

IV/2019

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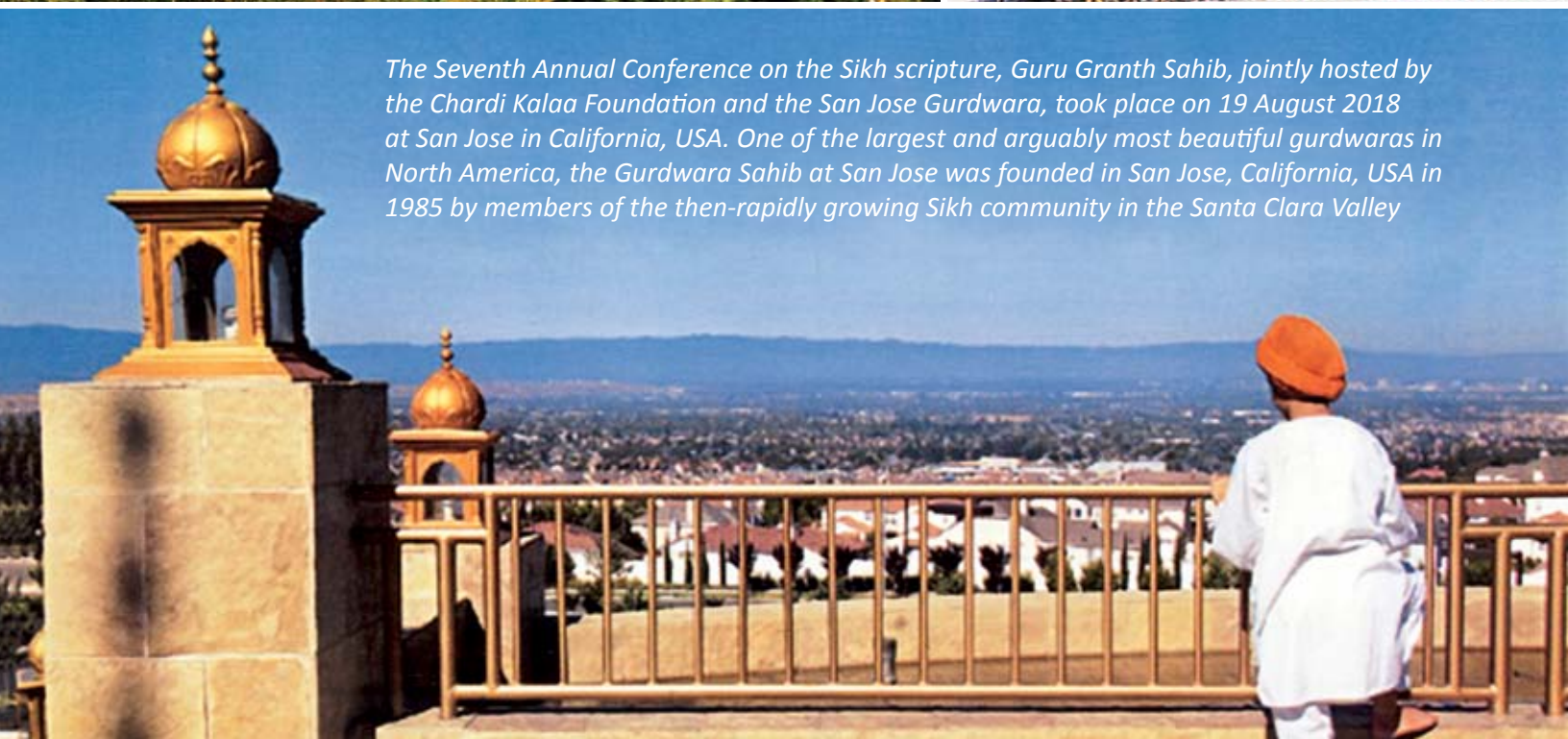
NAGAARA



Guru Nanak's Legacy: 550 years on



The Seventh Annual Conference on the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, jointly hosted by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and the San Jose Gurdwara, took place on 19 August 2018 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



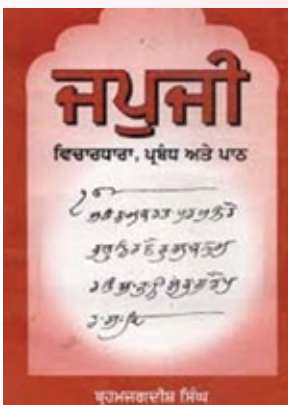
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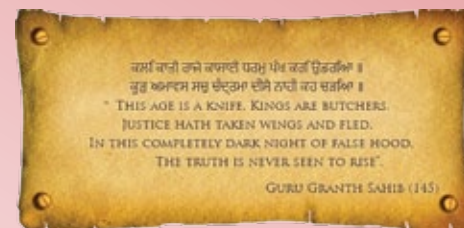
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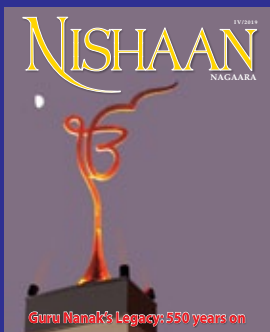


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Editorial Director
Dr IJ Singh

Managing Editor
Pushpinder Singh

Joint Editor
Bhayee Sikandar Singh

Editorial
D-43, Sujan Singh Park
New Delhi 110 003, India
Tel: (91-11) 24617234
Fax: (91-11) 24628615
E-mail : nishaan.nagaara@gmail.com

Please visit us at :
www.nishaannagaara.com

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Guru Nanak's Legacy : 550 years on

Guru Nanak's perspective on humanity is larger than life; expansive and timeless. In a lifespan of about 70 years, Nanak married, sired two sons, traveled widely across much of the known world of his times. Today, a worldwide ever-growing circle of more than 25 million Sikhs and many more non-Sikhs live by his message.

I offer today not a paean of praise to Guru Nanak, the man and the prophet, but an exploration of the transformative agenda he gifted us – its meaning and purpose.

Religions alone cannot always hold a nation together. Bangladesh was created out of Pakistan. Both are Muslim nations but their 24 year old union collapsed in 1971. Sunni and Shia Muslims remain at logger heads. Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews are not too fond of each other. Christian history is instructive on internal frictions and travails of the so many sects.

India is somewhat like Europe. It was never a single unified nation except under the British and for a time, the Mughals. Ergo, invaders could dominate India with only limited manpower. India was then a *mélange* of independent or quasi-independent nation states, each with a distinct culture, language, cuisine, music and ethos. Since 1947, it is a politically unified nation as it was under colonial masters, but the fragmentation persists.

When Guru Nanak appeared 550 years ago India was ruthlessly ruled by Muslim invaders bent on converting the inhabitation at the point of a sword, if necessary. Hindu society, despite its noble antecedents, was hamstrung by a decadent, divisive religious culture, reprehensible caste system that exists even today, and the shamefully degraded place of women. A divided society had lost its moral compass, often willing to sell out to invaders. This is what the young Nanak observed.

How do a people reclaim their own humanity and dignity? The hope that tomorrow will be better, has prerequisites: Freedom of speech and action, participatory self-governance with transparent

accountability, security, economic progress, infrastructure and an ethical code for a productive life.

But all that is easier said than done! Two choices surface: evolution or revolution. Revolutions are bloody. They change rulers but not as easily the mindset of a people which is a product of long-standing inter-generational and culturally ingrained habits of the heart, traditions that define the self; in other words, the paradigm or the default position of the mind. Lasting paradigm shifts demand time that transcends generations

A transformative paradigm shift is exactly what Guru Nanak created, and it took some ten generations – almost 240 years -- to mature and bear fruit in its modern form. The path was mine-laden. The Muslims with connivance of some Hindu rulers went on the offensive to defend their politico-religious dominance. Hindus saw Sikhi as undermining their hold on the people with a challenging new ideology that rejected their timeless, but backward, teachings on caste, place of women, idol worship, practices that divided and weakened the people.

The first step in the endeavour was creation of community of the dispossessed people. Nanak started a kitchen (*langar*) where people of all castes would come together, prepare and serve food to all irrespective of caste, creed, colour or gender, have a meal, listen to uplifting poetry and teachings with music (*keertan*), and relate to each other as equals. In traditional Indian society, high and low castes would never mingle or break bread together. Nanak rejected such notions and taboos. People had to learn to live with each other – not caring if they were sharing time with a king or pauper, a Brahmin or an untouchable. In India of that time, this was truly revolutionary.

Guru Nanak's teaching begins with a revolutionary alphanumeric of his own making : *Ik Onkaar*.

Ik stands for the number One; *Onkaar*, rooted in Sanskrit, speaks of the Creator. If one can see the Oneness of the Creator, there is then no room left for a sectarian separate Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Brand X, or any other form of the Creator. That

would be a lesser god, not worthy of worship. Guru Nanak's Creator has no physical form and transcends all physical descriptions. This infinite reality by definition can never be captured by our human finite mind and vocabulary.

This profound message framed the fundamentals of a productive meaningful life in the language of the people – *norma loquendi* – as poetry to be musically rendered. Why? Because, at best, the spoken message settles in the head, music takes the message to the heart. And what exactly is the mind or the soul but both the heart and the head put together. Poetry is roomful of allegories, analogies and devices to hold the mind. The compositions used the classical timeless *Raga* system of Indian musicology. Music and poetry are thus internalised and interpreted, not literally rendered.

Guru Nanak, accompanied by his Muslim musician companion, Mardana, took his message across the known world of that time, much beyond the Punjab and India.

Did Nanak start a new faith system? He did. Guru Nanak traveled through the Indian sub-continent and well beyond, south to Sri Lanka, north to Tibet, east beyond Assam and west to Afghanistan, Mecca, Baghdad and neighbouring areas; perhaps even China. He held dialogues with scholars of many faiths. After four odysseys, he returned to the Punjab and founded the town of Kartarpur, now in Pakistan, as the Sikh model of Utopia where he nurtured the first Sikh community. Kartarpur became a bustling presence with businesses and traders. The community prospered. Guru Nanak lived there with his wife and sons, preached the Sikh way of life and tilled his farm.

Kartarpur was a defining step forward towards development of an economically viable infrastructure for the people. Note that it was not near any Hindu or Muslim religious centre. Guru Nanak never ever recommended that Sikhs go to a Hindu or Muslim place of worship. The Gurdwara (*Dharamsal*) in Kartarpur was the community's hub and place of worship.

Think a moment: If a business, or shop closes its doors on the passing of the founder, it is a failed venture. An enterprise must continue past the generations to earn the sobriquet of an institution or movement. How do you rebuild a nation and its people diminished by centuries of invasions and destruction? A massive transformative task is not accomplished in hours, days, months or even years. There are dots to connect; life models, habits of

the heart or paradigms need to be re-explored, tweaked, modified, even jettisoned and replaced. A *paradigm shift* is needed. Habits of the heart are never easy to reform or displace.

Guru Nanak's message continued and was further developed by his nine successors. He lived over five centuries ago. Times change; newer questions surface. Sikh institutional development continued. Lehna, as Guru Angad, succeeded Nanak. Significantly all ten Gurus wrote under the name and authority of *Nanak*.

Guru Angad moved his activities to a new settlement: Khadur Sahib and then there were two urban centres flourishing in the Punjab. He also systematised rules of Gurmukhi, script of the Punjabi language.

Amardas, the third Guru, chose Goindwal as his base. His presence attracted businesses, creating a third Sikh community without diminishing the luster of Kartarpur and Khadur Sahib. In order to upend the injustice to women, he appointed them to leadership positions in spreading Sikhi's message; encouraged widows to remarry and condemned the horrendous practice of *satee*, the self-immolation by widows. He also started the tradition of twice-yearly conclaves of Sikhs to reconnect with the teachings and confer on current issues that might impact the community.

Guru Ramdas followed. He founded Ramdaspur which has become Amritsar. It remains, over 400 years later, the largest, most important commercial, cultural and educational hub of the Punjab. It defines, through its history, the Sikh psyche of today.

Guru Arjan compiled writings of the previous four Gurus, along with his own, added compositions of a few selected Hindu and Muslim saints and poets whose views resonated with Sikh teachings, and installed the compilation as the first rendition of Sikh scripture (*Adi Granth*) in 1604. This became the authoritative document on Sikh ethos. The *Harmandir Sahib* (Golden Temple) was located within Amritsar. Amritsar has since been the *defacto* capital of all Sikh activities, social, educational, administrative or political, whether local or international from that time; Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, completed its development. He was the first Sikh martyr in the cause of freedom of religion. The lesson: *One must learn to die before one may pick up a weapon.*

Over the 100 years after Guru Nanak, much had changed. Islam had become aggressively fanatic. The Sikh movement had acquired heft and visibility, and

continued to emphasise peaceful coexistence with all other faiths. Guru Nanak had taught that the Creator is not found in seclusion, ascetism or renunciation but within the active worldly life : the two are not mutually exclusive.

Then Guru Arjan was martyred. So, Guru Hargobind, the sixth Founder-Guru formally enunciated the doctrine of *Meeri-Peeri* that emphatically merges the internal spiritual life of the mind with the outwardly directed worldly pursuit of action. *These two primary fundamentals of Sikh existence must never be sundered.* Sikhs are to be peaceful and non violent – but not pacifist. Guru Hargobind wore two swords, those of *Meeri* and *Peeri*, thus recognising that a successful human life is one of action (*Meeri*) but never torn asunder from its spiritual foundations (*Peeri*). One without the other remains incomplete. He raised a militia to counter armed warfare thrust upon him. Each subsequent Guru maintained an armed militia. Guru Hargobind also built the townships of Hargobindpur, Mehraj and Kiratpur, and even a mosque for the many Muslims in the area. Briefly, *Meeri-Peeri* and Akal Takht that he defined and built are at the core of nation building and critical to Sikh history and Sikh values. Nation building here does not imply geographical lines drawn in the sand.

Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkishan served briefly and it was now time for consolidation for the movement and a growing community. The towns of Anandpur Sahib and Paonta Sahib are associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur. But the ninth Guru lives in our memories for accepting martyrdom to assert the fundamental right of religious freedom, which was for Hindus to refuse conversion to Islam under duress. Guru Tegh Bahadur himself was not a Hindu. The underlying principle here remains that “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”

The saga of Guru Gobind Singh must be recorded in volumes, much more than the brief paragraph here. In 1699 he brought the transformative change started by Guru Nanak to its mature modern form. He created the community of the Khalsa that changed face of the Punjab – and India – into a free outer directed people at peace with their inner self : remember the underpinnings of *Meeri-Peeri* that must remain in sync. Guru Gobind Singh also added Guru Tegh Bahadur’s compositions and prepared a final recension of the *Adi Granth* that he installed as the Guru Granth Sahib.

In the two centuries from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, Sikhi had come an infinitely long way. Guru Gobind Singh further saw that his Sikhs had now earned self-governance. He decreed, therefore, that henceforth, in Sikh praxis, Guru Granth remains the repository of all Sikh spiritual heritage while temporal authority rests in the Sikh community acting in awareness of their defining spiritual heritage.

He institutionalised the community as the Khalsa. As he initiated his followers, in dramatic manner, he knelt and asked that the Khalsa now initiate him into that order. This creates a unique bond between the teacher (Guru) and the student (Sikh), *Gur-Chela* in Sikh parlance. It antedates the very modern idea of Servant-Leader that we see today in modern models of education and management.

A terse historical nugget has resonated from the time of Guru Nanak to capture unerringly the magic and mystery of his teaching. Equally in vogue today, it captures the Sikh way of life as one of honest earnings, sharing rewards of life with the needy, and remaining always connected to the one Creator common to all, regardless of caste, colour, creed, gender or religious, cultural and national identity. Note that two of the three are social, societal constructs.

Soon after Guru Gobind Singh in the early 18th century, Sikhs evolved the tradition of *Sarbat Khalsa* where community representatives would gather in conclaves, like town hall meetings that we see across the world today, to debate and discuss issues of peace and war or critical turns in direction that face us. Also, matters like traditions, code of conduct (*Rehat Maryada*), protocols and related constitutional matters may be revisited as needed.

These systems exist but have been corrupted by neglect and human inertia. As in any path, we need to know where we are at a given point. But even more critical is the trajectory of the path. Only then, as Sikhi promises, the journey becomes the destination but a continuing exploration is necessary.

My mandate today was to delineate the parameters of Guru Nanak’s mission. My plea is that you see Guru Nanak, unusual and special as he surely was, as the one who founded and shaped our journey, a revolutionary movement that continues to guide us for always.

IJ Singh

ijsingh99@gmail.com

Guru Nanak

The Universal Truth

Paper by Bhai Sahib Sirdar Kapur Singh*

Nanak, who came to be universally known as the Guru, the Light of Mankind, was born in 1469 AD, in a small village, Talwandi Bhoie, situated in the alluvial barren tract or *Bar*, the area now comprised mostly by Sheikhpura district of the Panjab, south west of Lahore. The village, Talwandi Bhoie, situated at a distance of about 50 kilometers south west of Lahore was renamed as Nankana Sahib by Maharaja Kaura Mall who constructed holy tanks and memorial gurdwaras in this then deserted village in 1750. The extensive lands bequeathed to the monuments and the memorial gurdwaras sacred to the memory of Guru Nanak continued to be a part of the estate of the gurdwaras at Nankana Sahib till 1947 when the partition of India assigned Nankana Sahib to Pakistan.

The father of Nanak was a *Patwari*, revenue overseer and accountant appointed by the feudal chief of the village, Rai Bular, originally a high caste Hindu of Bhatti Rajput clan who had, it seems, recently converted to Islam under the pressures and duress of the times.

Janam Sakhis

The life of Nanak is contained in *Janam Sakhis*, two of which are now extant. The earlier account, known as *Walait Wali Jamm Sakhi* is on account of a partial recession of this being recovered from a manuscript in the British Museum in London in the late nineteenth century. This was with a British military officer who took it from the personal kit of a Sikh soldier slain on the battlefield of Gujarat in 1848, and contains a less imaginative and more realistic account of Nanak's life than the other and popular *Janam Sakhi*, called *Janam*

Sakhi Bhai Bala. The latter is manifestly inspired by Buddhist *Jatak Tales*, usually described as “histories of the previous lives of the Buddha”, though this description is inadequate. Many of these *Jatak* tales are folklore tales far older than Buddhism, which represent the deposit of esoteric story of the evolution of human religious dimension, from the animal instinctual structure up to human awareness.

Such recorded accounts of Nanak's life, more often than not, strike as “bad history” and have confused legend to the modern mind familiar only with rational and objective semantic traditions as the only respectable verbal mode of expression and, as a consequence, even many Sikh scholars describe these basic records and testaments of the Guru's Life as excessively imaginative, puerile and unworthy of acceptance by ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’ minds. This is not so because it is not the *Janam-Sakhis* that falsify the Guru's profile but a failure of comprehension of their idiom that confuses the modern European and the Sikh scholar as to the delineation and portrayal of a human being. Guru Nanak is eviscerated of his true personality the moment he is distorted into the mould of a ‘historical Nanak’ as distinct and wholly separated from what these ‘scholars’ designate as the ‘legendary Nanak’.

Such failure of comprehension has twin roots : European literary tradition delights in generalising and in the abstract and the impersonal while the genius of almost all the oriental languages, that is their pre-19th century morphal organisms, is personal, particular and concrete, where the folklore narrative attempts to communicate the universal concepts as

informing a concrete historical person and occurrence. Then, the so called ‘historical Nanak’ that is sought to be churned out by modern scholars, the European as well as the Sikh, on deeper thought, is seen to be a person, who demonstrably is not the Nanak born in 1469 AD at the village Talwandi Rai Bhoi, and who gave birth to the historical upsurge and movement known to history as Sikhism. This distilled ‘historical Nanak’ is clearly seen as a mere emotionalised intellectual who said this and did that such as many others of his contemporaries, predecessors and those who followed had said or done but who crossed the desert of life and history to vanish beyond the skyline, without leaving tell-tale footsteps and beckoning footpaths involving future generations of mankind into new modes of impulse and behaviour such as the Guru Nanak did.

