

II/2017

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

**CHARDI KALAA CONFERENCE  
AT SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA**



*The Fifth Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 10 September 2016 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley*



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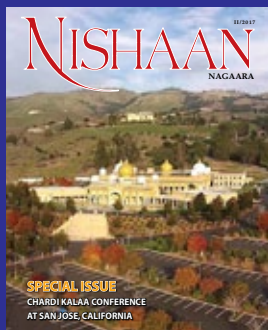


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# Editorial

## In The Marketplace Of Ideas

**T**he California-based *Chardi Kalaa Foundation*, working jointly with Sikh Gurdwara San Jose and SikhNet, is in the fifth year of its annual laboratory on mining the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib; an experiment launched in 2012. So what else is new, you might ask. Isn't all life exactly that – teaching and learning - from birth to its inevitable end? We also know that religions usually demand unquestioned obedience to a path rather than asking us to reason our way along the journey.

Faith or reason is each necessary but not sufficient alone. The dual lenses of both reason and faith are essential to engagement with Sikhi. The two together create a totality that is greater than the sum of the parts. The result is then best experienced as grace like manna from heaven, not like an earned skill mastered after copious blood, sweat and tears, nor does it come with a sense of entitlement.

The theme of the conference remains essentially unchanged from five years ago: 'Applying the universal message Guru Granth Sahib across centuries, cultures, religions and continents in today's world.' Over the last couple of years, we have made some changes aimed at engaging more strongly with younger Sikhs. The conference programme this year started with beautiful kirtan renditions by two award winning jathaas of young children followed by an interactive panel discussion with six very articulate young women on 'The role of women in building a future for the Sikhs'.

Another feature introduced at this year's conference was two sessions of short speeches by Sikh children on 'The context of Sri Guru Granth Sahib' and 'Is it OK to eat meat according to Gurbani'.

The rest of the day is dedicated to the six to eight participants (this year there were seven) where an invitee presents a paper on a theme from Guru Granth and its eternal message. Free flowing discussion is the hallmark. To ensure this, the exchange occurs neither



within the Gurdwara Darbar Hall nor in any room with the Guru Granth ensconced, but in the adjoining Khalsa School building. This ensures that participants speak freely without worrying that their demeanour or words might contravene protocol and tradition, even if inadvertently.

Most participants were either born and/or raised outside the Punjab and India; they also exhibit a challengingly large age-span: from the energetically young barely out of their teens just stepping into the professional world to others who are certifiably entering the winter of their lives. They are best pigeon-holed mostly as products of a predominantly Western worldview, exhibiting varying intimacy with Sikh and Punjabi culture. Keep in mind that some differing perspectives come together in this initiative; at times, the fit may be less than seamless. The Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the Sikh Gurdwara, San Jose, initiated the project, now SikhNet, the pre-eminent internet portal on Sikhi, is also a major contributor. This is how lasting institutions are built and heaven knows we need them.

Some participants come from academia where they hold appointments on and about Sikhi. Others are best labeled as educated Lay-Sikhs. Some have serious interest in Sikhi; others may be just a shade closer to

fellow travelers. But we appreciate their dedication and presence. This sorely needed generational and inter-gender interaction is usually evident neither in our community nor in its institutions.

And then some weeks later, after some necessary cajoling and reminding by two of us (IMS & GPS), participants submit final versions of their papers. Each year they have been collated as special issues – of *The Sikh Review* (Kolkata, India) for the first two symposia, and of *Nishaan* (Delhi, India) for the next two. The papers are also published online on the Chardi Kalaa Foundation website ([www.chardikalaa.com](http://www.chardikalaa.com)) along with videos of all the conference sessions. English is the language of choice but some mixing with Punjabi and the rich language of Gurbani inevitably occurs.

How do we go about selecting and inviting participants? Not all that easily. The goal is an eclectic mix of participants representing the community. Each year we try to attract some new talent – from mainstream Sikhi and even from Sikh communities of non-Indian origin. These include some who were born and/or raised in North America; from urban settings and rural enclaves; one or two directly from India; some who discovered Sikhi later in life; even those who represent different streams of Sikhi in their personal and community life

Sikhi is now a world-wide faith of about 25 million adherents and is comfortably ranked as the fifth or sixth largest religion. In numbers it follows Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism; its place vis a vis Judaism remains an open question at this time. Our participants reflect this complex global presence of Sikhi's rich reality. The learning and teaching flow directly from this fact.

We encourage lively and open conversation, as should be norm in any vibrant community with a commonality of practices. Interpretations of the same fundamentals will differ, even strongly, among equally dedicated minds. We accept and foster the belief that *unanimity of opinion and homogeneity of thought are not the hallmarks of Sikhi or any living community*. How to differ and disagree without becoming disagreeable is the goal. These basics are essential to progress. Sikhi offers us a rich tapestry to behold. Such goals demand careful watchfulness and self-

discipline; occasionally we fall short on one or both counts. These are human frailties and should shock no one.

We celebrate our connection to the San Jose Gurdwara; it continues to create sensitivity and mould our social behaviour. Each passing year more people from the gurdwara drop in our symposia. Some of them may be new to the idea of free discussion and debate on and about interpretations of Gurbani.

Our challenge: how to shape our rhetoric such that it honours the core idea of freedom of speech while preserving intact the reverence for Gurbani – the appropriate demeanour and ambience. This becomes a challenge when the blood is a-boil. From us, this demands a paradigm shift, a state not so easily attained. This skill needs constant honing, regardless of where one learned life's basic lessons – in academia or on the streets.

It is self-evident that we need spirited, even raucous debate on the most dearly held beliefs and practices that lie at the core of our lives. This is how we implant them within us. Then we own them and they become defining dicta for which good people will live and die. Thus they will transform us. The presentations reflect wide ranging intellectual forays in and about Sikhi. Assertiveness is desirable, aggression is not. Assertive debates show where the questioning mind is at a given time. This means that there are no bad questions; only inadequate answers. Also, no one may have absolute answer to a question. Such exchanges, too, are welcome; answers, partial or complete, may surface then or later with time. We will learn to disagree



and yet continue. In this process is a lot of learning. Teaching and learning are inseparable twins; there is a whole lot of learning within teaching for both teachers and students.

To summarise our approach: As one of us (IJS) who has taught at a university for umpteen years likes to warn his students, "I am not here to pour information into you as if you are empty, perhaps, bottomless buckets, but to make it possible for you to learn what your talents and inclinations allow." A most critical matter in learning and teaching is not to always offer stone-etched answers to a query but have

Sikhi spoke eloquently to people in India then; it speaks just as powerfully to us today over 500 years later and 10,000 miles away. Obviously then we need to stay connected to the repository of our spiritual heritage, Guru Granth. Mining it to give purpose, direction and meaning to our lives demands that our exploration of the Guru Granth Sahib never ceases. This is and remains the unchanging over-arching theme of these annual symposia.

Our larger purpose remains to become the bridge that spans the inter-cultural and inter-generational divide that often fragments our community; in other



the willingness to step into uncharted territory; and to hold our biases tentatively, not with certainty. And explore our beliefs in the marketplace of ideas.

A quick scan of the contents will inform readers of the variety of topics that engaged us at this Conference. *We assure you that the last word on any single topic has not yet been said.* These matters will continue to engage us for many a lifetime and each generation, we fondly hope, will continue to revisit these and related matters anew. As long as life lasts, it will continue to refill our plate with such themes with many variations on them, along with newer mysteries to decode and decipher. And we will lean on our growing understanding of Gurbani for this process.

The larger purpose of these sessions remains absolutely unchanged since their beginning in 2012. Five hundred years ago Sikhi's message was transformational for the people of Northwestern India and neighbouring areas. Today the Sikh message remains unique, universal, timeless, designed for the thinking person and most powerfully expressed through the words of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

words, to construct linkages that connect home and work with our community centers (gurdwaras).

This seems to be the only way that our subdivisions can be subsumed into a larger whole. All people – no matter their age, colour, culture, gender, language or religion – need such connections for survival and growth. This is how dynamic communities grow and thrive.

Remember that this is only the fifth year of our activities; there are many more years to go. Grateful thanks to the participants, those who flawlessly managed the occasion as well as Pushpinder Singh, Monica Arora of *Nishaan*, the quarterly journal are surely in order. Guru Granth Sahib exhorts us to come together and collectively work through our differences (*Hoi Ikatr milo mere bhai; Dubidha door karo liv layee*, p.1185.)

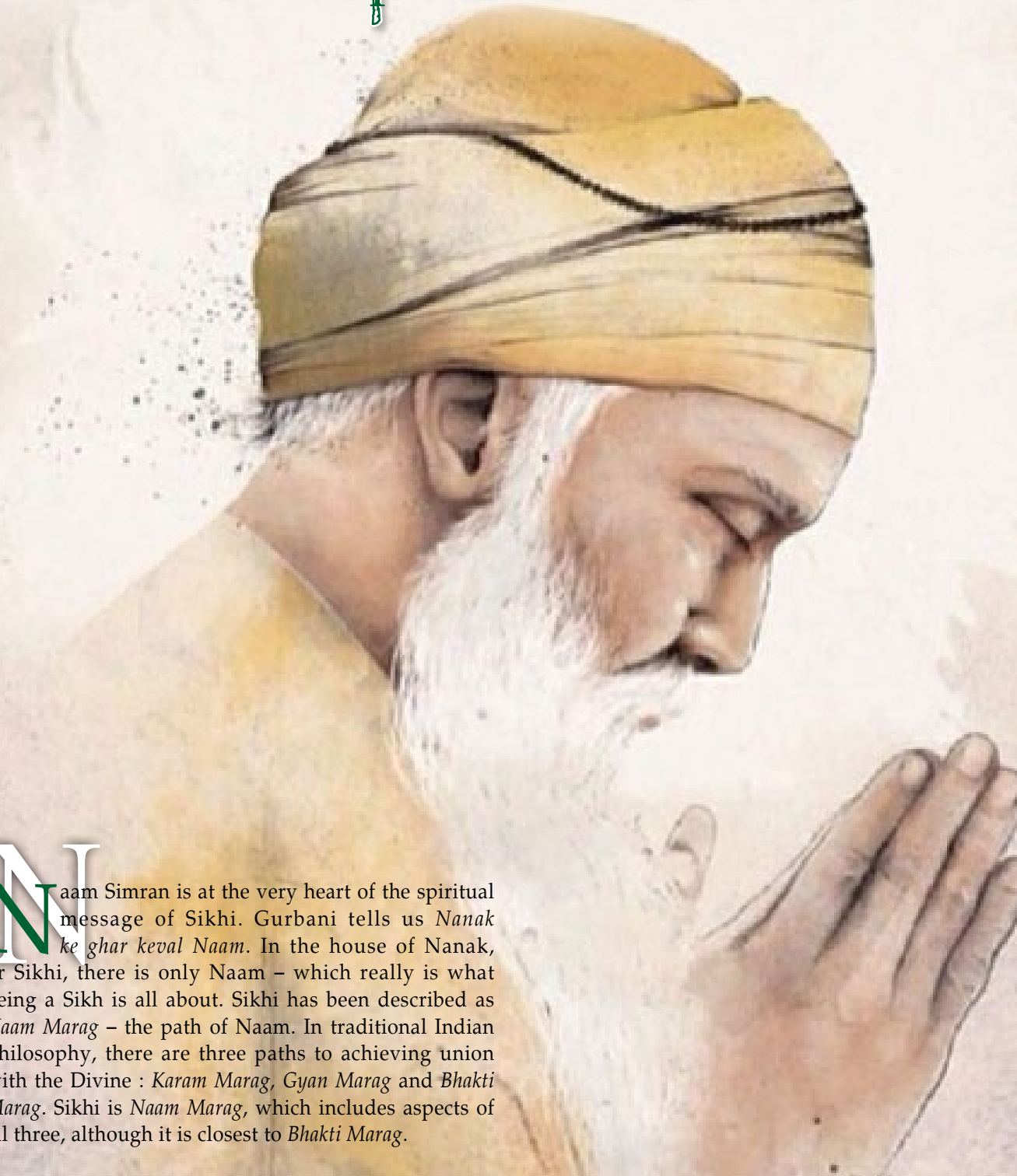
The debates and discussions remain passionate, as they always should. They define a process and a place to preserve and nurture what makes us what we are. That is what we need to treasure.

The journey is the destination.

*IJ Singh, Inder Mohan Singh & GP Singh*

# Naam Simran

## Concept and Practice



**N**aam Simran is at the very heart of the spiritual message of Sikhi. Gurbani tells us *Nanak ke ghar keval Naam*. In the house of Nanak, or Sikhi, there is only Naam – which really is what being a Sikh is all about. Sikhi has been described as *Naam Marag* – the path of Naam. In traditional Indian philosophy, there are three paths to achieving union with the Divine : *Karam Marag*, *Gyan Marag* and *Bhakti Marag*. Sikhi is *Naam Marag*, which includes aspects of all three, although it is closest to *Bhakti Marag*.

The Guru tells us that the whole purpose of life is to seek union with God which is achieved through Naam Simran.

*Bhaee parapat manukh dehuria Gobind milan ki eho teree baria*

*Awar kaaj tere kitay no kaam, mil saadh sangat bhaj keval naam.* [SGGS p. 12]

*(This human body has been given to you. This is your chance to meet the Lord of the Universe. Nothing else is of any use. Join the Saadh Sangat and meditate on the Jewel of the Naam).*

Nothing else is as important as Naam Simran. Gurbani has many passages asserting how useless life is without Naam.

*Mar na jae jina bisrat raam, naam bina jeevan kaun kaam* [SGGS p. 188]

*(Those who forget the Lord might just as well die. Without the Naam, of what use are their lives?)*

*Naam bina nahi jeevia jai* [SGGS p. 366]

*(Without Naam, it is not really living— you are spiritually dead.)*

So what is Naam?

The literal meaning of Naam, of course, is 'Name'. You use a name as a kind of handle to refer to someone or something. This has been described as *Akhri naam*, the literal word that identifies someone or something. But this word or name brings to mind some attributes or qualities, or the concept you have regarding what it points to – this can be called the *sookhsham naam* or conceptual naam or its deeper meaning. For example, when you say 'table', this *akhri naam* or word makes us think of something with four legs and a flat top on which you can put stuff, the essence or concept of what a table is. Similarly the word Waheguru invokes the concept and attributes of the Divine that are described throughout Gurbani.

Two other forms of Naam that we will talk about can be called *Vyapak Naam* : the all pervading Divine Presence of Naam, and *Anubhavi Naam* or *Naam anubhav* which is what you experience when you practice *Naam Simran* and get in tune with the Divine.

With respect to the *Akhri Naam*, there are several other terms in Gurbani that are broadly related to *Naam* : *Simran* which means remembrance; *jap* or *japna* which refers to repeating or chanting the Name; *Dhian* or *dhiawanaa* which is more about concentration or meditation. The word 'shabad' is also used frequently

in very similar sense to Naam. The word 'mantar' or 'Gurmantar' is also used in Gurbani

In other religions too, we find 'Name' and 'Word' come up often for similar concepts. Both these words are used frequently in Hinduism, particularly in Vedanta, in very similar way. In Christianity and Judaic faiths, Name and Word also come up. For example, one of the ten commandments tells us not to use the Name of God in vain. So the name of God is something very special to them. 'Word' is used a lot too. For example the Bible says "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God."

Naam is a word with broad, deep, and often mystical meanings. As used in Gurbani, in addition to the literal meaning of Naam as name or *akhri naam*, there are at least three deeper levels of meaning to the word Naam.

The first is as an aspect of the Divine Himself : a mystical all-pervading Divine Presence or force or vibration – which we can call the *Viaapak Naam*. Second, it is used to describe a state of being in tune with or one with Naam, or the experience of being in this state of God consciousness or God awareness. When someone practices Naam Simran, the experience is also Naam, or *Anubhavi Naam*.

Finally, it refers to the process or techniques for actually achieving this state of God Consciousness, the practice of Naam Simran or Naam Japnaa. At the deepest level, Naam refers to the essence of Waheguru, an aspect of the Divine.

In Asa-di-Vaar, Guru Nanak Ji tells us

*Aapi ne aap saajio aapeenay rachio Nao  
Dui kudrat saajeeay kar aasan ditho chao* [SGGS p. 463]

Waheguru created Himself, then He established the creative power or spirit of Naam and through that Naam He created all of *kudrat* or creation. So Waheguru starts in the Nirgun or absolute state, and then He creates all of *kudrat* or creation. But before that, somewhere in between, there is Naam.

So Naam is an aspect of God Himself, a Divine force or Presence that is the underlying foundation of all of creation. You can think of the laws of nature as also being a manifestation of this Naam which is the foundation of everything in the universe.

Some other words in Gurbani that are used for the same concept are *Jot* (or Divine Light) and *Hukam*.

This all-pervading spirit of Naam, the *Vyapak Naam*, is the underpinning or foundation of everything in the universe:

*Naam ke dhare saglay jant*

*Naam ke dhare khand brahmand [SGGS p. 384]*

It is difficult to get our arms around this concept of Naam and define it in a concrete way because according to Gurbani, Naam, like Waheguru Himself, is *agam, agochar* – incomprehensible, unfathomable and indescribable. You cannot really analyse it, you can only experience it.

### Naam as an Experience or State (*Anubhavi Naam*)

Naam is also used to describe a state or experience – what we may call *Anubhavi Naam*– the experience of being in tune with the *Vyapak Naam* or all pervading spirit of Naam.

This is a mystical experience or state that is referred to by several words in Gurbani including *Chautha pad*, or the fourth state – beyond the three *gunas* or modes

in which we normally operate, thus it is a state of transcendence. Other terms in Gurbani that refer to this state include *Turia awastha*, *Sehaj awastha* and *Dasam dwar*.

This *Anubhavi Naam* is a mystical experience that is beyond description in words. It is described as *goongay de mithai* – like a mute person tasting something really delicious but is incapable of expressing it in words, can only smile in delight.

The Gurus describe this Naam experience in many different ways, but they have to use metaphor and allegory; they can give us some glimpses but they cannot describe this in its entirety because it is an *akath katha* – a story that cannot be expressed in words.

This experience is described in various colourful ways in many beautiful shabads not only by the Gurus, but also by all the bhagats. Some shabads describe it using images from Yogic terminology, some in terms of brilliant light, while others refer to Divine music : *anhad shabad*. Individuals who reach this stage experience it in several different ways.



A key part of the Naam experience is Anand : bliss, joy or ecstasy, also described as *ras* – like drinking something delicious and fulfilling.

When we speak of this Naam experience, it is like being on a constant spiritual high. Gurbani often uses the terminology of drinking and of being intoxicated.

*Baba man matwaro naam ras peevai  
Sehaj anand rach rahia [SGGS p. 360]*

*(O, Baba, my mind is intoxicated with the Naam, drinking in its Nectar. It remains absorbed in the Lord's Love.)*

There are many such shabads using the imagery of drinking liquor or wine. Drinking alcohol is not something that is recommended, of course, instead we are encouraged to get intoxicated on Naam.

These experiences are not unique to Sikhi. In every religious tradition, there have been some who have followed a path of divine meditation or reflection and have described similar mystical experiences. Naam is in fact at the core of most faiths, but they get distracted from it by religious dogma and ritual. Some segment of these faiths have gone after the mystical path of spiritual experience. Within Islam you have the Sufis, the Christians have had their mystics in some monasteries, and so on.

All the bhagats in the SGGS, not just the Gurus, talk about Naam Simran and this mystical Naam experience, even using the word Naam. The bhagats came from different religious backgrounds, so we can see that Naam Simran was already being practiced by many within all of these faith traditions.

## The Unitive experience

A key aspect of this mystical Naam state is the unitive experience, a strong sense of Oneness, that all of Creation is One, all are connected and part of the One.

*Brahama deesai brahama suneeai ek ek vakhaaniay  
Aatam pasaara karan haraa prabh bina nahi jaaneeay  
[SGGS p. 846]*

*(I see God, hear God, and speak of the One and only God.  
The Divine spirit is seen in the expanse of creation.  
Without God, I see no other at all.)*

And again:

*Sabh Gobind hai sabh Gobind hai Gobind bin nahi koi  
Soot ek man sat sahans jaise ot prot prabh soee  
[SGGS p. 485]*

*(God is everything, God is everything. Without God, there is nothing at all.*

*As one thread holds hundreds and thousands of beads, He is woven into His creation).*

All of creation is like a *maalaa* or a necklace or rosary, and everything can be thought of as the different beads strung on a string. That string that connects and supports everything, is Naam. The beads include all the people that we see. So one of the goals of the Sikh spiritual path is to see the Naam in everybody and to treat every one accordingly. This is a key driver of the ethics of Sikhi.

*Na ko bairi nahi baigana, sagal sang ham ko ban aee  
---*

*Sabh me rav rahia prabh eko pekh pekh Naanak bigsae  
[SGGS 1299]*

*(No one is an enemy or a stranger, I get along with every one  
---*

*The One God is pervading in all. Gazing upon Him, beholding Him, Nanak blossoms forth in happiness)*

## Naam Simran : the Practice

Now we get to the practice of Naam Simran.

Some people think of this as Naam Japna – the repetition or chanting of ‘Waheguru’ or other mantra or name of God. There is much discussion around whether Waheguru is the Guru mantra.

