations have to live together and interact with one another. One cannot run away from or wish away this

reality of religious plurality and the social and theological issues arising from it. However, in the religiously plural society, each faith-community is, unfortunately, not in the desirable harmonious relationship with the other. This has been due mainly to the fact of our failure to accept that we sometimes fall short of the ideals of our own tradition and we also often compare our own ideals with practices of others so as to underrate the tradition and ideology of the other. Some of us tend to claim monopoly of truth for their faith. To them, only their religion, or only their prophet can lead people on the path to God-realization and self-realization. Other religions are taken as fake or inauthentic, and other faith-communities as pagans. This exclusivist attitude has often been harmful to our social fabric; we must realize that "the religious life of mankind from now on, if it is to be lived at all, will be lived in a context of religious pluralism.... This is true for all of us."<sup>2</sup>

It appears more and more difficult today to hold on to an exclusivist or inclusivist model for leading a peaceful and harmonious social existence. It has to be understood that there can be no one way to the realization of God and that there are many paths and many Saviors to help people in their efforts to pursue truth and meaning. Further, these many ways cannot exist in isolation from one another, nor can they possibly remain intolerant of or indifferent toward one another. The neighbour can no longer remain a stranger. It is necessary for different religions and faith-communities to meet each other and relate to each other, the objective being not to absorb or obliterate the other but to help and learn from each other. This has become obligatory for humanity today because pluralism is no more just a textbook issue but has become a human existential problem.

To enable different faith-communities to live harmoniously and peacefully we need something like the pluralist attitude as also the pluralist model as formulated in the Guru Granth Sahib. In this attitude/model, the value and validity of other religions are duly recognized and not only tolerated but, also appreciated. Such a pluralist perspective of religion holds that all religions of the world affirm ultimate reality/truth which is conceptualised in different ways. With their diverse teachings and practices these diverse religions constitute

authentic paths to the supreme good. All persons have the freedom of conscience and right to choose their own faith. It is for mutual witnessing which promotes mutual respect, and opposes proselytising which devalues the faith of the other. Absolute truth claims can easily be exploited to incite religious hatred and violence.<sup>3</sup>

Each religion is a different historical manifestation of the absolute reality, and it presents visions of God, world, and humanity from a localized, historically particular perspective. In other words, it can be said that the essence of divine revelation is universal but when shared by the receiver-prophet with humankind in a mundane language in a specific historico-religio-cultural context, it acquires limitations as well as differentiation. To affirm the fact of diverse religions as finite manifestations of the one Infinite is in no way to diminish the significance of any particular religion; rather, such diversity reveals the richness of eternal and infinite truth. One must try to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs and doctrines of one's neighbour. No doubt, one cannot put one's faith in parenthesis while trying to understand and examine the faith of the other; and yet, one must listen attentively to the faith of the other as this is witnessed to by the believer, without pre-judging that faith and without abandoning one's own commitment. This is a very delicate undertaking because while doing so "our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival."<sup>4</sup>

A pluralist attitude toward other religions cannot be confined to the knowledge of other religious systems and their doctrines and teachings only. This would mean trying to confront a religious truth in the abstract. It also presumes the effort to know and appreciate the historical-cultural context and the people themselves who make up other faith communities. This would involve our discarding the prevalent attitude of considering our neighbours, who are people of different races and religions, as aliens. Discarding this kind of exclusivist attitude and instead adopting a pluralist attitude is essential if we want to lead a meaningful, satisfying and safe life. We must not

only live with our religiously diverse neighbours; we must also talk with, work with, and learn from them.

### **Sikhism: A World-affirming Faith**

The Sikh faith integrates the world and worldly life with the idea of divinity. On the one hand, it rejects asceticism and on the other provides reality, relative reality though, to the mundane world. This world cannot be considered simply to be sinful or mere *maya* (delusion) or primarily a place of suffering; it is, rather, the dwelling-place of the Divine. As the residence of the Lord, the world need not be renounced; on the contrary, humans must strive to fashion the world into *Sach Khand*. In this process, for Sikhs, the spiritual is socialized, and the secular and social are spiritualized. Ethics, therefore, become central to Sikh belief and practice; the scriptural teachings call upon man for an active and righteous participation in family and social life. The ideal religion, as says the scripture, is one which places emphasises upon man to perform concrete good deeds in this world and at the same time to constantly remember the Divine Name.<sup>5</sup>

Since Sikhism is embedded in society, it needs to play its part for the betterment of society. In the modern-day pluralistic world, the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib can play a vital and constructive role, mainly because they tend to accept plurality. However, this acceptance is not passive; it is, rather, critical. This critical spirit is quite explicit on at least two vital points such as the sanctions and safeguards favouring hierarchical social structures. In Sikh thought, all humans are equal, no matter how different they may appear externally. They are spiritually one with God and ethnically equal among themselves. Sikhism is also equally critical of certain prevalent religious practices which are contrary to the scriptural spirit of the given faith. The role of clergy, in both Hinduism and Islamic traditions, in misusing religion for the purpose of oppressing certain classes of society receives a severe condemnation in some of the hymns.

### **Sikh Attitude Toward Other Faiths**

The lives of the Sikh spiritual teachers, the message of the Sikh scripture, and Sikh tradition and history all stand witness to the

constructive and positive Sikh response to interfaith relations. For example, if we look at the life of the founder of the faith, Guru Nanak, we learn that after he received the revelation,<sup>6</sup> he took on four preaching odysseys in four different directions to share this divine message with the people at large. During these odysseys, he seems to have made it a point to visit any place of pilgrimage or importance to both Hindus and Muslims which fell on his way and hold discourses with the holy men there. The idea was to listen to them and then convey them his own viewpoint. Instead of thrusting his view of truth on anyone, he would listen to them and also share with them the revelation he had had.

Guru Nanak negated another exclusivist point by providing validity and authenticity to other traditions, their prophets and revelations. Unlike the exclusivists who generally compare the ideal of their own faith with the practices of others, Sikhism not only acknowledges and appreciates other faiths but accepts their validity as well. There is an episode relating to Guru Nanak's visit to Multan where he is received by the holy men residing in the town. They met the Guru with a bowl filled to the brim with milk, implying that the place was already full with holy men of different religious traditions. Guru Nanak is said to have placed a flower petal on the milk, indicating that his faith though distinct was not an attempt to displace any; it was to co-exist with others.<sup>7</sup> This attitude helps us understand and appreciate other religions and live in harmony with other faith-communities.