The ‘historical Nanak’ of our ‘scholars’, therefore, is not *the* Guru Nanak whose portrayal is attempted by our profound literary genre, the *Janam Sakhis*, but a mere type, a denominator of what the individual Nanak might have been, had he not been *the* Guru Nanak. These ‘scholars,’ thus, by piecing together carefully and laboriously selected passages from these existing documents and by checking them with tradition and historical monuments which sprang up soon after the conclusion of the earthly career of the Guru Nanak, give a connected and ‘objective’ story of his life.

As the decades and centuries went by and as the formative impulses Nanak had fashioned and released amongst the people assumed concrete social and political shape in the form of the Sikh nation, incidents of Nanak’s life acquired an ever-growing vivid halo and aura of reverence surcharged with primal significance so that miracle and heavenly assistance were seen and recognised as an integral part of Guru Nanak’s life story. Such a process is always an evidence of the magnitude and the extent of the spiritual forces released by the personality of an individual which actualised in the destiny of a people. Besides, it is a higher and poetic form of history designed to lift the prosaic, personal, impermanent but, nevertheless, the true story of that individual to a plane above the accident of time and space.

This aspect of the *Janam Sakhis*, though, requires a fuller treatment in its own right but for which the present is hardly the proper occasion. Suffice to say that it is certain that Nanak was, from the very beginning, a precocious and moody child, and as he grew up he became the despair of his matter-of-fact male parent, Mehta Kalu Ram. He was sent to the village *paathshala* under a Brahmin teacher, from whom he learnt arithmetic, book-keeping and mnemonic tables of accountancy and reading and writing of the current *devnagri* script known as *shastri* script in north western India. By all accounts, he was a very intelligent and clever pupil and soon learnt all that was to be learnt from this *paathshala*.

Nanak then went to the local *mektab*, the seminary run by a Muslim teacher Syed Hassan, as the author of the *Siyyar-ul-Mutaakhirin* tells us. In this *mektab*, Nanak studied rudiments of Persian and Arabic and Indian Islamic literature which became the foundation of his later acquaintance with the highest religious thought then current in the Islamic World. Nanak’s was a knowledge-hungry mind and a restless soul and through self-study and dialogue he soon became at home with the ancient Hindu scriptures and the pious writings of the exponents of the Bhakti School of Medieval India. He finished his education by personal discussions with the recognised teachers of various religions and itinerant *sadhus* and *faqirs* of whose company he was exceedingly fond. These educational attainments and the grounding in learning which Nanak thus acquired is amply evidenced in his revelations such as the *Japu*, the *Siddhagosti* and the *Onkar*.

At the age of nine, it is recorded he was asked to participate in the Hindu ceremony of *yajnopavitam* and he took exception to the mere formality and empty of its spirit, remarking that he would rather put on a thread which would “neither break, nor get soiled, nor burnt, nor destroyed” (*Var, Asa, I*).

All attempts of Nanak’s father to put him to some useful profession or trade failed and he became increasingly more moody and contemplative. The story goes that he was sent to the neighbouring market of Chuharkana with a good sum of money to conduct some sound business deal but Nanak spent this money



Painting by Arpana Caur : *Sacred Thread*, Oil on canvas, 2004, Collection Mahinder Tak, Washington

in feeding a group of hungry mendicants, taking too literal stand on the instructions of his father that he was to invest this money in some *sachha sauda*, 'profitable business'. The magnificent temple known as *Sachha Sauda*, now in Pakistan, marks the spot where Nanak demonstrated how the impulse for material gain may be transformed into a spiritual purpose.

Thoroughly disappointed in the conduct of his son, Mehta Kalu Ram sent him to his brother-in-law, Mehta Jai Ram Das, to whom the elder sister of Nanak was married, at Sultanpur, now a decaying town in the former Kapurthala State on the banks of a tributary called Bein, to the river Beas. Jai Ram Das was an official in the court of Daulat Khan Lodhi, the local Pathan potentate and through his influence Nanak was appointed Custodian-General of the State Stores. He performed his duties diligently and efficiently and

the previous impression that Nanak was unfit to engage himself in any profession or trade was completely removed. Here, Nanak married and two sons were born to him.

Universal Spirit

But his restlessness soon had the better of the sense of security and creature-comforts which a happy home and a good job guaranteed. It was in the year 1496 AD, when Nanak was 27 years old that, one morning, when he went as usual to bathe in the rivulet Bein, that he had the unique experience of complete atunement with God, the Universal Spirit and received the Mandate for his Ministry. Chroniclers inform us that Nanak remained submerged in the waters of the river for three days and three nights, and he was commissioned by God Almighty to go forth into the World to praise and preach the Religion of the Name, which later came to be known



Arpana Caur : Sultanpur Lodhi, Oil on Canvas,
2019-Collection Dr Parvinder Khanuja, Phoenix

as Sikhism. The God Almighty said to Nanak “I am God, the Almighty, you are the Guru-in-God”, recounts *Janam Sakhi*. On emergence from the river-waters, first words that Nanak uttered are recorded as “There is neither a Muslim, nor a Hindu,” and this utterance is at once the starting point of Nanak’s teachings, as a notification of the assumption of his Ministry as the Guru, the Light and the Teacher of Mankind.

What is the significance of this event and this occurrence as comprehended by Sikhs and epitomised in the Sikh movement ?

First of all, it is a claim that the movement which Guru Nanak initiated is the complete and legitimate heir to the spiritual truths of the Hindu and the Semitic races. Simultaneously, it is a proclamation that the truths that had hitherto been the property in exclusivity of the exclusively organised peoples, the Hindus and the Muslims, were henceforth to be property of entire mankind, guarded by a World religion.

Secondly, it was a judgement that the current exclusive and corrupted forms of the Truth believed and hugged by the races calling themselves Hindus and Muslims were not enough and that they needed purification, further elucidation and newer interpretation before they could be accepted. The Sikh Movement, as a consequence, took over and inherited the activism, or *jihad*, of Islam, along with the spirit of deep quest and profound introversion of the Hindus. Thirdly, it proclaimed the advent of a unique event, the manifestation of a particular Attribute of God, God as the Guide, with the avowed object of leading Mankind from Darkness to Light, in answer to the eternal cry of human heart, paraphrased in the Upanisidic text as *Tamsomajyotirgamyā*, the emergence of the Guru Principle of God, capable of being placed as a number in the series of other incarnations of God, and prophets of mankind, but in quality and historicity, unique, to be repeated in Ten Manifestations, ‘ten’ being the ultimate Number, not merely a peak in human evolution, but a discontinuous once-for-all initiative of God, within the spatiotemporal order, known as the world. Fourthly, it affirmed that human life on earth is not without real significance, a mere dream or a *lila qua* the human beings, but has abiding consequences for them.

It was in this context that Guru Nanak started on his extensive journeys of the then known civilised world, of India, and Muslim Asia, to preach his new religion, which at once combined the creative intuition of the Hindus and the critical intelligence of the Semitic mind and thus it is that we find the integrated co-presence of the spirit of combat and organisation as also the spirit of quietist contemplation amongst the Sikhs. At this point, Guru Nanak left Government employment and the town of Sultanpur, accompanied by a Muslim

musician known as Mardana in Sikh chronicles. For a while, he tramped over northern Punjab. He went to Saidpur, now Aiminabad in Gujranwala District of West Punjab, and halted at the house of a low caste carpenter, revered in Sikh history as *Bhai Lalo*. This in itself was a dramatic starting event, a high caste *kshatriya*, accompanied by a low-casteless Muslim living with a low caste *sudra*. The local Hindu prefect, or *faujdar*, Malik Bhago, called upon him to explain his conduct. Here Guru Nanak publicly denounced the *Varnasramadharma* and the Hindu caste system and declared humanity as one social brotherhood. It was here that Guru Nanak openly preached one of his three basic tenets of Sikhism, namely that all possession of material goods and wealth, unless acquired legitimately, through honest non-exploitive by creative labour, was sinful.

Basic tenets of Sikhism

The three basic tenets of Sikhism as declared by Guru Nanak are *Naam Japo*, practice the yogic discipline of Name, *Kirt Karo*, engage in honest non-exploitive labour, and *Wand Chhako*, share your earnings with others.

The first tenet inculcates the necessity for spiritual *sadhana* for the purpose of purifying and uplifting an individual soul to the full realisation of its true essence, and the *sadhana* recommended is yoga of the Name, in supersession of the difficult and involved spiritual disciplines that had been current amongst the Hindus and certain sects of Islam and other religions, entailing complete retirement from social and wordly activity and maceration of the body and mortification of the mind. This *sadhana* centres around the verbal repetition of the Sikh formula, **Wahe Guru**.

In its deeper import and significance, this *sadhana* is a psychological discipline having remarkable points of resemblance with the system propounded by Rishi Arvind Ghosh of Pondicherry, to empty the mind of its content, of evanescent impressions and the awakening and awareness of the *Numina* as contrasted with the phenomena of perceptions through physical sense, by the displacement of this phenomenon of *rupa* and *raga*. Thus the individual psyche becomes aware of its true essence, *svarupa*. This is the highest goal,

envisaged by the highest forms of yoga. Consciousness of culture, which is the social aspect of spiritual awakening of people, intellectually creates its primary *numina* to sustain it, imposes significant words, names, on forms of the culture, and conjures them, seizes or bounds them. By virtue of the *Name* these *numina* are subject to the intellectual powers of man who possesses the name, and the whole of philosophy and the whole of Science and everything that is related in any way to knowing, which is at the very bottom, nothing but an infinitely refined mode of applying the *Name* of that which before such application, is alien, unknown and unknowable.

The pronouncement of the right name, which in physical sciences we call, ‘the concept’ is, in essence, an incantation, a *mantram*. Deities and basic notions of science alike come into being first as vocable names, with which is linked the idea that is to become more and more definite in the consciousness. Thus alone, through the magic of the name do men become capable of knowing God, and Guru Nanak discovered this essential truth and advocated it as a true, proper and royal path to the completest fulfilment of the religious quest in man, in supersession of the ancient arduous and tortuous disciplines and *sadhanas* so far prevalent and practised. This is religion in its purest sense, separated from its social and ethical content. It is the *adhyatam vidya* of the Upanisadic sages. It is religion as implicated in its loftiest conception by the Western mind, as AN Whitehead defines “What man does with his solitariness”.

The second tenet namely *Kirt Karo* was preached by Guru Nanak to the Governor of Saidpur, Malik Bhago, by refusing to partake the luscious and luxury food offered by him to Guru Nanak, on the ground that this food had not been earned and acquired through honest, non-exploitive labour, and his possession of the food, therefore, was sinful. It is interesting to speculate on some points of apparent similarity between this ethical doctrine of Guru Nanak and the theory of ‘Economic Value’ propounded by Karl Marx, four centuries later. If all wealth and material possessions not acquired through honest non-exploitive labour are sinful, such possession is, by and large, morally illegitimate and also unjustified. All such possession is, essentially,

usurpation and exploitation and a just and equitable social order therefore should be such as to make this usurpation and exploitation impossible; the communist basis of the social order logically follows. It is necessary to point out here, though, that an ethical justification of an economic order, of the pattern of Communism, does not, in any manner, directly justify the methods adopted in contemporary times to establish and sustain such an economic order, such as centralisation of power, annulment of the human individuality and dictatorship.

The first is a question of ethics and ‘economic justice’ while the second is a question of organisation and instrument of power, i.e., political power, whether direct or indirect and there is no logical nexus between the two. It is necessary to make this distinction here, because Guru Nanak has not altogether neglected the second question, and it is clear that all achievement of power and its sustenance that is devoid of a human face or has non-human face masqueraded, is anathema to the religion of Guru Nanak, that is Sikhism.

The third and the last tenet of Sikhism *Wand Chhako*, carries the process further. Even the wealth which an individual legitimately and through his own honest creative labour acquires, must not be reserved by him for his selfish, self-centred and exclusive enjoyment. The entire community is morally entitled to the fruits of such labour, not indeed on the grounds of equity or ‘economic justice’, which are amorphous and relative concepts but on the ground that no individual is spiritually complete unless he considers himself as a part of society as a whole. The Sikh way of life, as preached by Guru Nanak, therefore, is by no means a vague religiosity but a way of believing and living revealed in the concrete stuff of history and mediated from generation to generation and through the centuries, in well-defined thought and practice. It is indefeasibly social, for according to Guru Nanak’s teachings, no individual can, for ever, or for long, experience God without the divine society, the *sangat*, as known to the Sikhs up to the Ninth Nanak, and the *panth* into which this *sangat* was reorganised by the Tenth Nanak, in which *sangat* and the *panth*, is the necessary vehicle and its abiding guarantee.

And in his conception of *sangat*, Guru Nanak reveals his teachings about the vexed question of the organisation and distribution of power, which has become such a vital issue for modern man. The source of power is the spiritually awakened individual, the *gurmukh*, and the basic unit of organisation is the *sangat*, rooted in its geographical locale. It is through the voluntary and revocable delegation of ‘power’ by such *sangats* that any centralisation of power may come into being, if it has to win approval by the Sikh doctrine. This centralisation takes the form of the *Guru Sangat*, the *Guru Panth*, always subject to the Sikh doctrine *Guru bis biswe, sangat ikees biswe* : “The Guru is twenty parts and plenary but the *sangat* may override and veto him”.

Centralised authority is all-powerful but always subject to scrutiny and control of the primary and basic units, which are the local *sangats*. Thus, neither any tyranny of the majority nor any form of dictatorship is countenanced in this scheme of organisation of power. And since each individual is an end-in-himself and each local *sangat* completely and fully sovereign, even when it has delegated its sovereignty to a centralised authority, there is no question of sacrificing the individual for the State or of one generation for the next as is being tacitly accepted in the pre sent day world of totalitarian regimes or ‘Socialist Planning’. Such scheme of organisation of ‘Power’ is not merely implicit in Guru Nanak’s teachings, it is explicit and was demonstrated in practice, as the Sikh movement unfolded itself under the guidance of successive Gurus.

After appointing Bhai Lalo as his first missionary whose instructions were to go forth into the world with the tools of his trade and to make no other request to people except that for a carpenter’s job. While doing his work as a carpenter, Bhai Lalo was to keep himself engaged in repetition of the Name and, if and when any soul was attracted to him on account of his honest work as a carpenter and his conduct as an honest labourer, it was then and then alone that he was to preach the Sikh way of life and to impart the three basic tenets of Sikhism and explain how these tenets were to be lived in practice.

Four Udasis



Painting by Arpana Caur : Journeys , Oil on canvas, 2001
Collection Sikh Foundation, San Fransisco

The Guru travelled towards Multan where he preached good religion and the way of life which is Sikhism and then returned home. After staying at his village for a short time, he commenced his four famous ‘grand-tours,’ known as the four *Udasis*. The first *Udasi* was towards the East when he covered important centres of the Hindu religion. He visited Kurukshetra from where he passed through Panipat to Delhi and arrived at Hardwar. He preached along the way from place to place, to individuals and to the multitude, in his peculiar, characteristic way. He visited Kurukshetra at the time of the Sun-eclipse fair and to horriification of the brahmins and pilgrims, started cooking meat near the holy tank at the sacred hour of the Sun-eclipse when all cooking fires must be extinguished. In the discussions that followed, he explained that the doctrine of non-meat eating on the ground of meat-diet involving the taking of life was

untenable since the principle of life prevailed in equal measure throughout both the animal-kingdom and the vegetable-kingdom. It was equally untenable on grounds of well-established, ancient tradition, for the ancestors of Hindus used to kill animals for sacrifices, and thirdly, in any case, avoidance of flesh as food was impracticable and impossible so long as they used water since water was the source of all life, the first principle of life.

At Haridwar, he stood in waters of the Ganga and instead of throwing handfuls of water towards the rising sun, as other pilgrims were doing as oblations to their ancestors residing in the *suryaloka*, Guru Nanak began to throw water towards the west. When questioned, he answered that he was throwing water to irrigate his newly sown grain-fields about two hundred miles away in the Punjab. People laughed at him, pointing out that his endeavour was useless : how could his handfuls of water irrigate his fields over 200 miles away in the west ? The Guru rejoined : “In the same way in which you expect your water to reach your ancestors millions of miles away in the *surayloka*”; the Guru had made his point.

From Haridwar, Guru Nanak went to Kashi, or Banaras and today’s modern Varanasi, where he held discussions with and preached to learned pandits, collectively symbolised by the name of *Caturvedi* or *Caturdas* in the *Janam Sakhis*, that is those learned in the sciences of the four Vedas. The purport of these discussions has been compressed by Guru Nanak himself, in his revelation *Onkar* and the doctrine preached is that God resides in the human heart and the human mind could become aware of it through the discipline of the Name.

Those who accepted the way of life preached by the Guru, were organised into *sangat* and the leader of that *sangat* was appointed as the Sikh missionary at Banaras. The headquarters of this congregation is now marked as *Guru ka bagh*, where a gurdwara stands to commemorate the Guru’s visit. From there the Guru journeyed further east and went to Gaya, from where he detoured towards Patna where a rich jeweller, by the name of Salis Rai, accepted his teachings and was appointed a Sikh missionary

at the head of a Sikh congregation. He continued onwards to Assam and Dacca. At Dhubri, in Assam, Guru Nanak's visit is commemorated by an artificial hillock surmounted by an altar. The hillock was raised through the voluntary labours of a Rajput General of Emperor Aurangzeb while leading an expedition to

Assam. The Guru returned by way of the 24 Parganas, went along the coast and came to Cuttack where a gurdwara named *Datan Sahib* commemorates his visit. At Jagannath Puri he visited the world-famous temple but did not participate in the magnificent *arti* to *Jagannath* but performed it otherwise, in his own way. The purport of what he explained to these priests is paraphrased in a revelation, that most magnificent hymn, favourably comparable in grandeur of diction and depth of thought to the famous hymn *Ushas* in the *Rig Veda*. The Guru then returned to his home in the Punjab passing through central India where the *Janam Sakhis* are unanimous that, he preached his gospel to aboriginal tribes making them give up their ghastly life of cannibalism and mindless violence.

Before he started on his second *Udasi*, Nanak crossed the river Ravi and went to Pakpattan, headquarters of the Sufis of the persuasion of Sheikh Farid, the *Shakarganj*. A very large proportion of the mass conversions of Hindus in West Punjab to Islam are ascribed to the teachings of Sheikh Farid, the *Shakarganj* and his descendants during the 12th and 13th centuries. His discussions with the reigning pontiff at this centre of Sufism and verses of Sheikh Farid, the *Shakarganj* and the Guru's sayings thereon are included in Guru Granth.

Nanak continued to roam in central and western Punjab and a large number of Pathans, the then ruling Muslim people, converted to Sikhism. During this *Udasi* he also met a millionaire, Duni Chand, Khatri, at Lahore on the occasion of the feast ceremonies for his late father. Guru Nanak's preaching to Duni Chand Khatri was centered on his pointing out that the variety of food being distributed for the benefit of his deceased father's soul might do no good in case his father's soul was now in the body of a wolf, since human and animal tastes much differed!