Some chant the entire Mool Mantar, others chant *Ekonkar Satnaam Waheguru*. Many people or groups have different styles of chanting as well

Then there is meditation or focussed contemplation. Again, there are many different ways of doing this, with some advocating specific postures of sitting, different breathing techniques, focussing your attention on a specific spot such as the middle of the forehead, belly button, and so on. None of these are wrong, as whatever helps to get in the right contemplative state is fine.

What really matters is one's attitude, frame of mind, dedication and focus.

Some people say Simran is really *sifat salaah* : praising God and singing His praises instead of just repeating his Name or chanting Waheguru. Others say instead of His Name, think of His attributes. In fact Jaap Sahib does just that : it takes you through one quality of God after another, addressing hundreds of Divine attributes.

Naam Simran in Sikhi is an integrated, holistic process of getting in tune with the *Vyapak Naam*, the Divine Spirit, which can include all of these components. Gurbani, Kirtan and Nitnem are important parts of the process as well.

Gurbani constantly reminds us of God, praises Him and shows us many different ways to relate to Him. Kirtan adds music, which can move us at a deep level, and which provides a whole other dimension of tuning in. In the early stages, these are the most effective ways of developing our concept of God and relating to Him. For someone who has had no exposure to Gurbani, but wants to be a Sikh, if you say just sit and repeat 'Waheguru, Waheguru' and tune in to the Divine, it isn't likely to be very effective. The word Waheguru is not going to mean very much to him. It is through the Guru's word, in the form of *nitnem*, *paath* and *kirtan*, that we develop the concept of Waheguru and start relating to His Name. It is Gurbani, in its many forms, that helps us to add the deeper meaning to the Word or the Akhri Naam.

All of these—*paath*, *kirtan*, *nitnem*—are forms of Naam Simran that can take us along the path of tuning into the Divine. However, the ultimate part of the process which is really important for the Naam experience is the actual Naam Simran, which consists of dedicated meditation and contemplation, sitting down and focussing just on Naam. Gurbani itself tells us repeatedly to Naam Japo, to do Naam Simran. So we have to take this next step, otherwise we are reciting Gurbani, but not actually doing what the Guru is telling us to do.

When you first start meditating on Naam, it can be really challenging to stay focussed. Concentrating on a single word like Waheguru goes against the mind's tendency to run around chasing one thought after another. Naam Japna can feel difficult and even boring. It has been described as *sil alooni chatna* or like licking a tasteless stone. At the earlier stages, kirtan and paath can be much more enjoyable. But you have to keep at it and after a while, Naam Simran becomes more and more enjoyable, and overwhelming with 'ras'

*Raam ras pia re ram ras pia re* [SGGS p. 387]

Then you actually look forward to your daily time for meditation. If then you don't do it, you feel you are missing on something.

The practice of Naam Simran consists of regular, dedicated meditation on some word which is His

Name, and *Waheguru* is the favoured word. Now Waheguru itself does not appear in Gurbani, except in the Bani of the bhagats where it is used in praise of Guru Ramdas. The words 'wah wah' or Awesome do appear in many places. There is also this line from Bhai Gurdas where he says '*Wahguru Gurmantar hai*'. Gurbani uses names like Har, Raam, Gobind, Allah and many others:

*Har har naam japo man mere  
Raam Raam bol Raam Raam  
Saas saas simro Gobind*

Many of those who are not Sikhs, including the bhagats, have used many of these names other than Waheguru, and they have all been doing Naam Simran.

The Name of Waheguru is more important in my opinion, than the specific word one may use. I personally use 'Waheguru' when I do Naam simran, because that is the tradition that I have grown up with. I personally like Waheguru because it evokes a sense of wonder and awesomeness of Waheguru.

As we said earlier, there are many opinions on the specifics of the mantar, the posture, breathing techniques, etc. What really matters is one's attitude and frame of mind, and the dedication and focus with which we approach it.

What is really essential is to fill our hearts with love as we say Waheguru and to feel His love for us, to feel enveloped in love – for Waheguru is all love. That is what adds real meaning to simran – experiencing the love, experiencing the Divine Presence, and blissfully enjoying the *ras*.

Guru ji tells us.

*Jin prem kio tin hi prabh payo ... Guru Gobind Singh  
(Only those who love can achieve the Beloved.)*

One of the biggest challenges in the practice of Naam Simran is to still the mind and keep it focussed. The mind is inherently very 'chanchal' or restless and slippery. You try to keep it focussed but something triggers a thought, then one thought leads to another, and suddenly you realise you have lost it. You then have to gently bring it back on track.

One way to deal with this challenge is to use a favourite line or two from Gurbani and repeat it once or twice before getting back to 'Wahguru'.

I usually choose a line about love, such as

So Satgur pyara mere naal hai

or

SaaJanra mera saajanraa, nikat khaloya mera saajanraa.

So as to experience the love as I get back to focussing on Waheguru.

You can choose any Gurbani line that appeals to you.

Bliss and joy are a key part of the Naam Simran experience.

*Tere ghar anand vadhae tud ghar [SGGS p 965]*

*(God's house or presence if full of bliss and celebration)*

*Anand bhaiaa meri mae Satguru mai paya [SGGS p. 917]*

*(I am in ecstasy, O', my mother, for I have found my True Guru.)*

This is what we must strive to feel as we do the Naam Simran.

Another important aspect of the practice of Naam Simran is surrender, overcoming our *haumai*.

*Haumai naave naal viroddh hai doi na vasai ik thai [SGGS p. 560]*

*(Haumai and Naam are enemies; they cannot dwell in the same place.)*

Now, Gurbani also tells us that Naam is the best way to overcome Haumai. So it is an iterative process.

When people talk about meditation, they often say that make one's mind blank, and empty it of all thought. That does not really work. The mind cannot be made blank, and in any case a blank mind is useless. What you have to do is to still it instead and focus it. In fact you have to fill it, not empty it, fill it instead with loving thoughts of Waheguru and the Divine presence. Still, one has to stop it from all other thoughts, the usual chatter in which the mind likes to indulge.

When the surface of water in a lake is disturbed by a pebble dropped in the water, or by the wind, you cannot see the bottom because of all the waves. But when the waves are stilled, you can clearly look through the water and see the rocks at the bottom, and the colourful fish swimming around. If someone were to throw in a stone, suddenly we cannot see anything any more. The stone is the thought, and the beautiful colourful fish deep in the water is experience of Waheguru and His presence. Only when your other thoughts are stilled can you experience the Divine presence deep within the self.

There is some debate as to when one should do Naam Simran. The best time is early in the morning.

But the Guru also says

*Har simran ki sagli bela [SGGS p. 1150]*

*(Any time is good for doing Simran.)*

We are told to do simran *saas giraas* – with every morsel of food and with every breath, that is, at all times.

*Rain dinas parbhaat toohai hee gavana. [SGGS p. 652]*

*(Night and day, morning and night, I sing to You)*

But actually the best time to do dedicated Simran is at *Amrit Vela*, or the ambrosial hour early in the morning.

*Gur satgur ka jo sikh akhaae so bhalke uth har naam dhavai [SGGS p. 305]*

*(One who calls himself a Sikh of True Guru, shall rise in the early morning hours and meditate on the Lord's Name.)*

We hear this message not only from Guru Ram Das ji as in this shabad, but every one of the Gurus gives us this same message about *amrit vela* in their *banis*. There are also references to simran at *amrit vela* in the *banis* of all the bhagats: Naamdev, Kabir, Ravidas—as well as Fareed who comes from the Islamic thought.

Early in the morning at *Amrit Vela*, most people are still asleep and all daily activities and noise and distractions haven't picked up. Also the body is fresh after a night's sleep. Thus this is a the ideal time for Naam Simran—although any time is good !

## Grace

His have to put in dedicated effort to progress on this path of Naam, but it is ultimately all in Waheguru's hands and subject to His Grace.

*Karam milai aakhan tera nao [SGGS p. 662]*

*(It is only by Your Grace that we chant your Naam)*

We can only hold up the bowl and pray for the gift of Naam, and it is Waheguru who pours the Naam amrit in His Grace.

Naam Simran is like a door. We go through that door to meet Waheguru, but Waheguru also meets us through the same door. Thus it is a two way process.

In the words of Bhai Gurdaas,

*Charan saran Gur ek painda jai chal*

*Satgur kot painda aagai hoe let hai (Bhai Gurdas)*

*(Take one step towards the Guru, and He will take a hundred steps forward to receive you.)*

## Saans Saans Simran

Gurbani tells us do simran all the time – *saans saans* – with every breath. How can we do this as we go about our worldly activities. We have to pay attention to whatever we are engaged in. If you are working on an engineering problem, for example, you have to concentrate pretty intensely on it. What Guru ji is telling us is to be a constant state of God consciousness or God awareness.

*Haath pair kar kaam sabh*

*Cheet niranjan naaal [SGGS p. 1376]*

*(Go through all your activities, but keep God in your heart.)*

As you practice Naam Simran, the Naam comes to reside in your heart at a level below the conscious level, it becomes a part of who you are and all your actions are guided by this God awareness. You would refrain from doing anything unethical, for example. Even when you are engaged in mental activities that require concentration, the connection with Waheguru will remain intact.

## Rewards of Naam Simran

Let us touch very briefly on some of the many rewards of Naam Simran. The main objective of Naam Simran is to get past the cycle of birth and death and to achieve everlasting union with the Waheguru. However, Gurbani tells that you don't have to wait for the afterlife to enjoy the rewards, benefits start flowing right away and right here in our present life.

*Ih lok sukhie parlok suhele [SGGS p. 292]*

*(Be at peace in this world, and happy in the next)*

Through Naam Simran, one gets peace, stability and strength of character. One is able to maintain an even keel through the ups and downs of life. Whatever life throws at you, you can remain in *Chardi Kalaa*.

Naam has powerful healing properties. Gurbani tells us

*Sarab rog ka aukhad naam [SGGS p. 274]*

*(Naam can provide a cure for all ailments of the body, mind and spirit).*

*Kar isnaan simar prabh apna man tan bhae aroga [SGGS p. 611]*

*(Take a bath in the sarovar of Naam amrit and your body and mind are healed).*

Naam Simran is the 'soap' that can cleanse us of our sins and weaknesses, make us better humans and more worthy of our ultimate destiny of merging with the Divine.

*Bhareey hath pair tan deh*

*Paani dhotai utras kheh*

---

*Bhareey mat papa ke sang*

*oh dhopai naavai ke rang [SGGS p. 4]*

*(When the hands and the feet and the body are dirty, water can wash away the dirt*

*But when the intellect is stained and polluted by sin, it can only be cleansed by the Love of the Name.)*

Let us close with the words as we end one ardaas:

*Naanak Naam Chardi Kalaa!*

*(Through the power of Naam, may we all grow spiritually and remain in Chardi Kalaa)*



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# So Help Me

O' God, Yahweh, Allah, Vaheguru,  
Et Al.....

**H**ow do our many religions address the Creator? Every faith tradition seems to endow the Creator with a specific name. How do Sikhs address Him/Her? Without much doubt the most commonly used word for the Creator in Sikh parlance is *Waheguru*. But there remain possibly many regional and dialectic variations in its spelling, exact

enunciation and usage. These are mostly minor and not particularly meaningful.

Some literature suggests that the word *Waheguru* may have come to us from Hindu mythology, but the evidence is not convincing; furthermore, even if true, it is without significance.



It is important to note the very sparse occurrence of this word in the Guru Granth Sahib. It has only been used by the Bhatt Gyand in a total of 8 times: 6 times as Vahiguru, and twice as *Waheguru*. No other contributor to the Guru Granth Sahib has used it. Bhai Gurdas used it in his writings, but no Guru, Saint or

Bhatt (except Gyand) who contributed to the Guru Granth Sahib, did. It seems to be associated with one *hukumnama* of Guru Gobind Singh.

Sikhism offers a rich tapestry for the moniker of the Creator. This is not surprising since Sikhi found its voice in the very rich, varied and awesome nexus of Hindu and Islamic mythology and languages over 500 years ago. The unusual title of this essay is a fair reflection of my state of mind on this matter.

Sikh teaching repeatedly directs us to constantly remember the Creator and that, in comparison, all other activities in life are futile (*"Avar kaaj terey kitay na kaam; mil saadh sangat bhaj keval naam"* Guru Granth p. 12). I am convinced that this directive is not to be literally translated to mean that we quit our jobs and meditate on the Creator 24/7. Instead it asks that the awareness of the Creator becomes the foundational and defining principle of life and its actions.

Most Sikhs seem pretty much agreed on these fundamentals. What seems to divide us, often passionately, is what name to ascribe to the Creator. How to tag him in our worship? I suppose this is important; we cannot really address the Creator by a hearty 'Hey You' or 'Howdy'.

The Jews have Yahweh or HaShem, Christians look to God and Jesus as the Father and his deified Son, Muslims worship Allah, while Hindus have myriad Gods with just as many definable and recognisable entities that collectively direct us to the Creator.

What about us, the Sikhs? We well know when the passion and possession of an idea, the love of God for instance, becomes the flash point of anger. In Malaysia, a recently enacted law decreed that the name Allah may only be used by Muslims; its use by non-Muslims would be a crime. I remind you that the word Allah is found in the Guru Granth Sahib, p.1349. I do not really know how methodically this law is or was enforced. It may be like many statutes in every society that remain in books for generations but are rarely, if ever, invoked. After some vigorous back and forth with the government, Sikhs were apparently granted an exception to the rule.

The ever present danger of conflict arising from such fragmented identity of the Creator is self evident; human history bears ample and bloody testimony of it. I certainly have problems with embracing the idea of a God who is the micromanager of our puny lives. Believe me I am not attempting to deconstruct the Creator - so help me Yahweh, Ram, Allah, Vahiguru, God, et al!

How many names exist for the Creator?

## The Creator in Sikh Tradition

Among Sikhs the verbal battleground on the Internet usually turns on the idea that the most commonly used moniker for the Creator is 'Waheguru.' Its origin and usage have a contentious history like most old world practices of any religion. It is not a word that is unambiguously and clearly coined by any of the ten Sikh Founder-Gurus. So, one may safely conclude that it was not in popular usage at the time of the Gurus.

I offer you an aside: In the Gurmukhi script in which the Guru Granth is usually, but not always scribed, there is only one phoneme for the sound of both 'v' and 'w'; the two are not distinguishable from each other. Punjabi itself is a perfectly phonetic language; English is not and comes to us with a chaotic history to its structure and rules. Gurmukhi remains our preferred script. Indic languages generally conflate the sounds of *v* and *w*.

Also, wide ranging regional differences in enunciation and recording exist when transcribing Gurmukhi and Punjabi into the Roman script. So, is it Vaheguru, Wahiguru, Waheguru, or some other minor tongue twisting variant? This remains pretty much a matter of personal or regional preference and no rule governs such usage. Waheguru appears to be a combined form derived from 'Wahu' and 'Guru'. Hew McLeod took note of this and recently, in a well documented essay in *The Sikh Review*, Dalvinder Singh Grewal, pointed out that Guru Amardas used the words 'Wahu' (Guru Granth p. 515-516) and 'Guru' repeatedly but separately and never in the combined form as 'Waheguru'.

As noted earlier, only one author in the Guru Granth, the Bhatt Gyand, has used 'Waheguru' in the combined form (p. 1402-4). Not that it matters, but in this hymn in Gurmukhi script, Gyand spells it so that on transliteration into Roman script it sounds like Wahiguru with an *i* and not as Waheguru with an *e*.

Gyand spells it as Wahiguru six times and as Wahguru twice; the latter variant may reflect the needs of poesy and may not be significant in itself. Some scholars also assert that the word Wahiguru by Gyand was not intended for the name of the Creator but in

praise of Guru Ramdas. Of course, in Guru Granth, many examples also exist of "Gur or Guru" to indicate the Creator.



Some literature also suggests that popularity of the term *Waheguru* in Sikhism stems from the writings of Kapur Singh but that seems improbable, hence incorrect. Kapur Singh was a man of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The word *Waheguru* existed earlier and was used by the legendary scholar Bhai Gurdas (in *Vaars* 24 & 40). A contemporary of the first six Gurus and scribe of the first recension of the Aadi Granth; his writings are revered in Sikh tradition.

What leaves us in difficulty is that Bhai Gurdas went a step further; he parsed the term *Waheguru* and strongly opined that this name for the Creator owes its origin to the defining gods of the Hindu pantheon.

He said:

*Satijug Satigur Vasdev vavaa Visna naam japavae*

*Duapur(i) satigur Hari trisan haha Har Har naam japaaavae*

*Trete Satigur Raam jee raara naam japay sukh paavae*

*Kaljug Nanak Gur Govind gagga Govind naam alaavae*

*Chaaray jaagay chahu jugree panchhayan vitch jayay samaavae*

*Chaaray achhar ik(u) kar(i) Vaheguru japu mant(r) japaapavae*

*Jahaa(n) te upjiyaa phir tahaa(n) samaavae (49,I)*

*Bhai Gurdas Vaar I, Pauri 49*

In a rough and ready, but brief translation, this says that for the moniker *Vaheguru*, the letter V stands for the Hindu God Vishnu, H comes from Hari, G denotes Govind, and R is for Ram. The problem is that it ties *Vaheguru* to Hindu mythology in an embrace that is too close for comfort and undermines Sikh identity. But this tale of the complex origin of 'Vaheguru' is not verifiable history. This poetic rendition, gives us no clue on when the term *Waheguru* was designed or by whom.

My take on this matter is a bit different. No writing of Bhai Gurdas is Canon; absolutely none is

incorporated in the Guru Granth. A fantastic poet, he had a unique insight into Sikhi. Perhaps, he was indulging his magical genius for poetry, not necessarily connecting Sikhi to Hinduism. His poetry is catchy, enjoyable and instructive.

Sikhism and Hinduism (with Islam) have always occupied and operated in the same common socio-cultural, ethnographic and linguistic space with overlapping boundaries. In India, where Sikhism arose, Sikhs have always existed as a small powerful minority, a prominent drop in the sea of Hinduism and its practices. It is also undeniable that most of the early converts to Sikhi came from Hindu roots. Religions do not emerge *de novo* in a vacuum but find their niche within existing societies. History suggests that in at least one *Hukumnama*, Guru Gobind Singh used the word *Waheguru*; he is also said to have used it in his last greeting to the Sikhs. In the immediate post-Guru period, Mata Sahib Devan apparently used the appellation *Waheguru* in her messages to Sikhs as well. Additionally, there are copious references in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century literature where the term *Waheguru* is prominent.

I leave it to social historians and religious scholars quibbling over exactly when, by whom and under what circumstances the term *Waheguru* evolved, as I am unable to unravel this convoluted knot. My further take on this comes from an entirely different direction and perspective.

## The Many Ways of Connecting to the Creator

Undeniably, the term *Wahiguru*, *Waheguru* or *Wahguru* for the Creator is now very much an integral part of the Sikh lexicon. This does not necessarily imply that any

Guru prescribed or mandated its use in Sikh worship or religious service. These are the 'all important' questions here.

"Let me count the ways..." as Shakespeare said. Look at the Guru Granth; the question is: In how many different ways is the Creator referred to, and why?

*If every people and their religions speak in a specific language, as they do, and cultural context, as they do, there are bound to be endless names and endless variations on them for an endless entity that is the Creator.*

The Guru Granth of the Sikhs speaks of the many Islamic names for an Infinite Creator: *Allah, Rahim, Kareem, Khuda...* and so on. Hindu names of God are even more plentiful: *Hari, Ram, Gopal, Thakur, Bekunth, Prabhu, Ishvar, Bhagvan, Vishnu, Shiva*, and so on ... a truly endless list. Sometimes the Gurus address the Creator as *Sajjan*, meaning a soul mate in contemporary Americanese. I cannot personally vouch for the numbers but apparently, in the entire Guru Granth, the name *Hari* for the Creator occurs 8324 times and *Ram* over 2000 times. This emphatically does not mean that Sikhism is an offshoot of Hinduism as many Hindu scholars would like to insist; that would be a horrendously erroneous idea, akin to labeling Christianity as a sect of Judaism. What is important: The three faiths, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, shared the same socio-cultural linguistic, ethnic and geographic territory.

The *Jaap Sahib*, a composition attributed to Guru Gobind Singh that is not included in the Guru Granth but is read every day by observant Sikhs, seems to be a catalogue of the many names and endless *attributes* of the Creator. The many attributive names of the Creator in the *Jaap Sahib* alone come to an awesome 950. Not having counted them myself I cannot speak for the veracity of this overwhelming number. But having read the *Jaap Sahib*, this number seems eminently credible.

*To my mind, this is a confession of the fact that our finite language and limited human imagination can never fully grasp the reality of an Infinite Creator. At the same time, it remains a wonderful tribute to human imagination and proclivities.*

Ergo, exactly how many names exist for the Infinite is absolutely immaterial.



## Which Name of the Creator should Sikhs Use?

The operative principle here is simple: Not that it is necessarily healthier, more respectful, or more acceptable to remember the Creator by a specific name but that it is essential to cultivate a relationship with the Infinite. What language, what name or what ritual we use to train our minds is just so much trivia.

On the other hand, such minutia may not always be so trivial a matter. Why? The human mind is fickle. A discipline, a habit of practice is essential to cultivating a life. Hence, the many religions, traditions and ways of worship! It may not matter if the worshipper is alone; in his solitude he can use any name for the Creator. But what if, in a group of worshippers, the words of the congregants do not coincide? It cannot be particularly peaceful or fruitful if in the same congregation one person prefers to sing or dance a joyful prayer, another wants to close his/her eyes to the world and merge in silence, while a third needs a celebratory bash. Or just imagine a religious service punctuated by a cacophony of different languages, terms and monikers for the Creator. Surely, this would not help; the congregation would essentially be dissembled.