The Sikh scripture calls for respect for all religions, tolerance for religious pluralism, and understanding and co-operation among different faith-communities. It is quite explicit in its statement that revelation cannot be religion-specific, region-specific or caste-specific. In other words, the claim to truth cannot be the monopoly of any one particular religion, caste, class, or region. The Sikh scripture contains apart from works of six of the Sikh Gurus hymns of certain other holy men also coming from Hindu as well as Muslim traditions. They belong to different caste-groups and several of them belonged to the so-called lower strata of society. These holy men come from different far-off regions of India and they belong to a period of about

five centuries beginning with the twelfth century [chronologically, Shaikh Farid (1173-1266) is the first and Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) is the last] and ending with the seventeenth.

Since each expression of revelation is considered an attempt to encounter and understand the Real One in a particular localized context, the Sikh Gurus advised everybody to be true to his or her faith: a Muslim should be a true Muslim and a Hindu should become a true Hindu. There is no instance in Sikh history or tradition of exhorting anybody to convert to Sikhism because it was, so to say, a better faith than any other. On the other hand, it holds that while mutual witnessing promotes mutual respect, proselytising devalues the faith of the other. Sikhism seeks to unite people belonging to different religious traditions into a broader unity: Sikh theology holds that the object of religion is not to divide mankind, but to unite it; "not to act like the scissors and tear asunder the social fabric, but to act like a needle and sew it together."<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Sikhism also rejects the idea of only one Saviour. The idea that my prophet or my spiritual teacher is the only Saviour to lead humanity on the road to salvation is alien to Sikhism which takes different religions as divine revelations made known by the prophets or spiritual preceptors at different times in different spatio-cultural contexts. It accepts each one of the prophets and the traditions founded by them as equally valid paths toward God-realization. In one of his hymns as included in the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Amar Das, the third spiritual preceptor of the Sikhs, declares all religious traditions equally valid as he prays to Lord to save mankind through the way He considers best.<sup>9</sup>

There are several instances in the Sikh tradition where we find the Sikh Gurus advising their followers to give equal regard to the prophets and seers from all traditions. Sikhs must also not look down upon those who have a different form of worship. Such an attitude in the late medieval times was much ahead of the times and can very easily be taken as a precursor to the modern-day pluralistic model. The oft-quoted example in this viewpoint is that of Guru Arjan who was once visited by a group of followers. They were confused by the diverse incarnations in which God was worshipped and they sought

the Guru's advice. The Guru advised them: "All forms and attributes are God's, yet He transcends them. You should, therefore, worship only the Absolute One. At the same time, you must abjure rancour towards those who have a different way of worship."<sup>10</sup> Earlier Guru Arjan had himself set an example by getting the foundation of the Harimandar, the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Sikhs, laid by Shaikh Mir Muhammad (popularly called Hazrat Mian Mir), a saint of the Qadiriya order of the Sufis.

Lest this understanding and appreciation of other religions should remain an abstract idea, Sikhism seeks to promote a dialogical relationship between different faith-communities. The Sikh scripture is quite emphatic in stating that "man throughout his worldly existence must seek to converse with others by first listening to others' viewpoint and then putting forward his own, for this is the only way to attain truth"<sup>11</sup> The notions of listening to the others' viewpoint (*kichhu suniai*) and putting forward your own viewpoint (*kichhu kahiai*) clearly urge fruitful dialogue aimed at searching for the truth. Such a dialogical relationship with other faiths leads to a much-needed deeper understanding and appreciation of other religions. The Sikh scripture categorically rejects polemics, insisting rather that only after polemics has been set aside can the real search for truth begin and bear fruit. Polemics and argumentation cause — and are also caused by — "the ego which in the Sikh scripture is referred to as a 'serious malady'<sup>12</sup>;" but humility, a pre-requisite for genuine listening to another, is the essence of all virtues.<sup>13</sup> There are innumerable references in Sikh scripture that stress the value of humility.

The best example of interfaith dialogue in the Sikh scripture is Guru Nanak's *Sidh Gosti* which is a sort of spiritual dialogue on the Sikh philosophy of life vis-à-vis the philosophy of Nath Yogis. In this composition, the yogis put searching questions to Guru Nanak who answers them with courtesy and confidence. The dialogue is held without hurting the feelings of any of the participants, ever retaining serenity and sobriety and aiming at realizing the truth. This is the basis as well as the ideal of interfaith dialogue in Sikhism. Other examples of dialogue can be found within the hymns of the saints. Certain *slokas*, especially of Kabir and Farid have been frequently held

up and commented upon by the Gurus for clarifying or expanding God's message to humanity - a kind of dialogue rather than polemic.

The vision of religious tolerance and the affirmation of religious pluralism that are found in the message of the Gurus as contained in scripture are also embodied in the lives of the Gurus themselves and in Sikh tradition in general. This is evident in the way Guru Nanak was revered not just by Sikhs but also by Hindus and Muslims. And Guru Arjan was recognized by the Emperor Akbar for the way his message and conduct brought Hindus and Muslims together to converse with him. Guru Tegh Bahadur went even further and laid down his life to protect man's religious freedom, offering himself for sacrifice in order to stop the Muslim ruler of his time from forcing the conversion of Hindus to Islam. It was clear that he would have done the same for Muslims had the situation been the other way round. The Guru's sacrifice was clearly to uphold what we today say is the fundamental principle of religious pluralism - freedom of conscience and the right to choose one's own faith.

When Guru Gobind Singh took up the struggle against the deceit and decadence of Hindu Rajput chiefs and the oppression and suppression by the Mughal government of the day, he could count many Hindus and Muslims standing on his side. One of the most moving Sikh affirmations of the value and validity of other religions can be found in Bhai Kanahaiya as he looked out over the slain and wounded soldiers on the battlefield of Anandpur and honoured the same divine essence in all of them, no matter what their religion.<sup>14</sup> Treating all human beings as spiritually one and ethnically equal no matter what their religious beliefs is the pre-requisite for maintaining harmonious relationship in the modern-day pluralistic society, and the Sikh attitude towards other religions and religious communities can be taken as a model.

### Looking Ahead

If we want a world free from the prevalent distrust and disharmony, hatred and violence, we must be able to see others as our brothers and sisters. This means that we have to discover how to affirm our own identity without threatening the identity of others.<sup>15</sup> And we have to

recognize and feel in our religious awareness that when we revile another's religion or desecrate another community's place of worship, we revile or desecrate the Divine Presence itself. This happens to be the central message of the Sikh faith in its teaching that if we truly believe in God's love for all beings, we must affirm and value the others in their otherness. The Sikh acceptance of the cultural and religious plurality in human social existence is found expressed in several of its institutions and the Sikh way of life. The Sikhs conclude their daily prayer to God seeking welfare of all - *sarbat da bhala*.