Kartarpur

It was about this period that Nanak founded the new town of Kartarpur on right bank of the river Ravi, which is now in Pakistan, settling his family there before proceeding upon his second *Udasi*. A manuscript copy of the Guru Granth retrieved by Major Henry Erskine in the battle-field of Gujarat during the Second

The Universal Anthem : 'Gagan Mein Thaal'



Painting by Arpana Caur : Aarti, Oil on Canvas, 2016

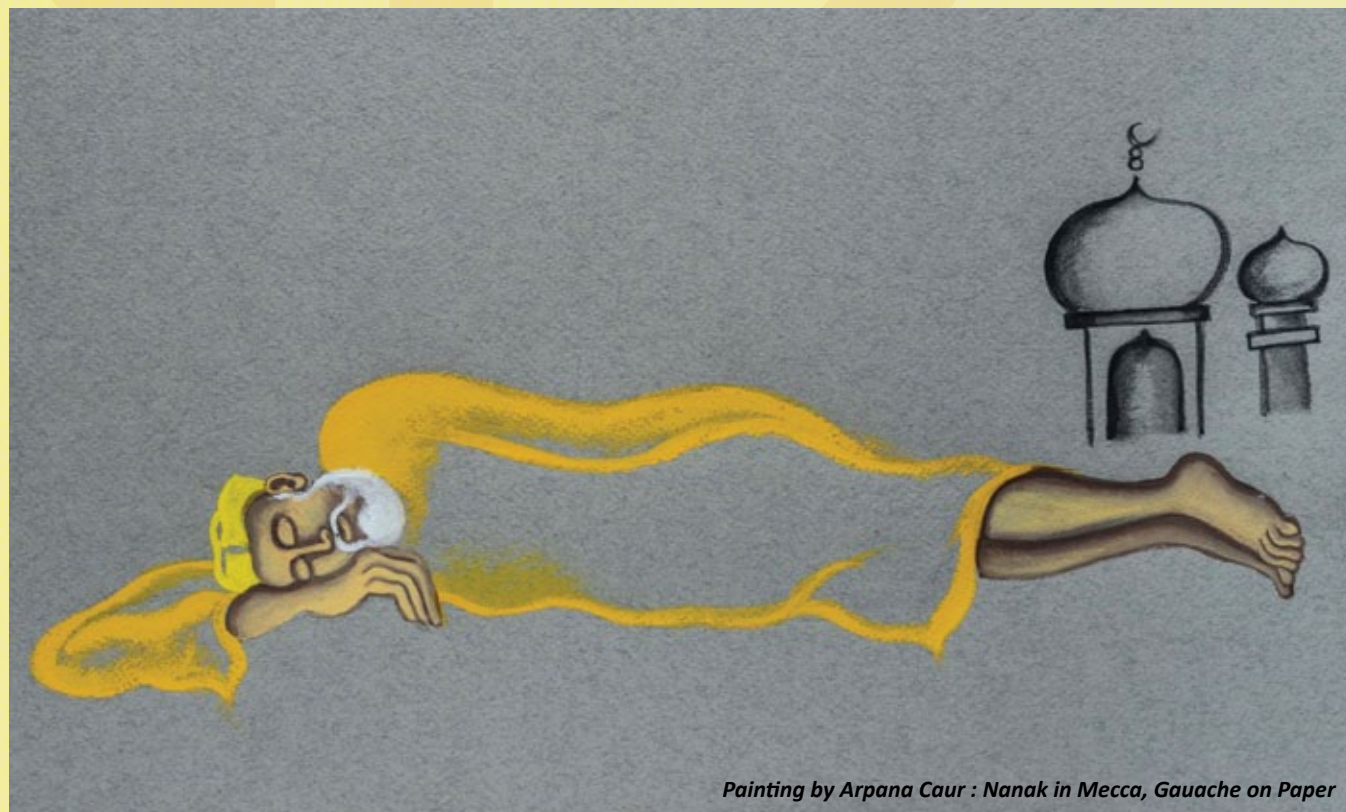
*Gagan mein thaal, rav chand deepak bane,
taarka mandal janak moti
dhoop malay aan lao, pawan chavro kare
sagal ban raai phulant jyoti
kaisi aarti hoye, bhavkhandana teri aarti anhata
sabad bajant bheri rahao.*

“The sky is the salver and the sun and the moon
Are the golden lamps,
The stars are scattered pearls.
The winds waft incense.
The flowers shed luminance.
So is Thy *Arti* performed,
Thou, the Dispeller of fear and Dispenser of
mercy”.

Anglo-Sikh War in 1849 and now preserved as original manuscript No.1125 in the British Museum at London, gives the detailed itinerary of Guru Nanak's second *Udasi* which was southwards in India to as far as Ceylon. The entire tour is commemorated by a series of gurdwaras, some of which still exist inspite of their neglect by Sikhs owing to political circumstances. Some of these prominent historical monuments are at Rameshwaram, Salur, Bhaker and Shivkanji in Tamil Nadu, as also at Colombo in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Many Sikh centres of worship founded by the Guru and his Sikhs in the Island of Sri Lanka were destroyed during the Portuguese Inquisition and fanaticism in the century that followed.

There exist similar monuments and gurdwaras at Burahanpur, Surat, Mahalaxmi (Bombay), Amraoti and Nirmal, containing manuscript copies of the Guru Granth, taken to these places by Sikh Preachers, sent by Guru Har Rai and Guru Har Gobind, the Sixth and the Seventh *Nanaks*. Guru Nanak then returned to Punjab along the western coast of India, preaching his gospel through the way, blessing converts and establishing *sangats* or congregations.

The third *Udasi* commenced soon after and this time the Guru turned his attention to the *Yogins* who were active in the sub-montane tracts of the Himalayas. Some of the Guru's most profound philosophical revelations refer to his discussions with these *yogins*, and recluses of which the *Siddha-gosti* is the most significant. In this *Udasi*, Nanak passed through Kashmir and Nepal on his journey from Western Tibet, visited the Mansarover Lake and also the famous Himalayan mountain Kailash. The *Janam Sakhis* record that the denizens of Kailash were amazed to see him at the summit of that inaccessible mountain. Bhai Gurdas gives a short account of the main preachings of Guru Nanak to these recluses which declares that an attitude of world-negation and renunciation of society is self-stultifying and leads to corruption of the psyche of the recluse, implying that salvation of man was ultimately in and through society. When asked to display some of his extra-psychic powers, the Guru declared such powers as irrelevant to true religion, and added that ethical conduct, communion with God translated into authentic living in human society was the only true means of salvation.



Painting by Arpana Caur : Nanak in Mecca, Gauache on Paper

Nanak's fourth and last *Udasi* was to west of the Indian sub-continent from where he travelled by sea to Mecca. There he rested in the holy enclosure with his feet towards the *Ka'ba*, the sacred cube structure, for which he was severely rebuked by an Indian Muslim priest, Rukunul-Din, for "turning his feet towards the House of God". The Guru humbly replied that he was too tired to move and that the priest could turn his feet towards any direction where there was no *Ka'ba*, or the House of God. Rukunul-Din turned Guru's feet away from the sacred structure but beheld the platform of *Ka'ba*, moving in whichever direction Rukun-ul-Din moved feet of the Guru. The Guru then solemnly repeated the verse of the Koran in which, "Allah is in the East and in the West. So whither-so-ever ye turn, there is the face of Allah".

Questioned whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim he replied: "I am a human being and Nanak is my name". When asked as to whether he considered the Hindu or the Muslim the superior way of life, he replied, "The deed is important, not the creed."

On his return journey, Nanak went by the land route and halted at Baghdad which at that time was a great centre of the Islamic religion and learning. A monument, extensively repaired by a Turkish Government subsequently and bears the date of its original erection as the year 927 Hijri (1520 AD) which marks the place where Guru Nanak stayed, and preached, at Baghdad and where he founded a Sikh *Sangat*. This memorial is still reverently tended and worshipped by the successors of Shah Bahlol Dana whom Guru Nanak had appointed as head of the *sangat* there. A Turkish-Arabic inscription on this monument describes Guru Nanak as *Guru murad eldi hadrat rabbul majid, baba nanak faqir*.

Many attempts have been made by 'scholars', non Sikh and not so objective or impartial who doubt the authenticity and meaning of both this stone-inscription but crass prejudice and envy, rather than any impartial spirit of academic enquiry, are seen as the underlying reasons here.

It is not a little surprising that this Turkish inscription is exactly the titles and designations by

which Guru Nanak and his successors have been known by contemporaries in India, : *Guru Baba, Akal Purakha* which last appellation has been correctly and aptly translated into Turkish as *Hadrat-rabbul majid*, which is certainly amazing when viewed in the background of the fierce, uncompromising and monotheistic tenets of Islam, particularly embodied in its formulated creed, the *kalima*, which pronounces that "there is no deity but Allah and Mohammed is his last prophet."

The Guru returned to the Punjab via Afghanistan and the ancient valley of Gandhar and on his way converted a Muslim saint of high repute and exalted spiritual station called Hassan, the *Abdal*. *Abdal* in Arabic means an anchorite who has attained exceedingly high spiritual excellence. This *Abdal* was residing near a sweet spring of water, which in all probability had been a Buddhist monastery during first centuries of the Christian Era.

This Hassan, the *Abdal*, then became a Sikh and was appointed as head of the Sikh *sangat* which Guru Nanak founded there. The spring which Guru Nanak hallowed by his feet is now marked by the magnificent gurdwara at Hasan Abdal, or *Panja Sahib* in the Attock district of Western Panjab, in today's Pakistan. This was almost exactly at the period when Babar invaded India for the third time at the end of 1521 AD. Guru Nanak was eye-witness of the sack of Saidpur and the complete massacre of its inhabitants and made poignant references to this invasion and the barbaric massacre, calling upon God and man both, to witness the uncontained violence, pointedly upon God who is the creator of both, invader and the invaded.

Unison with God

Nanak left this world on 22 December, 1539 while at Kartarpur but after having appointed Guru Angad as his successor, to carry out the task of reconstruction of society in accordance with his teachings. One of Nanak's very last revelations is *Tukhari Chant* in which the Guru recalls with rare, chaste passion and in a diction at once sophisticated and simple: the seasonally changing face of the land where he was born, a land which before it is seen through the eyes of the poet and the prophet Nanak, as a barren dry alluvial plain, studded with stunted monotonous shrubbery. Guru Nanak reveals

the hidden beauties of this land's changing face along with the changing seasons of nature, month by month, in the literary tradition and genre of the *Baramaha*, the calendar's twelve months. This composition in *Raga Tukhari* in *Guru Granth Sahib* stands out for its incredible poetic splendour and philosophical import.

In the background of these changing moods of nature in the land of his birth and childhood, Guru Nanak speaks of his passionate love of God, the restlessness of the soul, the soul in search of its true nature and its yearning for unison with its original source and ultimate base, the abiding significance of human life and actions on this earth and how this life and human actions may be co-ordinated with totality of these forces, as sustain the universe. Nanak speaks of the totality of these forces, as a person (*Purukhu*), and how the varying moods of nature provided an aid to the endeavours of the individual soul for unison with this person.

Before passing away, Nanak walked with his disciples from the town of Kartarpur into the fields,



Arpana Caur : Saints are Green, Oil on Canvas: Collection Pavan and Neera Verma, Delhi

full of dark green plants of wheat, and lay down on the ground, under the open sky, under a bony *jand* tree, and had the following revelation sung to the accompaniment of instrumental music in the mode, *Majh*, which recalled the commencement and significance of his Ministry on earth :

*“An insignificant bard at the gate of the Lord was I.
My assignment was to sing His praises day and night.
He, the True Lord, has now called me to his Mansions
And there I go robed in honour”.*

550 years on

This, briefly, is the life-story of Guru Nanak, that most wonderous personality the world has ever known. The limited space of this article precludes the possibility of giving any detailed exposition of Guru Nanak's outlook on life or his teachings. Guru Nanak was born at a time when north-western India had already succumbed to the dominative impact and influence of Islam over the previous three centuries. The period of Muslim invasions of India from 664 AD to 1206 AD had passed and establishment of Muslim domination stabilised.

Particularly in northern India, the Hindu mind was in a state of much fermentation and faced disintegration owing to the extraneous impact of Islam. In the revelations of Guru Nanak, there are numerous and poignant references to the resultant social and religious conditions which prevailed at the time. In *Var-Asa* of *Guru Granth*, we are categorically informed that the old Hindu world had irretrievably crumbled : *car varan ik hoe dharam ki gati rahi*. In more than one way, this was a period of fundamental transition, politically, culturally and spiritually, a period of political disintegration. The Sultanate of Delhi came to an end with the invasion of Babar and the Mughal period then began, signifying, as the intriguing *Bhavishyapurana* text puts it, “destruction of Hindu identity and the Vedic dharma.”

This was also about the time of transition from medieval to modern India, heralded by arrival of the Portuguese Vasco-da-Gama at Calicut in 1498 AD and the victory of Babur at Panipat in 1526 AD. The advent of modern India, from the political

standpoint, is a resultant of the two forces released by these two historical events. The five preceding centuries had seen the invasion and gradual infiltration of Islam into India, even before Mughal power was strongly established, which actually led to political unity of the Indian sub-continent again, after a lapse of about seventeen centuries. These two seminal events are considered as outstanding to a serious student of history.

There had been political separation between the South and North of India, leading to containment and stagnation. Ever since the Muslims had firmly established themselves in the form of Sultanate of Delhi (1206 AD), they had attempted to extend their domination upto the farthest ends of the Indian sub-continent within the very first century of their arrival. In view of the condition of communications then prevalent, this had necessitated a shift of the centre of Muslim power from Delhi to Daulatabad (1327 AD). But the Tughlaks soon found that it was futile to attempt domination of Southern India, and within ten years of shifting of the capital, the great Hindu Empire of Vijaynagar emerged.

After emergence of this Hindu Empire, within just ten years, in quick succession the Brahmani Sultanate was founded in the Deccan which demonstrated that forces responsible for the political separation of the South from the North were by no means based on religion. The second outstanding fact of the pre-Mughal era, is the decline of authority and influence of the Delhi Sultanate even in Northern India, in Bengal in Eastern India and Sind in the West. Authority of the Delhi Sultanate was openly challenged by rebellious governors even as the Rajputs were threatening to overwhelm the nearby Muslim kingdoms of Delhi, Malwa and Gujarat. In wake of the invasion of the Timur Lang (1398-99 AD), Malwa and Gujarat finally broke away from the rulers at Delhi. Such was the situation and political disintegration prevailing in India at the time when Guru Nanak was born. Culturally too this was a turning point in the history of India. 'Highways on the seas' had opened up, establishing contacts with the Western world, while more invasions from Central Asia had extended communications and contacts with

racess professing ways of life which were fundamentally different from those of the Hindu race. The great Indologist Albiruni, in his *Kitdbul-Hind* has written that "we (the Muslims) believe in nothing in which they (the Hindus) believe and they believe in nothing which we do." This period, therefore, witnessed a cultural spectacle about which Sir John Marshal has written "seldom in the history of mankind has the spectacle been witnessed of two civilisations so vast and so strongly developed, yet so radically dissimilar as the Mohammdan and the Hindu, meeting and clashing and mingling together".

Cultural and political upheavals

What was this Hindu culture which was being so violently shaken and reshaped by these cultural and political upheavals? A critical study of development of cultural history of the Hindu race reveals the existence within it of two distinct and separable culture-forms and impulses since the earliest times when the Vedic Aryans are said to have conquered and subdued the pre-historic Mohenjodaro civilisation and the then indigenous peoples of India in the second millennium BC. This is hardly a place for discussing the genesis and contents of these two culture-forms but they may conveniently be described as *Brahmanic* and *Sramanic* culture-forms, broadly represented by the ceremonial activities and social way of life reflected in the hymns of the *Rig Veda* and the individualist, contemplative reclusive way of life represented in the reflections of the *Upanishads*.

The first is grounded in the recognition of a social hierarchy, a caste system, the second recognises human equality in the spiritual sphere. The one is aristocratic by temperament and insists upon Sanskrit as the only fit vehicle for expressing and communicating spiritual truths and cultural activities of the race, the other is democratic and freely employs *prakrits* and vernaculars for the purposes of religion and culture. The former is racial and national in spirit, insisting that Aryan truths are the monopoly and prerogative of the Hindus bounded by the geographical limits of India, the latter is universal and missionary in spirit, declaring that the whole humanity, irrespective of race and creed, are legitimate heirs to these truths. The first lays exclusive stress on ceremony and formal conformity of conduct,

the second essentially insists on the necessity of the inner culture and *sadhana*. These two culture-forms co-existed and overlapped, comingled, influenced and modified each other throughout the last 2,500 years cultural history of Hindus.

The Vedic which lasted from about 1500 to 800 BC, as European scholars compute it, mainly represented the Brahmanic way of life, and the *Upanisadic* period lasting from 500 BC to 100 AD represented, mainly, the *Sramanic* way of life, marking development of the *Upanisadas* and accompanied by the growth and expansion of Jainism and Buddhism. This was followed by a revival of the Brahmanic way of life during the climax of the great Hindu Empire of the Guptas, flowering into the Incarnation-doctrine, *Avtarvada*, codified in *Addendum* to the *Mahabharata*, called *Harivamsa*. The latest archeological excavations in India and their recent interpretation by experts throw a most revealing light on the roots of the above mentioned culture-forms and the subsequent shapes which these culture-forms have assumed through history of the Hindu race till conclusion of the 18th century. It had become clear that the potent forces behind the organisation of the Harrappa culture, which symbolised and supported the pre-Aryan culture and civilisation in India were, by no means, wholly secular and archeological finds more than hint that the priesthood of some religious order played a considerably important part in regulation of the Harrappan economy, as appears from certain walled structures of the two capital cities so far dug out, of Mohenjodaro in Sindh and Harrappa in the Montgomery District of West Pakistan.

Such rule by priests, probably priest-kings, would altogether be in accordance with what is known of other contemporary ancient civilisations in Western Asia where the written record in the form of cuneiforms and hieroglyphs has provided us with knowledge and with insight which are beyond the limits of archeology. It is not unlikely that the pre-Aryan culture and civilisation, individual and peculiar though it probably was, did not differ radically in respect of its basic organisation from contemporary cultures and civilisations. Some of

the relics found during excavations of these two ancient cities throws light on the organisation of its basis and also furnishes links between the Hindu culture-forms and religion as we know them from times of the *Rig Veda* and the religion of our pre-Aryan ancestors. The numerous clay figurines of women in all these excavations, whether in Baluchistan or Sindh, Western Punjab or Gujarat suggest that there was some form of worship of a Mother-goddess in which these figurines played their part in household shrines, while there is a clay seal impression which bears representation of a female form from whose womb issue branches of a plant and suggest the idea of an Earth-goddess connected with vegetation. Such gods are by no means rare in Hinduism of the countryside even today, the *gram devatas* and *kul-devis* of many a shrine in the country are particularly seen in the Himalayan region where iconoclastic Muslim impact has not been so fierce. Secondly, the priests of such shrines are rarely Brahmins whose authority would date back to the Aryan invasion or supremacy by the middle of the second millennium BC, but these priests are outcastes who still know the ways and customs of the gods who were sovereign rulers before *Rig Vedic* gods.