Yet, in human societies all these signal variations exist.

*Yes, there is a place for each in God's green acre, but not within the same congregation and not at the same time. There are times when we need to be on the same page and the same line.*

The Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib is unique in that it showcases many names of God from the different religions of others. The widespread usage of so many names from both Hindu and Islamic traditions is an indication of the diverse, inclusive and rich culture of the greater Punjab at that time, over 500 years ago. If literature and traditions of other religions had been widely available at that time, I am sure they too, would have found inclusion and commentary.

The word Waheguru seems to have evolved from the Sikh community's need for a common culture, lexicon and practice – indeed the *norma loquendi* of a people. Thus, Sikhs seem to have sanctified the appellation 'Wahiguru' more than any other.

In connecting to the Infinite one may address the Creator by any name or none; this would be entirely consistent with the message of Guru Granth Sahib. But in communal practice (*sangat*, congregation) a common moniker would be necessary. The Guru Granth Sahib opens with *Ik Oankar*, an alphanumeric designed by Guru Nanak, the Founder of the Sikh faith. *Ik Oankar* speaks of Singularity: one Creator of all creation. If one can

comprehend this Oneness and Universality there is then no room left for differences in caste, creed, colour, gender, religious label or national origin etc.

From *Ik Oankar* (sometimes phonetically rendered as *Ik Oangkaar* or with other minor variations) to *Waheguru* the journey points to a meaningful evolution that seems simple yet complex. This path towards a working terminology for the Creator from *Ik Oankar* to *Waheguru* speaks of several centuries of a meaningful process that is breathtaking in its simplicity and at the same time rich in its impact on our lives.

One way to describe the Creator (*Waheguru*) would be as the inner reality that our intellect cannot fathom, our senses cannot perceive but with which our inner self can commune. This intimate practice has to emerge from the language, culture and world view of a people. This is what connects us to our inner self. Theoretically then, any moniker for that inner reality is just as good as any other name. It is not at all a matter of which name is right or wrong.

The idea is to find the Creator in the individual self; discover and nurture this universal connectivity. This then enables us to create a community and a sacred fellowship.

*Si volet usus /quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi"*

*("if it be the will of custom, in the power of whose judgment is the law and the standard of language")*



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A prolific writer with many books to his name, he also writes a regular internet column on Sikhi.

# Universal Appeal – Beyond Time

## Implementation of the Eternal Message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Context of Solving Human Problems at the Universal Level



### About Sikhism itself

Sikhism was not initially launched as a religious institution, it was, actually, a movement of revolutionary reformation, not focusing on any particular sect or a single social aspect. It was devoted to the overall development of a human being and reorientation of social set-up in its totality. Addressed as it was to the whole of the humanity, it needed a fairly long duration to express itself completely. As if it were pre-planned, it took nine more generations of leaders and devout followers extending over more than two centuries to preach and demonstrate

what Guru Nanak stood for. While going through history, one finds it hard to believe how much the Sikh Gurus and their devotees had to face formidable odds while upholding the cause set forth by Guru Nanak. Followers of Guru Nanak and those of other Sikh Gurus were known initially as Gurmukhs (those devoted to God). Later Gurmukh was assigned the epithet of Sikh (the one engaged in learning) because the latter term appeared frequently in the verses composed by the Gurus and the other saintly poets. In due course, the movement got institutionalised as a faith and it came to be known as religion of Sikhs or simply as 'Sikhism'.

Sikhism is, no doubt, the faith most modern in outlook, philosophy and tenets as conceived, practiced and preached by Guru Nanak, other Sikh Gurus in the lineage and their true followers. The philosophical concepts as propagated and practiced by the Sikh Gurus over a period of more than two centuries have a universal appeal and potential for practical applicability in human life in all parts of the world –and for all times to come. In fact, tenets as espoused by Guru Nanak form the basis for Sikh teachings and whole of the edifice of philosophy of the only Sikh scripture Holy Granth reverberates with the underlying spirit of these tenets.

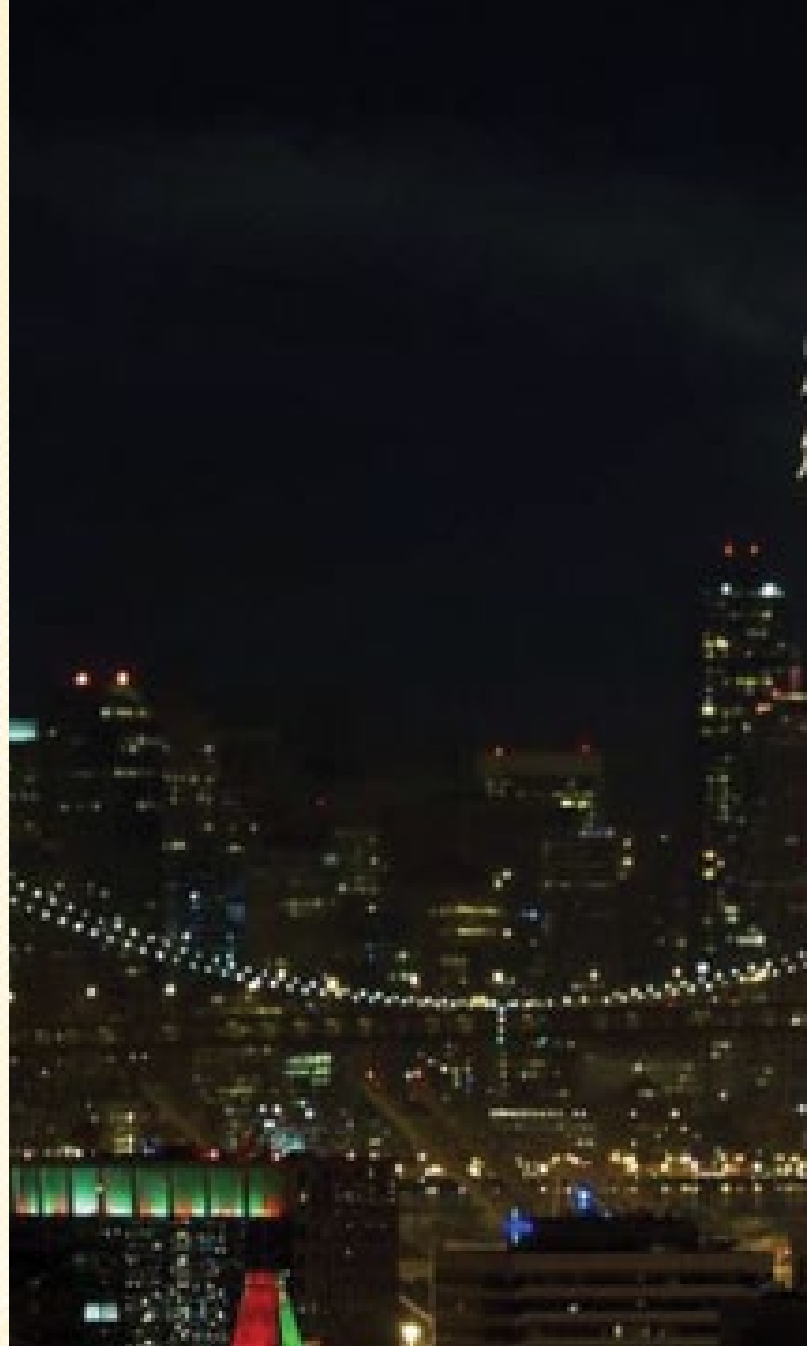
### About Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, declared that the Holy Granth of Sikhism would be the next and perennial Guru of the Sikhs. The Holy Granth was originally compiled in 1604 CE by Guru Arjan, the fifth in the hierarchy. Original compilation included writings by five Sikh Gurus and 30 other learned personages. Originally called 'pothi', it later came to be known as 'Adi Granth'. Guru Gobind Singh added Guru Tegh Bahadur's verses to it and the revised version came to be known as 'Damdami Bir'. Finally, it has come to be revered as 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib'.

Present Bir (text of Sri Guru Granth Sahib), running into 1430 pages, was adopted from the hand-written Birs prepared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Taken together, all the verses are called 'Gurbani' as the main thrust of these verses is building up faith in God and imbibing ethics out of this faith (the term 'guru' or 'satguru' is mostly used for God in these verses). Scripted in Gurmukhi, compositions are available chiefly in Panjabi, Sadhukari, Braj and some are mixed expressions. These verses are further based on 31 different musical patterns as classic 'ragas'.

### Wonderful Compilation

The Holy Granth, as a scripture, is a wonderful compilation containing writings of 36 saintly figures who belonged to different regions, different communities, different sects, different professions and different stages of history. In itself this is a unique example of human tolerance, emotional integration and mutual understanding. The philosophy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib lays stress on adoption of high moral standards at the individual as well as social levels. Firm faith in benevolent God was developed in the face of oppressive feudalism and in contrast to selfishness of the



priestly class, people were blessed with humanitarian approach of the Guru. Hollow religious rituals were replaced by direct communion with ever merciful God and instead of material cravings, high moral values came to be inculcated, redemption for all was stressed and equality between man and man in every respect was vehemently preached when discrimination on different counts was so prevalent in society. Hegemony of the elite feudal class as well as corrupt priestly classes was challenged boldly and a strong voice was raised against different kinds of social evils.

All the verses forming part of Guru Granth Sahib, known collectively as Gurbani, contain thoughts which fall in line with the ideas propounded by Guru Nanak.



A true Sikh is supposed to put the teachings of the Granth to actual practice in his or her life. This, for a Sikh, is the only way of worshipping God. The only rite Sikh religion prescribes for the devout is choral singing of hymns in the Holy Granth.

Main theme of Gurbani is to elevate the moral self of human beings through faith in God. God of Gurbani is formless and non-personal being manifest in the entire universe and the laws governing it. For human beings, surrender to God's being and universal laws (*hukam*) is the foundation of all ethics ultimate aim of Gurbani is to enable a human being work for attaining the position of being 'sachiar', a really truthful person.

Although compiled in the medieval period of Indian lore, Sri Guru Granth Sahib has relevance in the context of modern people living not only in India but also for peoples across the globe. All human beings, irrespective of their countries and colours are facing similar problems born out of situations created chiefly by modern lifestyles, intra-communal tensions and disturbances taking place vis-à-vis international relations. Moreover, the Granth possesses potential for offering authentic guidance for all times to come and will serve as a perennial guide for knowing and practicing universal philosophy for the welfare of mankind at the global level.

The modern age is one of science and technology but advancements in the field of technology has affected human life adversely to a great extent. It has put mankind in a mad race for enhancing worldly effluence. People are engrossed in cut-throat competition with fellow-beings in grabbing opportunities for acquiring maximum material possessions and comforts. In fact, the sense of greed has overpowered human psyche and has robbed everyone of their peace, happiness and self-control. Not only this, humans can be seen adopting unfair means and criminal acts in order to fulfil greedy designs. As a result, crime and corruption have vitiated the entire social network leading to avoidable tensions and restlessness. People are fast losing tolerance and tensions are on the rise at the intra-communal and international levels. Erosion of ethical values and principles is the hallmark of modern life and this results directly from the peculiar lifestyle people around the world have adopted.

Moreover, modern lifestyle has spoiled the food habits the people. Junk food, adulterated food, chemicals added to the food or fertilizers and pesticides used while growing fruit, vegetables and other crops are not only proving harmful for human health but are also leading to various diseases in humans as well as cattle. Use of intoxicants and drugs is increasing day by day and proving instrumental in squabbles and disturbances at personal and social levels. Use of modern gadgets such as computers, mobile phones and other machinery is also proving a big hazard for human health both physical and mental. Environmental pollution is on the ascent and is affecting human life everywhere, in multiple ways.

Such modern lifestyle has also led to alienation and insecurity not only at the individual but also at the national and international levels. On the one side most countries are striving for forging unity through the UNO but at the same time, regional polarisation is emerging in the shape of groupings such as the, G-20, G-8, SAARC, BRICS, ASEAN, etc.

## Teachings of Gurbani

Teachings of Gurbani have their relevance as solutions for almost all types of human problems being faced in modern times. Gurbani quite appropriately highlights the modern trend of craving for more and more of material possessions:

ਦਸ ਬਸਤੂ ਲੇ ਪਾਛੈ ਪਾਵੈ ॥ ਏਕ ਬਸਤੁ ਕਾਰਨ ਬਿਖਿਟ ਗਵਾਵੈ ॥  
ਏਕ ਭੀ ਨਾ ਦੇਇ ਦਸ ਭੀ ਹਰਿ ਲੇਇ ॥ ਤਉ ਮੂੜਾ ਕਹੁ ਕਹਾ ਕਰੇਇ ॥ (P. 268)

*Das bastū le pāchhai pāvai. Ēk basat kārān bikhṭ gavāvai.  
Ēk bhī na dēe das bhī hir lee. Tao mūrā kaho kahā karei.*

Gurbani advises that it is only by developing contentment that man can overcome his greed for material possessions.

ਅਨਕਿਭੇਗ ਬਖਿਆ ਕੇ ਕਰੈ ॥ ਨਹ ਤੁਰਪਤਿਾਵੈ ਖਪਿ ਖਪਿ ਮਰੈ ॥  
ਬਨਿਸਤੋਖ ਨਹੀ ਕੇਉ ਰਾਜੈ ॥ ਸੁਪਨ ਮਨੋਰਥ ਬਰਥਿ ਸਭ ਕਾਜੈ ॥ (P. 279)

*Anik bhog bikhīā ke karai. Nah tūriptāvai khap khap marai  
Binā santokh nahī koū rājai. Supan manorath barith sabh kājai*

Gurbani gives solution to worries, by surrendering to the will of God:

ਨਾਨਕਚਿਤਾ ਮਤਿ ਕਰਹੁ ਚਿਤਾ ਤਸਿ ਹੀ ਰੇਇ ॥  
ਜਲਮਹਿ ਜੰਤ ਉਪਾਇਅਨੁ ਤਨਿ ਭੀ ਰੇਜੀ ਦੇਇ ॥ (P. 955)

*Nānak chintā mat karahu chintā tis hī hee  
Jal mēh janṭ upāian tinā bhē rojī dēe.*

and

ਉਦਮ ਕਰੇਦਿਆ ਜੀਉ ਤੂੰ ਕਮਾਵਦਿਆ ਸੁਖ ਭੁੰਦੁ ॥  
ਧਿਆਇਦਿਆ ਤੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਮਲਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਉਤਰੀ ਚਤਿ ॥ (P. 522)

*Udam kareḍiā jīo tūn kamāvḍiā sukh bhunch.  
Dhiāiḍiā tūn parabhū mil Nānak utrī chint. ||1|*

Gurbani exhorts human beings to shun unethical practices and adopt constructive role in society:

ਘਾਲਖਾਇ ਕਛਿ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ ॥ (P. 1356)  
ਮਠਿਤੁ ਨੀਵੀ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਗੁਣ ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ ਤਤੁ ॥ (P. 470)

*Mithat nīvī nānkā guṇ chāngāī tāṭ.*

In the same way, Gurbani warns human beings against wrong habits

ਨਦਿਭਲੀ ਕਸਿ ਕੀ ਨਾਹੀ ਮਨਮੁਖ ਮੁਗਧ ਕਰੰਨਿ  
ਮੁਹਕਾਲੇ ਤਨਿ ਨਦਿਕਾ ਨਰਕੇ ਘੋਰਿ ਪਵੰਨਿ ॥ (P. 755)

*Muh kāle tin nindkā narke ghor pavann. ||6|*

Gurbani takes very seriously that human beings are suffering from diseases both mental and physical. In this context Gurbani offers the way:

ਅਨਕਿਉਪਾਵੀਰੇਗੁਨਾਜਾਇ ॥ ਰੋਗੁਮਟਿਹਰਿਅਵਖਧੁਲਾਇ ॥ (P. 288)

*Anik upāvī rog na jāe. Rog mitai har avkhaḍh lāe.*

and

ਸਰਵ ਰੋਗ ਕਾ ਅਉਖਦੁ ਨਾਮੁ॥(P. 274)

*Sarab rog kā aukhad nām.*

Gurbani advocates love for the environment

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਤਿ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤੀ ਮਹਤੁ॥ (P. 08)

*Pavan gurū pāṇī piṭā māṭā dharaṭī mahaṭ.*

and

ਬਲਹਿਾਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ਵਸਿਆ॥(P. 469)

*Balihārī kudratī vasiā.*

In the face of increasing intolerance, hostile attitudes, communal polarisation, mutual distrust, strained relations and mounting terrorism at both national and international scenes, Gurbani puts forth a model of harmonious and balanced social set up

ਏਕੁ ਪਤਿ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੂ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰ ਹਾਈ॥ (P. 611)

*Ēk piṭā ekas ke ham bārik tū merā gur hāī.*

and

ਅਵਲੀ ਅਲਹੁ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ॥  
ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ॥ (P.1349)

*Aval alah nūr upāiā kudratī ke sabh bande.*

*Ēk nūr te sabh jag upjiā kaun bhale ko mande. ||1||*

Gurbani has this special message for giving women equal status with men. It warns man from showing disrespect to woman

ਸੇ ਕਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਤਿ ਜਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ॥ (P. 473)

*So kio mandā ākhīai jai jamēh rājān.*

In fact, Gurbani emerges as a great champion of human welfare and human rights as it declares

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਬੁਰੇ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ਕਰੀ ਗੁਸਾ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਹਢਾਇ॥  
ਦੇਹੀ ਰੇਗੁ ਨਾ ਲਗਈ ਪਲੈ ਸਭੁ ਕਛਿ ਪਾਇ॥ (P. 1381)

*Farīdā bure dā bhalā kar gusā man na hadhāe.*

ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੂਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ॥  
ਗੁਰੁ ਪੀਰ ਹਾਮਾ ਤਾ ਭਰੇ ਜਾ ਮੁਰਦਾਰ ਨ ਖਾਇ॥ (P. 141)

*Hak parāiā nānkā us sūar us gāe.*

*Gur pīr hāmā tā bhare jā murdār na khā*

Gurbani even presents teachings which exhort human beings to save themselves from addiction to wine, intoxicants and other harmful substances:

ਬਾਬਾ ਹੋਰੁ ਖਾਣਾ ਖੁਸੀ ਖੁਆਰੁ॥  
ਜਤਿ ਖਾਧੇ ਤਨ ਪੀੜੀਐ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਚਲੇ ਵਕਿਾਰੁ॥(P.16)

*Bābā hor khāṇā khūsī khuār*

*Jai khāḍhai tan pīṛīai man mēh chalēh vikār. ||1|| rahāo*

and

ਮਾਣਸੁ ਭਰਿਆ ਆਣਿਆ ਮਾਣਸੁ ਭਰਿਆ ਆਇ॥  
ਜਤਿ ਪੀਤੈ ਮਤੀ ਦੂਰਿ ਹੋਇ ਬਰਲੁ ਪਵੈ ਵਚਿ ਆਇ॥  
ਆਪਣਾ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨ ਪਛਾਣਈ ਖਸਮਹੁ ਧਕੇ ਖਾਇ॥  
ਜਤਿ ਪੀਤੈ ਖਸਮੁ ਵਸਿਰੈ ਦਰਗਹ ਮਲਿੈ ਸਜਾਇ॥ (P. 554)

*Māṇas bhariā āṇiā māṇas bhariā āe.*

*Jai piṭai matī dūr hoe baral pavai vich āe*

*Āpṇā parāiā na pachhāṇī kḥasmahu dhake khāe*

*Jai piṭai kḥasam visrai dargēh milai sajāe*

In this clear way, Gurbani offers solutions to all types of human problems from the individual up to the international level. Gurbani has, therefore, a universal appeal beyond time and regions.



**Dr. Jaspal Kaur Kaang** has been working at the Panjab University, for the last 38 years, having translated the universal wisdom and ethical values represented in the lives and works of Sikh Gurus into interdisciplinary pedagogical modules for the dissemination of value education through Punjabi language, literature and culture. Moreover, as an administrator (being the member of Senate, Chairperson, Dean, Member of Finance Board and Member of Academic Bodies of various Universities), she has promoted Indian culture as directed by UNESCO and contributed to the reconstruction and the restructuring the policies, programmes and pedagogic practices to nurture the idea of Indianism. Her objective is to spread the eternal values symbolised by our great Gurus, which are more relevant in today's world.

# Gurmat –based Sikh Global Leadership



Sikhs regard Guru Granth Sahib as the living and eternal Guru (*Sabad Guru*) and rightly believe that its message of Oneness - *IK* - is universally applicable. Sikhs certainly have an obligation (in the spirit of *Guru-Chela*) to spread the seeds of *Sikhi* across political, cultural and religious boundaries, especially in the highly divisive environment of today. How to share the message of *Sikhi* globally is a challenge. *Sikhi* remains, for the most part, relatively

unknown and Sikhs are a tiny minority wherever they live, always adapting and adjusting to the dominant social and political structure. Sikhs have also experienced a long period of colonisation, which has coloured their worldview and distorted their own understanding of Gurbani, not to mention the fact that Sikhs have lost intimacy with their mother tongue, which are obstacles in any honest projection of the Guru's message.