They see the love for God as the *vis-a-tergo* for love of mankind; and they express this love through *seva* or voluntary service rendered unto others and such other philanthropic activities. Sikhism is in full agreement with St. James's assertion that "faith without works is dead." (James 2:20); with their ethics of creative activism, they seek to realize the Gurus' vision of a society based on faith and love, tolerance and justice. This is the need of our contemporary, threatened world — that we do not limit ourselves to words alone but try to actively turn religious words into actions reality in our social lives.

## Notes and References

1. For an understanding and detailed discussion on the concept and meaning of exclusivism and other related terms (inclusivism and pluralism), see Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM), 1983. This phraseology was used by Alan Race for the first time and it has since been accepted and supported by almost all theologians including John Hick [*The Rainbow of Faiths*, London: SCM, 1985], Paul F. Knitter [*The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987] and Harold Coward [*Pluralism in the World Religions: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneword Publications, 2000].
2. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 11
3. These characteristics of religious pluralism have been taken from the nine key principles of pluralism articulated and adopted at the conference of pluralists held at the Birmingham University, Birmingham, in September 2003.

4. M.A.C. Warren, General Introduction to the "Christian Presence" series (London: S.C.M. Press, 1959).
5. Guru Granth Sahib, 266
6. For details, see the Bein episode in the *janam-sakhis* (the traditional life-accounts of Guru Nanak) wherein Guru Nanak, after leaving the house at Sultanpur where he was living with his sister and brother-in-law, to carry out his usual morning routine of bathing in the Bein rivulet, does not return and is missing for a number of days. It is believed that during those days he remained in meditation during which he was summoned by Nirankar (God) who offered him a cup of nectar and directed him to go into the world and spread his message.
7. *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, I.44. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* refers to one such instance relating also to Shaikh Abdul Qadiri Gilani, a Sufi saint of the Qadiri tradition.
8. *ibid.*, XXXIII.4
9. S.G.G.S., 853
10. Bhai Mani Singh, *Sikhan di Bhagat Mala* and *Varan Bhai Gurdas*, XI.20.
11. S.G.G.S., 1255
12. *ibid.*, 853
13. *ibid.*, 470.
14. Bhai Kanahaiya was a devotee of Guru Gobind Singh; during a battle the Guru had to fight against the Rajput hill chiefs and the Mughal imperial forces, the Bhai served water to the wounded soldiers. One day it was reported to the Guru that the Bhai served water to the wounded soldiers of the enemy camp as well. The Guru sent for him and asked him to explain. He told the Guru that he saw the same divine image in each face irrespective of the camp he belonged to. The Guru, on listening to this, was highly pleased and urged him to tend to the wounds of inquired as all.
15. Marcus Braybrooke, "Sikhism: A Religion for the Third Millennium" in *Perspectives on Sikhism* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2001), 15

# Woman, the Soul and the Transcendent

Sudip Minhas

Religious texts function within the domain of the sacred space a space rendered so sacrosanct that the academic approach to it is fraught with the dangers of *illegitimizing* the practices of its cultural inception and interpretation. Do we treat religious texts as ordinary texts when it comes to interpretation? Is there a possibility of transcending historical interpretation? How do these texts retain their validity as spiritual guides through the ages?

My paper is an attempt to unravel the various levels at which the sign “woman” is used in the Guru Granth Sahib. To limit the scope of this paper I have restricted myself to *Rag Asa*, *Ashtpadis* and some parts of *Asa di Var* of the first Guru. It is more a matter of personal convenience and limitation though I am also aware that such an approach might lead one into the trap of defining the whole by examining a part.

The question of the representation of woman in the Guru Granth Sahib traverses a minefield of interpretations resting on the simplistic concept of a woman. For many an interpreter the very fact that the Guru Granth Sahib incorporates the woman as an ideal wife, mother and sister is enough to say that women are respected by the Sikhs. The contemporary issues then are deciphered within the paradigm of the roles assigned to an ideal woman in the Granth Sahib. On the other hand are other scholars who do not see the *Granth Sahib* as apart and distinct from the general tenor the Bhakti period. They realize the limitations imposed by the metaphorical representations

of women in the literature of the Bhaktas. The woman is seen as a beloved of the transcendental, the cultural paradigm of the subservient wife transposed to the transcendental relationship between the soul and God. If the tradition of the Bhaktas had already imposed this limitation on the Guru Granth Sahib then where was the possibility of re-interpretation of this text? Yet, one can attempt simple structural analysis to find out how the Guru Granth Sahib represents the woman in her numerous metaphorical perspectives and see whether these structures would allow a modern woman to relate to its text as an emancipatory tool?

Is woman merely a wife or a mother or is she so described figuratively to describe another relationship: that of the soul with the transcendental? Treating these metaphors as literal is bound to produce a mere reductive analysis of the text. This, in turn, becomes a trap for both conservative patriarchal fathers and liberal feminist sisters. This is the inherent flaw of considering the text as literally true in a metaphorical space. Guru Granth Sahib, however, makes transcendent encoding and decoding through metaphoric representations. Therein lies the answer to the question of how it has retained its validity as a spiritual Guru over the centuries.

The text of the Guru Granth Sahib reveals certain structures which are the semantic basis of this text. The predominant relationship within *Rag Asa* and *Ashtpadis* is that of the woman in wait for her transcendental Lord. This in turn is seen as the paradigmatic representation of the man-woman relationship in the social systems, where the Man/Husband was considered the God/Lord and the woman as her inferior. When we closely analyse the relationship that is taken up in the Guru Granth Sahib we realize that not only are the cultural constructions not taken in their entirety and essence but they also serve as a critical comment on the existing structures. It is in its destination that the sign of the woman brings in the idea of the egalitarian world that this text so passionately espouses.