Link of Mohenjodaro and Harrappa

Development of the concept of *Sakti*, as a counterpart of the all Vedic gods, at quite an early period of the development of Hindu religious thought is definitely traceable to the cult of these pre-Aryan clay-figurines. In later centuries, whether it is the cult of Visnu or Siva, Hari or Hara, or whether it is the development of Sakatism in its pure form, it is these clay-figurines who animate and mould the subsequent development of Hindu religious thought. This is not the only link of Mohenjodaro and Harrappa with contemporary Hinduism. There is more than one representation on the seals from Mohenjodaro and Harrappa of a male-god, horned and three-faced, the *trimurti* Siva so strikingly sculptured in the Elephanta Caves, offshore from Bombay, sitting in the posture of a yogi, *padamasan* and on one seal this three-faced yogi is surrounded by beasts, unmistakably suggesting the *pasupati* Siva who is also 'the prince of the *yogins*' or *yogeswar*.

The four beasts represented on this particular seal are the tiger, elephant, rhino and the buffalo,

with a couple of deer at his feet This yogi on the seal may very well have been conceived as four-faced, the fourth face being incapable of representation on a two-dimensional place, with his four traditional links to the four quarters of the earth. This would readily recall the symbolical elephant, lion, horse and bull on the column of Asoka of third century BC at Sarnath from which the *dharmacakkara*, Asokan Wheel, now imposed on the tri-colour flag of the Republic of India, has been borrowed. The word *Shri* which in Indian official parlance and in official correspondence has almost instinctively and unofficially been adopted in supersession of all other courtesy-titles after 1947, is unmistakably and directly traceable to the concept of the female counterparts of major gods of the Hindu pantheon, which concept has its roots in the clay-figurines found in the pre-Aryan cities of Mohenjodaro and Harrappa and which, in the hands of the philosophical Hindus, has grown into the theological doctrine of dichotomy and bifurcation of the Ultimate Basis of the Universe, as the dual unity of *Siva-Sakti*. The presence of deer by the feet of the horned yogi on the above-mentioned seal furnishes another significant link with the later religion of Gautama, the Buddha, where the *Jatakas* represent Gautam as a king of the deer in one of his previous lives, with *Sarnath*, *Sarangnath*, itself signifying the place where this king of the deer had his earthly career.

There is also evidence of phallic linga-worship in the Mohenjodaro and Harrappa culture. Representations of *lingam* and *yoni* have been found, and also of tree-worship, as a female deity, is shown concealed in the branches of a *pipal tree*, which is still the holy tree of the Hindus, *ficus religiosa*. On the pieces of pottery discovered in the lowest layers at Harrappa, and Kulli, Baluchistan, *pipal* leaves provide the dominant motif for pottery painters. The well known Mohenjodaro seal-representation of the bull again shows that the humped bull was a sacred animal, true prototype of the sacred Siva's bull *Nandi* found in most Saivite temples of which the gigantic black nandi of Cammundi hill, Mysore is most famous. The privileged position which this holy animal occupies today as he slowly and royally noses his way unmolested through India's streets and bazars, helping himself to whatever

takes his sacred fancy, must date back to at least the 3rd millennium BC, if not the 5th millenium BC on the banks of the Indus and the Ravi rivers. These links are of profound and immediate interest, providing as they do some explanation of those many features that cannot be traced from the Aryan tradition brought into India after, or concurrently with the fall of the Mohenjodaro and Harrappa civilisations. Old faiths die hard. It is even possible that early historic Hindu society and its organisation owed more to Harrappa and Mohenjodaro than it did to the Sanskrit-speaking Aryans.

Shaken by Muslim impact

The Hinduism which was shaken to its very foundations by the Muslim impact was, in the five centuries preceding the rise of Guru Nanak, a body of customs and a body of ideas, the two together having such pervasive power and defensive force as to absorb or resist, in a passive or stubborn manner, for centuries past, any system that came in contact with it, though it found itself as not altogether strong enough to absorb the shock which the Muslim impact gave it. It is sometimes assumed, and even claimed by Muslims themselves, that the majority of them in India represent the influx of foreigners during the past centuries, although such is hardly the case. A great majority of Muslims in India are actually Hindu converts, although in their composition and their relation with the Hindus, they exhibit a complexity which is not easy to analyse. The first group of Muslims, no doubt, came in the shape of invading armies from the North West. They were *armies* in contrast to all the earlier invasions, which were *folk-migrations*, the Aryans, Scythians and the Hunas. As such they did not make any large scale settlements on the soil of India. From the very start, these men formed a military ruling caste, and though their numbers were considerable enough to form communities, they were scattered groups rather than compact bodies. These men and their descendants then scattered and formed, first a military aristocracy then a ruling caste and eventually a social *elite*. They are still to be seen in the Indian Muslims families of the upper strata, the *Qureishis*, the *Sayyads*, the *Chughtais* and the *Bukharis*, not all of them being genetically genuine.

The remaining Muslim population, almost ninety five per cent of it, are Hindu converts, mostly from low-castes. These conversions were of two kinds, individual among the upper classes of the Hindus and mass among the lower classes. Upper class Hindu individuals embraced Islam either from conviction or from policy. A long list could be made of persons during Muslim rule and holding high rank and official positions, who were Hindu converts. But the bulk of Muslim population comes from mass converts, some as a result of forcible conversions, terror or economic duress, but others, and there is considerable number of such mass conversions, who embraced Islam voluntarily. Wherever the Muslims were established in power, then Islam could not have failed to attract the Hindu outcastes. It's promise of brotherhood, its simple and complete demands, its comparatively few taboos opened up a new world to any outcaste who could see beyond the sun-baked mud walls and the surrounding shrub-land of his village.

Decadent Mahayana Buddhism

There is another, but very little known, factor which accounts for these mass conversions, the decadent Mahayana Buddhism. Not long before the Muslim impact in the 11th century, the Buddhist population in India, by and large, came under the political domination of the militant Hindu dynasties who were active protagonists of the *Brahmanic* form of culture which is the traditional antithesis of the *sramanic* form. The resultant cultural conflict considerably aided the alliance of Buddhist masses with political Islam, both in north western India and the Ghandhara valley, as well as in eastern India and Bengal. The subtle metaphysical doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism, called the doctrine of the *trikaya*, as understood by the generality of the Buddhist masses, helped and hastened the absorption of these populations into Islam.

The Buddhist Trinity or *trikaya* is a complex doctrine and, as understood by the Buddhist masses of Mahayana persuasion, it represents grades of Buddhahood, *dharamakaya*, *ambhogkaya* and *nirmankaya*. These are a complex group of conceptions and are typical of the subtlety of Mahayana thought. Buddhahood, according to the esoteric tradition, has seven Buddha *kshetras* of which the *trikaya* represents the three, just as the 'body', 'soul and 'spirit' of St. Paul

is a condensed version of the seven-fold human nature of early Greek philosophers. From another angle, these grades of Buddhahood include *Sampuran Buddha*, *Pratyeka Buddha* etc. and *dharamkaya* i.e. the body of the Dharma, which is the religious vesture of a Buddha, is supposed to be present in varying degrees in all ages and climes. It was the doctrine of *trikaya*, which made it easy for the Buddhist masses of north western India and eastern India to accept the status and authority of Prophet Mohammed as the foundation-head of revealed truth. For, in the Buddhism, as Dr. Suzuki has pointed out, "Mahayana Buddhism is a religion which developed around the life and personality of the Buddha rather than a religion based upon the words of his mouth. The person is greater and more real than his words. In fact, words gain validity because of the person behind them." To be absorbed into Islam, and to renounce their ancestral faith, the Buddhist masses, when they came in contact with Islam, did not experience any great spiritual qualms such as the Hindu masses of the *svarna Brahmanic* classes did.

On the political plane, their conversions to Islam did not represent crude coercion, as it did in the case of militant and priestly classes of the Hindus whose political power had been extinguished, but it was a release for them from the political tensions and cultural pressure in which they were living. On the religious and spiritual plane, the conversion to Islam represented to them an easy and an almost imperceptible glide. Once it was accepted that *dharamkaya* was, in the historical past, the vesture of the Prophet of Arabia, Mohammed, the rest became easy. The *Koran*, as the revealed truth through Mohammed, then logically became the code of conduct and repository of religious truth to be meticulously followed. The Catholicism, the universality, and the metaphysical subtlety of Mahayana Buddhism, which had made it into a great world-religion for a thousand years in the greater part of Asia, directly facilitated the accession of its populations to Islam, while those who followed Brahmanic Hinduism showed far greater tenacity and resistance to the impact and onslaught of Islam.

Al-Biruni (970-1039 AD) author of the *Kitab-ul-Hind*, who came to India in the wake of the invasion of Mahmood of Ghazni, notes in chaste Arabic but

with unconcealed acerbity that, “Hindus believe that there is no country like theirs, no nation like theirs, no religion like theirs, and no science like theirs.” Al-Biruni adds that, “the ancestors of the Hindus were not so narrow-minded as (are) the present generation.”

The Bhakti School

Something has already been said as to what are the essential teachings of Guru Nanak. Considerable ignorance and misunderstanding prevails about these teachings for a variety of reasons. He has been called the exponent of the Bhakti movement in medieval India, and it has even been asserted that he was a disciple of Kabir. Intelligent scholars no longer assert that there was any personal contact or even intellectual commerce between Kabir and Guru Nanak, but it is not properly realised that Guru Nanak was neither a *bhakta* in the historical sense of the word, nor an exponent of the Bhakti School of medieval India.

What is the Bhakti School and what is a *bhakta* ? Literally, bhakti is understood as devotion to God, a fervent devotion to God. In that sense it is an essential part of all Deistic religions, past and present. This is to be found wherever men turn in eagerness of desire or in extremity of despair away from themselves, to a supreme power, *Du*, of Martin Buber : “You perceive it and accept it for your Truth”, capable of controlling their environments and their destinies. This *bhakti* is unmistakably present in our earliest records, *Vedas* and in *Rig Veda*, the grace of god, *Varuna* already provides the ground for and expression of *bhakti*.

In the Egyptian Pyramid texts and in the writings of the baked tablets of Mesopotamia, in the texts of the Old and New Testaments of the Jews, this element of *bhakti* is unmistakably present. In Hindu Sacred literature, however, the idea of bhakti had a genesis and development of its own. It is not with the general and abstract idea of bhakti with which we are here concerned when assessing the teachings of Guru Nanak, with reference to the claim that he belongs to the Bhakti School of Hinduism but with historical development of this idea of bhakti in the religious history of Hinduism. In the later-than-Vedas literature of the *Brahmanas* (800-500 BC) *Visnu*, though only one of the gods, already has assumed an attraction which distinguishes

him from the others. Whether it is to rectify an error in a ritual of *yajna*, or it is in marriage, *Visnu*’s aid is invariably invoked, but by far the most important reference to *Visnu* in the Brahmanas is the legend which is subsequently incorporated in the Addendum, *Khilla*, to *Mahabharata*, called *Harivamsa*, the legend in which *Vishnu*, as *Vamanavtar*, redeemed the Earth from the oppression of the king of demons, the asura, Bali. *Visnu* as *Vaman* was contemptuously offered by Bali as much of the earth as he could measure by his three strides. Straightaway, *Vaman* swelled into the huge form of *Trivikram*, the Grant of the three Strides, and with his first step bestrode the whole earth, with the second the whole heavens and his third stride he placed on the head of Bali thus killing him : *at damn bali badho...ati sarvatra varjayeti*. ‘Bali lost his life because he gifted excessively.....all excess is dangerous’.

It is this thread of the legend which is taken over in *Bhagvadgita* (200 BC) and transformed into magnificent doctrine of the god *Visnu* assuming terrestrial forms, “whenever there is decline in Dharma on earth” *yada yadahi dharamasya gilanir bhavati*. This doctrine in the *Bhagvadgita*, is the corner-stone of the Hindu Bhakti movement. Whatever the philosophical inconsistencies of this doctrine, it has struck firm roots in the Hindu mind during the last two thousand years. This doctrine, in the first place, takes shape of the identity of the Brahman and the Atman of the *Upanisads*, and then identifies it with the god, *Visnu*, who is one of the three gods of the Hindu Trinity, the other two being *Brahma* and *Siva*. *Visnu* and *Brahma* are, from now onwards, convertible terms. Secondly, it identifies *Visnu* with certain prota-historical personalities, such as *Rama* and *Krishan* and lastly, it lays down the technics of salvation and release from recurrent births, the method of *bhaktimarg* in addition to the two methods already approved, the *jnnmarg* and the *karammarg*. How the incarnated god can be reconciled with the impersonal, actionless, absolute, *Brahmn* of *Upanisads* and of *Advaitavada* of the later *Samkaracarya*, the *Bhagvadgita* does not satisfactorily answer. It was not until many centuries had passed that the Bhakti movement found a competent philosopher in the person of *Ramanuj* (1017-1137) and in his *visistadavaita* he tried to reconcile the conception of impersonal *Brahmn* with the incarnated *Visnu*. But Ramanuj was not the

morning star of the Bhakti movement as is sometimes assumed. Between the period of *Bhagvadgita* and *Ramanuj*, a mighty movement of Bhakti took birth and flourished in South India represented by a succession of over fifty saints, known as *Alvars*.

In their hymns and songs, these *Alvar* saints assume the position taken up in the *Bhagvadgita* with regard to the identity of *Visnu* and *Krishna*, and in the type of devotion which they represent and approve. They maintain *bhaktimarg* as the sure way to salvation. This happened in the period between 7th and 9th centuries of the Christian era and a parallel movement of bhakti also arose which identified the *Brahmn* with Siva but without positing that Siva had assumed a historical incarnation. The thesis held by some recent scholars that the *Bhakti* movement in India owed its origin or main stimulus to influence or impact of Islam is thus found to be rather farfetched. The hymns of these *Alvar* saints, which are all in the Tamil language, were gathered together by Nathmuni in 920 AD and were called *Nalayira-prabandham* and these hymns are regarded by *Alvars* as embodying the essence and validity of the Vedas and they are used in replacement of sacred Sanskrit texts in the ritual worship by the *Alvars*.

Evolution of Sikhism

These facts are interesting as they throw light on certain facets of the Sikh movement as it developed out of the teachings of Guru Nanak. Guru Arjan, the Fifth Nanak, collected his own revelations and of his predecessors into one volume, called *Adi Granth* (1604 AD) and this *Adi Granth*, is popularly referred to as the fifth Veda in northern India. This 'fifth Veda' in succession of time to the four previous Vedas, is believed to supersede and replace them all. The suggestion which is sometimes made that the *Adi Granth* was compiled with a view to give the Sikh people status of 'the People of the Book', *ahlkitab*, "those to whom Allah spoke", to obtain for them a political status higher than that of the Hindus and to save them from the exactions of *jeziyeh*, is thus shown to be merely fanciful, if not spiteful. Bhakti was imported to northern India by a follower of Ramanujacarya Ramanand, who came to reside at Benaras, modern Varanasi, in about 1430 AD and the movement which he founded there produced two mighty figures, Kabir and Tulsidas.

Kabir sought to bridge the gulf between the creeds of the Hindus and the Muslims by preaching bhakti of an impersonal God, while Tulsidas followed the conservative tradition of preaching the bhakti of a personal god, Visnu incarnated as Rama. At end of the 13th century, Bhakti appeared in Maharashtra and Western India through the works of Jnanesvar, who wrote a commentary on the *Bhagvadgita* in verse. In the 16th and 17th centuries the Bhakti movement flowered into its full bloom with Tukaram and Caitanya in north-eastern India. Caitanya worshipped *Visnu* in the form of Krishan and Tukaram in the form of his village god, *Vithobha*. Mention has already been made of bhakti towards Siva as a god of the Hindu Trinity and by the great Tamil poet Manikkavicar (circa 900 AD) in his *Saivasidhanta*, wherein god Siva is transformed into being Siva, the Saviour. Bhakti is also preached by the Sakatas in their scripture *Devi Bhagvati*. From these synopses of the development of Bhakti thought in India, it becomes clear that *Bhakti* as a devotional attitude in religion must be distinguished from *Bhakti* proper which is equivalent to *bhagvata-puja*, that is, devotion towards god, *Visnu* or, at other times, towards some other deity of the Hindu Trinity or outside it.

When it is asserted that Guru Nanak was not a *Bhakta*, what is meant is, firstly, that he did not teach that *Bhaktimarg*, that is, mere emotional devotion which constituted the whole or the essence of religious activity or that it was in itself exclusively sufficient for salvation, whatever the content of that term 'salvation' may be, and secondly, that he is not, in any sense, a follower of the doctrine that takes its inception from the doctrine in *Bhagvadgita* asserting the identity of the Absolute Brahmn with *Visnu* and the identity of *Visnu* with the incarnated human form of Krishna or some other proto-historical figure.

The essence of this Bhakti movement may thus be summed up in the following two propositions

- * That God *Visnu* is a compassionate Person, who out of his compassion for human beings incarnates himself from time to time, *sambhavami-yugeyuge* and has so incarnated himself as Rama and Krishna, the proto-historical individuals.

- * That the finite selves may be saved through the loving worship of this incarnated god.

By implication, this doctrine of Bhakti transcends distinctions of caste in so far as the spiritual salvation of finite selves through bhakti is concerned. There is the splinter group of this Bhakti movement whose greatest exponent is *Kabir*, called the *Nirguna* School, as contrasted with the *Sarguna* School, who worship God in His human incarnations. The *Nirguna* School lays stress on worship of God in His infinite and formless aspect. The *Nirguna* School neither denies the possibility or historical truth of 'Incarnations', nor crusades against the Institutes of caste as embodied in the *asramadharma*. It does not protest against the social discrimination inherent in the doctrine and the political consequences of such discrimination, nor does it challenge the sources of authority in which these distinctions are rooted, the corpus of Sanskrit *Brahmanic* literature, from *Rigveda* down through the *Bhagvadgita*, to *Manavadharmasastra*.

In ultimate analysis, the *Nirguna* School is essentially a methodology and not a fundamentally distinct doctrine. It is a method of salvation for the finite selves and no more.

Historical Perspective

It has been necessary to go through this cultural background of Hinduism and to provide this historical perspective of its political and social conditions so as to furnish a backdrop to the content and significance of the religion revealed by Guru Nanak. The birth of Guru Nanak is thus seen to coincide with one of the most critical periods of the history of the Hindu race, if not, indeed, the entire mankind. A whole political and cultural epoch had come to an end and medieval India concluded with the second battle of Panipat in 1526 AD. A unified modern India took birth from the ruins of a disintegrated and medieval India. The organism of the Hindu society and Hindu culture had, for the first time in its history, failed to absorb the shock of a foreign impact, that of Islam, and to assimilate it. Hinduism sometimes likened to a ship in which one can compare its hierarchical castes and the essential ideas that bind them, with the steel frame-work and special fixtures, such as the engines and the steering gear, which

fixtures are located in some parts but not in all sections of the Hindu ship. So, it is claimed a mixture of all these component parts, a loss of any one of which would involve the sinking of the ship. This view of Hinduism still persists along with a faith in its almost limitless powers of assimilation and its capacity to endure.

The analysis of consequences of the impact of Islam on the Hindu race given above should provide a necessary corrective to this faith and optimism on which some contemporary politician might wish to base his state policies today. Some modern ships are so carefully constructed and sub-divided with such technical perfection that they are deemed unsinkable, a claim similar to that made on behalf of Hinduism. Seamen, however, know that these claims of unsinkability are only based on a calculation of known and predictable dangers. This, at any rate, is the warning note implicit in the teachings of Guru Nanak. In this cultural and historical background, and in the locale of the north-western India and the Punjab where always decisive political and cultural struggles and upheavals have taken place crucial to the destiny of the Hindu race, Guru Nanak set upon his appointed task of laying down the foundations of a new Society which must retain all that is true in the past, and yet accept supplementation and re-arrangement to guard against the already known dangers and to provide strength and elasticity necessary for future risks and perils. Guru Nanak is neither a "*bhakti*" as our Akasvani delights in referring to him and nor an adherent of the *nirguna* school of *Bhakti* as aspirants to academic doctorates in our present day universities love to dub him. His only contention with the B movement is of an accidental character, of chronological nature.