Before we consider spreading the Guru's message globally, Sikhs require collective introspection and self-analysis to gauge their own assimilation and embrace of *Sikhi* and their commitment to serve as foot soldiers of Guru Nanak. If we wish to spread the message of *Sikhi* across political and cultural boundaries, then we need to first personify that message. This, I believe, is the most effective way of applying *Sikhi* universally. I would also like to offer the outline of a newly launched project, *Young Minds: Sikh Global Leadership of the Future* that is aimed at seeding young minds with the message of *Sikhi*, preparing the soil for global leadership of tomorrow.

The memory of Guru Nanak that persists in popular consciousness is best captured in a song that is sung even today: "*Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu ka Guru, Mussalman ka Pir.*" The Guru is remembered as a universally revered spiritual teacher, whose appeal cuts across ideological, religious and cultural boundaries. Guru Nanak is also remembered as a gentle, soft-spoken mystic who sang his way into the hearts of the people, but also an iconoclast who called out the humbug in religion. He was a fiery critic who raised his voice against social inequities and a political activist, who was not afraid to take on the establishment and dared to speak truth to power. Sikh tradition celebrates the coming of Guru Nanak as the descending of Divine Light on Earth to dispel the mist and fog of spiritual ignorance in *Kali Yug* – the Age of Darkness. Nanak's appearance was to be the beginning of a new Way (*Tisar Panth*) that was based on his mystical experience of *IK*–or *ONENESS*.

As inheritors of Nanak, the icon of universality, and as standard bearers of his message, it is only natural that Sikhs should feel pressed to answer the call of how to apply Guru Nanak's universal and timeless message in the world today. To my mind, this is putting the cart before the horse. Perhaps a more appropriate starting point would be to first reflect on the current state of affairs in the Sikh world. Some pertinent questions come to mind.

Why, despite our global presence, has Guru Nanak's compelling, universal message remained largely unknown? How did Guru Nanak's WAY shrink into another narrow ideology or *ism*, competing for space with other thought systems? How have his flag bearers, the Sikhs, allowed themselves to be painted in not so flattering an image despite the good they do? What of Guru Nanak himself? Why has a universal

teacher been reduced to a reformer or a synthesiser of competing ideas?

These are broad but foundational questions that Sikhs have to reflect upon collectively. But there are, I believe, more important personal questions as well that we need to confront: what sort of *Sikhi* am I living, and what is my personal relationship with the Guru? Is my *Sikhi* sheer happenstance or am I a Sikh by choice? Is *Sikhi* centre stage in my life or is merely an add on?

Even the most optimistic view of Sikh reality today would be hard pressed to deny that our institutions are in a shambles; that we lack moral leadership and a structure to address issues of global concern. It is also undeniable that our colonial past continues to fetter us in many ways, impacting our mind-set, culture and identity. We are living a derived culture, residing at the edges of power with no real leverage. In the process we are out of tune with the Guru's real message. There is a process of self-development that has to be engaged in, both at the individual and social level. Where does one begin?

## The Gurmukh Ideal

It would be worthwhile to re-visit Guru Nanak's ideal: a *Gurmukh*. A *Gurmukh* forms the foundation on which an ideal society would be based. Let's examine the *Gurmat* ideal for clues on the foundations of an ideal society and the world at large. At the very outset of the Japji, Guru Nanak states that the proper end of human life is to become a *sachiara*, which literally means one who wears or adorns the Truth: our lives must become personifications of the Truth (*Sat Nam*). The deeper implication, of course, is that there is a way of life that is worthy of living, and another, less desirable mode of existence. Our central responsibility as humans is to fashion a life that is worth living: with purpose, meaning and dignity. To personify the Truth is another way of saying that we must learn to imbue our lives with the qualities or virtues expressed in the *Mool Mantar*.

How does one achieve such a life? Guru Nanak's answer is that we must attune our lives to the *Hukam* of the *Razai*. In common idiom, this means that the Truth of the *Mool Mantar* (here equated with God as *Razai* or the Owner of the Will) expresses itself in its Creation through *Hukam* - variously understood as Order, Command, Writ or Will. It is to this Divine Will that we must conform in order to become *sachiara* or embodiments of Truth. This is Guru Nanak's

construction of the Gurmat ideal - described variously as *Sachiyar*, *Gurmukh*, *Saṁt*, *Bhagat*, *Gursikh*, *Jan*, *Sevak* and *Brahmgyani* in *Gurbani*. For our purposes, we will use the term *Gurmukh*, literally, one facing the *Guru* or being *Guru*-oriented.

A *Gurmukh* is a composite and integrated personality, combining knowledge, action and devotion. Of the two ways, or orientations available to us, *Liv* and *Dhat*, a *Haumai* (ego) laden life or a *Manmukh* life is fueled by *Dhat*: that vicious cycle of our daily grind (or rat race) that snares us into the worldly web of *Maya* (constant change) causing us to lose our inner bearing and spiritual compass. Becoming a *Gurmukh* is to heed our inner voice, to see through the veil of *Maya*. A *Gurmukh* balances *Dhat* with *Liv* or the movement inwards and cultivates his inner environment through the application of Guru Nanak's recommended spiritual technology of attentive listening (*Suniyeh*) and immersion in the *Shabad* (Word). By choosing the right balance (*Liv* vs. *Dhat*) and invoking the power of attentive listening (also referred to as *dhyana*), a *Gurmukh's* consciousness finds its inner centre where the writ of *Hukam* becomes clear. *Hukam* becomes the lighthouse, providing clarity of purpose and direction as it guides us across the sea of life.

The practice of attentive listening (*dhyana*) also cultivates qualities like compassion, contentment and service that can flower and bloom. Combined with the self-regulating restraint and discipline that manifests as inner devotion and love of God (*bhau*), these form the foundation and the roadmap of a *Gurmukh's* life. The cultivation of inner virtues (devotion) is what gives a *Gurmukh* the necessary purity of motive, integrity of action and autonomy to transcend dogma ('*mannai mug na chalai panth*'), materialistic bias and narcissistic self-obsession (*Haumai*). A *Gurmukh* pulls away from the lure and pull of established mental patterns - exemplified by our attachment to instinctive behavior such as *kām*, *krodh*, *lobh*, etc. and moves towards the call of *Hukam* through the practice of the discipline of *Naam*. Outwardly, a *Gurmukh* life may appear conventional, but inwardly, a very different consciousness is at work. A *Gurmukh* does not live simply for individual goals or accomplishments - biological, social, political or economic - but is committed to a higher or larger purpose, namely, to act as an instrument of *Hukam* to create a new "social blueprint" or social order that

is characterised by *Halemi Raj*. This is Guru Nanak's ideal person, a model that we have to emulate. This central teaching was amplified and explained by succeeding Gurus in no uncertain terms, and eventually institutionalised as the *Khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singh.

## Sikhi: The World View

Here it would be especially pertinent to ask, "What sort of world did the Guru envision?"

In his essay, *The Global Vision That Was*, Dr IJ Singh makes the point that Guru Nanak's message of "hopeful faith tempered with reason, gender and caste equality" was institutionalised by his successors and sealed by Guru Gobind Singh in the institution of the *Khalsa*, giving Sikhs "democratic institutions of accountability, transparency and participatory self-governance." Drawing from *Gurbani*, Dr. Singh suggests that the pact that binds Sikhs is no ordinary one and quite unlike the modern nation-state that is bound by ties of blood, or race and contained in a geographical or territorial boundary. While others may be bound by blood-ties, caste affiliations, or political power, Sikhs have a covenant with Waheguru that "pervades all." Sikhs, he concludes, are a nation without borders, a global community founded on the bedrock of institutions of *Sangat*, *Langar* and *Pangat*. A true manifestation of the notion of *E Pluribus Unum*! This is the uniqueness of *Gurbani*, its universality and applicability to every corner of the world.

But for Sikhs to spread this message, they have to become *Gurmukhs* first.

## The KhojGurbani Project

With the Guru as Guide and Mentor, *KhojGurbani* (*KhojGurbani.com*) was launched on Vaisakhi of 2014 as an online portal, with the aim of becoming a one-stop resource for anyone wishing to deepen and enrich their relationship with the Guru. *KhojGurbani's* guiding philosophy rests on the conviction that every Sikh must commit to a lifelong apprenticeship to the Guru by engaging in a holistic, collaborative and social model of learning that includes inquiry, thought, contemplation and discernment.

Through the established kinship of *Sangat*, *KhojGurbani* hopes to leverage available technology and collaborative learning models to work towards a common, shared purpose: namely, the creation of a

new corpus of knowledge to further our understanding of Gurbani. Specifically, *KhojGurbani* hopes to generate synergies between *Sangats* globally to the development of a commentary on the Guru Granth Sahib, a contemporary translation as well as the compilation of a Gurmat dictionary.

## The Project

One initiative that has come about is the *KhojGurbani* Project or *Young Minds: Sikh Global Leadership of the Future*. It aims to create a collaborative educational framework to provide *Gurmat* training to children of ages 6-18. The goal is to create an ongoing pipeline of contemporary *Gurmukhs*: the ideal person that Guru Nanak gave us as a model. A cadre of Sikhs who are grounded and trained in *Gurmat*, as they are in contemporary science and technology: *Gurmat* theologians and academic scholars rolled into one. We need such a nucleus of trained people to revisit and re-interpret the eternal truth of *Gurbani* in the light of our current understanding. This is an undertaking that successive generations must take on and is implied in the concept of *Gur-Chela* and *Guru Panth*. No theology can hope to sustain itself if it does not address contemporary concerns. This suggestion, of course, is not new, nor is the idea exclusively mine.

How is this different from existing training?

The *KhojGurbani* Project is of the view that education and educational systems should take the lead in questioning, and if necessary, raising controversy over foundational questions of the future of our planet: what kind of future should we strive for? The educational system today unhesitatingly and blindly serves the dominant socio-economic model: a high-tech corporate capitalist model that relies on individualism, competition, consumption and competition.

The system is teaching skills that will help students adjust and adapt to a society of large corporations, bureaucracies and institutions.

But is it offering alternatives?

Like Guru Nanak, Sikhs must ask and challenge existing orthodoxies: political, economic and religious. Can we instill the wisdom of a *Gurmukh* in our children so that they can survive – and thrive - in this structure without being co-opted by it? Can they ask the uncomfortable questions? Do students have the capacity to envision another kind of future, one where a fulfilling life is possible without being so dependent on technology?

Guru Nanak challenged the elites of his time – the *Yogis*, *Brahmins* and *Mullahs* and condemned the



political and economic corruption and exploitation that he witnessed. Can we create *Gurmukhs* to follow in his footsteps?

## Approach

The prototype is to identify five *Sangats* across the globe that will volunteer five families with children in the desired age range. As of this writing, there is interest in Boston, MA, Columbus OH, Brisbane, Australia, Chicago IL.

The key will be to deliver to the 6-8 year olds (or the appropriate age group) relevant Gurbani based material. For each age group, the outcome or expectation will be pre-defined. In the case of 6-8 year olds, memorisation of *Bani*, identification of the *Gurmukhi* alphabet and *Saakhis* will be central components. Each day, the participant will receive the relevant package and be expected to spend no more than 15-20 minutes. The package will be, with the help of the volunteer parent, incorporated seamlessly into the child's regular homework. The aim is that the process should appear seamless to the child.

Incentives will be provided according to age. For instance, a 6-year-old might be incented to complete memorisation of particular *Banis* in a certain time frame in return for a gadget that appeals to their age group. This process will continue until the child is ready to go to College. Between the ages of 6-8 and 18, the expectation is that there will be greater assimilation of Gurbani and Gurmat. Along the way, our hope is to also develop a broader framework that could help children with tutoring, coaching and mentoring with their regular, conventional education. This will have the beneficial effect of also creating a pool of Sikh adults who can function as mentors and tutors. The objective of the project is to ensure that by the time a child has turned 18 years of age, he/she should have completed one reading of the Guru Granth Sahib with a line by line understanding; memorised the 5 *Banis*; have the ability to perform *Kirtan* understands the Sikh leadership model. In addition, the child should have received ongoing development in extracurricular skills: both in sports, training in arms and public speaking ability. These boys and girls – our contemporary *Gurmukhs* – should invite the attention of the best institutions in the world and be able to pick and choose their desired professional training. One beneficial by-product of this process is that adult parents, who may not be that well

versed in Gurbani, will also get an education as they help their children.

If we can fire up even a small handful of kids, imagine the global impact!

The purpose of this Project is to reclaim Sikhi in its pristine purity by creating a new body of knowledge and new approach in understanding Gurbani that will serve as a counter to the subjective identity formation that Sikh children experience around the world because of being a minority. *Gurmukhs* are not created overnight, nor can future generation of Sikhs produce *Gurmukhs* if they do not engage with Gurbani daily and incessantly. That is what this Project hopes to accomplish: to fill the world with contemporary sages who will look beyond their bellies and work in the service of humankind.



Ravinder Singh Taneja spent his formative years in Singapore and Delhi and has lived in the US since 1976. His consuming passion is Sikhi in all its flavours and dimensions. He is the convenor of the Talking Stick, a weekly online colloquium devoted to a dialogue around Gurbani that appears on the online magazine, [Sikhchic.com](http://Sikhchic.com). Ravinder has served as the Executive Director of the Sikh Research Institute and is currently on its Board of Directors. He is also on the Editorial Board of *Khaj Gurbani* an online crowdsourcing platform that aims to provide Sikhs with educational resources. He moderates a weekly online discussion on Gurbani and Gurmat.

# Sukhmani Sahib

## The Jewel of Peace

**I**t was a great blessing in my life that the Guru gave me the opportunity to spend eight years meditating upon and doing a poetic interpretation of Guru Arjan Dev ji's *Sukhmani Sahib*. I wanted to share some of my experiences while undertaking this translation. For me, translating the Gurbani has been a profoundly challenging and emotionally intimate act. The reality is that "I" don't translate *Gurbani*. *Gurbani* translates me. And by that I mean, in order to find an English rendition of a line of *Gurmukhi*, there is a need to go deep into the original, with whatever linguistic and

meditative capacity is at my disposal, to imbibe it. To imbibe what the Guru is saying.

While working on the *Sukhmani Sahib*, I became acutely aware of how much this particular *bani* speaks to the issue of non-duality. Guru Arjan Dev challenges us on multiple levels to get our egos out of the way and to see the One in absolutely everything.

Now, while this may sound mystically very correct and proper, but actually in the emotional truth of life, such a perspective is brutally challenging. And while

working on *Sukhmani Sahib*, it was not unusual for me to go into various “healing crisis” in relation to different passages. In other words, what the Guru said provoked me so intensely, that I would cry or be angry for days, struggling to accept the meaning.

Slowly, over time, what I came to understand is that the Guru stands with us through all our trials and tribulations. And that the Light of the Divine still exists within every player, no matter how painful the game. Even now, when I go back and re-read this translation, I watch my ego get provoked by the simple truth that Guru Arjan Dev is trying to share. It is all One. So do not get caught in the play of illusion. Just remember and merge with the One.

I am sharing some passages from this particular translation and offer some reflections about what those passages mean to me, in light of the Guru’s guidance about non-duality.

The first passage I would like to reflect upon– is the Third Ashtapadee, Sixth verse.

3-6

*Among all people.  
That person is the greatest leader  
Who erases his pride*

*In the company of those  
Who live by purity, grace and discipline.*

*Consider that person the highest of all  
Who knows within himself  
What his weaknesses are.*

*The mind that becomes the dust  
Beneath everyone’s feet*

*Such a mind constantly perceives  
The Divine Reality in every heart.*

*When the darkest, most difficult thoughts  
Within the mind get destroyed*

*Then a person shall look upon the entire Universe  
As a beloved friend.*

*Happiness and sorrow  
Become equal in his eyes.*

*Then, Nanak,  
Neither vice nor virtue can affect him.*

One of the most powerful concepts offered within this passage is that the person who is the highest has created an awareness within himself or herself of their weaknesses, of the worst parts of themselves. And when the darkness of the mind gets destroyed, then the sight arises where everything and everyone is Beloved.

Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji used to say, “Everyone knows your weaknesses except you.” In other words, humans are uncomfortable seeing the worst aspects of ourselves. We have a natural defence mechanism to block the sight of our own “stuff” and that defence mechanism comes from a sense of shame. To see our worst creates so much shame inside, that we have to block, hide or run away from it in order to protect ourselves.

But when we refuse to own our shadow, that is actually what creates the dualistic vision. We project



our shadow onto other people. The difficulties in our lives, which come from our own darkness and weaknesses, we tend to blame others for those. And it is that process of projecting the shadow out “there” that blocks us from experiencing the One in everything.

So in this verse, Guru Arjan Dev puts the problem of duality where it belongs – squarely on our own shoulders. That we have a responsibility to work through the shame and see our own weaknesses. To confront and destroy our own darkness. Because when we do that, the Truth can reveal itself. When everything becomes Beloved, it means everything we see, we see as part of the dance of the One. Which means that the polarity of happiness and sadness, vice and virtue no longer create a reaction within us. I feel happy. I see You. I feel sad. I see You. Someone acts virtuously – I see You. Someone acts in vice. I see You. I see the Beloved in all.

Another challenge to the mind to perceive non-duality is anger. And Guru Arjan Dev addresses this poison of anger in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ashtapadi.

In the first verse of the fifth Ashtapadi, Guru Arjan Dev Ji writes:

*After receiving ten objects,  
His confidence gets destroyed  
Because of one object he did not receive.*

*If the one was not given,  
And the other ten were taken away, as well,  
Then what would this idiot have to say?*

*No remedy exists  
Outside the Master.*

And then, in the 5<sup>th</sup> Ashtapadi, 2<sup>nd</sup> verse,

*You, Yourself are the Banker  
Whose wealth cannot be measured  
And You bestow Your capital upon us.*

*Eating and drinking,  
We use it for our pleasure.*

*Then, Banker, from the deposit You made,  
You take something back,*

*Causing the ignorant mind  
To become angry.*

*Because of that anger, we lose Your trust  
And then our own confidence disappears.*

One of the illusions we have in life is that our own ego, our own will, is responsible for gain and loss. For

what we have and don't have. For what comes and goes.

And when we lose something, when something gets taken away, the mind that cannot recognise that the One is responsible for what we receive in life, reacts with anger. Anger creates a block in the flow of communication between the finite and infinity. And when the trust breaks between the finite and infinity through that anger, we lose our own confidence. Why?

At the level of the Ji or the level of the Inner Being, it knows that life comes and goes by the Hand of the One. But anger destroys our sensitivity to see and feel the One. And so ultimately, when we become angry for losing something, we make ourselves highly insecure. We lose the sense of that touch of the One. And it is only that touch that can give us a true sense of security throughout life.

It is only through that sight and touch of the One that a person can find true security.

This insight is offered at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse:

*Whatever your capital, place it  
Before the One.*

*Trust and accept  
The order of the Creator  
On your forehead.*

*By doing so, you shall flourish  
Four times over.*

*O Naanak,  
The Master's kindness  
Extends forever.*

So the key lesson for the mind is to surrender, accept, trust whatever the One does. To not fight or argue or manipulate. But to live in acceptance. And that spirit of acceptance that what comes and goes is controlled by a Loving Consciousness much greater than our Ego as surrender ultimately creates prosperity.

This Ashtapadi completes with an amazing affirmation. That the kindness of the Creator never ends. So it encourages the mind to trust and accept the order, and see what unfolds in life as part of a plan created by a Master who is kind – not vengeful.

*Sukhmani Sahib* is filled with verses that go into ecstasy about the One in all.

*Why forget the One  
Who does not deny anyone's efforts?*

*Why forget the One  
Who knows what you have done?*

*Why forget the One  
Who gives absolutely everything?*

*Why forget the One  
Who is the life of every creature?*

*Why forget the One  
Who protects You in the fire?*

*Through the gift of the sound of Wisdom,  
Some rare person realises this.*

*Why forget the One  
Who draws the poison from you*

*Who breaks through the cycle of rebirth?*

*The perfect Teacher gives me  
The understanding of the Essence of Truth.*

*Servant Naanak meditates  
On the Creator, alone.*

The title of this bani is *Sukhmani*. This means that the mind is directed to peace. This passage speaks very simply and directly to the underlying instructions of non-duality. Mind – focus on the Creator. Do not focus on the Creation. Watch the creation, sure. Enjoy the creation – absolutely. But do not let your mind get lost in that creation. Stay focused on the One who has staged the show. When the mind can anchor itself to the One – then it can create ease and relaxation. Because why should the ego hustle and hassle, when there is a Doer? Let the Doer go. And let you not forget. This is the ultimate formula to attain peace.

*Sukhmani Sahib* is the most outrageously positive spiritual exposition. That was another shock that I had to metabolise while translating *Sukhmani Sahib*. There are so many amazing, incredible positive statements about the possibilities of human life and the human condition. And this set of incredibly positive affirmations challenges the mind to see life in the true spirit of *Chardi Kalaa*.

It made me realise what a trying time Guru Arjan Dev had to go through at the end of his life that he channeled this beautiful prayer, asking the human race to see the One in everything, to view the One as

the Doer of everything. And then, while sitting on the hot plate, Guru Arjan Dev had to prove this to himself. He had to sit there and take the torture, the pure, raw, hot torture, that was going on around him, day after day after day after day, and just keep seeing the One in all of it. No matter what the personal cost to him. To smile through the suffering and only see the One.