The trajectory of a woman's relationship that one encounters in the Guru Granth Sahib ranges from her parental family to her husband's family. She has her friends, her female companions and her own family before she gets into her husband's family. All these

relationships are set against her one true relationship with her transcendental husband, the others are merely worldly attachments. The relationship between her and her transcendental husband is symbolized on the conjugal bliss of a perfect worldly marriage. On page 377 of the Guru Granth Sahib, the bride is seen as discarding her worldly attachments as well as other evils such as lust, wrath, avarice etc. and humbly invoking her Lord to accept her.<sup>1</sup> A symbol/metaphor of the real life bride leaving her life of single-hood, of her carefree days to take on the responsibility of her husband's family. The image of a bride is then metonymically transposed to that of the soul. Yet, one is still interested in the manner in which the Guru Granth Sahib employs metaphorical representations to serve as a commentary as well as an ideal. This metaphor functions at these two levels at the same time. It is a soul's journey towards the Ultimate and also a woman's self realization. On the surface this ideal bride is seen as someone eagerly keen to please her husband, forsake all the other relationships that she has known so far and remain in perpetual subjugation. *Dasan ki hoi dasri*<sup>2</sup> (377). Not a very inspiring view for the modern woman as far as looking for a relevant role model in the Guru Granth Sahib. The answer lies in looking at the progression of this woman towards attaining her ideal relationship with the husband. She has two kinds of relationships other than with her beloved. One that she has developed with her own free will, her friends and companions and later her beloved (not the same as her husband who becomes her beloved only after she has discovered herself, nor even by betrothing him). Then there are those relationships which are a part of her kinship structure, her parental home and her in-laws' home. Things become clear the moment we see these two sets of relationships as separate and set apart from each other and the way the bride relates to them.

The former relationships remain intact even when she has achieved the ideal and the latter are forsaken or overcome for the freedom of her soul. The relationships within her home and her in-laws' home are the ones where she is hierarchically placed vis-à-vis others in a position of subjugation. These relationships once forsaken allow her to flourish and on the other hand her friends and companions are the

ones who share the secret of her union with her beloved "Listen thou, O my mate, this is the toil of mine" (p. 384). This union which is passionate and replete with sexual imagery is conventionally shared with women friends in the culture. "My mind is reconciled to the beloved and my fever has poisoned itself to death"<sup>3</sup> (p. 378). The companions then serve as the bride's allies in her joyous moment of celebrating her union. Her friends have now stopped complaining as they have also come to know of her union. "Gone are the upbraiding of my friends and mates"<sup>4</sup> (p. 384).

This state of her blissful union is also important in determining the concept of a perfect bride. She has through this union raised her caste. "A low pariah woman becomes a high caste lady..."<sup>5</sup> (p. 381). Once her doubts have been dispelled she also rises above subservience. "My doubt is dispelled and the Guru has united me with my beloved ... My Beloved drawing me near has seated me on the couch, and I have escaped other people's subservience"<sup>6</sup> (p. 384). She has also given up dualities. "The fearful load of the sins of many births has vanished and the doubt of duality is also gone"<sup>7</sup> (p. 382). There's the life of a house-holder which is wrought with anxiety and there is the life of a hermit who suffers from pride. It is the ideal woman's house where there is peace, "Within my home there is peace..."<sup>8</sup> (p. 385). The worldly house-hold is representative of the oppressive system of kinship relations which become a major cause of anxiety and if she were to forsake this for the hermit's life she would be conceited to think of her sacrifice as a path to salvation. What comes across is the important feature of this woman's identity. She remains in this world and performs her worldly functions but in a state of detached aloneness. She is then self sufficient and not dependant for her identity as any other person "With people I have but artificial dealings. My ties are but external and I am happy with all like the lotus in water, I live separate from them"<sup>9</sup> (p. 384). Though this is achieved only after her union with the transcendent one, but his True Name is within her and not without. That is the reason the Perfect Guru has shown the One Lord within and without.<sup>10</sup> (p. 384)

This Bride maintains and aspires for a relationship with her cosmic Guru in personal and very intimate terms. This intimacy reveals a

relationship in which she becomes an active agent rather than a passive recipient of her husband's love. Her longings and her desires are her own and though there are references to her efforts to please her husband ultimately it is also an effort to fulfill her own desires. This view of a demanding, desiring soul-bride borrows a potent symbol of a woman's sexuality which hitherto remained suppressed and without expression. There are also references to her menstrual cycles though it conforms to connote these as unholy pollutants but again. A closer look reveals that it is not entirely so. "As a woman has her recurring monthly menses, so does falsehood dwell in the mouth of the false one and he is ever, ever distressed"<sup>11</sup> (p. 472). Falsehood is shown as constant like the menstrual cycle of a woman but the very next verse makes it clear that though one can be seen as a bodily impurity which can be cleansed by bathing the other is the impurity of the mind which is beyond cleansing. So what one should endeavour for is to clear the mind of its impurities and not create rituals of exclusion, like the one relating a woman who is having her monthly cycle and is therefore banished from the public realm.

A woman's body and her ornaments are described in great detail in the Guru Granth Sahib. It is almost a celebration of her body and the way in which she beautifies her body. "I will adorn my neck with garland of flowers..."<sup>12</sup> (p. 359) "If she kindles the lamp of Divine Knowledge in her mind's mansion and makes her body the couch, he (her spouse) enjoys her"<sup>13</sup> (p. 359). The material body is used as a metaphor for the beautiful soul. Every material aspect of her culture, her clothes and her body become a symbol of her inner beauty. As Nikki Guninder says "the bride's ritual embellishments embody the sanctification of the human personality. Her bodily adornment is representative of her mental purification..." (Nikki, 94). My argument is that the woman in the Guru Granth Sahib becomes such a potent symbol in all her aspects that the very act of giving her a voice, a space and a humanness that is otherwise missing in the cultural space, is an act of empowerment.

This humanness can be assessed from the fact that this symbol is used in many ways other than that of a pure soul. She is not the pure and unembellished figure of a goddess, but instead is also associated

with the human failings though most of the times these only confirm the stereotypical attributes such as Pride, Lust, Conceit and Avarice often associated with the feminine. Allowing women to be equal participants even of the negative values, in a way, evens out the perspective that the Guru Granth Sahib projects.

Another factor that makes the position of a woman of equal importance in the social structure is the aspect of Divine Knowledge. The bride traverses the path towards this divine knowledge through the various stages of separation. She has to rise above the bondages of the material world. Having stilled her ego and avarice, "the bride enjoys her groom on the comfortable couch"<sup>14</sup> (p. 426). She has to forsake the bondages of worldly relationships and this takes place after she has experienced death in living. It is in this state of non-existent—existence, what I have termed as separateness and aloneness earlier, that the Divine knowledge is manifested. This Divine knowledge then reveals the transcendental Guru as being within and not without. "The pious persons understand their own self, and they contemplate over the Lord, and through the true Name meet Him"<sup>15</sup> (p. 429). So this Divine knowledge is manifested in self knowledge. It allows women then to become participants of an activity which no longer is limited by the function of her body and her social roles. She has as much a right to the divine, if not more, as any other. In a very complex manner this path to the Divine is not through simple renunciation because then the hermit would not be accused of false pride. She has to understand the body as it is, the body which has a primal relationship with the soul "O body, with the soul, thou art engaged in frolics. In her company thou comest in contact with every one"<sup>16</sup> (p. 390); even though the body functions only because of the soul. Again the relationship of the soul with the eternal is portrayed in sexual terms there is ample mention of the couch of love-making, the union is blissful and conjugal and there is the intense longing of the bride. Therefore the body and its desires become a metaphor for depicting this union. The semantics of the soul function at the level of the body. The body thus cannot be denied its validity.