Historically, Guru Nanak lived in the 15th century which was a flowering century of *Bhakti* movement in northern India and this alone relates him to this phase of Hinduism. Secondly, Guru Nanak in his revelations, makes use of metaphors and phrases, verbal expressions and idioms which are the stock-in-trade of the religious pious literature of his times, which was more or less, inevitable. With regard to the meanings and nuances of these metaphors and phrases, he leaves no doubt whatever that he is trans-valuating and not mechanically copying. That which sharply

distinguishes him from the *Bhakti* movement as well as the *nirguna* School is demonstrably fundamental. Guru Nanak absolutely repudiates the concept of Incarnation of God, who is *ajuni saibhanga*, 'unborn and self-existent'. Guru Nanak denies the adequacy and efficacy of any mere emotional approach or loving adoration of a formal God for salvation though he concedes its high value. Guru Nanak insists that a life lived in a social context and on an ethical plan is necessary for salvation. His concept and content of 'salvation' is also distinct from that conceived by the followers of the *Bhakti* School, in more than one fundamental respect. Above all, Guru Nanak repudiates not only the Hindu caste structure but the whole basis of the divine authority for *Varnasramadharma* and asserts that a full and authentic religious life is impossible without such repudiation. These are fundamental and significant points and an appreciation of these distinctions alone can explain why Guru Nanak's teachings resulted in the birth of a political nation and a special society while no such fruits ripened out of the variegated chromatism of the *Bhakti* movement.

Japuji

As a philosophical foundation of the religion he brought to humankind, Guru Nanak rejected *mayavad-vedanta*: the interpretation by *Samkara* of the *Upanisadas*, which doctrine involves a denial of the reality of the world, and which doctrine has glaciated and pervaded the whole thought of the Hindu race. It is epitomised in the cliché: *Tattwamasi*. All moral and individual distinctions are, in this way, obliterated, the criminal and the saint are equally manifestations of *Brahamn*, and to believe that one has a separate individuality A, B or C is to dwell into a state of gross error and crass illusion, or at least, a state in which the facts are fundamentally misperceived and misconceived. Thus a social life on a rigorous ethical plane, with an abiding sense of duties and rights, becomes inconceivable and the absence of social cohesion, and consequent political weakness logically and inevitably proceed from this position. Guru Nanak has placed his new Society on a sound philosophic base. His *Japu* is believed by many as an epitome of Nanak's philosophy and teachings and the whole of the remaining *Guru Granth* is viewed as essentially exegetic. This thesis about the *Japu* is

arguable and in the *Japu*, Guru Nanak has clearly laid down that the moral categories and imperatives are absolutely real and abiding, and not mere verbal quibbling's or relativistic. Having thus repudiated *mayavad-vedanta* and having firmly established the validity and the absolute ontological status of ethical categories, Guru Nanak preached that the content of salvation was not merely individual but collective and social. Thus is the validity of social progress and political activity, within the frame work of a religious life of the highest order, retrieved.

Three pillars of Sikhism

The organisation of the Sikhs into the *Khalsa Panth*, as a political organisation was founded with the explicit and declared object of gaining political fulcrum so as to establish a free, vital and progressive Society in which it becomes possible for each individual to develop his personality as a limb of the Society. That religion is to be practised not in utter and unrelated seclusion and retirement, not by a denial and negation of the world and sense-experience, but on the social, ethical and co-operative plane, is the point which Guru Nanak is clearly making in the 16th stanza of the *Japu*. These teachings and these doctrines can have nothing but a remote and superficial resemblance with the teachings of the *Bhakti* School, and the historical contiguity of Guru Nanak to a certain phase of the *Bhakti* movement in northern India is more than a coincidence. These teachings of Guru Nanak entail fundamental and far-reaching social and political consequences, and history of the Panjab, henceforth inevitably, becomes the Sikh history. During the last days of his sojourn on this earth, Guru Nanak settled, as already said, in a township which he himself founded on the right bank of the river Ravi, called Kartarpur. He settled as a farmer on the lands surrounding this township and worked there with his own hands, so as by precept and by deed to teach and demonstrate as to what one of the three pillars of Sikhism, *kirat karo* signifies. This means, engaging in honest, non-exploitive, creative labour. All the fruits of the labour, whether of his own or of his Sikhs were pooled into a common fund out of which the needs of the local community were met and out of which a common and free kitchen was run and which was open to all those who needed food and which fund was open to all those who stood in some need or

succour. Thus Guru Nanak exhorted mankind to adopt a life of religion, a life of nearness to and awareness of God, a life of ethical conduct and a life of social service, of mutual co-operation, and of self-sacrifice, in short, a way of life alone capable of redeeming man.

Trans-valuation of Values

What Guru Nanak's teachings and life's work amount to is not merely the inception of a religious movement, much less a phase of *Bhakti* movement of medieval India. Happily, Nietzsche has given us a phrase through which we may comprehend the true significance of the achievements of Guru Nanak. The phrase is "Trans-valuation of Values". The process of this kind is neither a phase nor a link in any preceding historical movement, strictly speaking. It is the most fundamental character of a civilisation, of every civilisation. It is the beginning of a civilisation in that it remoulds all the basic forms of a culture that went before. It understands them differently and practices them in another way. Apparently, as it strikes all but the most keen observer, it begets no more, but only reinterprets. But it is neither a repetition nor a continuation but a new fundamental phenomenon. Indeed, such a process alone, as is the case with the teachings of Guru Nanak, assumes that the genuine act of creation has already occurred enabling it to enter upon an inheritance of big actualities. It is in this sense that Guru Nanak might be said to have founded no novel religion but merely unfolded the potentialities that lay dormant in the human psyche.

Nevertheless, Guru Nanak has ushered in a new spiritual era as well as a social and political era for mankind. This was not a matter of mere political or even religious transformation. It was the condition of the soul of a people which underwent transformation. It was the kind of process which took place in the Graeco-Roman world in the interval from Socrates to Marcus Aurelius and in the case of India at the time after the Vedic *aranyakas* and coming into existence of the *upanisadic* literature, round about the time of Emperor Asoka. No external life and conduct, no institutions and

customs, but the deepest and the last things are in question when such a process is initiated. Viewed thus alone it is possible to understand Guru Nanak and Sikhism, properly.

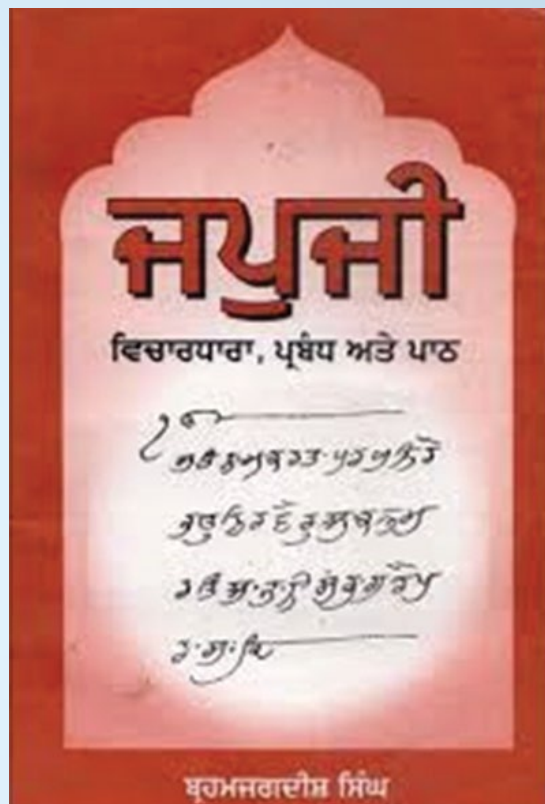
As a divine, inspired thinker and a religious teacher, Guru Nanak thus occupies a uniquely significant place in History. He has neatly separated pure religion from ethics and ritual. He has determined the place of religion in social context and has clearly shown their interdependence. He has, with remarkable penetration, analysed and formulated the basic problems of social organisation namely, the creation of wealth, the distribution of wealth and the organisation of power, the problems which only in recent years have assumed a clear and definite shape in the human mind, but problems to which clear and acceptable answers are still awaited. Guru Nanak gives definite and clear answers to these problems and correlates them to the problem of religion. Such clear formulation of the basic problems, their elucidation, their solution, and their correlation to each other, is not to be found easily in the past human History. His teachings arose out of the political and social problems of the Hindu race at a great critical transitional period and the answers that he gave to these problems are calculated, not only to preserve that what is best in the Hindu genius, but also to furnish a firm foundation for reconstruction of the Hindu as well as the universal human society, to meet the requirements of the modern age, of which he is indubitably the morning star. Further, the teachings of Guru Nanak shed and projected light into the future and seek to solve its social and religious questions, a prognostication of which problems is assuming a dim shape only today.

Let us salute Guru Nanak.

** Based on the paper read at the Punjabi University, Patiala on 29 April, 1976 by Bhai Sahib Sirdar Kapur Singh M.A. (Pb), M.A (Cantab), Indian Civil Service, Ex Member of Parliament, Ex. Member, Punjab Legislative Assembly, Professor of Religion, Khalsa College, Bombay National Professor of Sikhism.*

Paintings by Arpana Caur

The 'Japuji' of Guru Nanak



dwells within me when I read the hopeful message, “*Thou shalt not live by bread alone.*” My thirst for reality is greatly assuaged. And when I reflect that Sikhs of the olden times, the disciples of the Guru, lived on the hymn of ‘*Japuji*’ I am filled with joy and thankfulness. So profound has been the influence of the constant repetition of this divine lyric by my Sikh ancestors, the ancestry that started only 450 years ago (*this essay was written in 1919*), that when I dip myself in cold water, involuntarily escapes the song out of me as birds cry out at break of dawn. To have dissolved its pure cadences in the blood of the Sikh children is a great artistic work. For this hymn gives joy; it vitalises the whole of our spiritual being, and elevates and ennobles. Its touch cools down all fires of desire and the peace that was of Buddha, comes to the Sikhs, to both men and women as they chant the Guru’s songs.

Today if you ask any Sikh child to choose between *Japuji* and bread; he will answer unhesitatingly “*Japuji!*” I am glad whenever I find the son of Man rises above physical need. And the true Sikh, a true hero, will not exchange his *Japuji* for the wealth of the three worlds, for the comforts of a Paradise or the joys of a dream-world of intense pleasure. With a broken shoe, a

Modern age has been auto-suggesting through its false science of political economy that man lives on bread alone. Miserably small and depressing is this animalistic view of human life! The greatest thinkers of the world have not put faith in bread alone. Pregnant with spiritual beauty are the memorable words of Jesus Christ, “*Thou shalt not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*”

All animals get hungry; they must go to the manger, but to glorify this physical necessity, as does the modern world, is the outcome of ignorance and of blindness to spiritual values. My eyes turn upwards and kiss the lotus feet of the Great One who



Images from the Internet



"The Mountain is such a splendid Sikh of the Guru"

tattered turban, and a thread-bare shirt, a poor toiler on the earth without name or caste reads *Japuji* as he sits clothed in the colour of the false dawn under a tree in the wilderness. His eyes grow red with delight and as he opens them there is the red sun trembling in the east. The Sikh is one with Nature and it is *Japuji* that has brought this about.

Japuji is a hymn that has in its ring the tremble of the stars, the flickering lamps of this blue-domed Temple. They who live on the surface, rebuke the Sikh for wearing a white turban, but as he raises his head, the clouds disperse and reveal the snow-covered mountains. I sometimes wonder because the mountain is such a splendid Sikh of the Guru. The Sikh copies his fashions of dress from the beautiful in nature. Of what use is life, if my head does not rise above all its circumstances and conditions even as the high white mountain rises above the plains? Seeing the river that comes out of the mountains like a song, is it manly for me to have a heart that is not the fountain of all the rivers that flow? *Japuji* has in it the inimitable

rhythm of life in Nature : it makes man a fountain that flows with the milk of human kindness. *Japuji* is the text of the art of living in unison with Nature and with Nature's God. It describes creation, as the divine poet sees it and suggests the realisation of cosmic consciousness. Our reasons are of the material and therefore negligible; but feeling is of the spiritual. Nothing in the other scriptures and Bibles of men equals *Japuji* in its wonder, its depth and its simple clarity of perfect revelation of personal truth. Those who have the likeness of God in them dwell within the inmost circle of the family that is Nature. Is it not crude to speak of 'one's own family' and not to be of all families? What is that courtyard which has not the moon and the mountains within its small expanse? What is that house which has not the wondrous expanse of the whole universe? It is miserable to be small. I wonder we do not suffocate in mental misery because of this ignorant exclusiveness. But by its rhythm, *Japuji* of Guru Nanak lifts us up to great heights. We clasp the stars in one hand and the roots of life on earth in the other.

The 'Japuji', in translation

*'O Beloved,
Thy name is Truth
Thou art the Person who creates,
Thou art the humanity that hath no fear, no enmity.
Thy shining spiritual form is above time and space.
Thou art immortality,
Self-radiant Thou, O Love,
Whom no birth can envisage
And no death can remove
'O Beloved,
Sacred, secret is Thy name.
And it opens like the flower of life in the kindness of the
Guru.
Thou art eternity
The beginning Thou,
The middle Thou,
The end Thou.
O Beloved,
Thou art beyond the wings of thought,
Thou art beyond the plumbings of silence.
Without Thee desire is not sated
And all wise proposings sink with sorrow, nothing avails
without Thee.
Living with Thee,
In Thee, O Great Love,
Consenting to be Thine for ever and ever is life's fulfilment.
At the signal of Thy brow
The forms rise,
The souls are cast,
And glory gilds the brow even of the smallest, the meanest.
At the signal of Thy brow
Life is scattered in myriad positions, low and high,
And the souls rise up through pain and pleasure.
Some are the gifted beings in union with Thee
And others wander away, in their orbits, for ever and ever.
All is the superb creation of Thy eyes, 'O Beloved.
Thou art.
Glory, glory, 'O Beloved.
All are in Thy sunshine.
Thieves, they say.
Cut-throats, robbers who live on other's blood,
Sinners, slanderers, liars,
They say these are mean and small,
But when Thou shinest, all is beautiful.
I am attracted out of myself,
Fascinated by Thee I sacrifice myself to Thee.
Glory, glory, O Beloved,
All is well.
Thy palace is of music made,*



*On its walls the universe breaks in song,
Its sky is full of fair dancers,
The space resounds with the rhythm of soundless bliss,
The rivers and the continents sing Thy Name, 'O Beloved,
The stars beam with Naming Thee
The mail-clad warrior is fierce,
But his heroic death on the battle-field sings in faint tunes
of love Thy anthems of personality-music.
Thy dream rolls on.
Life is inspiration of Thy Beauty,
And they are the princes of Heaven who love, who love,
In that still repose of soul, in the infinite rapture of silence.
When one I buds forth into a million,
When the voices of the rivers become my voice.
And the cries of birds on wing my own,
And the leaves of the forest and the blades of grass my
myriad tongues,
When one call of mine to Thee, 'O Beloved,
Becomes a million, and that million becomes a million
again,
And the wheel of the whole Universe moves as a wheel in
wheel of song
Naming Thee, 'O Beloved, and ever in harmony with the
celestial music within my soul of Thy Love.
And my once saying "Thou", "Thou", 'O Beloved, Starts
the countless ages of life saying "Thou" "Thou".
Of this music is made the ladder that rises up to Thee.
And they meet Thee who scaling this shining ladder cross
the frontier.
Beyond, there, up, above, the highest art Thou,
'O Beloved,
And higher floats like the nimbus around Thee Thy song
of Naam,
And the entrance unto Thy Palaces is according to the
assonance of one's soul ; they enter whom Thou callest,
And the smiths that make men of themselves toil hard at
their craft.
They cast and recast their souls in the image of Thee, 'O
Beloved,
From near and far, It is the music of life that ascends to
Thee.
Born of waters,
We children of earth
Hear news of Thee from the winds.
Day and night nurse all life.
According to the actions of each soul are appointed places
for all, be they near or far,
Those who Name Thee, Beloved, are perfected,
Bright are the faces of the victors who have learnt to live in
the maddening music of Thy Presence, 'O Love, my Love !*

It is a charmed hymn. In its repetition is life. It is wonderful that Guru Nanak resumes his personality in this one hymn of His. We meet the master in its sound. They of this earth have not yet heard of it, but the Heavens resound with its lilt.

I think it is of no benefit to translate it. Having translated it once, in another mood, I am impelled to translate it again. At least I wish to translate it endlessly. And it is for ever impossible to translate it. In its vision swing many universes. In its sound live many beautiful gods and goddesses. In its movement there is the thrill of the silver steps of a myriad dancers of the sky. In its repetition is the assonance of a choir of Heaven, and the companionship of the liberated souls. It teaches no philosophy but it imparts the spark of life. Be it true or false, in its chant is the secret of the future esoteric religion of the whole mankind. And one never has enough of this spiritual chant. *Japuji* will make the little sweet intense language of the Punjab the universal language of man. "A fond hope !" you may say. But love has its ways. And a small track may lead to a new continent I do not know. Love works all miracles. And Guru Nanak's chosen language may, by the love of His name, be the chosen of the people of this earth.

Its cadence is audible in Heaven : this much I know.

Some of you will say this is not a translation of *Japuji*. True, it is not the million readings we can have of it, but it is one of those readings. Music has an infinite number of moods and meanings. Moreover, this translation is absolutely literal. I should be a blasphemer if I were to give any sense differing from that of the Guru in my translation of His hymns. I like the short rendering given above better than that I gave in *The Sisters of the Spinning Wheel* and I still like some of the passages in my earlier version. And when out of the million more renderings I have yet to give in centuries to come, I shall have selected the best, pearl-like in their beauty, and have strung them on a thread of light, I shall then make still other translations and become so vain with pride of wearing the garland, that then perhaps my ambition of translating *Japuji* will have its first crude fulfilment.