When it comes to the issue of non-duality, there are many extreme yogic practices to get the mind to enter into that point of view. *Sukhmani Sahib* opens a portal for the person to enter into the practice of non-duality simply through the normal ups and down, trials and tribulations of everyday life. That seeing the One in the good times and the bad times, in the pleasure and the pain, in the love and the heart-break, gives us the ability to go through life with equanimity. And in a world filled with terrifying, difficult, challenging situations, grace and equanimity is what the mind needs most of all.



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# The Mystique of One

## Its profound applicability to life

Legend goes that when Guru Nanak was living in a town called Sultanpur Lodhi, one day while bathing in a river he disappeared into it. Everyone thought he had drowned. He returned after three days and made the proclamation that “There is no Hindu and there is no Musalman” and thereafter, he proceeded with reciting the Jap ji, the first of many divine revelations he received.

Authoritative Sikh scholars (Bhai Vir Singh, Singh Sahib Giani Mani Singh) are of the opinion that Jap ji summarises the message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and the essence of Jap ji has been distilled in the Moolmantra, the opening verse is “*Ik Ongkar Sat naam Karta Purak Nirbhu Nirvair Akaal Murat Ajooni Sehbnahe Gurparsaad.*”

*Ik* or *Ek*, is germane to understanding the basic premise of Sikhi because the entire expanse of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is an exploration of the mystique and munificence of *Ik*. I will attempt to move from a conceptual understanding of *Ik* to its experiential aspect and the profound impact of its application in our lived reality.

Guru Nanak chose *IK* (numeral One) to describe the essence of the Creator. According to Bhai Vir Singh (Santhya SGGGS Pothi 1), *Ik* is not used as an adjective that describes a noun, but is used as a noun, the name of a person. The rest of the Mool Mantra describes the uniqueness and vastness of *Ik*, endowing the *Ik* of Jap ji with a depth of meaning that is as fathomless as the nature of *Ik*.

*Ik* is placed before *Ong*, the age old symbol representing the auspicious sound manifestation of the Creator. But Guru Nanak opened the vowel *ura* at the top to indicate its expanse as *Kar* (dynamic action). He used the imagery of *Ongkar* to embody the manifestation of *Ik* into many.

*Ongkar eko rav reha sab ekas mahe samavego*  
*Eko roop eko bahu rangi sab ekat bachan chalavego*  
*Gurmukh eko ek pachhata gurmukh hoay lakhavego*  
(SGGS 1310)

The One and Only Creator of the Universe is all-pervading everywhere. All shall once again merge into the One. His One Form has one, and many

colours; He leads all according to His One Word.  
|| 4 || The Gurmukh realises the One and Only Lord  
is revealed to the Gurmukh.

Furthermore, Ik is both formless and immanent in  
creation.

*Agam agochar roop na rekheya,  
khojat khojat ghat ghat dekhya*

(SGGS P838)

*Fathomless, invisible, without form*

*Upon searching is found in each and every heart.*

Even as Ongkar diffuses in every particle of the  
creation, it remains inviolable and intact as a singular  
and unique entity.

*Ekam ekamkaar nirlala, amar ajoni jaat na jalaa*

*The One Universal Creator is unique, immortal, unborn,  
beyond social class or involvement.*

(SGGS P 38)

Mool Mantra goes on to state another quality of Ik  
which is inherent in its quintessence: Ik is constant,

does not vary or change. It is the only truth because  
anything that changes is not truth, it is transitory.  
Truth however is stable and unvarying.

*Aad sach jugad sach, haibhi sach*

*Nanak hosi bhi Sach*

*True in the primal beginning, true throughout the ages,*

*True here and now, O Nanak forever and ever true.*

(SGGS P1)

Sat is followed by Naam which literally means  
name, but is not intended to give Ik, the nameless  
cosmic force a name. Naam refers to the vibration,  
light, the spirit, the essence if you will, of the creative  
force. Naam also refers to the innumerable qualities  
of the Doer. Sat Naam is the essence of the timeless  
supreme truth that words fail to describe, eyes are  
unable to see, and the mind cannot comprehend.

Karta Purakh further explains the doer aspect of Naam  
that with one utterance manifested a dynamic Universe  
with infinite forms, immutable laws, held together by the  
Will of the Creator and infused with its essence.



The Mool Mantra describes Ik as Nirbhau and Nirvair. Being the Creative force, Ik is also the nurturer, the benevolent provider, the protector with no hatred, angst, malevolence towards anyone. Being above and beyond its creation, the first cause, and indebted to none, Ik is fearless. Furthermore, the creator Ik is not far from its creation; it is a part of it, immanent in it and watches over it. But while creation ebbs and flows, forms and dissolves, shapes and reshapes, Ik remains undying (*akal murat*), unborn (*ajooni*), self-created (*saibhang*) entity within the churning and outside of it.

It is not surprising that human language is unable to convey the mystical phenomenon of Ik. It can be fathomed only by the grace of an enlightened soul (Guru). As the creator and nurturer Ik is always kind,

forgiving, benevolent, merciful, and endlessly giving. Dynamic creation extends from Ik and reverts back into it. As the rays of the light merge with the sun, and rivers lose themselves in the ocean, the dispersive light of the Creator comes back into its fold.

*Suraj Kiran milay jal ka jal hua raam*

*Jyoti jyot rali sampuran thea raam*

*The rays of light merge with the sun, and water merges with water. One's light blends with the Light, and one becomes totally perfect.*

Such is the playful nature of Ik. In fact SGGS refers to creation as *Waho waho kavad data masa*, an epic play of the Divine. The play is interactive. We are the performing actors that crisscross with the Divine, and other actors who are part of the caste.



The Creator made the play complex by throwing in some warring elements:

*Eho jug aap upayean kar choj vidaan*

*Panch dhaat vich payean moh zhoot guman (SGGS P786)*

*The Supreme One created the world and staged this wondrous play*

*Within the five elements of the body were infused attachment, falsehood and conceit.*

As if this were not enough some smokescreens were also added to throw the players off:

*Ekam eke aap upayeya dubedha dooja tribadh maya*

*First, the One created the One; second, the sense of duality; third, the three-phased Maya.*

(SGGS 113)

We have to out game the manoeuvres of *Maya* (a catch all for everything that distracts) that clouds our mind and takes us away from constant alignment with the Divine and *Bharam* the illusion of separateness from the Divine and our co-actors that propels us to work against each other rather than for the benefit of one another.

The best outcomes are achieved only when we recognise the oneness that connects us - each one of us carries the same spark, is fashioned from the same clay and our goal is to merge back into the Light we come from which is also our true nature.

*Ya yug mein eke ko aayea, janmat moehoe mohni maya*

*We have come into this world to become One,*

*But ever since birth, we have been enticed by the fascination of Maya.*

(SGGS 251)

An important step towards clearing the veil of *brahm* is mindfully recognising:

*Bahar bheetar eko jaano eh gur gyan bataee*

*Jan Nanak bin aapa cheeney mitay na brahm ki kae*

(SGGS 684)

*Wisdom lies in recognising that within us and outside of us, there is only One reality.*

*Without self-reflection the algae of doubt doesn't go away.*

Scientists and spiritualists are converging in seeing the connectedness of all things. We hear phrases like "unified field" from physicists and "ecology of

oneness" from Sufi mystics. Our prejudices, biases, violence in words and in action stem from our ego and not from our essence. It is the dominance of ego that over arches the strong hold of *kaam, krodh, lobh moh ahnkar* (lust, anger, greed, attachment and arrogance). The conquest of ego entails constant battling of two opposing forces – Ego and Oneness.

The role of ego is to create walls, to serve the self, and to perpetuate selfishness. One is all embracing love that simply put brings down the walls. This is the game that is played out, won or lost on the stage of life. The tension is constant. The narrow trail that leads to wining has been described as finer than a strand of hair, sharper than a razor's edge. The trail takes us away from the swamp of exploitation and steers us towards spiritual responses to daily challenges :choices and decisions that do not merely serve material gains but help us garner true wealth that comes from preserving and sustaining the unifying presence that ties us to one another and to our eco system.

The true wealth is earned by strengthening the sound vibration of *naam* in our heart through chanting, seeking guidance through prayer, and living by the principles laid out by the sages through the centuries. The synergy of daily practice and grace (*gurprasad*) enables us to expand our sense of self. Alignment with One enables our actions to be for the larger good of all. We find inner fulfillment and outer peace. Contradictions and conflicts are effaced in the experience of a unified whole.



**Jessi Kaur** is the author of three highly acclaimed children's books. She travels extensively to deliver seminars on Sikhi and is a frequent contributor to popular and scholarly publications.

# ‘Kaljug Mein Kirtan Pardhana’

## How Gurbani Kirtan Helps in Applying the Message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib



**Bhayee Baldeep Singh, one of the most powerful exponents of Gurbani Kirtan extant**

**W**e often think of kaljug (an era of vices) as a distant notion that is not of our making. However Gurbani tells us in numerous sabads that we are immersed in lifestyles that sustain kaljug, lifestyles caught in a web of greed (*lobh*) and arrogance (*ahankar*) to such an extent that we are in denial about them; we live in delusion (*bharam*). In this paper I discuss how gurbani kirtan (the musical rendering of gurbani) can help us overcome the social ills we perpetuate, often without awareness.

I will make my point with the help of a well-known *sakhi* (life story) about Guru Nanak, and a *sabad* by Guru Ramdas, as well as its musical rendition by the most renowned ragi of the last several decades, Bhai Harjinder Singh Srinagar Wale and his brother Bhai Maninder Singh. A thread running through these three

that I will focus on will be the Gurbani concepts of *har-ras* (divine sensations) and *an-ras* (other sensations).

The painting of Guru Nanak dev ji (on next page) is picturisation of a *sakhi* which describes one of the many ways Guru Nanak confronted actions and lifestyles that sustain kaljug. In this *sakhi*, Guru Nanak rejects the invitation of Malik Bhago, who is rich in material wealth but poor in ethical values, and accepts the hospitality of Bhai Lalo, who instead is poor in wealth but rich in moral virtues. Through this action, Guru Nanak teaches us how to conduct our everyday social lives. He is setting an example that we should choose those we associate with on the basis of their ethical values rather than the value of their wealth and power. Indeed, that is the very concept of *sadh sangat*: the company of the ethical. In this *sakhi*, Guru Nanak



is also setting an example of courage, in exposing wrong-doing and standing up against it. He squeezes the food prepared at the homes of both men to expose Malik Bhago's vices through the blood that oozes from his food, and Bhai Lalo's virtues through the milk that flows from his. The sakhi uses the metaphor of *ras*, literally as juice and essence.

By comparing the pure *ras* in the food of the humble and honest Bhai Lalo with the impure *ras* in the arrogant and dishonest Malik Bhago's food, Guru Nanak is also teaching that what we ingest, matters. In many sabads in the Guru Granth Sahib, we are asked to drink, eat, taste and savour *har-ras* and *amrit-ras* – the experience of the divine. These have ethical connotations too. *Har* is a word for the divine that refers to the divine moral virtue of removing suffering. Amrit is that which does not die, which is everlasting, that is truth and truthfulness. *Ras* here then is an experiential sensation of divine virtues. By incorporating these divine sensations into one's body, one renders it capable of divine actions, such as empathy and compassion for the less fortunate, and courage to speak the truth to power, that Guru Nanak is showing in the above cited sakhi.

*An-ras* on the other hand is described in Gurbani as the experience of other *ras*, of excessive consumption and worldly pleasures, as for example, in the following shabad.

ਗਉੜੀ ਬੈਰਾਗਣਿ ਮਹਲਾ ੪ ॥

*Gaurī bairāgaṇ mēhlā 4.*

Gauree Bairagaan, Fourth Mehl.

ਮੇਰੇ ਰਾਮ ਇਹ ਨੀਚ ਕਰਮ ਹਰਿ ਮੇਰੇ ॥

*Mere rām eh nīch karam har mere.*

My Waheguru, these are my unethical actions.

ਗੁਣਵੰਤਾ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਦਇਆਲੁ ਕਰਿ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਬਖਸਿ ਅਵਗਣ ਸਭਿ ਮੇਰੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

*Guṇvanṭā har har daiyāl kar kirpā bakḥas avgaṇ sabḥ mere. rahāo.*

Virtuous, remover of suffering, compassionate, bless me with your Grace, forgive my vices.

ਕੰਚਨ ਨਾਰੀ ਮਹਿ ਜੀਉ ਲੁਭਤੁ ਹੈ ਮੇਰੁ ਮੀਠਾ ਮਾਇਆ ॥

*Kanḥan nārī meh jīo lubḥat hai moh mīṭhā māiyā.*

With my being/inclination immersed in the greed for wealth, sexual pursuits, worldly pleasures,

ਘਰ ਮੰਦਰ ਘੋੜੇ ਖੁਸੀ ਮਨੁ ਅਨ ਰਸਿ ਲਾਇਆ ॥

*Ghar mandar ghore kḥusī man an-ras lāiā.*

And my happiness linked to conspicuous consumption, I am absorbed in *an-ras*.

ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਚਤਿ ਨ ਆਵਈ ਕਉ ਛੂਟਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਇਆ ॥੧॥

*Har parabh chit na āvī kio chḥūtā mere har rāiā. 1*

I do not remember divine virtues and, not surprisingly, have lost my divine.

As this sabad emphasises, *an-ras* leads one away from divine virtues and ethical actions. Conspicuous consumption is particularly seen in gurbani as unethical action, because this leads to arrogance, and to further greed. Arrogance deprives one of the ability to see and treat all human beings as equal and deserving of the human dignity. Greed compromises one's ethical principles. And both these escape the awareness of the person subject to them, making her/him a contributor to the preservation of *kaljug*.

To draw people away from the charms that the wealthy and powerful can offer, Guru Nanak travelled far and wide singing his songs that spoke of the divine and of divine virtues, of ethics and social justice. Indeed the theme of this sakhi, and of daily ethical action, is found in many sabad of our Guru sahiban, such as:

ਊਠਤ ਬੈਠਤ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਧਿਆਈਐ ਅਨਦਨਿ ਸੁਕਰਤਿ ਕਰੀਐ ॥

*Ūṭhat baiṭhat har har dhiāīai anḍin sukarit karīai.*

As you go about, contemplate the divine; day in and out, enact good actions. Guru Granth Sahib: 621

Our Gurus not only used the medium of music to communicate their message, they explicitly proclaimed musical rendition as the most effective means of accessing the divine and divine virtues: *Kaljug mein kirtan pardhana.*

Why? Why is the musical rendering of Gurbani the most efficacious means in an era of vices?

The answer lies in music's ability to affect us. Music moves us; it creates action tendencies. Some aspects of music that are particularly effective in affecting us are intonation, phrasing, repetition and variation-and voice quality.

Music creates *ras* in us. This can be *har-ras* or *an-ras* depending on the text (lyrics), context, associations, memories and histories. Music, including rāg music, can generate *an-ras* and lead us away from the divine. For example, music in product advertisements leads to unnecessary and conspicuous consumption, which further leads to arrogance and greed, trapping one in a loop of vices beyond one's awareness.

When music is paired with gurbani, it can generate *har-ras*. It can move us to enact divine virtues, to ethical actions. Listening to gurbani kirtan, especially with sadh sangat amplifies the message of gurbāni, the *ras* from gurbani.

In the following *short* on music analysis, the phrasing, repetition and variation are beautifully executed by Bhai Harjinder Singh and Bhai Maninder Singh in their rendition of the sabad discussed above, ਮੇਰੇ ਰਾਮ ਇਹ ਨੀਚ ਕਰਮ ਹਰੀ ਮੇਰੇ ॥ (*Mere Rām eh nīch karam har mere*).

The first *rahao* line is sung as two melodic lines. In the first melodic line, the initial sabad phrase, *Mere Ram*, is repeated thrice, starting from the tonic note, *Sa*. Spanning the octave to reach the upper *Sa*, the melody carries us up toward Waheguru. The repetition of *Mere Ram* intensifies the address and plea to Waheguru. Listening and singing along, *ram-ras* begins to flow in the body, opening one to the rest of the message of the sabad. The second melodic line is used for the rest of the first sabad line, *eh nīch karam har mere*. This sabad phrase is also repeated thrice, but the melodic line starts from the upper *Sa* and moves down, matching the introspective mood of the sabad text. Both melodic lines end on *Ma*, tying the two together.



As the sabad progresses, a supporting *ragi* often repeats melodic variations of the phrases sung by the main *ragis* in call and response form, adding to intensity of the address to Waheguru.

The phrasing in rest of the sabad is also masterful. Each phrase of each line of the sabad is sung with a well-fitting melodic phrase, the pauses in between aiding comprehension and emotional affect. The overall result is *ras-bhinaa* (ras-drenched) kirtan that moves the body and fills it with *har-ras*. This is the hallmark of Bhai Harjinder Singh's compositions and kirtan singing, which has brought *har-ras* to many millions of Sikhs.

*Har-ras* brings peace and relief from the injustices rampant in kaljug. It can also move one to action to counter kaljug, to have the courage to be truthful, humble, and selfless, instead of becoming collusive with and a participant in dishonesty, arrogance and greed.

However, the effectiveness of *har-ras* in moving us to ethical action is counteracted by all the *an-ras* flowing in our bodies from our immersion in a consumption oriented lifestyle. Typically, we spend most of time in activities that produce *an-ras*, and very little time in activities that produce *har-ras*. The music too which we choose or which plays in the background in our everyday environment intensifies *an-ras*. As an example, the background music in shopping malls is designed to increase consumer spending. With the immersion in such environment and activities, the effect of a little bit of kirtan listening is overtaken very quickly by the shift to worldly pleasures, taking us away from *har-ras* and ethical actions. The derivation of pleasure from consumption and egotism dulls our ability to be aware of the compromises we make to Sikh values in our daily choices.

Guru Nanak's example from the above sakhi is actually very difficult for us to follow. Not only are we unable to speak truth to power, we yearn the company of the wealthy and powerful, often irrespective of their everyday ethical values (such as arrogance, greed, and duplicity), and therein lies a significant way that we on a daily basis play a role in sustaining kaljug, because we actually end up further empowering those with poor ethics.

However, Guru Nanak's example is not impossible to follow—if we make a conscious effort. If we bring focus and mindfulness into our daily choices

and actions, and inculcate an awareness of their consequences on ourselves, upon others and on the sustenance of kaljug, we can be strong agents of our Guru Nanak's vision of an egalitarian and just world where divine virtues prevail.

In fact, the more we practice the Guru's ways, the easier this becomes. And that is the gurbani concept of *sahaj*. Further more, the more we practice ethical action, the more pleasurable it becomes. Our body wants more *har-ras*, and less *an-ras*.

Fortunately, Guru Nanak blessed us with the gift of gurbani kirtan. It is a great resource for getting *har-ras* integral in our bodies, and for moving towards everyday choices and actions that, instead of being self-oriented and supportive of kaljug, are self-less and disruptive of kaljug. This *har-ras* is essential to our ability to stay away from vices such as greed and arrogance that are some of our daily ills sustaining kaljug. We must give *har-ras* a chance!



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Inderjit has published and presented widely for the academy as well as the community. She is currently working on a book that explores the meaningfulness of kirtan in the everyday lives of Sikhs.

# Young Voices at the Conference 2016

A novel feature introduced at the 2016 Conference was two sessions of speeches by Sikh children on 'The context of Sri Guru Granth Sahib' and 'Is it OK to eat meat according to Gurbani?'

The speakers were Joymaneet Kaur, Ekam Singh Brar and Sukhveer Singh Karlkut and excerpts from their speeches are reproduced.

## Context of Sri Guru Granth Sahib

As **Joymaneet Kaur** put it, Guru Granth Sahib is the central religious scripture of Sikhism, regarded by Sikhs as the final, sovereign and eternal *living* Guru. She quoted Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki, the noted Sikh scholar, who had written many books on Sikhism and the Gurbani (*and Editorial Director of The Nishaan till his passing some years back*).

On the Guru Granth Sahib, Dr Neki had articulated on its meaning and significance. According to him, in the context of religious traditions, Guru Nanak Dev ji concentrated more on spirituality which is the common core of religious life. He rejected formalism and rituals, prevalent in society at that time. Guru Nanak respected all revelations of God and wrote these words which are in Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Nanak considered all men equal in the eyes of His God. He disapproved the caste system, individual

discrimination, gender inequality and strove to give women their rightful place. Guru Nanak Dev ji rejected Avtar-vad as set forth in Bhagvad Gita, because God, the Creator does not go into the cycle of birth and death.

In the context of divine revelations, Dr Neki wrote that Sikh Gurus have asserted that Guru Granth Sahib is a work of Divine Revelations. The Mool Mantra is an enunciation of the essence of God made by Guru Nanak Dev ji which is at the beginning of Guru Granth Sahib ji. The revelatory nature of Gurbani is testified by Guru Nanak Dev ji and is preserved in Guru Granth Sahib.

Within the politico-historical context, during the time of Guru Nanak Dev ji, the Lodhis were ruling India. They were very unjust, tyrannical, and corrupt. Guru Nanak Dev ji felt that the people were lacking morale. He wanted them to get rid of slavery and be free of fear.