My argument so far rests on showing that the woman as depicted in the Guru Granth Sahib is blessed with all the faculties that makes

her a perfect human creation of God. She is neither exalted like the Devi and thus loses her humanity nor is she debased. She is as much a creation of the Divine and Nature as are the other creatures of the world. Her function as a mother is not of primal importance, it is a function which is performed equally by all the female of the known species. "The sources of creation, egg-born, womb-born, earth-born and sweat-born, and oceans, mountains and sentient beings; He the Lord knows their condition, O Nanak"<sup>17</sup> (p. 467). Thus, in a way, the role of the mother is mystified. If a woman then cannot be understood through the role that she performs, she is freed from the limitation imposed upon her. She at once has endless possibilities available to her.

Finally the famous hymn in the *Aasa Di Var* puts everything in perspective. The woman is called the *Bhand*, a vessel that is creativity in all its aspects. Structurally this hymn juxtaposes her social position with that of her importance. It says that the woman is sought after at every stage by man and yet he refuses to acknowledge her value. She is considered defiled (*manda*), when she gives meaning to every thing that man seeks. She is the friend he seeks, the procreator he needs to further his kind, the one who controls as well as satisfies his passions. She is the one he is constantly in search of. She it is who should be praised for giving birth even to kings. She also need be praised for giving birth to women. She becomes the central creative metaphor. Only the formless can be without the woman as no form exists without her. It might appear as a contradiction because all along we have seen how the relationship of the formless is manifest in the material relations of the form. But if that is so then how can the formless be comprehended without the form. In fact the Lord enjoys the bride (metaphorical) "If she kindles the lamp of Divine knowledge in her mind's mansion and makes her body the couch then, when the King of Divinity comes to her couch, He enjoys her"<sup>18</sup> (p. 359). The contradictions dissolve the moment we understand that the Guru Granth Sahib maintains an underlying structural unity in the way pairs are created and positioned. The soul and the transcendental are modeled on the bride husband relationship. One cannot exist without the other. The transcendental is within the soul and not without.

This is the final culmination of the duality. Likewise man does not exist without the woman. As long as she is understood as the Other, the defiled, the debased even man would have no meaning. There has to be a union of the equals in order to overcome duality. As long as the woman remains subjugated humanity can never aspire for the transcendental experience.

## Notes and References

੧. ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਮੋਹੁ ਮਿਟਾਵੈ ਛੁਟਕੈ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਅਪੁਨੀ ਧਾਰੀ॥  
ਹੋਇ ਨਿਮਾਣੀ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਵਹਿ ਤਾ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਹੋਵਹਿ ਮਨਿ ਪਿਆਰੀ॥੧॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੭੭)
੨. ਦਾਸਨ ਕੀ ਹੋਇ ਦਾਸਿ ਦਾਸਰੀ ਤਾ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਸੋਭਾ ਹਰਿ ਦੁਆਰੀ॥੨॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੭੭)
੩. ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਸਿਉ ਮੇਰੇ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨਿਆ ਤਾਪੁ ਮੁਆ ਬਿਖੁ ਖਾਇ॥ਰਹਾਉ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੭੮)
੪. ਚੁਕਾ ਨਿਹੋਰਾ ਸਖੀ ਸਹੇਰੀ॥ ਭਰਮੁ ਗਇਆ ਗੁਰਿ ਪਿਰ ਸੰਗਿ ਮੇਰੀ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥(ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੪)
੫. ਅਧਮ ਚੰਡਾਲੀ ਭਈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਣੀ ਸੂਦੀ ਤੇ ਸ੍ਰੇਸਟਾਈ ਰੇ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੫)
੬. ਨਕਟਿ ਆਨਿ ਪ੍ਰਿਅ ਸੇਜ ਧਰੀ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੪)
੭. ਜਨਮ ਜਨਮ ਚੁਕੇ ਤੈ ਭਾਰੇ ਦੁਰਤੁ ਬਿਨਾਸਿਓ ਭਰਮੁ ਬੀਓ॥੧॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੨)
੮. ਘਰ ਮਹਿ ਸੂਖ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਫੁਨਿ ਸੂਖਾ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੫)
੯. ਲੋਗਨ ਸਿਉ ਮੇਰਾ ਠਾਠਾ ਬਾਗਾ॥੧॥ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਸੂਤੁ ਸਗਲ ਸਿਉ ਮਉਲਾ॥  
ਅਲਿਪਤੁ ਰਹਉ ਜੈਸੇ ਜਲ ਮਹਿ ਕਉਲਾ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੪)
੧੦. ਪੰਨਾ ੩੮੪, ਪਦੇ, ਆਸਾ, ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਦੇਵ ਨ ਨਕ ਜਨਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਪਾਇਆ॥
੧੧. ਜਿਉ ਜੇਰੂ ਸਿਰਨਾਵਣੀ ਆਵੈ ਵਾਰੇ ਵਾਰ॥  
ਜੂਠੇ ਜੂਠਾ ਮੁਖਿ ਵਸੈ ਨਿਤ ਨਿਤ ਹੋਇ ਖੁਆਰੁ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੪੭੨)
੧੨. ਫੂਲ ਮਾਲਾ ਗਲਿ ਪਹਿਰਉਗੀ ਹਾਰੇ॥  
ਮਿਲੈਗਾ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮੁ ਤਬ ਕਰਉਗੀ ਸੀਗਾਰੇ॥੨॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੫੯)
੧੩. ਗਿਆਨ ਰਾਉ ਜਬ ਸੇਜੈ ਆਵੈ ਤ ਨਾਨਕ ਭੋਗੁ ਕਰੇਈ॥੪॥੧॥੩੫॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੨੫੯)
੧੪. ਸਦਾ ਰਾਵਹਿ ਪਿਰੁ ਆਪਣਾ ਸਦੀ ਸੇਖ ਸੁਭਾਇ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੪੨੬)
੧੫. ਵਿਚਹੁ ਆਪੁ ਗਇਆ ਨਾਉ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਸਚਿ ਮਿਲਵਾ ਹੋਇ॥੧॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੪੨੯)
੧੬. ਉਨ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਤੂ ਕਰਤੀ ਕੇਲ॥ ਉਨ ਕੇ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਤੁਮ ਸੰਗਿ ਮੇਲ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੯੦)
੧੭. ਅੰਡਜ ਜੇਰਮ ਉਤਭੁਜਾਂ ਖਾਣੀ ਸੋਤਜਾਂਹ॥  
ਸੋ ਮਿਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਸਰਾਂ ਮੇਰਾ ਜੰਤਾਹ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੪੬੭)
੧੮. ਮਨ ਮੰਦਰਿ ਜੇ ਦੀਪਕੁ ਜਾਲੇ ਕਾਇਆ ਸੇਜ ਕਰੇਈ॥  
ਗਿਆਨ ਰਾਉ ਜਬ ਸੇਜੈ ਆਵੈ ਤ ਨਾਨਕ ਭੋਗੁ ਕਰੇਈ॥੪॥੧॥੩੫॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੩੫੯)