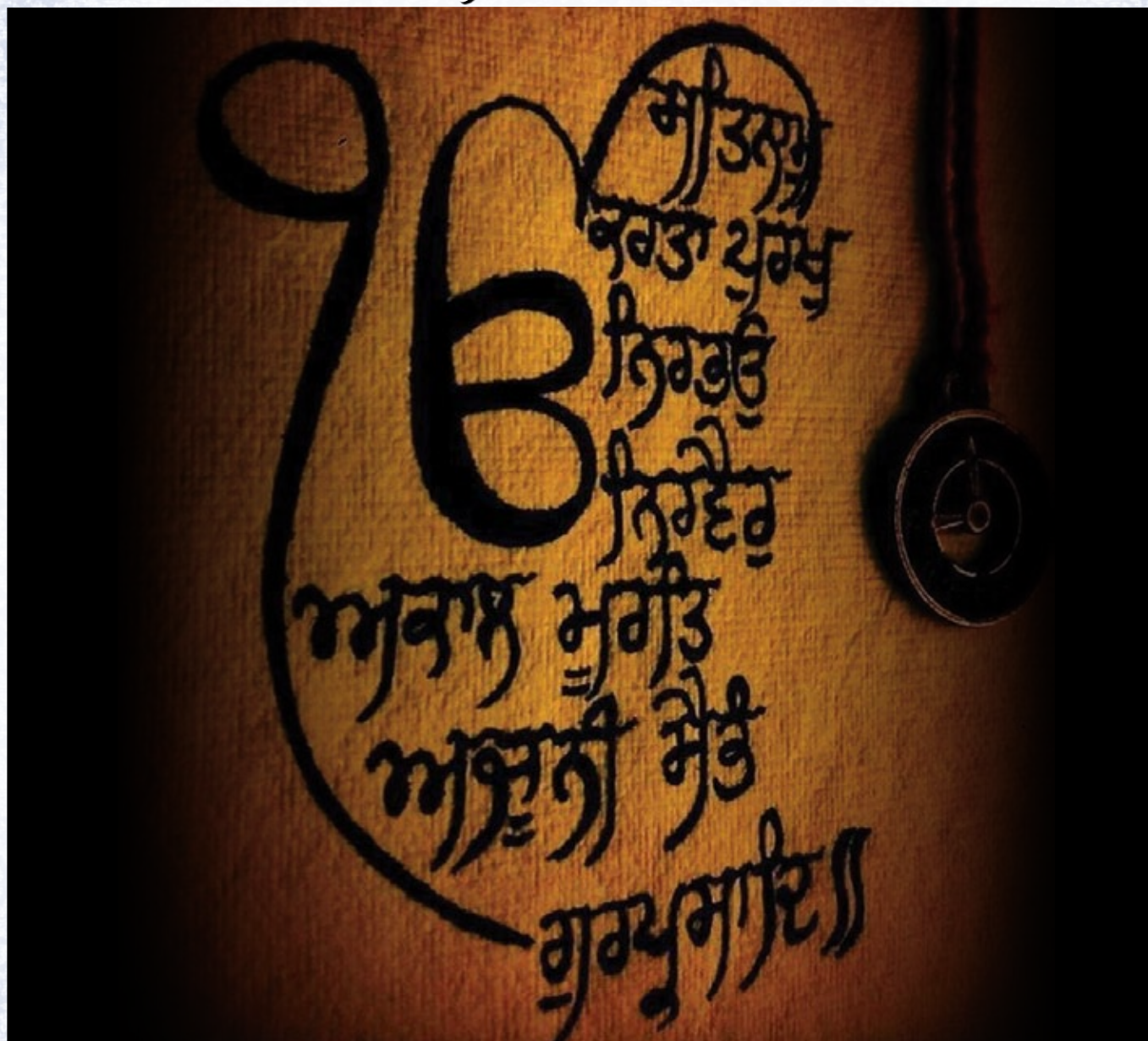
I make a personal confession here. I have been saved from death by the love of the maker of *Japuji*. I have doubted frequently with others of the age the merit of repeating the psalms of the Guru, but by actual experiments conducted by myself on myself, I find that without *Japuji* one dies, that the personal love for the Guru falls into the dust and dirt of daily life and that without *Japuji*, one is famished. Without the repetition of the psalm of the Guru one becomes heavy of soul — and knows it not ! Repeated singing of the psalm is to me the very essence of the best ethical state of mind. But all lyrical repetition follows love, it cannot precede it. No one who has not learnt the lesson of the sorrow of this life is capable of love of the Guru and without His love there can be no life of the spirit.



From Puran Singh's book : **Spirit Born People**,
Chapter VII

Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia on

The Concept of Akal Murat



Time and Reality in Sikh Philosophy

Sikhism ushered in a qualitatively new mode of thought in the realm of religious philosophies of the world. Before Guru Nanak, first Prophet of the Sikhs, ‘ultimate reality’ was thought to be

manifesting itself in four main ways [*] revelation in the Word; [*] immanence in space (nature); [*] incarnation in the individual, human form, and [*] dwelling in the self *qua* soul seen as efflux of the

Absolute. With Sikhism, emerged for the first time in the history of religious thought a new conception of time-transcendent God descending in time (history) and determinating Himself *qua* Spirit in and through the-collective form of Society.

Such new conception of God marks a qualitative change in cognition of the ultimate reality from *Being* to *Spirit*. This evolutionary change, heralded by Sikh metaphysics involves a new conception of time.

The concept of *Being* (substance) involves the notion of uncreated, eternal, isotropic (spatial) time which, according to Barrow, the teacher of Newton, is “the continuance of anything in its own being” On the other hand the idea of Spirit partakes of anisotropic time of which the conception of historical time, as implied in Sikh metaphysics, is one form. Vedantic thought (in its generic form) is essentially based on cognition of the ultimate reality in terms of *Being* (substance) with its corresponding isotropic notion of time which, divested of its essential temporality and historicity, turns out to be a static, space-like continuum in which ultimate reality abides in its self-same, unchanging state of being as substance can individual soul as a microcosmic form or part of the ultimate reality is also conceived of as “abiding substance”. In other words the Vedantic conception of Akal refers to timelessness of ultimate reality, that is, to its eternal, self-same state of *being* in the static continuum of time. This is contradiction from the Gurbani concept of *Akal Murat* which refers to the *a priori*, in-itself, time-transcendence of God, who *qua* Spirit descends in historical time.

The point is that connotation of the term *Akal Murat* can be properly understood only in perspective of the view that Sikhism is essentially a religion of the *Spirit* contradistinguish-able from pre-Nanak religions and religious philosophies (Vedantic) which partake of the concept of *Being* (substance) as the ultimate reality.

The concept of *Akal Murat* is key-note of the Sikh *Mool Mantra*—the quintessence of the Sikh doctrine. But almost all of traditional interpretations follow the Vedantic conception of time and reality. As such the entire *Mool Mantra* is rendered in a Vedanticised way. Take, for instance, *A Rendering from the Jap (u)* by Prof

Gurbachan Singh Talib, who has rendered *Sat Nam* as “Reality Eternal”. The opening passage of the *Japji-Aad Such, Jugad Sach*-has been translated as : “The Eternal, The Holy Ever Was, Ever Shall Be.” Further, Prof Talib refers to the “eternity” of God in the sense of His “immutability in all time.”

With Prof Talib and other scholars following the Vedantic tradition, timelessness of God means not a supra-temporal state, but a quality of being eternal, that is, immutable in all time.

Eternity as a state of being (immutable) in time is a category applicable to the Vedantic ultimate reality-Brahman *qua* Being (substance)-and not to the Sikh conception of the Absolute *qua* Spirit conceived as *Akal* in the sense of being supra-temporal or time-transcendent. Herein lies the essential difference between the general Vedantic thought and Sikh metaphysics. The Vedantic Brahman, accordingly, is envisaged in terms of *sat* (being), *chit* (consciousness), and *anand* (bliss), but the quality of being the Creator is not attributed to it. Further, Brahman here is *sat*, but not *Sat Nam*, as in the Gurbani; Brahman in Vedantic thought is *chit* (consciousness), but not “self-consciousness”. The above differentiation is essential for understanding the real, logically consistent, connotations of the *Mool Mantra* terms of metaphysical nature: *Ik Onkar*; *Sat Nam*; *Karta Purakh*, and *Akal Murat*. The first term refers to the in-itself, indeterminate essence of the ultimate reality which is supra-temporal (*Akal Murat*) vis-a-vis the realm of time and space created by the Absolute as the creative Spirit (*Karta Purakh*). The Absolute through the creative act becomes determinate reality-*Sat Nam*-in the sense of determinate Infinity as against the abstract Infinity given by the category of *Ik Onkar*. As it is, in the creative act that the abstract Infinite becomes the determinate Infinity, so the created realm comes to be seen as a determination of the Absolute, which in the Gurbani idiom is called His Name:

(ਜੇਤਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਤੇਤਾਂ ਨਾਉ) ।

(“All that He has created is His name”).

The Sanskrit word *sat*, like the English term *being*, refers neither to the ideal nor to the material

aspect of reality; rather it connotes the logical aspect under which all that can be said is that the Real *is*. In their abstractness, the Vedantic (*nirguna*) Brahman (*Being*) and the Buddhist *Shunyata* (Nothingness) tend to be indistinguishable from each other, for the simple reason that when the ultimate reality is seen as excludent of all determinations, qualities, attributes and predicates then, there remains no (epistemologic) way of distinguishing Being from Nothingness. As such, though epistemologically there remains no determinate distinction between the Vedantic Brahman and the Buddhist *Shunyata*, yet the former is posited in the logical aspect of “is-ness”. It is in this sense that in the monistic Vedantic thought, Brahman, while sharing its indeterminacy and abstractness with the Buddhist *Shunyata*, is *sat*: Being-in-itself. It was to emphasise such *logical* “beingness” (is-ness) of the (*nirguna, nirankar*) Absolute that Guru Nanak placed the numerical ‘ੴ’ (as a sign of positivity in contrast to the Buddhist negativity given by the term *Shunyata*) before the letter *ੴ* to constitute the term *ੴ* (*Ik Onkar*) to symbolise “beingness” (is-ness) of the Absolute, notwithstanding its abstractness and indeterminacy.

Having thus contradistinguished his doctrine from the Buddhist concept, Guru Nanak, then proceeds to differentiate it from the Vedantic Brahman which is *sat*, but not *Sat Nam*. In other words, Guru Nanak does not rest content merely with positing the logical being (*sat*) of the ultimate reality, but goes on to make the indeterminate Absolute manifest itself as determinate Infinity, *Sat Nam*, in the creative act *qua* Spirit.

Thus the term *Sat Nam* does not mean that “His Name is Truth”, or that “His Reality is Eternal”. It would be much more appropriate to render it as such: His Name (*qua* determinate Infinity) is True. It is in this sense that Guru Nanak says that all that God has created is “His Name”.

In other words, this term emphasises the reality of the (*relational*) determinate aspect of the Absolute, as the expression *Ik Onkar* stresses the *in-itself* indeterminacy and abstractness of the Absolute, the positivity (beingness) of which is simultaneously underscored so as to contradistinguish it from Buddhist *Shunyata* (nothingness).



Reality as pure Being (substance) devoid of all determinations and qualities when approached idealistically takes, inter-alia, the form of the Platonic (abstract) Universal, or the Vedantic Brahman. When seen materialistically the (abstract), substance turns out to be the empty substratum, or the Kantian thing-in-itself. As such the determinate, phenomenal world of time and space is reduced to the Platonic appearance, the Vedantic illusion (*maya*), or the Kantian projection of the (epistemic) mental forms of cognition onto the thing-in-itself. Existential reality comes to be seen in terms of nihilism or solipsism. Sociologically, such an attitude towards the worldly reality ends up in a status-quoist value-pattern. When the Real is taken as the abstract Being, for man there can be no ideal other than that of getting rid of all the sensory contents, or the determinate characteristics, that constitute the individuality of a person. The resultant abstract individual is, then, amenable to being subsumed under this or that *type* in a totalitarian system. The lopsidedness inherent in this approach and trend is corrected in a religion of the Absolute *qua* Spirit. In the Indian context the transition to a religion of spirit in the form of Sikhism corresponds to and involves a process of change heralding the post-feudal

value-pattern. *Such is the revolutionary role played by Sikhism in the history of humankind.*

The counterposing of abstract reality to the determinate, concrete existence is due to the alleged non-identity of being and cognition—a notion challenged by Hegel in Western thought, and by Guru Nanak in Indian metaphysics. With Hegel the ontological process of the self-development of the abstract idea into a determinate whole *qua* self-conscious Spirit corresponds to the epistemologic process of the auto-genesis of the concepts and categories of the Dialectic. In fact, with Hegel the two processes are just the two ways of looking at what essentially is one and the same process wherein the being and the cognition of the being sublate, that is, pass into each other.

In the Nanakian thought, the identity of being and cognition is established in another way. It is in the creative act that the abstract Absolute manifests itself as determinate Being, as self-conscious Spirit: the created, existential reality turns out to be a determination, that is, a determinate predication (“Name”) of the Absolute—a process in which *what is cognized* (“Named”) is a determinate form of *what is*. The Real as such no more remains ineffable, beyond prehension or verbal description:

ਅਖਰੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਅਖਰੀ ਸਾਲਾਹ
ਅਖਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਗੀਤ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਹ ।

“In words weprehend God in His Name
In words His qualities are Sung.
In words we cognize Him, praise and predicate Him”

Looked at from this angle the term *Sat Nam* implies the identity of being and cognition.

As mentioned above, it is in the creative act that the abstract Absolute becomes conscious of itself as Spirit; creation here covers not only the existential reality, but also time and space as the constitutive aspects of the created phenomena. This brings us to an analysis of the different conceptions of time in the context of which the concept of *Akal Murat* (timelessness of God) would reveal its connotation in Sikh philosophy.

Ordinarily the concept of ‘timelessness’ is interpreted in the following ways:

First, a thing is said to be timeless when, though in time, it not subject to or under the influence of time, that is, when it is not subject to the temporal processes of origination, development and disintegration. This, in other words, means that such timeless thing has an essence, essential property, substance or substratum, that does not change at all and remains in the self-same state of *being*, irrespective of its location in any temporal instant or duration (past, present, future) of time. Time might affect its non-essential, secondary characteristics or its external form, but its essence remains uninfluenced by time. The Newtonian “matter” is such a timeless substance in time. Similar is the Sankhya theory of timelessness in the continuum which the transformation of A (milk) into B (ghee) is only a change *of* form, and not a change *in* the underlying substance which remains the same. The effect, B, preexists in the cause, A. The three causal *gunas* inherent in the Sankhya *prakriti* (substance), and subsisting in passive equilibrium, give rise to effect in the form of the phenomenal world, when the initial equilibrium is disturbed. What is potentially pre-given manifests itself in a changed form.

Obviously, there is no new creation, no novel development, no real evolution, as these concepts imply change to be the innate characteristic of time, whereby to be in time would mean to be subject to change, not only in *form* but in *essence* as well. But in the Sankhya *parinamvada* what is potentially pre-given and precontained manifests itself out in a changed form. The same, *mutasis mutandis*, applies to the Vedantic form of *parinamvada*; in *Brahman-parinamvada*, the *saguna* Brahman is only a changed form of the *nirguna* Brahman. Behind this secondary, phenomenal form is the primary noumenal substance which alone is the Real (*sat*) in the sense of eternal, timeless, ever-same Being in relation to which the world of *becoming* has either derivative reality, or no reality at all.

In Indian thought the quality that remains eternal or unsublated is indicated by the traditional term *sat*, which is not any determinate characteristic but is only the logical quality of “is-ness” of substance (being).

The timeless-in-time, whether considered idealistically (Vedantic Brahman), or materialistically (Newtonian matter), implies an isotropic, ahistoricist conception of time called “spatial” by Bergson. Here time is conceived of as the space-like container of substance, and partakes of all the qualities of space: homogeneity; infinity; continuity, uniformity, directionlessness; reversibility and causal inefficacy.

The characteristics of spatial time, mentioned above, flow from its homogeneity which means that all temporal instants and intervals are in every respect equivalent to and identical with one another. Hence no temporal instant can be said to be “before” or “after” any other instant. So there is no beginning, no end of time, which as such, has to be conceived of as uncreated. Time, accordingly, becomes infinite duration or durational infinity. Further, if time admits of no internal differentiation per se in terms of “before” and “after”, then, the correlative concepts of succession, causation, change, origination, development, evolution, disintegration etc., become meaningless and unreal. Hence the *Real* is that which remains eternal, that is, in the self-same state of *being* in infinite duration stretching from *beginningless* past to *endless* future.



The Ultimate Reality

As seen above, the concept of eternity implies infinite duration of isotropic time. For a consistent monist viewpoint there cannot be three simultaneously existing infinities: Brahman, infinite time, and infinite space. So infinite time and infinite space must be deemed as aspects or dimensions of the ultimate reality—Brahman. As infinite time and infinite space are both devoid of “content”, so their being the aspects of Brahman would not make the latter a determinate *Being*. Thus the ultimate reality, having infinite time and infinite space as its aspects, retains its abstractness as well as its timelessness, that is, its unchangeability. And by being so congruous with infinite time and infinite space, it comes to be seen as ‘immanent’ in time and space.

The archetypal concepts and categories of Hindu thought such as *karma*, *sansara*, reincarnation, *samadhi*, and so on, partake of the isotropic, spatial conception of time. As distinct and different from the Gurbani conception, *karma* of the Bhagvad Gita is “not action in time but action in Eternity.” As regards the law of *karma*, says NA Nikam: “It is evolution through the infinities of space and time that is the field for the operation of the law of *karma*.”

Here evolution does not mean real development, which is something more than displacement in passive time and space, or a mere change of form. The Vedantic conception of change, of cosmological transformation, leading to the existential appearance of *sansara* does not mean real change in the sense of an evolutionary process. The spatial nature of time implies that it is *per se* without any intrinsic directionality, or irreversible temporal sequence, in terms of “before” and “after”, of the precedent (cause) and the consequent (effect), of the lower and the higher stage in an evolutionary process. Accordingly the Hindu law of *karma* (*qua* cosmological causation) entails cyclical, reversible succession (*avagavan*) in which there can be a transition from “ascent” to “discent”, as much as from “descent” to “ascent”.

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਭਏ ਕੀਟ ਪਤੰਗਾ
ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਗਜ ਮੀਨ ਕੁਰੰਗਾ
ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਪੰਖੀ ਸਰਪ ਹੋਇਓ
ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਹੋਵਰ ਬ੍ਰਿਖੁ ਜੋਇਓ
ਮਿਲੁ ਜਗਦੀਸ ਮਿਲਨ ਕੀ ਬਰੀਆ
ਚਿਰੰਕਾਲ ਇਹ ਦੇਹ ਸੰਜਰੀਆ
ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਸੈਲ ਗਿਰਿ ਕਰਿਆ
ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਗਰਭ ਹਿਰਿ ਖਰਿਆ
ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਸਾਖ ਕਰਿ ਉਪਾਇਆ
ਲਖ ਚਉਰਾਸੀਹ ਜੋਨਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਇਆ
ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਿ ਭਇਓ ਜਨਮ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤਿ
ਕਰਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਭਜੁ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ।

*For several births you were just a worm
For several births, an elephant, a fish, a deer,
For several births, a bird, a serpent
For several births served as a bull, horse.*

*This is the moment of union with God—
Now that you have, after ages, evolved into the human form.*

*Many times destroyed in the womb
For countless times subjected to vegetative growth
Passing through myriads of species,
Through communion with the Holy you arose into a man*

Serve now the Lord, meditating on the Guru's Word.

This viewpoint stands in sharp contrast to the Gurbani conception which envisages an irreversible evolutionary process : This evolutionary process proceeds beyond the material domain, and comprehends the moral and spiritual development of man as stressed by Guru Nanak in his *Japji* wherein five 'successive stages (*khands*) are envisioned leading to the spiritual union of the seeker with God.

It is owing to the reversibility of spatial time that the three *gunas* can roll back into their original state of equilibrium of the Sankhya *prakriti*, thus ending the *sansara*. Further, it is the reversibility (that is, the cyclical nature) of time that makes it possible for Hindu thought to go back in time to regain the 'Paradise Lost—*satyuga*—in its quest for betterment of life, which as such does not remain a question of developing and evolving in the future new human and societal life-patterns.

The state of *samadhi* in which one could unaffectedly subsist for quite a large stretch of time is logically possible only on the basis of spatial notion of time in which it is conceivable to be -timeless while in time.

The Buddhist theory of causation known as "dependent origination" (*paticca samuppada*) is also based on the spatial notion of time. The differentiation of instants of time in terms of "before" and "after" [being ruled out in spatial time, the cause and the effect, then, must be seen as occurring simultaneously and not successively. This is the very essence of the Buddhist "dependent origination". Writes NA Nikam: "The peculiarity of the notion of Dependent Origination is that it presupposes the notion of simultaneous occurrence of cause and effect . . ." This peculiarity, in fact, is the peculiarity of the underlying spatial, a historicist view of time. It was owing to such a notion of time that the Buddhist phenomenism, despite its rejection of the static category of substance (being), could not result in a dynamic, historicist conception of reality, but got evaporated in the concept of "nothingness".