Dr Neki further asserted that the Guru Granth Sahib as a scripture, is a holy text. Guru Granth Sahib has been light house of the spiritual life of the Sikh people for many centuries. It is not merely a scripture, but living spirit of the Gurus, thus designated as *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Prof. Owen has written that the Guru Granth Sahib is both unique and distinctive. The content of sacred books of many religions differ from the content of Guru Granth Sahib. The Abrahamic or Semitic scriptures have historical and biographical contents which refer to Jesus and Mohammad. Hindu religious literature is divided into two: Shruti and Smriti. Many other scriptures contain similar material. Those sacred books preach about men through whom the message of spiritual liberation was preached. But, in Guru Granth Sahib, the Sat Guru is Parmeshwar, God, the Waheguru.

The scripture itself plays a very important role in Sikhism. A gurdwara is a place where the scripture is installed. It is the Guru Granth Sahib that makes a gurdwara, and not a place that makes Guru Granth Sahib. Worship in Sikhism is done in presence of Guru Granth Sahib, and consists of singing or reading the Gurbani and explanation of holy hymns.

The Guru Granth Sahib is also unique for its attitudes to other religions. Guru Nanak was remarkable for his validation of other forms of religion and his attitude was one of critical universalism that is not found in other scriptures. Sikhs have no need to convert people, but have a need to practice the life style preached by the Guru.

As Prof Dhillon correctly says, "The principle of Spirit was the central unifying factor between Guru Nanak and his nine successors." Although the Gurus are different in physical form, they are of the same spirit. As a lamp, lights another lamp similarly the "spirit of Nanak" was enshrined in the successive Gurus.

The first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev ji was imbued with divine light of the Akal Purakh to fulfill God's will and mission in the world. When Guru Nanak conferred Guruship on Guru Angad Dev ji, the same *Jot* was passed on. In the same way, the Divine Light was passed from one guru to the next.

Guru Gobind Singh ji named the Pothis as Granth, consisting of two words, *Gur* and *Ant*

meaning eternal Guru. He asserted: "In future whoever wishes to seek enlightenment, guidance and solace, let him read the holy Granth. This is your Guru for eternity."

Dr. Ahmad writes that the Guru Granth Sahib is not only spiritual but also relevant in addressing social issues. He dwells on the dichotomy between *Gurmukh* and the *Manmukh*. A Gurmukh praises the Naam, and the fire of egotism is extinguished. The Lord abides within the mind of the Gurmukh. But, the self-willed Manmukhs are polluted with egoism, wickedness and desire.

The issue of the distinction between believers and non-believers and their co-existence in society is addressed in the Guru Granth Sahib by separating community and power from their mutual relations. Guru Granth Sahib teaches us to treat all humans as equal. Sikhism acknowledges and appreciates other religions and accepts their validity. This attitude helps the Sikhs understand and appreciate other religions and live in harmony with other faith communities. As such, the Gurus gave equal regard to saints from all traditions. Guru Arjun Dev ji had himself set an example by getting the foundation of Harimander Sahib laid by Saint Mian Mir.

Sikhism seeks to treat all human beings as spiritually equal irrespective of their religious belief. We must know Waheguru is present in everyone. We believe in God's love for all beings. Therefore, we conclude prayers to Waheguru seeking the welfare of all.



Joymaneet Kaur

She was followed by **Ekam Singh Brar**, who elucidated thus on Sri Guru Granth Sahib:

The intensity and emotion layered in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is evident at first glance. Its exquisite characterisations of Waheguru and extensive lyricism make for a compelling text with universal appeal. But in order to properly understand the purpose of this multi-layered text, we must first contextualise it.



Firstly, it is important to note the spirit of the times. At that time in India, there was a galaxy of holy men, such as Dhanna, Kabir, Farid, Ramanand, and Namdev. Their writings are included in Guru Granth Sahib not only to indicate religious solidarity but also to enhance the universal appeal of the Granth.

Additionally, preceding historical traditions played an important role. Guru Nanak believed that, to an extent, there was truth in all world religions. So he decided to preach spirituality instead of anchoring Sikhism to the dogma of other world religions. He separated elements of other religions that he found particularly distasteful and refused to include them in the Sikh faith. He sought to eliminate the repressive systems of prejudice and class warfare that plagued the society of his time.

ਸੂਰਜੁ ਏਕੇ ਰੁਤਿ ਅਨੇਕ ॥

As a reaction to preceding historical traditions, the Guru Granth Sahib became more than a spiritual text to also become a quintessential example of social equality. It is impossible to properly contextualise the Granth without also considering its context as a divine revelation: its source is Waheguru Himself. It

is ultimately a tribute to the glory of Waheguru, one commissioned by the creator himself.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣਹੁ  
ਗੁਰਸਿਖਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਮੁਹਹੁ ਕਢਾਏ ॥

So the Guru Granth is not just speculation on the nature of the Creator, it actually transcends theology through its status as divine revelation.

ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ  
ਗਿਆਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥

Finally, the aesthetic context of the Granth is especially notable. Guru Granth Sahib is constructed almost entirely in musical form through various raags. These raags are designed to elicit varying emotions. The language is really simple, but modified to fit the music it is crafted around. And the Gurus saw the musical medium as powerful enough to deliver the divine revelation so it's implemented consistently and expertly in the Granth.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib differs from the Abrahamic texts especially in its content, but also in its world view. The holy scriptures of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam and their ilk largely vacillate between discussing matters of historical and biographical content, while the authors of Guru Granth Sahib largely discuss matters of philosophy and spirituality. While the Abrahamic scripts speak of Allah and his disciple Mohammad, of God and his son Jesus, Guru Granth Sahib speaks of man and Waheguru and discusses the elevation of man through the Shabad which culminates with the sublation of the soul into Waheguru. Guru Granth Sahib is thus defined by its discourses on the wonder of Waheguru's grace.

In other words, those books are about men who preached spiritual liberation, while the Guru Granth Sahib is about us reaching spiritual liberation.

ਹਰਿ ਜੀਉ ਮਿਲੈ ਤਾ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬੂਝੈ ਚੀਨੈ ਸਬਦੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਹੇ ॥੮॥

In its approach to scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib proves itself similarly unique. While other scriptures are only valuable to the extent that they extol the virtues of their prophets, Guru Granth Sahib extols the virtues of Waheguru and His Sikhs. The attitude towards other religions depicted in the Sri Guru

Granth Sahib is respectfully critical. Guru Granth Sahib not only vindicates other religions, but testifies to the light of Waheguru and the lifestyle taught to us by the Gurus.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is consistent in its principle of Spirit. BS Dhillon explains that although the Gurus existed in linear succession, they “were One in Spirit.” Guru Granth Sahib is unified because all of the Gurus that wrote in it shared this common experience of the Spirit. All of the Gurus worked for the same end, even as they all had different physical appearances.

ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਤਿ ਪਾਈ ॥੨॥੧॥੭॥

All of Guru Nanak’s nine human successors recognised themselves as an instrument of God and maintained that they were simply translating the divine experience into hymns. They distanced their personages from their work by humbly referring to themselves as “Nanak.” This selfless devotion to the principle of Spirit over self was a unifying factor for the Sikh Gurus.

In his essay, Dr Imtiaz Ahmad mentions three contemporary social issues: a hedonistic society, individuals competing for displays of wealth, and economic inequality. He describes these as primarily the result of duality and the human condition. The human condition can be seen as the predisposition of humans to do both good and bad, an internal conflict that becomes compounded with the addition of religion. Why? Religion is a force that sees humans as imperfect beings working towards salvation and an ideal of “good.” Dr. Ahmad highlights that without religion to act as a moral anchor to the heavens, the human condition “has a natural propensity to deteriorate.” This is the human condition right here. It’s dealing with the human potential to be drawn to pleasure but simultaneously working towards harmony and spirituality.

This is the duality that Guru Granth Sahib addresses. One of the objectives of the Guru Granth Sahib is to nudge humanity away from vice and towards the pursuit of spiritual ascension. The duality creates a paradigm. Through this dichotomy, two types of men are made: the Gurmukh and the Manmukh. Although they were both reared in the smouldering ashes of maya, the two are distinctly different. The

Gurmukh is devoted to worship of Waheguru and practicing truth, but the manmukh is consumed with anger and egoism

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਮਨਮੁਖਿ ਮੁਗਧੁ ਗੁਬਾਰੁ ॥

Sikhism recognises that there is validity in all religions and encourages us to treat everyone with kindness. This mindset is the foundation of a healthy relationship with other religions and harmony with other faiths. This is why we pray “*sarbat da bhala*” because we respect and appreciate other religions. Sri Guru Granth calls on humans to tolerate religious pluralism and co-exist peacefully with those of others faith simply because we all have the same light of Waheguru inside us.

ਏਕੁ ਪਤਿਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੂ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰ ਹਾਈ ॥

This isn’t just taught: it is applied in Sikhism as well. The Gurus preached that we should give consideration to all religious leaders. Guru Arjan Dev even called upon Shah Mian Mir to lay the foundation of Sri Harmandir Sahib. The idea that all humans are ethically equal and deserve equal treatment was radical for the time, but seems more appropriate now, in the age of chaos, than it has ever been. This is the core of the Sikh religion. We must pray for the welfare of all. We must pray for each other. We are one in the eyes of Waheguru.



Ekam Singh Brar

Finally, it was **Sukhveer Singh Karlkut** who said, that the Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji embodies the spiritual compositions of our Gurus and other holy men. Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki had described many contexts surrounding this monumental work. In the first context, according to his work 'Spirit of the Times', he writes that there was great spiritual awareness during the time of the Gurus. Those who met Guru Nanak Dev ji were impressed by his humility and clear thinking. Furthermore, Guru ji created models for inter-faith dialogue.

In the second context, of 'Religious Traditions', Dr. Neki writes that Guru ji accepted religious traditions that concentrated on spirituality or the praise of God. However, any that were sacrificial or ritualistic were rejected. Guru ji viewed all men and women as equal in the eyes of God and advocated social justice for all.



In the third context, 'Aesthetic', he writes that while other scriptures are to be read or chanted, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is meant to be sung. It is arranged under a number of ragas of a peaceful tempo to match the spiritual nature of the text. "Our Gurus recognised that music is the medium which can make an inroad to our soul and cultivate unity in all those that hear it."

In the fourth context, 'Divine Revelations', Dr. Neki writes about Guru ji's profound mystical experience from when he was summoned to the Divine Presence, which he then expressed in the Mool Mantra. When God revealed Bani to our Gurus, they shared it with us through verbal expression and preserved it for future generations in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

*Sathigur vich aap rakhioun kar paragatt aakh sunaaeiaa ||  
He has placed Himself within the True Guru; revealing  
Himself, He declares this openly.*

Guru Nanak Dev ji, SGGS Page 466

It is these four contexts that form the core essence of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and so justify the title of the subject.

Professor Cole states that the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is both unique and distinctive in several ways. He notes that it is distinctive by being focused entirely on God – and not on any religious leader. While the Gurus are held in the highest esteem and reverence, it is the message that God revealed to them, that is in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

*Log jaanai eihu geeth hai eihu tho breham beechaar ||  
People believe that this is just a song, but it is a meditation on God.*  
Bhagat Kabeerji, SGGS Page 335

Professor Cole highlights another distinction from other sacred texts by noting that congregational worship is centered around the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It is the presence of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib that makes a Gurdwara – without it, the Gurdwara becomes just a building. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib is also distinctive by including Bani of Hindu Bhagats, Muslim Sufis, and other holy men. It exemplifies the message of "religious equality" and offers advice for Muslims to be better Muslims and for Hindus to be better Hindus. "As the sole successor of our ten Gurus, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is truly unique by making the Guru-ship a continuous institution ever since its inception and forever into the future. There is no other sacred text that holds such a position in any other religion."

*Baanee guroo guroo hai baanee vich baanee a(n)mrit saarae ||  
The Word, the Bani is Guru, and Guru is the Bani. Within the  
Bani, the Ambrosial Nectar is contained.*

Guru Raam Daasji, SGGS Page 982

Bhai Dhillon has discussed why the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the unified embodiment and teaching of our first ten Gurus. It is the religious experience of the 'spirit of Nanak' that was the central unifying factor between our ten Gurus. Guru Nanak Dev ji received revelations from God and delivered them to the world through Bani.

*Jaisee mai aavai khasam kee baanee thaisarraa karee giaan vae  
laalo ||  
As the Word of the Forgiving Lord comes to me, so do I express  
it, O Lalo.*

Guru Nanak Dev ji, SGGS Page 722

The sacred hymns from Guru ji's Pothi were added to and then passed on by His successors. Guru Arjan Dev proclaimed:

*Pothhee paramaesar kaa thhaan ||*  
*This Holy Book is the home of the Transcendent Lord God.*  
 Guru Arjan Dev ji, SGGS Page 1226

Finally, Guru Gobind Singh Ji conferred eternal Guruship to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

All the Gurus being of the same devotion, service, ability, humility, and allegiance to the mission possessed the same spirit.

*Joth ouhaa jugath saae sehi kaaeiaa faer palatteeai ||*  
*They shared the One Light and the same way; the King just*  
*changed His body.*  
 Bhatt Sathaa & Balvand, SGGS Page 966

To emphasise this, the Gurus added Bani that was revealed to them under the name of 'Nanak' rather than that of their own name. As Guru Amar Das Ji writes:

*Eikaa baaneei eik gur eiko sabadh veechaar ||*  
*There is One Bani; there is One Guru; there is one Shabad to*  
*contemplate.*  
 Guru Amar Daasji, SGGS Page 646

Dr Ahmad paints a bleak picture of a world without religious guidance where our lives would be threatened by social evils and inequalities. Three of the social issues he mentions are:

- Duality
- Gurmukh versus Manmukh
- Positive virtues versus vices

Many verses in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib speak of the effects of duality and how to overcome it. Duality pollutes the mind and draws us to worldly pleasures and committing sins.

*Man mailaa hai dhoojai bhaae ||*  
*mailaa choukaa mailai thhaae ||*

*The mind is polluted by the love of duality.*  
*Filthy is that kitchen, and filthy is that dwelling*  
 Guru Amar Daasji, SGGS Page 121

The message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is that we have access to God provided we live the life of a Gurmukh - and not that of a Manmukh. A Gurmukh follows the path of devotion and obtains spiritual wisdom, whereas a manmukh is filled with darkness and attracted to worldly goods.

*Guramukh chaanan jaaneeai manamukh mugadhlh gubaar ||*  
*The Gurmukh knows the Divine Light, while the foolish self-*  
*willed manmukh gropes around in the darkness*  
 Guru Nanak Dev ji, SGGS Page 20

The central, social message of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is to give up the five vices: *kaam*, *krodh*, *lobh*, *moh*, and *ahankaar*. Living by positive virtues such as *sat*, *santokh*, *daya*, *nimrata* and *pyaar*, we can live in social balance and harmony.

*Sath sa(n)gath maelaap kar pa(n)ch dhooth sa(n)ghaarae ||*  
*When one joins the True Assembly, the five vices are*  
*liquidated.*

Bhai Gurdaasji, Vaars Bhai Gurdaas

In his essay, Dharam Singh emphasises that we live in a world of religious pluralism. There is no place for an exclusive attitude to religion as it is harmful to our social fabric. The object of religion is to unite mankind and not to divide it.

*Sarab dharam mehi sraesatt dharam ||*  
*har ko naam jap niramal karam ||*  
*Of all religions, the best religion is to chant the Name of the*  
*Lord and maintain pure conduct.*  
 Guru Arjan Dev ji, SGGS Page 266

Our Gurus taught us that everyone is equal, regardless of our appearance. We are spiritually one with God and ethnically equal, no matter our religious beliefs. The Ardas reminds us that the same One God resides within all of us.

*Ghatt ghatt mai har joo basai sa(n)than kehioi pukaar ||*  
*The Dear Lord abides in each and every heart; the Saints*  
*proclaim this as true.*  
 Guru Tegh Bahaadurji, SGGS Page 1427



Sukhveer Singh Karlkut

# “Is it OK to eat meat according to Gurbani?”

The speakers for the above topic were **Ardas Kaur** and **Kiran Kaur Brar**.

**Ardas Kaur** spoke in favour of the subject and said,

*Mās mās kar mūrakh̄ jhagre giān dhiān nahī jānai.  
Kauṇ mās kauṇ sāg kahāvai kis mēh pāp samāṇe.*

When we, as humans, take on a cause, we seem to become part of something bigger. We practice random acts of kindness, fight injustice, teach the next generation, and sometimes even start a revolution. But one of the most remarkable things about humans is that we possess the ability to reflect and reason. And along with that ability comes the application of it. But in doing so, we need to take a moment to consider. We as Sikhs, are part of a faith that holds the truth at the highest value. Our guru's message is the simple TRUTH. And keeping that in mind, what one decides to eat and doesn't decide to eat is a topic to be considered.

Let's explore this further through deciphering the Guru Granth Sahib ji.

*Baabaa hor khaanaa khusee khuaar  
jith khaadhhai than peerreeai man mehi chalehi vikaar  
Renounce the food that causes body illness and makes the  
mind filthy*

Without any doubt Sikhism encourages healthy living. Our body is a temple that we must keep clean and healthy. Although, "Health is not simply the absence of sickness. Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and spiritual well-being." But does it matter if this can be achieved by both eating meat and not eating meat?

*Maasahu ni(n)mae maasahu ja(n)mae ham maasai kae  
bhaa(n)ddae*

*In the flesh we are conceived, and in the flesh we are born;  
we are vessels of flesh*

The Guru Granth Sahib ji states one thing in very clear terms: vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism by no means share a relationship with spirituality or religion. In a world where everything is temporary and in Maya, Guruji asks only one thing of us, that we not get lost in the worldly pleasures, over indulging on things that we absolutely don't need to survive, this is an act of disciplining our bodies. And by disciplining our body, we are creating a platform to fulfill our ultimate purpose in life which is to discipline our mind.

*Jeeā badhhahu s dhharam kar thhaapahu adhharam kehahu  
kath bhaaee*

*aapas ko munivar kar thhaapahu kaa ko kehahu kasaaee*

Guruji says if killing a living being or taking away the beings' right to life - a life that has been given to the being by Waheguru himself - can be classified as a righteous action then, what can possibly be worse and be classified as an unrighteous action? We call each other sages, while butchering animals in the name of God. Who then would we call a butcher?

However, if we keep reading the shabad in the full Gurbani context, Guruji is telling us that we are failing to see the precedence in this matter.

*Raam naam kee gath nehee jaanee kaisae outharas paaraa*

He says that we have our priorities mixed up, we fight about the virtues of not eating meat and expend great efforts to show what is right and wrong, yet we do not instead spend our time contemplating Waheguru. He uses this particular example about the righteous and the unrighteous to highlight the level of hypocrisy our society has reached. Let us not make guilt the foundation of our faith.

Now this leads us to the question for those Sikhs who do choose to eat meat as to where do the boundaries lie. There are many mixed views about



ritualistic forms of meat, those being *kosher* or *halal*. According to the Damdami Taksal, Sikh Rehat Maryada Code of Conduct eating of any type of meat is strictly forbidden and it makes one a traitor to the Guru. According to the Akal Takhat Sikh Rehat Maryada, an Amritdhari Khalsa Sikh is not allowed to eat the meat of an animal slaughtered the Muslim way, but is allowed to eat *jhatka* meat, meat in which the animal has been killed quickly without suffering or any religious ritual.

The semitic practice of eating the flesh of an animal cooked in a ritualistic manner is not allowed because of the belief that killing an animal with a prayer is not going to ennoble the flesh. No ritual, whoever conducts it, is going to do any good either to the animal or to the consumer.

According to the Guru Granth Sahib ji

*Eik maasehaaree eik thrin khaahi  
eik mitteeaa mehi mitteeaa khaahi*

Sikhi is a state of mind. And although not eating *halal* or *kosher* is a practice we use to discipline our bodies, whether we do not eat meat at all, eat only *jhatka* meat, or eat all kinds of meat, does not determine how strong our faith is. Once we have reached the ultimate state of mind, where our faith becomes so strong that it consumes all fear, doubt and uncertainty, why would we ever need to question the relevance of what we eat or do not eat?

Many of us have heard the phrase, 'You are what you eat' and it is used to emphasise the importance of a good diet as a key to good health. Food powers your life. It fuels all bodily processes. Food affects who you are, what you do and your ability to pursue your dreams and aspirations. Whether one chooses to follow a vegetarian diet or meat based diet, is completely a matter of choice. Yet there are pros and cons to both.

The human anatomy has evolved to support a primarily vegetarian diet. A vegetarian diet delivers complete nutrition and can provide health benefits that are less susceptible to certain diseases than the meat-based diet. A vegetarian diet also is helping conserve the planet, and home that we live on, because it leads to the decrease of greenhouse gas emissions. It is pertinent to point here that a meat-based diet may prove to be a better source of protein, and may in fact help an individual fight many other diseases, and it may not be entirely increasing our environmental footprint. The list goes on and on. Either way we are detracting something and gaining something, but the

most important thing we are to determine is what we need and do not need to survive. And that is what matters most.

Vegetarians mistakenly elevate the value of animal life over plant life. Research shows that plants respond electrochemically to threats and may feel fear, so this might mean that being vegetarian is also killing plants. Every organism on earth dies or is killed, at some point, so that others organisms can live. There is nothing wrong with this cycle; it is how nature works. It does not necessarily mean that we should eat meat. Sikhism concludes no injunction against eating meat but also no advice to eat it. Why? Because what we eat should not be a hindrance to us, it is as simple as that. Do we eat to live or do we live to eat?