## Report on Regional and International Seminars

With a view to celebrating the quadricentenary of installation of the Adi Granth in the Golden Temple the Government of India constituted a National Level Committee with Dr.Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, as its Chairman. The Committee included prominent scholars and statesmen and made valuable suggestions for propagating the message of Guru Granth Sahib in different parts of India and abroad. One of the suggestions was to arrange five national level seminars in different parts of India and one international seminar in Delhi. To implement this decision the Department of Culture, Government of India, requested Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan to act as a nodal agency for arranging regional seminars in different parts of India culminating in an International Seminar on 'Guru Granth Sahib and its Context' arranged in New Delhi in October 2005.

The Programme Committee constituted with Shri Jaipal Reddy, then Minister for Culture, Information and Broadcasting, as its Chairman, included prominent scholars like Dr.Kapila Vatsyayan Prof. Namwar Singh, Prof. Amrik Singh, Dr. J.S. Neki and Dr. Mohinder Singh. Lt. Governor of Delhi Shri B.L. Joshi and the Chief Minister of Delhi Smt. Sheila Dikshit represented the Delhi Government in this Committee while the Panjab Chief Minister was represented by the Principal Secretary and Secretary, Dept. of Culture, Punjab.

Following regional seminars were organised:

### **1. West Zone : Seminar on Teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Namdev (July 8-9, 2005) in Pune:**

The first regional seminar in the series was organized by the Department of Philosophy, University of Pune, wherein prominent scholars from different parts of India and S.Jasdev Singh Rai from

U.K. attended the seminar. The Seminar was inaugurated by Bibi Jagir Kaur, President, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandak Committee, Amritsar, and presided over by the Vice-Chancellor of the Pune University. Dr. Amrik Singh, Officiating President and Dr. J.S. Neki, Hony. General Secretary of the Sadan represented the Sadan and presented papers at the seminar. Prof. S.S. More and Dr. S.K. Chahal acted as Coordinators of the Seminar. Prominent among others who made their presentations were Prof. Jodh Singh, Dr. Dharam Singh, Mrs. Renuka Sarabjit Singh, Dr. Harpal Singh Pannu, Prof. D.A. Gangadhar, Dr. Hardev Singh Virk, Dr. Parduman Singh, Prof. Sadananda More, Dr. S.E. Bhelki, Dr. Surjit Kaur Chahal, Dr. Rajinder Kaur Rohi, Dr. Parambir Singh, Dr. Shashi Bala, Dr. Navrattan Kapur, Dr. Harminder Kaur, Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon and Dr. Birindra Kaur. An interesting feature of the function in Pune was involvement of large number of local Sikhs in the event. The organizers also arranged a Kirtan Darbar in Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar, where numerous devotees joined the celebrations. S. Harminder Singh Ghai, President of the Gurdwara, Bhai Narinder Singh Banarsi, and Dr. Jasdev Singh Rai (U.K.) also participated in the seminar.

## **2. South Zone: Seminar on Guru Granth Sahib and The Sikh Hermeneutic Tradition (September 20-22, 2005) in Madurai:**

Second Seminar in the series was organized by Guru Nanak Devji Chair of Madurai Kamraj University, Madurai. The Seminar was inaugurated by S. Surjit Singh Barnala, Governor of Tamil Nadu while Dr. P. Maruthamuthu, Vice-Chancellor of the University, presided over the function. Dr. Sirpi Balasubramanian, an eminent Tamil Poet, delivered the Key-note Address. 19 scholarly papers were presented by scholars from different parts of India, prominent among them being Prof. B.S. Dhillon, Dr. Gurnam Kaur, Dr. Jaswinder Kaur Dhillon, Dr. Shashi Bala, Dr. Dharam Singh, S. Narak Singh Nishter, Dr. Paramvir Singh, Dr. Saroj Chaman and Dr. Harbhajan Singh. The Valedictory Address was delivered by Dr. Ranjit Singh Rangeela from Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore.

**3. East Zone: Seminar on Teachings of Guru Granth Sahib with focus on Bhagat Jaidev (September 21, 2005):**

Third Seminar in the series was organized by Guru Nanak Chair of Jadavpur University, Kolkata. The Seminar was inaugurated by Shri Gopal Kirshna Gandhi, the Governor of West Bengal, while S.Saran Singh, I.A.S. (Retd.) delivered the Key-note Address. S.Tarlochan Singh, Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, was the Chief Guest. Prof. Ashok Nath Basu, Vice-Chancellor of the University, presided over the function. Prof. Ramakanta Chakraborty, S. Jagmohan Singh, Dr. Provajit Kaur, S. Bhupinder Singh Sarna and other prominent scholars and citizens participated in this first major event of this type in eastern India. Prof. Himadri Banerjee, Head of Guru Nanak Chair, Jadavpur University, acted as Coordinator of the Seminar.

**4. Central Zone: Seminar on Teachings of Guru Granth Sahib With Special Reference to Kabir (September 26-27, 2005), Varanasi:**

Fourth Seminar in the series was organized by the Department of Hindi, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, in the campus of the University. The Seminar was inaugurated by Prof. Namwar Singh, eminent Hindi litterateur, while Prof. Punjab Singh, Vice-Chancellor of the University presided over the inaugural function. Prof. Mahendra Nath Rai, Head, Hindi Dept., acted as Coordinator of the Seminar. Dr. Mohinder Singh, Director of the Sadan also attended this seminar and made a power point presentation on 'Conservation of Rare Guru Granth Sahib Birs'. On the evening of 26<sup>th</sup> September a Kirtan Darbar was also arranged in the Auditorium of the Arts Faculty which was attended by local Sikh sangat apart from faculty and students of the University. Prof. Jodh Singh, Dr. Sukhwinder Kaur, Dr. Uday Pratap Singh and Dr. Suman Jain made their presentations on the first day. On the second day Prof. Shiv Kumar Mishra chaired the session while Prof. Puranmasi Rai Prof. Ramanarayana Shukla, Dr. Manoj Kumar Singh, Dr. Sanjay Rai, Dr. Brijbala Singh, Prof. Pramod Kumar Singh, Dr. Sadanand Sahi, Dr. Nilima Saha, Dr. Radheshyam Singh, Dr. Pankaj Parasar, Dr. Madhup Kumar, Dr. Anand Pande and Dr. Shashi

Kala Tripathi made their presentations. The Valedictory function was chaired by Prof. Srikant Lele, the Rector of the University, while Prof. Sukdev Singh presented the Valedictory Address. An interesting feature of this seminar was involvement of the local sangat with the seminar and the devotional evening organized in the University.