Modern thought under the impact of the Relativity physics has rejected the static, isotropic notion of time in favour of the anisotropic conception, that is, "asymmetry of time" involved in the dynamic, historicist view of reality. The Relativity physics

implies that no quality of an object remains eternal in time as well as in space, and further that an object derives its-qualities from its location in the spatio-temporal continuum; in fact an object is nothing but a particular, mutable configuration of and in the space-time continuum. Thus the essence of an object lies not in its so-called underlying unchanging substance (*sat*), but in its spatio-temporal relationships. This is how the correlative concepts of eternity and substance are knocked out. The concept of timelessness-in-time (the Vedantic *Akal*), which, is the very core of Vedantic thought no more remains ontologically valid and logically tenable.

As against the Vedantic idea of *Akal* (timelessness), the Sikh' concept of *Akal Murat* refers to the supra-temporal, time--transcendent nature of God. Now time-transcendence is also conceived of in many ways in speculative thought. The time-transcendence of the ultimate reality in the Kantian sense is different from what it means in the Sikh thought. With Kant, the noumenal reality transcends time for the reason that time is an *a priori* form of mind external to the Real-in-itself. Time, here, is an aspect of the subjective apparatus of cognition, and is not a form, mode, dimension, condition or characteristic of the objective Being-in-itself, which is timeless in the sense of being supra-temporal as such.

The Gurbani conception is closer to the Biblical thought in that it considers time to have begun with the creation of the reality. God as *Karta Purakh* created not only the world, but also time as the mode or the constitutive aspect of the phenomenal reality :

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਸੈਲ ਜੁਗ ਭਏ ।

(God has created matter (mountains), and time (aeons),

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਉਤਪਤੀ
ਕੀਆ ਦਿਨਸੁ ਸਭ ਰਾਤੀ ।

(God has created all things, all beings
And day and night too.)

A number of corollaries follow from this “createdness” of time. Time being created, the Creator must be prior to His creation both logically and historically, as envisioned in Sikhism. (In Hegelian thought this priority is only logical, because here what is meant by creation of B by A, or development of B out of A, means only that B is logically deducible from A. Dialectical development for Hegel means only a kind of “deductive necessity”). Time being a created phenomenon, it can not be treated to be eternally “there”, either co-extensively or congruously with the ultimate reality. The durational infinity of time is also knocked out, as the created time must be deemed to have a beginning.

In this context we can understand the real meanings of the terms *Aad Sach*; *Jugad Sach*; *Hai Bhi Sach*; *Nanak Hosi Bhi Sach* in Guru Nanak's *Japji*. The term *Aad Sach* refers to the *logical* priority of (indeterminate) reality of the Absolute before creation of time, while the second term *Jugad Sach* indicates the *historical* priority of the (determinate) reality of the Absolute *qua* Spirit in the beginning of (created) time (aeons-jug). The third and the fourth expression refer to the reality of God in the present and the future respectively. Traditional interpretations, rendering the term *Aad* and *Jugad* as meaning one and same thing (in-the-beginning-of-time) have all failed to comprehend the distinction between the two concepts—one referring to the *logical* priority and the other to the *historical* priority of God. This distinction also reveals the “createdness” of time, that is, the nature of time with a beginning, as against the eternal duration of Vedantic time. Further, this significant distinction also provides a clue to the understanding of the key-note concept of *Akal Murat*. God is supra-temporal or time-transcendent in two senses. The logical priority given by the term *Aad Sach* refers to the time-transcendence of the ultimate reality as indeterminate Being, while the historical priority reveals the time-transcendence of the ultimate reality *qua* determinate Being that expresses itself in self-created time as the Spirit, ultimately becoming diffused into the collective form of society, which is the Khalsa.

From the Book : Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine

Guru Nanak's socio-cultural regeneration



In a well-known 20th-century portrait, Guru Nanak is sitting in meditation with his eyes closed. In his compositions (*bani*) though, Guru Nanak keeps his eyes wide open. He says in fact that he had seen all nine regions (*nav-khand*) of the earth and seen sacred places, markets and cities, walking, as it were, on his eyes. The range of his comments is exceptionally wide, covering the social, political, and religious aspects of the life of his contemporaries. His *bani* enables us to know the kind of socio-cultural regeneration he brought about in his lifetime.

Contemporary social order

Guru Nanak was thoroughly familiar with the social order of his time. The royalty, the nobility, the officials of the government, its intermediaries at lower rungs, and common people figure frequently in his

compositions. Apart from the *mullah* and the *qazi*, the *shaikh* and the *pir*, several professions and occupations are noticed. Guru Nanak underscores the life of luxury of the ruling class and the grinding misery and ignorance of the *rai'yat*, the subject people. He takes notice of the ideal of the four *varnas*, and the outcastes. High caste has no merit in his eyes. The people who forget God have no caste.

The Sikh of the Guru is expected to rise above the distinctions of caste. Equality between men and women is emphasised in the many verses of Guru Nanak. The spiritual and ethical message for women is exactly the same as for men. There is no doubt that this liberation (state of union with God) was made accessible to women. The *sada-suhagan* enjoys the love of her spouse (God) throughout her life. However, she is placed in the patriarchal family which was inequalitarian. The tension between equality in the spiritual realm and inequality in the social domain was not easy to resolve.

Guru Nanak saw no merit in ritualistic practices. The sacred thread in his eyes has no spiritual or moral efficacy. The thread of the Brahmin does not restrain him from scandalous conduct. There is no restraint on his feet, his hands, his tongue, and his eyes. The sacred thread of the Khatri did not stop them from pandering to the rulers whom they regarded as unclean (*mlechh*). They wielded the butcher's knife against the people on behalf of the rulers.

Similarly, the meticulously observed *chauka* was useless. They told others to keep away but the line drawn around did not keep out their own ignorance and hardness of heart. The notion of purity and impurity (*sutak*) was merely an illusion. It had nothing to do with ethical living. To regard women as impure during childbirth or menstruation was sheer ignorance. There

can be no reproduction without women, and there would be no humanity without reproduction.

Guru Nanak ridiculed the popular practice of floating lighted lamps in water for the dead as an obituary rite. Another such rite was the performing of *shradhs* in which food was offered to Brahmins to eat on behalf of the dead ancestors of the patron. The dead received nothing. Guru Nanak's social comment extends to the rites of passage. They who mourn the death of a dear one forget that they themselves would die. Formal mourning served no good purpose. The debate about the mode of the disposal of the dead was futile. Only God knows what would happen to anyone after death.

On the whole, the social order at the time of Guru Nanak was marked by discrimination on the basis of caste and gender, and by ritualistic practices.

Polity and politics

There is explicit reference to the rule of Muslim Pathans (*Turk-Pathani 'aml*). The name of God now is Allah and the favourite colour is blue. An assessment is built into the association of Muslim rule with the *Kaliyuga*, the worst of the cosmic ages. Human beings had turned into goblins. Greed was now the Raja and lust was the Sikdar (*shiqdar*), local administrator. The seed was crushed, and it could not sprout.

The wielders of power come in for severe criticism. Millions may stand up to salute the masters of vast armies, and millions may obey them, but all this is futile without honour in God's court. Unlike the ordinary people, the rulers collect wealth with the levers of power, and their thirst for power is never quenched. Indeed, the rulers are butchers they suck human blood. Justice is administered not in the name of God (as the primary duty of the rulers) but only when the palm is greased. There is discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation. 'Now that the turn of the *shaikhs* has come, *Aad Purkh* is called Allah; it has become customary to tax gods and their temples.'

The verses of Guru Nanak, known as *Babur-bani*, refer to Babur's invasions. The army of Babur is called the marriage party of sin; brides are demanded by

force; the rite of marriage is performed by Satan. The reference here is to rape. The Mughals descended as the agency of death; the people cried in suffering. If the mighty strike the mighty, the fight is equal. But if a lion falls upon a herd of cattle, God is accountable. Actually, Guru Nanak is questioning God. Many unarmed civilians were killed, and the rulers of the land failed to protect them. Thus, both the Mughals and the Afghans stand indicted.

The Afghans suffered for their political and moral failure. Gone were their sports and stables, and their sword-belts and red tunics. Their tall mansions were razed to the ground and the princes cut into pieces. God takes away the goodness from those whom he wishes to mislead. The women of the ruling classes were dishonoured. Had they thought beforehand, they would not have suffered. There is a moral dimension to a political situation in which men and women suffer because of their misdeeds.

With all their power, wealth and pride, the rulers remained subject to the power of God. His service was far preferable to the service of earthly rulers. He who has access to the divine court does not have to bow to anyone else. This statement carries the implication of potential defiance. Indeed, Guru Nanak talks of the possibility of the white cloth being dyed and of the split seed becoming whole to sprout again. In other words, spiritual and moral regeneration could become the means of social regeneration.

Primacy of liberation

It is important to note that Guru Nanak gives primacy to liberation, the supreme purpose. Earthly pursuits have no meaning if God is forgotten or ignored. The foremost duty of a human being is to dedicate his or her life to God in order to become one with Him and to be released from the cycle of death and rebirth. The path of liberation is hard to follow, like walking on the sharp edge of a sword. It is important to point out that worldly life is not to be renounced but transformed.

Guru Nanak talks of *maya*, *mamta* and *haumai* as the great obstacles on the path of liberation. The thirst for *maya* is never slaked. Affection for kith and kin (*mamta*) is more difficult to overcome. Above all, human



beings remain preoccupied with themselves, suffering from the disease of self-centredness (*haumai*). Guru Nanak offers loving devotion to God as the antidote for *maya*, *mamta*, and *haumai*. Loving devotion to God was not divorced from *bhay* or *bhau* (reverential fear due to the realisation of God's power and grace). This way of *bhagti* was found through the Guru and with God's grace.

Guru Nanak lays great emphasis on action (*karni*), rather than verbal profession (*kathni*). The familiar proverb 'you reap as you sow' occurs at many places in Gurbani. Everything is lower than the realisation of truth but truthful living is higher. The world is the stage where merit is earned through altruistic action (*seva*). To help others is to serve God. Parupkar is a part of God's *raza*. The Guru, too, is Parupkari. The Sikh who lives in accordance with God's *raza* is the king of kings.

The state of liberation is also called *nirban-pad* or *pad-nirbani*, the state of detachment. This state is everlasting (*amrapad*). There is no *haumai* in the state

of liberation, and there is no fear. It is a state of bliss and peace. The liberated-in-life remains committed to social obligations with a spirit of detachment with a larger concern for the welfare of others.

Contemporary religious traditions

Guru Nanak makes a good deal of comment on the religious beliefs and practices of his contemporaries. He talks of the representatives of three traditions: the *Brahmanical*, the ascetical, and the Islamic. His comments on the *Brahmanical* traditions (*Shaiva*, *Vaishnava*, and *Shakta*) include scriptures, gods and goddesses, worship of idols, rituals, charity, pilgrimage to sacred places, and dance and dramatic performances. Guru Nanak looks upon Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh as God's creatures. They are not everlasting.

Contrary to the general impression, Guru Nanak is also critical of worship of Rama and Krishna. In the first place, there is no room for incarnation in Guru Nanak's conception of God. There is no spiritual or moral merit in dramatic representations of Rama and Krishna. Guru Nanak tells the *Vaishnavas* that the

adoration of God is the real dance; all else is sensual pleasure. Guru Nanak has little appreciation for the *Gorakhnathi Jogis*. He tells them to have contentment as their earrings, productive work as their begging bowl, meditation of God as the ash on their body, the fear of death as their cloak, trust in God as their staff, and keeping their body free from evil as their skill. To regard all human beings as equal is to belong to the highest order of the *jogis*. There is no ethical merit in possessing supernatural power. Only he can be called a real *jogi* who regards all human beings as equal. The real *avadhut* remains hopeless-in-hope (*asa mahi niras*). The gulf between the Jain monks and Guru Nanak was the widest. Apart from their asceticism, renunciation, and mendicancy, they are denounced for their atheism.

The Muslim claim to an exclusive possession of true faith had no justification. God does not consult anyone when He creates or destroys, when He gives or takes away. There is a suggestion in a verse that Guru Nanak appreciates the way of the Sufis. 'It is not easy to be a *Mussalman*; one should be called so if one is a real *Mussalman*'. First of all he should adopt the path of the *auliya*. However, Guru Nanak did not appreciate certain practices of the Sufis. They accepted patronage from the state in the form of revenue-free land, going against their own ideal of complete trust in God. Guru Nanak denounced the practice of the Sufi *shaikhs* to bestow caps (*kulhan*) upon their disciples and to authorise them to guide others. This appeared to be presumptuous on the part of the Sufi *shaikhs*.

God, Guru and Shabad

Guru Nanak's religious thought is uncompromisingly monotheistic. There is one God, and no other. He is self-existent; He never dies and He is never born. He alone is active (*karta*). He is devoid of fear and enmity. As the only eternal entity, God is equated with Truth. In Guru Nanak's conception of God, the attributes of power and grace are two sides of the same coin.

The concepts of *hukam* and *nadar* flow from these attributes. His command (*hukam*) keeps the physical universe and the moral world in order. His grace enables human beings to do what He likes; they act in accordance with his *hukam*, and become acceptable to God.



The Guru, in the first place, is God himself. He has revealed Himself in his creation. He who appropriates the Guru's Word is liberated and he can liberate others. The Guru is found in the *sant sabha*. The true Guru is found in *sat-sangat* where God's praises are sung through the *shabad*. The mind is turned to God only by praising Him through the Guru's *shabad*. The true Guru enables one to meet God. With the true Guru as a friend, one receives truth and honour in the divine court.

The term *shabad* occurs frequently in the compositions of Guru Nanak. It refers to the self-revelation of God. But more frequently it refers to the *bani* of Guru Nanak. There is no understanding without the *shabad*. God is praised through the Guru's *shabad*. The woman who gets rid of self and adorns herself with the Guru's *shabad* finds the spouse in the home. All illusion is removed by the pure *bani*. The *shabad* leads to recognition of the true creator. The *Gurmukh* is attached to the truth through the *shabad* and sees God everywhere. The one without any sign, colour or shadow is recognised through the *shabad*. True is the Guru's *shabad* that leads to liberation. There is only one *shabad*, and it is recognised through the perfect Guru. All *nads* and *Vedas* are in *Gurbani*.

The compositions of Guru Nanak are an integral part of divine revelation. He was called, as he says, by God to his court and given the robe of true adoration with the nectar of the true Name. They who taste it through the Guru's instruction attain peace. The minstrel (*dhadi*) of God spreads the message of the

shabad. He utters the divine *bani* as commanded by the Lord. This claim carries the implication that Guru Nanak's message was more authoritative than any known scripture.

The Sikh Panth

Critical of the socially privileged in society, Guru Nanak aligned himself with the lowest of the low. Critical of the rulers and the ruling class, he sympathised with the subject people. Marked by moral degradation, ritualistic practices, discrimination, oppression and injustice, the social order needed regeneration. The means of social regeneration for Guru Nanak was his own ideology. At the centre of the universe is God. He created the universe through his *hukam* and keeps it in order. God's *hukam* and *nadar* transcend the law of karma. God Himself is the guide to liberation. His creation is His Word (*shabad*). As the source of guidance, *shabad* is the Guru. The divinely inspired *bani* of Guru Nanak is a part of revelation. *Shabad* and *bani* stand equated.

Social action is necessary for liberation, and it becomes all the more important for the liberated-in-life. He remains active in society, not in his own interest so

much as in the interest of others. The most important function of the liberated-in-life is *par-upkar*, that is, all kinds of service for others as human beings. No distinction, whatsoever, is made between one human being and another for the purpose of redemption. The path chosen by Guru Nanak was open to all.

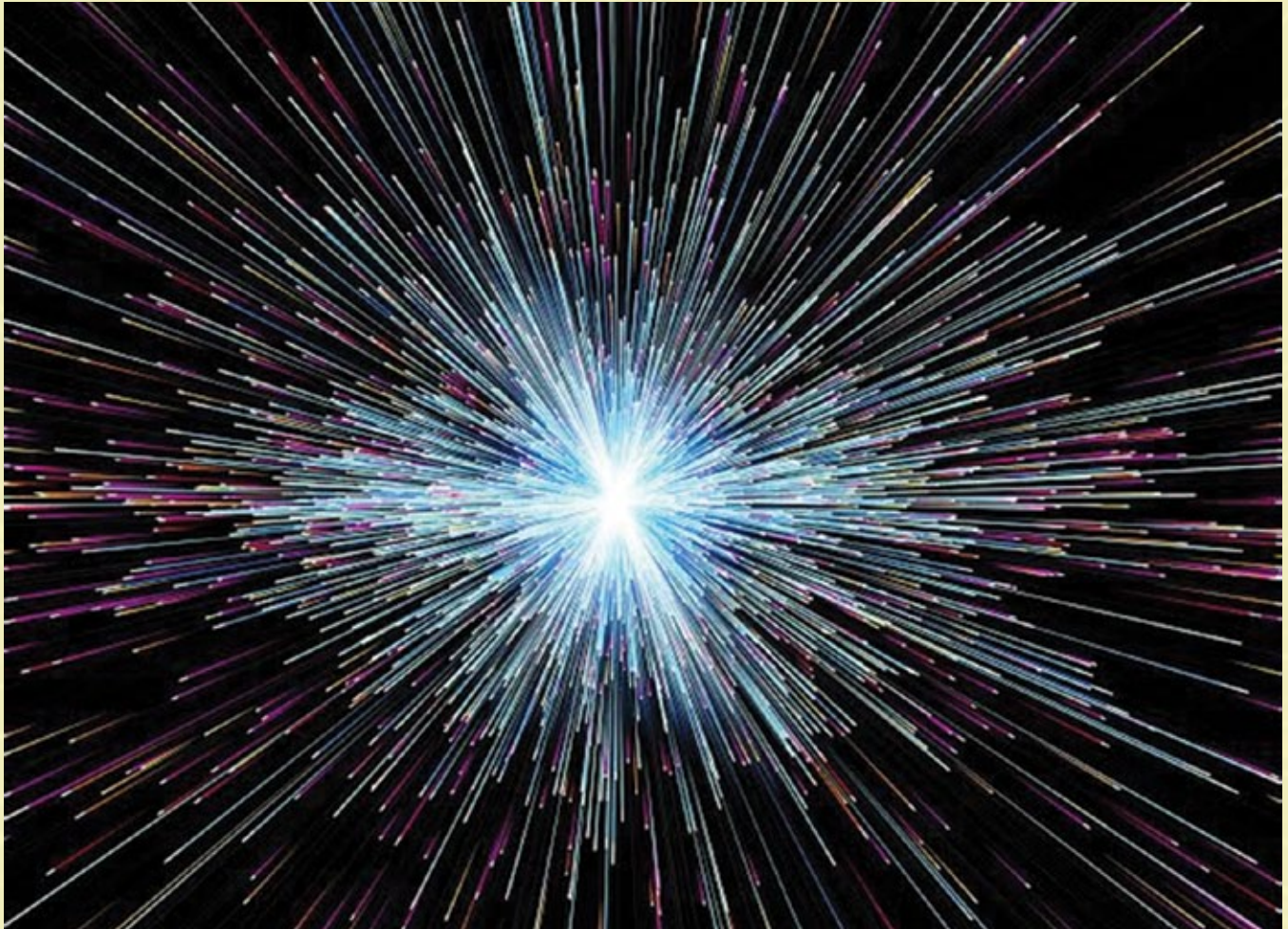
The *panth* founded by Guru Nanak was based on egalitarian ideology. The Sikh of the Guru had a distinct place of worship, called *dharamsal* (later *gurdwara*). They worshipped God in congregation regardless of caste or religious background of the participant. The *bani* of Guru Nanak was used for *kirtan* and *katha*. *Ardas* (supplication) was an essential part of worship. All the Sikhs ate together from a common kitchen (*langar*). This was the legacy Guru Nanak left for a successor to carry forward, installing him as the Guru in his lifetime. Guru Nanak discovered a new path and founded a new *panth*, as an instrument of universal redemption.