Guruji tells us to eat for solely survival, because overindulgence is diverting our attention, from the Guru's real hukam. Look into yourselves, try to find out the true, deeper reason that compels you to listen to your Guru, to find your true purpose, to connect back with the naam and see if it has spread its roots to your heart. Once you have attained this level of enlightenment, our differences and mistakes will not depend on whether we eat meat or not, but on whether our love for God is the source that fuels us to attain our ultimate purpose.

*Alap ahaar sulap see ni(n)dhraa dhayaa shhimaa than preeth  
eat little, sleep little, and keep Mercy, forgiveness and love  
in heart*



Ardas Kaur

**Kiran Kaur Brar** spoke against the topic. As she said, there is a lot controversy when it comes to consuming meat as a Sikh. According to Guru Granth Sahib,

*Foolish ones argue about flesh, but they don't about meditation and spiritual wisdom. They don't know the difference between flesh and vegetables, and eating which is sinful.*

According to the rehat maryada, kutha meat is prohibited. Regarding other meat, it is silent. It is presumed non-kutha meat is not prohibited for Sikhs. However, any kind of meat is not served in Langar.

There is also a lot of scientific evidence that human bodies, on a biological level, are designed to support a plant-based diet. Similar to herbivores, we have a stomach capacity that is 30% of total volume of

digestive tract, a need for extensive chewing, carbohydrate digesting enzymes in saliva, and a stomach pH level of 4-5 since we do not need strong acid to eat meat.

Our body does digest meat, but it comes at a very high cost to our health.

According to Dr Davis, "animal protein is not one of the healthiest foods around - rather it is strongly associated with diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and cancer, the primary killers of our time". Heating meat releases toxins which when consumed causes inflammatory response at the cellular level, along with containing carcinogens and heme Iron, which are chemicals directly involved in causing cancer. Iron in plants is non-heme and healthy for us. Thus, we should stick with food that is healthy and easily digestible.



Guru ji highlights the hypocritical behaviour of the pundits, while giving us a message that those people who are killing animals in the name of God should be ashamed of their act. Guru Nanak Dev ji always criticised the insincerity of the pundits and those who were only religious outwardly only for show, asking them if they are *truly* righteous and pure and cannot hurt an animal, then how can they justify being deceitful to others?

Guru ji has stated that renouncing of meat consumption alone does not make one pious, one must also stay away from evil deeds, do *naam simran* with love, and purify our minds. Otherwise, keeping a certain diet may only increase one's ego, distracting them from the spiritual path. Sikh rehat maryada strongly rejects meat that is made in a ritualistic manner, such as *kosher* or *halal* and is considered a Bajjar Kurehat. According to Dr. IJ Singh, "the reason lies in the view that killing an animal with a prayer is not going to ennoble the flesh." This also includes killing animals by reading the mool mantrar.

Instead of doing *jhatka* (as also done by Nihang Singhs), which is a quick strike from the back of the neck in the spinal cord (where all the pain sensors are located), *halal* is made by killing the animal slowly from the front of the neck to the back to maximise pain. Whether done reciting hymns or as a sacrifice to God, using force on any animal or human is tyranny and has no place in Sikhism. As Sikhs, we must also question the underlying practices behind the production of meat. Today, most animals go through a lot of cruelty.

Guru ji is reprimanding us for the obvious hypocrisy in murdering other beings for personal pleasure, but pretending to be a religious person. In order to live a spiritual life, we must have *santokh*, *daya*, and *dharam*. Keeping meat away from our diet supports these virtues. The purpose of life is not to live for the pleasures of food as a Sikh is always content with his simple meal.

Along with *santokh*, we must also have *daya* and sensitivity of what we eat and where it comes from. We should not support infliction of pain on animals. Commercially raised animals today are raised in very inhumane conditions. They are kept in filthy, overcrowded feedlots and inject hormones to make them grow bigger and faster abnormally.

Many make the argument that if we can eat plants, then why not animals? Although both are living organisms, the fundamental difference between the two is that animals are sentient beings. A sentient being is one that has a mind; they have preferences, desires, or wants. Plants are not sentient beings because they lack sensory organs, which enable them to see, hear, and taste like animals do. Plus, plants lack variability of response. Plants will react the same regardless of different scenarios.

Animals, on the other hand, have a conscious perception, which acts as an intermediary between their environment and their many different behavioral responses to it. There are many other additional differences that make the two distinguishable. Animals have a brain and a strong nervous system and can feel a lot of pain, unlike fungi and plants, which have a weak or no nervous system. Animals have relationships and mothers who look after their young's just like humans. Animals are also aware of death and will react when there is a threat to their life.

Having a plant-based diet is good for one's meditation and spirit. Eating meat can pass on hormones from the animals to us and biologically and chemically it is not difficult to see why.



Kiran Kaur Brar

# Sikh philosophy on

# Sustainable Development of the Environment

According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, word-Guru (spiritual teacher) of the Sikhs, God resides in creation. The exact term used in the very first line of SGGS is *Karta-Purukh* meaning that one God is the resident-creator of the universe. Therefore, Sikhs believe that the visible form of God is nature or environment itself, similar to the concept of mind and matter.

*Sarbat da Bhalla*, meaning 'prosperity and peace for everything in the world', is a statement that a Sikh utters at least two times a day, on completing the morning and evening prayers. This "everything" includes all the living and non-living as well as visible and invisible things in the universe.

Sikh religious philosophy believes that everything operates under principles set by God and the most basic principle that has regularly been stressed in the SGGS is

*The soul knows that as one sows, so will one reap*  
(SGGS, p. 1243)

Therefore, it is in the interest of everybody that no harm is done to anything in the universe and it is this context that many Sikhs prefer vegetarian diet, as partaken in community kitchens or *Guru ka Langar*, served in every *Gurdwara*.

As Sikhs believe that all things are created and inhabited by God, there is no scope for exploiting the environment or other individuals. Illustratively, Sikh Gurus were particular in raising the status of women in society and prohibited wearing of a veil, or practicing female infanticide and sati, and encouraged widow remarriage and a healthy family life; a male child was not considered a must. Therefore, social norms were changed to raise self-esteem of female population that constitutes one-half of the human race.

Guru Nanak said

*So kio manda akhiay jit jameh rajan*  
*So why call her bad from whom kings are born? (SGGS, p. 473)*

The general advice for an individual is to plan on a long term basis. The Guru also guides that the intentions while pursuing any activity should be pious otherwise the noose gets tightened around one's own neck. The emphasis is on developing harmonious relationship with natural surroundings. This would imply that nature and the environment which is important for the survival of human race has to be nurtured.

A major emphasis is on truthful living.

*Sachahu Orai Sabh Ko Upar Sach Aachar*  
*Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living (SGGS, p. 62).*

Truthful living is interpreted to imply environmentally conscious and responsible living. To attain spiritual bliss, an individual is advised to serve others.

*Vich Dunia Sev Kamaiai Ta Dargeh Baisa Paiai*  
*Serve in this world, and you shall be given a place of honour in Lord's presence (SGGS, p.26).*

Elsewhere too, a similar viewpoint is stressed. The concept of service to others includes nature and environment too.

Compassion and contentment should be the guiding principle for any follower of *dharma* as mentioned in SGGS:

*Dhaul Dharam daya ka Poot, santokh thaap rakhiya jin soot*  
*Superstructure of religion is son of compassion, and contentment binds everything*

Greed is considered one of the five factors that negatively impact peace of mind. The Guru cautions

that greed for wealth is not a good thing as wealth does not accompany a person after death. An individual is cautioned to not even trust a greedy person and therefore the implication is not to exploit the environment but lead a contented life.

Sikhism emphasises that there is need to respect everything in the environment,

*Huṅ hukam hoa meharvan ḡa.  
Now, the Merciful Lord has issued a Command  
Pai koe na kisai ranjaṇḡa.  
Let no one chase after and attack anyone else.  
Sabh sukhali vuthiah ill hoa haleini raj jio.  
Let all abide in peace, under this Benevolent Rule  
(SGGS, p.74)*

## The Sikh Religion and the Environment

Sikhism believes that God resides in the Creation.

*Balihari Kudrat vasia tera anth na jayi lakhiya  
God resides in nature or environment and it is not possible  
to fathom your end  
(SGGS, p. 469)*

*Apineh ap sajio apineh rachi nao.  
Self (God) created self. Self assumed a Name.  
Duyi kudrat sajiay kar asaṅ ditho chao.  
Fashioned the Kudrat (creation - nature and environment);  
seated within Kudrat, beholds it with delight,*

*Sache tere kḡand sache brahmand.  
True are your worlds, True are Your solar Systems,  
Sache tere loh sache akar  
True are Your realms,  
True is Your creation,  
Sachi teri kudratḡ sache patshah.  
True is Your Kudrat,  
True Ring (SGGS, p.463)*

*Paun paṇi ḡharti akas ḡhar mandar har bani.  
Air, water, earth and sky - the Lord has made these  
home and temple  
Vichḡ vartai Nanak ap jḡhuth kaho kia gam  
God is pervading everywhere, O Nanak. Tell me: what can  
be counted as false? (SGGS, p. 723)*

Granth Sahib also guides us that first came air, and from air came water. Therefore, these elements directly represent God's presence in the environment. The environment and nature is explained in very important manner in Sikhism, observed in the very first hymn of SGGS that all the basic elements sing praises of God, like we humans are expected to do.

*Gavahi tuhno paun pani baisanṡar — Gavahi kḡand mandal  
varbhanda kar kar rakḡe ḡhare*

*The wind, water and fire sing your praises ...the planets,  
solar systems and galaxies,  
created and arranged by Your Hand, sing your praises (SGGS, p. 6).*

SGGS mentions that natural resources like water, earth, and air are sacred and therefore, should be respected. SGGS speaks of water as the father, earth the mother and air, the Guru. To quote:

*Pavan Guroo Paanee Pitaa Maataa Dharat Mahat  
Air is Guru, Water is father, and vast Earth the  
mother (SGGS, p. 8),*

*Kudrat paun paṇi baisanṡar kudrat dharti khak  
By God's creation wind, water and fire exist; by God's  
creation earth and dust exist*

*Sabh ten kudrat tunh kadir karta paka nai pak  
Everything is in Your Power, Lord; You are the all-powerful  
Creator. Your Name is the  
Holiest of the Holy (SGGS, p. 464).*

*Pahila paṇi jio hai jiṡ haria sabḡ koe First, there is life in the  
water, by which everything else is made green (SGGS, p. 472)*

*Jal hi ṡe sabḡ upjal bin jal pias na jae,  
From water, everything is produced; without water, thirst is  
not quenched (SGGS, p. 1420).*

And nature and environment are so intricately woven into Gurbani that for followers of dharma, kudrat is just an extension of God and we living beings are a component therein

*Ih jag sachai ki hai koṡhri sache ka vichḡ vas.  
This world is the residence of the True Lord; within it is the  
dwelling of the True Lord  
Vismaḡ rap vismaḡ rang  
Wonderful are the forms, wonderful are the colours.  
Vismaḡ nageh firah jantḡ  
Wonderful are the beings who wander around naked,  
Vismaḡ paun vismaḡ pani  
Wonderful is the wind, wonderful is the water,  
Vismaḡ agni kḡedah vidani  
Wonderful is fire, which works wonders.  
Vismaḡ ḡharti vismaḡ kḡani  
Wonderful is the earth, wonderful the sources of creation.  
Vismaḡ saḡ lageh parani.  
Wonderful are the tastes to which mortals are attached.  
(SGGS, p.464)*

*Gagan mai thal rav chand ḡipak bane tarika mandal janak moṡi.  
Upon that cosmic platter of the sky, the sun and the moon  
are the lamps.*

# An Anthem for the World !



“Gagan Mai Thal Rav Chand Dipak Bane Tarika Mandal Janak Moti”

*Painting by Siddharth*

*The stars and their orbs are the studded pearls. D̥hup  
malan̄lo pavan ch̥avro kare sagal banrae fulan̄ joṭi.  
The fragrance of sandalwood in the air is the temple  
incense, and the wind is the fan. All the plants of the world  
are the altar flowers in offering to You,  
O Luminous Lord.*

*Kaisi art̄i hoe. Bhav khandna teri arti.  
What a beautiful Aartee (lamp worship) this is!  
O Destroyer of Fear, this is Your Ceremony of Light (SGGS, p. 13).*

In numerous compositions of SGGS, the example of nature and its different aspects have been captured to convey simple messages. Some excerpts from a composition which is based on months and seasons in North India (SGGS, p. 1107)

*Babiha pario bole kokil bania.  
The rainbird cries out, Prio (beloved), and the song bird  
sings the Lord's bani (word).*

*Barsay amrit̄ d̥har boond̄ suhavan̄i  
Ambrosial Nectar rains down on us, so delightful!*

According to SGGS, human beings have evolved from various stages and traversed the path of plant and animal life, and that human form, an ultimate gift, is the unique opportunity to self-realisation. Therefore, the guidance is to identify with flora and fauna and take care of the environment.

When Sikh Gurus founded new cities, environmental issues were given utmost importance. The cities established by the Sikh Gurus include Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib, Goindwal, Kartarpur, Kiratpur, Paonta Sahib, and Tarn Taran. In all these places, environment concerns like adequate development of water sources and drainage of waste water, gardens and open spaces were accorded special place.

However, and most unfortunately, these tradition has not been truly maintained by today's Sikhs during all major Gurpurabs, fireworks are organised, polluting the environment.

Many of our Gurdwaras named after trees like Gurdwara Amb Sahib, but in recent years, except for the name, mango trees and green coverage has been removed from the site. In Punjab, water table has been depleting rapidly, as also the quality of water.

As the emphasis is on a house-holder's life and long term view of life, Sikhism encourages active participation in economic and social activities without exploiting others, including natural resources, nature

and environment. As many of the above compositions in the text are part of daily prayers, respect for environment is inculcated in the psyche of the individual. For a practicing Sikh, a quote from SGGS sums up the attitude towards nature and environment.

*Sabhay Sajhevaal Sadain Toonh Kisai Na Diseh Bahra Jio  
All are known partners; you are not seen Outside of anyone,  
O! Lovable (SGGS, p.97).*

The whole universe is part of one continuity with nothing alien in it which is the main motivation in conserving and caring for environment, according to Sikhism.

**Dr. Charan Singh**



**Dr. Charan Singh** is RBI Chair Professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, India. Earlier, he was a Senior Economist at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Washington DC from August 2009 to November 2012. He has worked extensively for more than two decades in Reserve Bank of India where he joined as a Research Officer in 1984. His extensive career in the Reserve Bank, where he worked from 1984 to 2009, included many assignments in operational and research departments. Prior to joining the Reserve Bank, Singh worked, for a short period, as a Lecturer in Economics at Doaba College, Jullundur in Punjab; and Management Trainee in Punjab National Bank.

His current policy interests include international economics, monetary policy, fiscal policy and debt management.

# Vaisakhi 2017, in the West



Panj Pyaras lead the Vaisakhi procession

**V**aisakhi is one of the most important celebrations of the Sikh faith and is marked with great aplomb and zest every year. Traditionally on 14 April is commemorated that seminal event when Guru Gobind Singh, the last and Tenth Guru of the Sikhs created the Khalsa Panthin 1699, at Anandpur Sahib.

On Vaisakhi, Sikhs pay obeisance at gurdwaras, langars are attended and then processions, known as nagar kirtans, are joined for collective singing of hymns as the faithful march in procession, led by Panj Pyare or the five chosen beloved ones. People increasingly join these processions as they wind their way around town, singing hymns to the accompaniment of *dhol* and *manjeera*.

At that very first Vaisakhi in 1699, the chosen ones were bestowed the responsibility of defending religious freedom and spreading spiritual guidance, which has been followed over the centuries thereafter by the community in India, and increasingly, internationally. Sikhism today has spread to all the corners of the world and Sikhs are not only the most visible of communities extant, but are regarded as arguably the most helpful and supportive of all communities, as they follow their principles of *Sarbat-da-Bhala* (goodwill towards all). Many Sikhs are now in positions of responsible governance in many countries of the West, particularly in Canada, the USA and Britain, all these countries having substantial population of Sikhs who are substantially contributing to the welfare of peoples and the State.

## In the United Kingdom

In Britain, the Prime Minister Mrs Theresa May acknowledged this fact as such as she greeted the peoples on the eve of Vaisakhi in April 2017, stating that Britain needs Sikh values of equality and respect more than ever as the country forges a “new and ambitious role” in the world post-Brexit.



Mrs May said that Sikhs have set an example for all. “I send my best wishes to everyone in Britain and around the world celebrating Vaisakhi - one of the most important dates in the Sikh calendar and a time when families and friends come together to commemorate the birth of the Khalsa,” she said in a video message released by 10 Downing Street.

She said Sikhs in the country consistently follow the pillars of their faith, which sets an example to all. Praising Sikh values of equality and respect, of fairness and helping those less fortunate, the British prime minister said these values Britain needs more than ever as it forges a “new, ambitious, role” in the world.

“I am determined to build a country that works for everyone; a country where no matter who you are, you can achieve your goals - and the Sikh community is a vital part of that mission. So as the dancing and the festivals begin, at home and abroad, I would like to thank you for all that you do and to wish you a very happy Vaisakhi,” she said.

She continued: “As Sikhs across the globe take part in spectacular processions and neighbourhoods and gurdwaras burst forth with colour, I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the immense contribution British Sikhs make to our country. Whether it’s in the fields of business, the armed forces or the charitable sector, you consistently follow the pillars of your faith and in so doing set an example to us all”.



Crowds gathered in the thousands at the district of Southall in London to participate in the annual Vaisakhi parade, which started and ended at the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall Gurdwara on Havelock Road. It is thought to be the first time a London Mayor has ever taken part in the event. Sadiq Khan the London Mayor attended the Vaisakhi parade, which was reportedly among the largest open-air celebrations of any festival in Europe.

As the media reported, “with the sun beaming down, hundreds of people stopped by the many food stalls offering free drinks and food (langar) while hymns were sung and dancing took place.”



“London is open! Londoners don’t just tolerate our diversity, we celebrate it! Brilliant to be back in Southall alongside thousands at Vaisakhi celebrations,” the Mayor tweeted. Rupinder Virdee, one of the volunteers in Southhall Nagar Kirtan said, “The team was very lucky to also interact with non-Sikhs to raise awareness about Sikhi and Vaisakhi. As always, the Southhall Nagar Kirtan is a great opportunity to see the Sikh community come together and celebrate the creation of the Khalsa and taking part in this procession. The best is that this is an opportunity to interact with the local community (Sikhs and non-Sikhs) and share some food with them. Bhabinder Singh, one of the volunteers at Gravesend said, “In Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara Gravesend, every year

over 15,000 people attend the celebrations. A religious mela was the main attraction at the gurdwara grounds, with kirtan and gatka performances. The Punjabi tradition of Phulkari was also showcased. Turban tying was also a big attraction.”

A fortnight later, the festivities continued with gusto and zest at London’s Trafalgar Square, which included serving of langar, exhibitions by Sikh artists from around the world, community organisations and charities from the Sikh community. Children’s activities were organised by Kiddie Sangat Arts and crafts to engage and educate young children on the Sikh faith and culture and there was a turban tying session by the Chardi Kalaa Turban Academy.





**Members of the Sikh Caucus surround Prime Minister Justin Trudeau after he was presented with a sword during a Vaisakhi Celebration on Parliament Hill**

### Across the Atlantic, in Canada

On the other side of the Atlantic, at Vancouver in British Columbia, Canada, the Vaisakhi Parade took place on 15 April while Ontario held celebrations on 16 April. The Vaisakhi Mela 2017 was also held at Calgary, Alberta, Canada and celebrations focused on Vaisakhi Mela along with celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh ji's 350th Prakash Diwas and Canada's own 150th anniversary of foundation. Sukh Singh Dhaliwal, a Member of Parliament from Newton-

Surrey Canada gave a stirring Vaisakhi speech in the Canadian Parliament that resonated with applause. Vaisakhi celebrations were also held at Parliament Hill, Canada on 10 April 2017. In Canada, which also observed Sikh Heritage month, the Nishaan Sahib (Sikh pennant) was raised parallel to the Canadian flag through the month of April and various parades were held in Vancouver. Simranjit Singh, a student, said, "Vaisakhi is truly celebrated with feeling In Canada. The best part is that many non-Sikh Canadians also take part in the festival."



The Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau said on the occasion of Vaisakhi at Ottawa, Ontario on 13 April 2017, "This week, Sikhs in Canada and around the world will celebrate Vaisakhi, a festival that marks the most important date in the Sikh faith. Vaisakhi celebrates the founding in 1699 of the Khalsa – the community of baptized Sikhs – by Guru Gobind Singh ji. Family and friends will gather to pray at Gurdwaras and to participate in Khalsa Day parades."

He continued: "Next week, we will mark the 35th anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Just as the creation of the Khalsa defines

Sikhism, the Charter defines our country. It defends our individual rights and freedoms and, for Canadians of Sikh faith, ensures the Five Ks are protected.”



“This year, as we mark the 150th anniversary of Confederation, let us take the opportunity to honour the many cultures, traditions, and beliefs that make Canada such a wonderful place to live. Canada is proud to be home to one of the largest Sikh populations in the world. Sikh Canadians help make Canada the strong and diverse country it is today. On behalf of all Canadians, Sophie and I wish everyone celebrating a joyful Vaisakhi. *Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*,” he concluded amidst resounding *jaikaras*.