**North Zone : Seminar on Guru Granth Sahib: Different Perspectives (Oct.26-28, 2005), Amritsar :**

The last and fifth Regional Seminar was organized in the campus of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. The seminar was attended by nearly 500 scholars and inaugurated by Dr. S.P. Singh, Vice-Chancellor of the University. His Excellency Shri A.R. Kidwai, the Governor of Haryana, presided over the function. Dr. Darshan Singh, Professor Emeritus, Panjab University, Chandigarh, delivered the Key-note Address. Dr. Jaswinder Kaur Dhillon, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Religious Studies, and Dr. Amarjit Singh Dua, Dean College Development Council acted as Director and Co-Director of the Seminar. The seminar was divided into seven academic sessions which were presided by Dr. J.S. Puar, the former Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, Patiala, Dr. Kirpal Singh, well known historian, S. Chiranjiv Singh, I.A.S. (Retd.), Bhai Ashok Singh Bagrian, Giani Gurdit Singh, Bhai Surinder Singh (Singh Bandhu) and Dr. Gurnam Kaur. Prominent among those who made their presentations were Dr. N. Muthumohan, Dr. Surjit Kaur Chahal, Dr. S.K. Jolly, Dr. K.L. Sharma, Dr. Harnam Singh Shan, Dr. Balkar Singh, Dr. Kuldip Singh Dhir, Dr. Sukhdial Singh, Dr. Nazar Singh and Dr. Sukhmani Riar.

On the eve of the first day the University also organized a Kirtan Darbar wherein prominent Ragi Jathas – Bhai Amrik Singh Zakhmi, Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa and Bhai Sarabjit Singh sang devotional hymns. On the evening of the second day a Panel Discussion on “Exegesis and Translation of Gurbani: Problems and Prospects” was organized in which Singh Sahib Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, Jathedar of Sri Akal Takhat Sahib and Dr. Harjit Singh Gill were presented. Dr. Noel Q. King chaired the Panel while Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon performed the job of an anchor. The Valedictory Session on 28<sup>th</sup>

October was chaired by S. Chiranjiv Singh, I.A.S. (Retd.), while Prof. N. Muthumohan and Dr. Jatinder Pall Singh Jolly presented their observations and Prof. Jaswinder Kaur Dhillon offered vote of thanks.

### **International Seminar on Guru Granth Sahib and its Context (October 30-31, 2005), New Delhi:**

Five Regional Seminars culminated into an International Seminar held in Vigyan Bhawan on October 30-31, 2005. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the President of India, in his message on the occasion said, "The cherished and noble values of the Guru Granth Sahib should inspire all of us to follow the message of love, compassion, unity, brotherhood of man and supremacy of God the Almighty." The Seminar was inaugurated by Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, on the evening of October 30, 2005. While inaugurating the Seminar the Prime Minister said, "The Adi Granth is a unique scripture in the world history as an example of inter-faith collaboration and cooperation". On this occasion the Prime Minister also released translation of Guru Granth Sahib into German done by Dr. Jarnail Singh of Canada and published in four volumes by M/s. Singh Brothers of Amritsar. The Prime Minister also released Selections from the Guru Granth Sahib translated into English and Spanish through the munificence of Dr. Swami Veda Bharati.

While Dr. Amrik Singh, Officiating President of the Sadan, welcomed the guests Dr. J.S. Neki, Hon. General Secretary of the Sadan presented the Key-note Address. Shri Jaipal Reddy, Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting and Culture, referred to the essentially unifying message of Guru Granth Sahib and emphasized that India needs to popularize the transcendental vision of the Sikh Gurus, Sufi saints and the Hindu Bhaktas at this crucial juncture in its history.

Spread over two days the Seminar attracted nearly 50 scholars from different parts of India, U.K., Canada, Hungary, Afghanistan, Tehran, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The seminar was divided into five sessions. The first session - *From Adi Granth to Guru Eternal* - was chaired by Dr. Swami Veda Bharati with Mrs. Anita Singh as Co-

chair. Following papers were presented by scholars:

Guru Granth Sahib *Among World Scriptures* by Dr. W. Owen Cole, *Unity of Minds as envisioned by the Sikh Gurus* by Dr. J. S. Neki, *Guru Granth Sahib as Guru Eternal* by Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon, *Egalitarian Order in Guru Granth Sahib*, Dr. Rajesh Gili and *World View of Guru Granth Sahib* by Swami Swaroopananda with Dr. Abraham Karickam, Dr. B. S. Rattan, Dr. Darshan Singh, Dr. Azizun Nahar Islam and Prof. Kazi Nurul Is'am acting as Respondents.

The second session - *Philosophical and Theological Concepts in Guru Granth Sahib* - was chaired by Giani Gurdit Singh with Prof. Verne A. Dusenbery as Co-Chair. Following papers were presented by scholars:

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagavata Purana* by Dr. Shrivatsa Goswami, *Sikh Monotheism* by Prof. I.H. Azad Faruqi, *Guru Nanak and Upanishidik Thought* by Dr. Jodh Singh. *Linguistics & Stylistics of Guru Granth Sahib* by Prof. Prem Singh and *Poetics of Guru Granth Sahib* by Prof. Gurbhagat Singh with, Dr.M.K. Gill, Dr. Shashi Bala, Prof. Mahender Nath Rai, Prof. Ravinder Gregesh and Dr. Chandra Mohan acting as Respondents.

The third session - *Interfaith Dialogue and Contribution of the Bhagats and Sufis* - was chaired by Dr. Shaista Nuzhat with Prof. H.S. Shan as Co-chair. Following papers were presented by scholars:

*Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Kabir* by Prof. Namwar Singh, *Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Namdev* by Dr. I.N. Choudhuri, *Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Ravidas* by Dr. Kulwant Kaur and *Guru Granth Sahib and Baba Farid* by Dr. Ahmad Salim (Pakistan) with Shri Baldev Vanshi, Dr. Surjit Chahal, Dr. C.D. Sidhu and Dr. I. D. Gaur acting as Respondents.

The fourth session - *Some Major Concerns in Guru Granth Sahib* - was chaired by Dr. Mushir-ul-Hassan with Dr. B.S. Hansra as Co-Chair. Following papers were presented by scholars:

*Major Social Concerns in Guru Granth Sahib* by Prof. Imtiaz Ahmad, *Political Concerns in Guru Granth Sahib* by Prof. P.S. Kapur, *Guru Granth Sahib and Religious Pluralism* by Dr. Dharam Singh,

and *Gender Equity in Guru Granth Sahib* by Dr. Sudeep Minhas with Dr. Himadri Banerji, Dr. Jaspal Singh, Bhai Sikandar Singh Bagrian, Dr. M. Darrol Bryant and Mr. Amandeep Singh Gill acting as Respondents.

The Valedictory Address was given by Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyay, former Union Minister and presently Chairman, Centre for Studies in Civilization, and presided over by Justice A.M. Ahmadi, former Chief Justice of India.

The seminar was attended by many prominent scholars and other dignitaries from India and abroad such as Shri T.N. Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnatka, Dr. Nirmala Deshpande, M.P., Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Chairperson, Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts, Rev. Karam Masih, Bishop of North India, Mr. Paramjit Singh Sarna, President, D.S.G.M.C, Mr. Tarlochan Singh Chairman, Minorities Commission, Prof. Tahir Mahmood, Member, Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, Justice Rajinder Sachar, Chairman, Prime Minister's High Power Committee for the Welfare of the Muslims. Dr. Don Benson and Mrs. Avtar Hansra from Parliament of World's Religions, Chicago. Academic sessions on both the days were very well attended with participation from the teaching faculty and general public.

- Dr. Mohinder Singh

## Brief Bios of the Presenters, Chairs, Co-Chairs and Respondents of the International Seminar

### Presenters :

1. Prof. W. Owen Cole, eminent scholar, teacher and author. Presently based in Chichester, U.K.
2. Dr. J.S. Neki, well-known Sikh scholar, psychiatrist, former Director of P.G.I., Chandigarh and presently Hony. General Secretary, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan.
3. Dr. B.S. Dhillon, Professor & Head, Dept. of Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.
4. Dr. Rajesh Gill, Dept. of Sociology, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
5. Swami Swaroopananda, Chinmaya International Residential School, Nallur, Vaval, Post Siruvani Road, Coimbatore
6. Dr. Shrivatsa Goswami, eminent scholar and Head, Sri Caitanaya Prema Samsthana, , Varindavan.
7. Prof. I.H. Azad Faruqi, Head, Dept. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Milia Islamia, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025.
8. Dr. Jodh Singh, Editor-in-Chief, Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Punjabi University, Patiala
9. Prof. Prem Singh, former Professor and Head, Dept. of Linguistics, University of Delhi
10. Prof. Gurbhagat Singh, former Professor and Head, Dept. of English, Punjabi University, Patiala

11. Dr. I.N. Choudhuri former Secretary, Sahitya Akademy, New Delhi
12. Dr. Dharampal Singhal, former Head of Ravidas Chair, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
13. Dr. Ahmad Salim, well-known scholar and author, 30 UN, Boulevard, Diplomatic Enclave, G-5, Islamabad, Pakistan.
14. Dr. M. Darrol Bryant, Professor of Religion and Culture, Renison College, University of Waterloo, Canada.
15. Prof. Imtiaz Ahmad, Professor of Sociology, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
16. Prof. P.S. Kapur, former Pro Vice Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 10-C, Rajguru Nagar, Ludhiana,
17. Dr. Dharam Singh, Professor, Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Punjabi University, Patiala
18. Dr. Sudip Minhas, Dept. of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh

## Chairs and Co-Chairs

**Chair of First Session:** Dr. Swami Veda Bharati, well-known teacher, scholar and exponent of scriptures.

**Co-Chair :** Mrs. Anita Singh of Kapurthala, President of Indian Music Society, New Delhi.

**Chair of Second Session :** Giani Gurdit Singh, eminent scholar of Sikh scriptures.

**Co-Chair:** Prof. Verne A. Dusenbery, Professor of Anthropology, Hamline University, U.S.A.

**Chair of Third Session :** Dr. Shaista Nuzhat, Director, Institute of Punjabi Art and Culture, Government of Pakistan, Lahore, Pakistan

**Co-Chair :** Dr. H.S. Shan, former Chairman, Department of Guru Nanak Sikh Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

**Chair of Fourth Session:** Prof. Mushir-ul-Hassan, Vice Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi

**Co-Chair :** Dr. B.S. Hansra, Trustee, Parliament of World's Religions, Chicago, U.S.A.

**Valedictory Session:**

**Valedictory Address:** Prof. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Chairman, Centre for Studies in Civilization, New Delhi.

**Chairperson:** Justice A.M. Ahmadi, former Chief Justice of India

## Respondents

Dr. Abraham Karickam, eminent scholar, Mundackal, Karickam, P.O. Kottarakkara, Kerala-

Dr. B.S. Rattan, Acting Principal of S.G.T.B.Khalsa College, University of Delhi, Delhi.

Dr. S.S. Noor, Head. Dept. of Punjabi, University of Delhi, Delhi.

Prof. (Mrs.) Azizun Nurul Islam, Head, Department of Philosophy, Dhaka University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Prof. Kazi Nurul Islam, Head, Department of Comparative Religions, Dhaka University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Dr. (Mrs.) M.K. Gill, Former Principal, Mata Sundri College, Delhi.

Dr. Shashi Bala, Dept. of Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Guru Nanak Dev. University, Amritsar.

Prof. Mahendra Nath Rai, Head, Dept. of Hindi, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

Dr. Ravinder Gargesh, Professor & Head, Dept. of Linguistics, University of Delhi, Delhi.

Prof. N. Muthumohan, Head, Guru Nanak Devji Chair, Madurai Kamraj University, Madurai.

Shri Baldev Vanshi, A-3/283, Paschim Vihar. New Delhi.

Dr. Surjit Chahal, Department of Philosophy, Pune University, Pune

Dr. Kulwant Kaur, former Principal, Gurmat College, Patiala.

Dr. I.D. Gaur, Dept. of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Prof. Himadri Banerji, Head, Guru Nanak Chair, Jadavpur University, Jadavpur, West Bengal

Dr. Jaspal Singh, Principal, Guru Gobind College of Commerce, Pritampura, Delhi

Mr. Amanpreet Singh Gill, Dept. of Political Science, SGTB Khalsa College, University of Delhi, Delhi