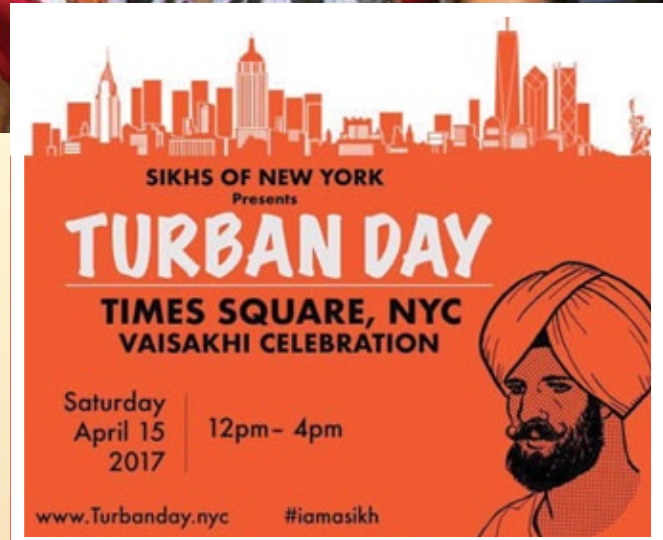


**The Vaisakhi Parade at Surrey, British Columbia, Canada**



## Vaisakhi in the United States

The Gurdwara at San Jose in California USA (*where the annual Conference on the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib is hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and is covered extensively in this Issue of The Nishaan*) held their Vaisakhi celebrations from 13-16 April 2017. On the east coast of the United States, in New York City the Sikh community from neighbouring states including from several other communities also created a splash of colour at Times Square in the heart of New York, having earlier on 15 April celebrating 'Turban Day'.



According to the NGO 'Sikhs of New York', which organised the Vaisakhi event, this was the biggest turban day event in the world. A day earlier, an unprecedented initiative called 'We Are Sikhs' was launched by National Sikh Campaign to create awareness about Sikh identity and forms, important at a time when ignorance has resulted in many unfortunate incidents post 9/11.

The 'Turban Day' event was started in 2013, and the first one at Times Square was held in 2016. This time the organisers had planned to tie 8,000 turbans. People from different places, communities walked about with the Sikh headgear in different colours. "The purpose of the event is to promote and educate about the Sikh religion and Identity and mark Vaisakhi," said the organisers.



Sikhs from Virginia, Washington DC, Florida, Ohio, North Carolina, Los Angeles, San Jose, Houston, New Jersey, Alberta, Toronto and New York volunteered to tie turbans. An exhibition was also held to highlight important achievements of Sikhs in the USA. "On an average 11,000 people cross Duffy Square in Times Square every hour. We had the opportunity to educate 100,000 people directly and hundreds of thousands through local/international media. But the biggest events were held in London (City Hall) and Birmingham (Handsworth Park) in which 100,000 Sikhs took part."

At the parade itself, more than 50,000 Sikh men, women and children wearing orange-coloured turbans and dupattas participated in the annual Sikh parade marking Vaisakhi. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who joined the parade, congratulated the "vibrant" Sikhs on the birth of Khalsa and commended the achievements and the contributions of the community to the American life. "Today the turbans all over the city show that New York belongs to and is home to the Sikh community," he said amidst loud applause. The Sikh Day Parade held on 22 April 2017 was organised by Gurdwara Sikh Cultural Society Richmond Hill, New York, with the support of Management Committees of Tri-State Area Gurdwaras, 'Shiromani Akali Dal' (Amritsar), 'Sikh Youth of America' and various Sikh civic organisations.



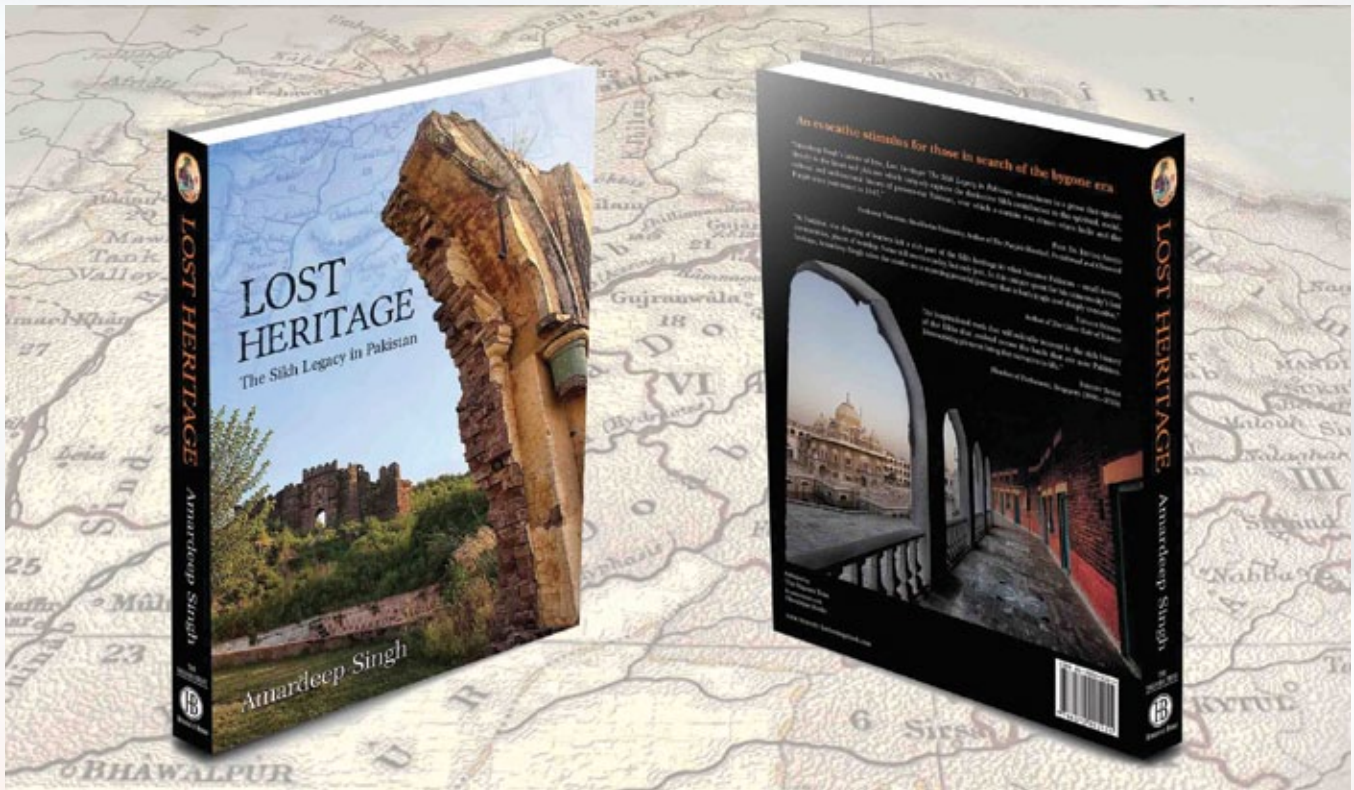


There is a substantial Sikh presence in the state of Arizona, which unfortunately has also many incidents of “hate crime” after 9/11. The community has held many conventions in the city of Phoenix to disseminate knowledge about the Sikhs, with an overriding message of tolerance and awareness of the faith. Vaisakhi

celebrations culminated with a parade through the streets of downtown Phoenix. Jaswand Singh Sachdev spoke in Punjabi as he stood behind a podium that read, “A turban is to a Singh what a crown is to a King.” Jaswand Singh, a Phoenix resident, spoke throughout the community about the Sikh identity.



# Return to Pakistan



**Amardeep Singh continues his journey to search for the Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan**

**T**he rich history – but largely forgotten legacy of the Sikh community – was the focus of a visual presentation and discussion session at Faiz Ghar in Lahore during January 2017 when Amardeep Singh, author of *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan*, toured the country again to promote his book. He had a number of interactions with several prominent personalities and heads of publications in Lahore, when he spoke in detail about his illustrated book, which had been launched in 2016 in New Delhi. (see cover story in *Nishaan* Issue II/2016). The *Nagaara Trust*, publishers of the *Nishaan* illustrated journal of the Sikhs, were very closely associated with Amardeep Singh for the editing and publication of this meticulously researched and historically rich effort.

A deep-rooted desire to connect with the land of his ancestors had propelled Singapore-based Amardeep Singh to visit the lands of Pakistan and discover historic landmarks and stories of his

community, which were forced to move eastwards after the partition of 1947. His dream of discovering his ancestral roots was fulfilled in 2014 when he got the opportunity to explore the Sikh legacy in West Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtukhwa and parts of Kashmir.

According to Amardeep Singh, he had then managed to visit 36 places in 30 days, his search ending with emotive stories, spanning 60 chapters. The publication has 507 photographs of monuments, forts, battlegrounds, commercial and residential establishments and places of worship which bear witness to the heart-wrenching circumstances of the partition.

Actually, according to Amardeep Singh, he did not visit Pakistan to write any book. In fact, he just wanted to visit Muzaffarabad in Kashmir where his father, who spoke endlessly about the beautiful area, was from. Amardeep stresses that he sees his



LOST HERITAGE presents myriad facets of Sikh legacy in Pakistan



Places of worship - functional, created by institutions and now occupied by immigrants



The Forts

The Battlegrounds

The Havelis (Mansions)



On Art,

Artifacts

and Spiritual remnants



Signs of the past, seen in the present

generation as the last link between those directly affected by the partition of India in 1947 and people of the present, who have little emotional attachment to that cataclysm. "We have grown up hearing firsthand accounts from those who were affected, uprooted and struggled as refugees to restart their lives", Amardeep reflected.

**The Sikh community lost 80% of its ancestral land during partition in Pakistan.**

However, he believed that the greatest loss was the forgotten history on both sides of the border. "Sadly, when it comes to Sikh history, Pakistani text books have entirely wiped out the Ranjit Singh era, while in India there is no need to teach the history of the Sikhs because this now is verily the history of Pakistan," he rued.

Amardeep Singh said that while compiling the book, he deliberately did not focus on gurdwaras but instead wanted to concentrate on human stories and their emotive value attached to Sikh architecture in Pakistan. According to him, the heritage of the land where Sikhism has its roots is certainly not limited to the very few gurdwaras, which are functional today.



"What about magnificence of the hundreds of gurdwaras that once adorned every village? What is the state of scores of forts, historic battle grounds and monuments especially in Kashmir and Khyber-Pakthunkhwa?" he asked. The author continued that while his search was focused on discovering the Sikh legacy, this certainly also included Hindu and

Muslim history. "I visited the Muslim shrines of Baba Farid, Baba Bulleh Shah, Sain Mian Mir and the Hindu shrines of Pharladpuri and others. This allowed me to appreciate the secularity of a united Punjab," he said.

According to the author, for anyone talking about Ranjit Singh's era, it is important to understand that his reign cannot be characterised as a Sikh rule, as his was a magnificently secular empire, the Maharaja's closest advisors including considerable numbers of eminent Muslims and Hindus. The most respected historian and educationist in Pakistan today, Fakir Syed Aijazuddin, who interacted with Amardeep Singh, is direct descendant of the Fakir brothers, who held most important responsibilities in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court.

At the Islamabad Literature Festival held in April 2017, Amardeep Singh recounted his "personal quest" in search of his community's roots. The panel discussion, titled *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan* featured Amardeep Singh and Fakir Syed Aijazuddin and the session was moderated by Reema Abbasi.

For Amardeep Singh, legacies are bigger than religion. "But roots and heritage are very important too because if the roots are missing, one really cannot create anything."

*With inputs from Shafqat Mariam and Aasma Mojiz*



**Amardeep Singh (centre) speaks at the launch of his book 'Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan' at Islamabad. With him are Fakir Aijazuddin and moderator Reema Abbasi (on the left)**

# The Sikh Review and The Nishaan

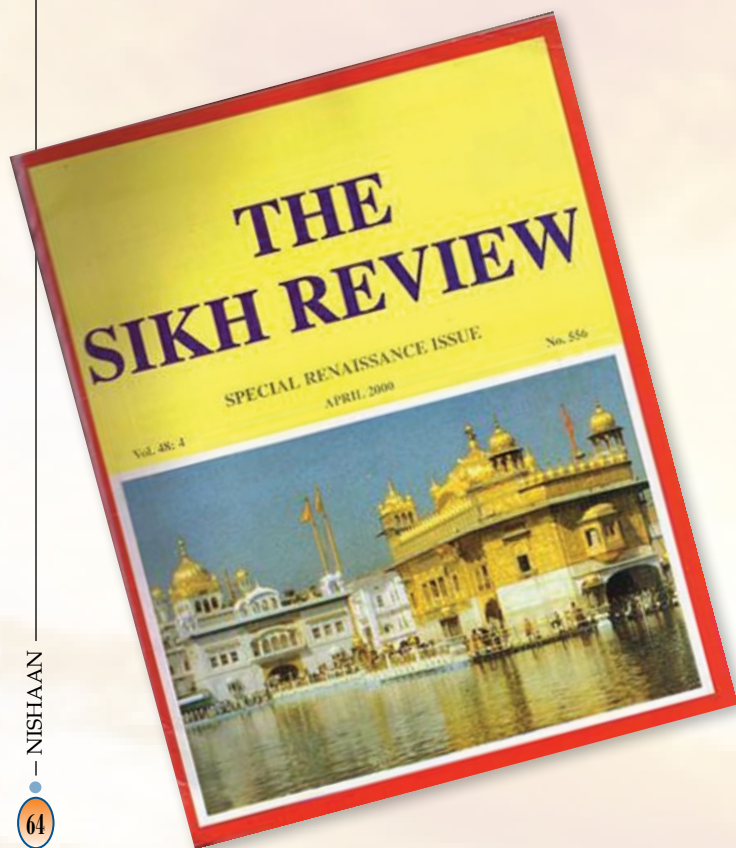
## Letter from Saran Singh, Editor of The Sikh Review

*The Nishaan illustrated continues to inspire and instruct. Every issue is an assertion of faith as well as the mind's delight.*

*One wishes the message and visual insights could be more widely disseminated. But then, the costs have to be cut – which might adversely affect the very values you seek to promote!*

*I am also delighted to note that the Nishaan and The Sikh Review share Dr IJ Singh's inspirational, editorial writings. His verve and energy reinforce the Gurmat principles, coming from a medical scientist. I am wonderstruck – and glad – that he left 'Anatomy' at NYU way behind in order to explore the Gurmat philosophy that guides us to infinite happiness:*

*Yours affectionately,  
Saran Singh*



Now in its 63<sup>rd</sup> year of publication, *raison d'être* of *The Sikh Review*, monthly journal, remains the dissemination authentic gurmat philosophy and the spirit of Sikhism, while developing interfaith understanding and promoting universal moral values to sustain a dynamic society throughout the world. Primarily intended to stimulate interest among global Sikh community, the upcoming generation, *The Sikh Review*, is meant for general readers in philosophy, moral science, history and sociology, with occasional forays into environmental issues and human rights.

Founded by Capt Bhag Singh, the journal's office has remained at Park Street in Calcutta, from where the present editor, the redoubtable Sardar Saran Singh, IAS, continues on this noble commitment. From around the globe, scholars and specialists contribute their writings as a labour of love. An editorial board works smoothly to select and streamline the articles. The dedicated volunteer representative body reaches out to Sikhs in every country they live, with the sole intent to disseminate Guru Nanak's mission for people of all ages in every continent.

A typical issue of *The Sikh Review* is a little under 100-pages digest that does not boast of fancy paper or graphics, just good contents. Contents that range from the philosophical to the practical day to day aspects of Sikhi, from graphic glimpses of History to current concerns that challenge Sikhs anywhere they call home; from reviving the classics to the review of the latest happenings in the scene of fine arts, cinema, music and literature. It is in simple English, supplemented with Gurmukhi fonts when needed. The content is easy to read and digest, and covers aspects that appeal to a wide range of thoughts and lifestyles centered on Sikhi.

*The Sikh Review* is published by 'The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta', and was founded in the summer of 1953 by a distinguished group of dedicated scholars and devout Sikhs, among them: S Raghbir Singh Bir, Capt Bhag Singh, Mrs Kuldip H Singh, later joined by S Mohan Singh Kalra, Dr Hira Lal Chopra, Dr Hari Singh Bindra, Dr Trilochan Singh, D Litt., Bhai Sahib Sardar Kapur Singh, ICS, S Amrik Singh and S Kulraj Singh. Their contribution has been a perennial source of inspiration.



# ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ।।

*The Book is the Abode of God.*

## Guru Granth Sahib

T H E G U R U E T E R N A L



With Message from Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India  
Dr. Mohinder Singh

To mark the tercentenary of the Gurgaddi Divas of Guru Granth Sahib in 2008, this volume is being brought out to highlight some distinctive features of the Sikh scripture.

This book features the history of the compilation of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Pictures of various Gurdwaras and ceremonies covered by India's leading photographers.

A photo montage on the morning and evening ceremony of the *Granth* at Harimandir Sahib.

A look at the world's smallest and biggest *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Important *Banis* of all the contributors to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, along with their translations.

Paintings contributed by the most renowned artists and other collections from around the world.

The first ever camera photograph of the Golden Temple by William Baker.

Glimpses of rare *Guru Granth Sahib Birs* from different repositories in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and U.K.

Pictures of *Mool Mantra* in the hand of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh in different rare *Birs*, *Hukamnamas* and relics of the Sikh Gurus.

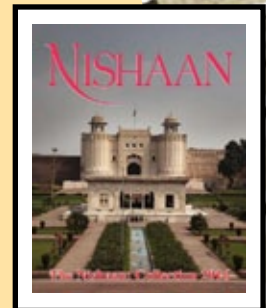
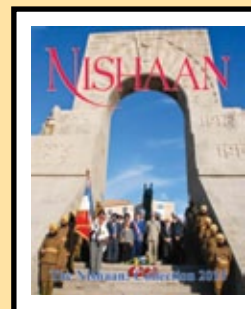
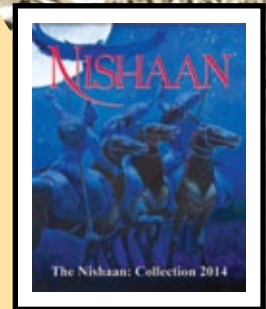
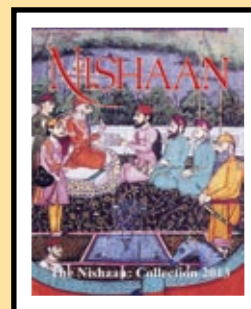
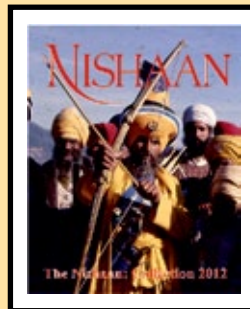
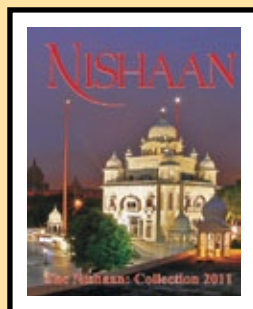
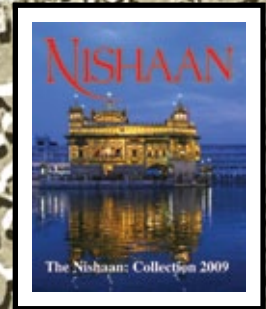
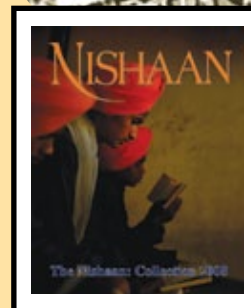
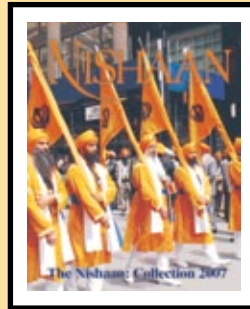
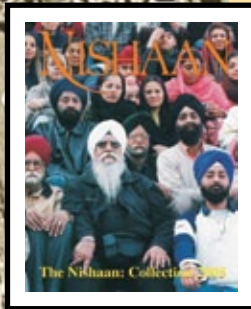
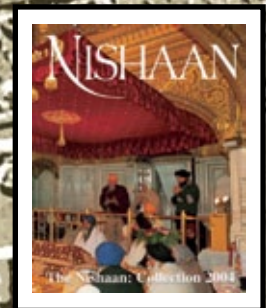
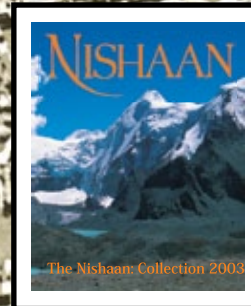
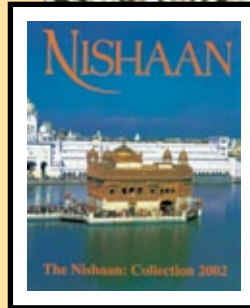
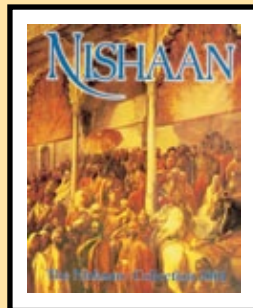
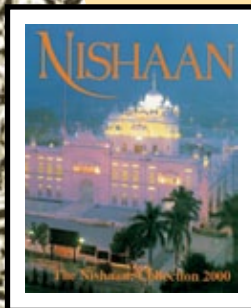


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