Dr Jagtar Singh Grewal is a historian and former Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Images from the Internet



The Universal Faith



Guru Granth Sahib is the unique scripture which gives equal respect to all the different names of God mentioned by different religions and sects. It includes the philosophy of persons from multiple faiths, all on the oneness of God. Many authors and philosophers have articulated on contents of the Guru Granth Sahib. All have noted the concept of Universality preached by the Gurus and others, the reader getting a logical and practical approach to the religion and “realisation” of God.

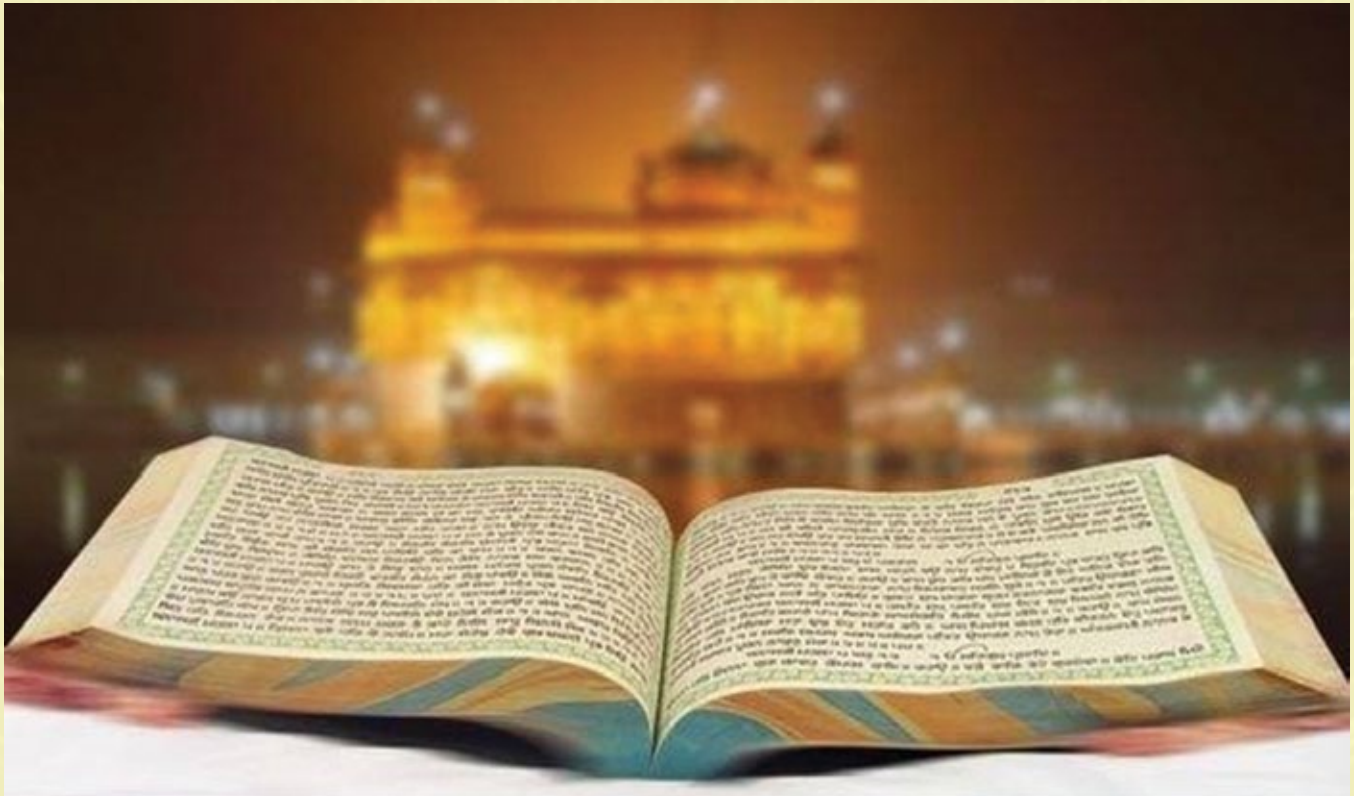
Pearl S Buck, Nobel laureate

I have studied the scriptures of the great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find here in these volumes. they are compact

in spite of their length and are a revelation of the concept of God to the recognition and indeed the insistence upon the practical needs of the human body.

There is something strangely modern about these scriptures and this puzzles me until I learned that they are in fact comparatively modern, compiled as late as the 16th century. When explorers were beginning to discover the globe, upon which we all live, is a single entity divided only by arbitrary lines of our own making.

Perhaps this sense of unity is the source of power I find in these volumes. They speak to a person of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind.



Rev. HL Bradshaw

Sikhism is a Universal Faith, a message for all men. This is amply illustrated in the writings of the Gurus. Sikhs must cease to think of their faith as just another good religion and must begin to think in terms of Sikhism being the religion for all in this New Age..... The religion preached by Guru Nanak is the faith of the New Age. It completely supplants and fulfills all the former dispensations of older religions. Books must be written proving this. The other religions contain the truth, but Sikhism contains the fullness of truth....

Guru Granth Sahib of all the world religious scriptures alone states that there are innumerable worlds and universes other than our own. The previous scriptures were all concerned only with this world and its spiritual counterpart. To imply that they spoke of other worlds as does the Guru Granth Sahib, is to stretch their obvious meanings out of context. The Sikh religion is truly the answer to the problems of the modern man.

Dorothy Field

Pure Sikhism is far above dependence on Hindu rituals and is capable of a distinct position as a world religion so

long as Sikhs maintain their distinctiveness. The religion is also one which should appeal to the occidental mind. It is essentially a practical religion. If judged from the pragmatistical stand point which is a favorite point of view in some quarters, it would surely rank as first in the world. Of no other religion can it be said that it has made a nation in so short a time.

Arnold Toynbee

Mankind's religious future may be obscure; yet one thing can be foreseen. The living higher religions are going to influence each other more than ever before, in the days of increasing communications between all parts of the world and branches of human race. In this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scriptures. The Guru Granth, will have something special of value to say to the rest of the world.

Max Arthur Macauliffe

Unlike the scriptures of other creeds, they do not contain love stories or accounts of wars waged for selfish considerations. They contain sublime truths, the study of which cannot but elevate the reader spiritually, morally, and socially. There is not the least tinge of sectarianism

in them. They teach the highest and purest principle that serve to bind man to man and inspire the believer with an ambition to serve his fellow men, to sacrifice all and die for their sake.

The Sikh religion differs as regards the authenticity of its dogmas from most other great theological systems. Many of the great teachers the world has known, have not left a line of their own composition, and we only know what they taught through tradition or second-hand information. If Pythagoras wrote any of tenets, his writings have not descended to us. We know the teachings of Socrates only through the writings of Plato and Xenophon. Buddha has left no written memorials of his teaching. Kung fu-Tze, known to Europeans as Confucius, left no documents in which he detailed the principles of his moral and social systems. The Founder of Christianity did not reduce his doctrines to writing, and for them we are obliged to trust to the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Aragian Prophet did not himself reduce to writing the chapters of the Quran. They were written or compiled by his adherents and followers. But the compositions of the Sikhs Gurus are preserved and we know first hand what they taught. They employed the vehicle of verse, which is generally unalterable by copyist, and we even become in time familiar with their different styles. No spurious compositions or extraneous dogmas, can therefore be represented as theirs.

The author of 'Vie de Jesus' was a great admirer of Jesus Christ. Greatly impressed as he was of the spiritual message delivered by Christ and those of the Semitic thinkers that preceded him, he posed the question: "Whether great originality will again arise of the world be content to follow the paths opened by the daring creators of the ancient ages?" Having Sikhism in his mind, Macauliffe in his book 'The Sikh Religion', answers the above question in the following words:

Now there is here presented a religion totally unaffected by Semitic or Christian influences. Based on the concept of the unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalities and adopted independent ethical system, ritual, and standards which were totally opposed to the theological

beliefs of Guru Nanak's age and country. As we shall see hereafter, it would be difficult to point to a religion of greater originality or to a more comprehensive ethical system.

Guru Nanak was not a priest either by birth or education, but a man who soared to the loftiest heights of divine emotionalism, and exalted his mental vision to an ethical ideal beyond the conception of Hinduism or Mohammandanism.

The most numerous and powerful of all is the great Sikh religion founded by Guru Nanak, which already forms a considerable section of the population of the Punjab, and which is scattered in greater or less numbers, not only throughout the whole of India but also in Kandhar, China and Southern Asia.

Dr WO Cole wrote more than half a dozen books on Sikhism. In 1985, he visited India after communal disturbances had created virtual turmoil and thousands of people were killed. In a key note lecture by him on the *Mission and Message of Guru Nanak Dev*, he spoke to the Sangat there and through them to all of humanity:

Remember the tenets of Guru Nanak, his concepts of oneness of God and Universal Brotherhood of man. If any community holds the key to national interrogation of India, it is the Sikhs all the way.

After the lecture, he was asked what drew him to the study of Sikhism, replied: "Theologically, I cannot answer the question as what drew me to the study of Sikhism. You may call it, the purpose of God. But to be more specific, the unique concept of universality and the system of Langar (free community meal) in Sikhism are the two features that attracted me towards the study of Sikhism which I found nowhere else in the world. Sikhism is the only religion which welcomes each and everyone to its langar without any discrimination of caste, creed, colour, or sex.

Swami Nitya Nand

In the company of my guru, Brahma Nand ji, I went to Mathra..... While on pilgrimage tour, we reached Punjab and here we met Swami Satya Nand Udasi. He explained



the philosophy and religious practices of Nanak in such a way that Swami Brahma Nand enjoyed a mystic lore. During the visit to the Golden Temple, Amritsar, his soul was so much affected, that he became a devotee of the Guru. After spending some time in the Punjab he went to Hardwar. Though he was hail and hearty, one day I saw tears in his eyes. I asked the reason for that. He replied, “I sifted sand the whole of my life. The Truth was in the House of Nanak. I will have to take one more birth in that

house, only then I will attain Kalyan.” After saying that, his soul left his body.

I also constantly meditate on Waheguru revealed by Nanak. I practiced Yoga Asanas under the guidance of Yogis and did that for many years; the bliss and peace, which I enjoy now, was never obtained earlier.

After hearing the lecture by **Joginder Singh, Pundit Ramsaran Das**, a prominent Hindu intellectual observed that Guru Nanak was a great reformer of Hindu faith. Nawab Zulfkar Ali Khan of Malerkotla disagreed and commented that Guru Nanak was a great Muslim fakir, his best friend was Bhai Mardana, a lowly Muslim, and his best devotee was Rai Bular, a Muslim, the village chief. The Governor of Punjab in his presidential remarks disagreed with both and said that according to what had been told by the speakers, Guru Nanak was a great Christian.

The Guru, had stated, “I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, I am a human being.”

Gurbakhsh Singh

From Sikh Faith : A Universal Message



The Cosmic Vision of Baba Nanak



The Cosmic Vision of Baba Nanak is presented in the very opening statement of *Japuji Sahib*

“There is but One Unique Creator who is beyond Time and Space, who has no Form or Figure. This Creator is denominated as *Sach*, Truth. In the beginning was Truth. It is the rhyme and reason of all ages : past, present and future. When it will be all over, this Sublime Truth will inhabit the Cosmos, the *Brahmand*.”

Sach khand wasse Nirankar. The *Nirankar*, the Formless, dwells in the realm of *Sach*, the Truth. In the associational dialectic, where there is *Sach*, there is *Nirankar* or where there is *Nirankar*, there is *Sach*. *Sach* and *Nirankar* are equivalent concepts. They can never be disassociated.

In *Sidh Gosht*, when the *Siddhas* ask “*Kis wakkhar ke tum wanjare ?*” Quick comes the reply “*Sach wakkhar ke ham wanjare*”.

Baba Nanak was in communion with Truth. He surcharged the whole Universe with this Sublime

ਜਪੁਜੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ
ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

॥ ਜਪੁ ॥

ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ ॥

ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥੧॥

ਸੋਚੈ ਸੋਚਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਸੋਚੀ ਲਖ ਵਾਰ ॥

ਚੁਪੈ ਚੁਪ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਲਾਇ ਰਹਾ ਲਿਵ ਤਾਰ ॥

ਭੂਖਿਆ ਭੂਖ ਨ ਉਤਰੀ ਜੇ ਬੰਨਾ ਪੁਰੀਆ ਭਾਰ ॥

ਸਹਸ ਸਿਆਣਪਾ ਲਖ ਹੋਹਿ ਤ ਇਕ ਨ ਚਲੈ ਨਾਲਿ ॥

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥੧॥

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਆਕਾਰ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਕਹਿਆ ਜਾਈ ॥

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਜੀਅ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਉਤਮੁ ਨੀਚੁ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਲਿਖਿ ਦੁਖ ਸੁਖ ਪਾਈਅਹਿ ॥

ਇਕਨਾ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਬਖਸੀਸ ਇਕਿ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਸਦਾ ਭਵਾਈਅਹਿ ॥

ਹੁਕਮੈ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਹੁਕਮ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਜੇ ਬੁਝੈ ਤ ਹਉਮੈ ਕਹੈ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥੨॥

Truth. He lived in and fought for Truth in every action, in every faction. At the very beginning of the dialogue, after the usual salutations, Baba Nanak delineates his discourse “*Kia bhawie Sach sucha hoe, sach sabad bin mukt na koe*”. Wandering in the jungles with all the metaphysical precautions and austerities leads one nowhere. It is a wild goose chase that has led many ascetics astray. The concept of *Sach*, religious purity, that was employed by most of our religious traditions to divide the society into pure and impure, into higher and lower classes, even into male and female, was ruthlessly denounced by Baba Nanak.

It is only *Sach* that is the criterion of all classifications, of all such divisions. In the same Sidh Gosht, Baba Nanak says “*Saach bina suucha ko nahi*”. There can be no such without *Sach*. The ultimate criterion, the *Sublime Concept of Truth*, is the only criterion that differentiates the pure from the impure, the sacred from the profane.

What the times demanded

In early eighteenth century France, Rousseau attempted to explain the ills of his times in terms of an imagined history of mankind. Once upon a time, human beings lived in jungles, with nature, where there were no families, no haves, no have-nots. There was no concept of mine and yours. Then began the struggles and strife over property, over areas of domination that led to the creation of different classes, of rulers and ruled, of conquerors and the conquered. And slowly it continued until modern times. All our inequalities and discriminations are owed to this progression in history.

A little later, another French philosopher, Condillac, followed the same discursive strategy to explain the problems in the understanding of language. In the beginning, at the zero state of language, a word corresponds to a given object. As the linguistic community grows, the particular names, signifiers, refer to a number of similar but not identical objects, as the word, man, for numerous men, all different from each other. From the concrete references, we move on to abstract words, truth, beauty, justice. With the same signifiers we refer to a number of similar objects, referents, universals. The creativity of the author lies in creating different conceptual contexts to underscore

specific significations. This is how we attempt at discerning the discourse of *Japuji* which is a unique construct, a conceptual construct, with a series of micro concepts, the *paurian*, whose context enables us to arrive at the true significance of Baba Nanak’s enunciations.

New Social Constructs

In the fifteenth century, Baba Nanak, in *Rag Maru*, as *Arbad Narbad Dhundukara*, composed the historiography of the Brahmand: *Arbad narbad dhundukara/dharn na gagana hukam apara/na din rain na chand na suraj sun samadh lagaeda....*



Long, long ago, millions of years back, it was all dark, all silent and sombre. There was no earth, no sky, no sun, no moon, no day, no night. None came, none left. There was no growth, no decay. There were neither men nor women, neither castes, nor creeds, neither sins nor sorrows. There was neither fasting, nor penances, neither austerities nor abstentions... There was neither *Gorakh* nor *Macchandrar*, neither endless disputes nor futile discussions. There were neither *khattris* nor *brahmins*, neither elaborate ceremonies nor deceptive rituals. There were neither *mullahs* nor *qazis*, neither sheikhs nor hajis; neither tyrants nor victims, neither prides nor humiliations... And when He willed, it all came to be, in all its mysteries and extensions, all

the gods and goddesses, and with them all the snares of *maya*... Rare were those who discerned the Word of *Nirankar*, who perceived the Will of the Creator. They were blessed, they lived in His Sublime Truth, the Sublime *Sach*.

In other words, as the creation progressed, as the social, political, religious structures evolved, we witness a series of progressive degenerations. The inequalities, the cruelties, the corruptions, the superstitions, the endless disputes in religious sects, led to modern social constructs. The superficial dialectical engagements, the deliberately infused contradictions led to conflicts and confusions. As a result, what we have today is *kurh raja kurh parja kurh sab sansaar*. The ruler, the ruled, the world at large, all are rotten. The moon of Truth is hidden under the darkness of ignorance, of untruth, of *Kurh*. This conceptual opposition of *Sach* and *Kurh* has prevailed in every sphere of human activity. But after this ruthless condemnation comes the optimist enunciation, *Kurh nikhute Nanka orak Sach rahi*.

Ultimately, proclaims Nanak, *Sach* will triumph.

Critique of the times

The discourse of Baba Nanak covers another very important theme in every religious disputation. It refers to *Dukh*, suffering. For Buddhism, it is the central concept. It is the beginning of its spiritual reflection and all efforts, physical austerities and penances are preoccupied with this paradox. Baba Nanak's reflection on this theme is diametrically opposed to this understanding. For him, *dukh daru sukh rog bhaia*. *Dukh* is remedy, *Sukh* is disease. *Dukh* leads to meditation, reflection and sublimation. *Sukh* leads to indulgence, luxury and degeneration. *Diwa mera ek naam dukh wich paia tel*. The lamp of meditation is lit by the oil of *Dukh*. And he continues to elaborate this highly complex conceptual construct by saying *sagle duukh amrit kar piwe bahurh duukh na paeda*. The devotee drinks the nectar of *Dukh* to eradicate suffering for ever. And finally, at a transcendental level of reflection, Baba Nanak simply abolishes the binary opposition of *dukh/sukh* by declaring that the being should reflect upon *dukh/sukh* as two equivalent existential states of mind, *Dukh Sukh Sam Kar Jane*.



Denouncing rituals

The discourse of Baba Nanak operates at two levels, the empirical and the transcendental. At the empirical level, we have his reactions to the affairs of this world, this world of conflicts and confusions, this world of extreme inequalities and injustices. Where ever there is tyranny and cruelty, he raises his voice for the downtrodden, for the victim.

In no uncertain terms, he condemns the invasion of his country by Babur. He pleads for the rightful status of women in our social structure. He ruthlessly denounces all the discriminations based on gender or race. His critique knows no bounds when it comes to the false rituals and ceremonies which deceive

is obliterated. More emphatically : *Na hau na main na hou howan*, neither I was, nor I am, nor I will be. It is interesting to follow his reflection on the human condition of male/female dichotomy : *Purkh mainh naar, naar mainh purkha, bujhauh brahm gyani*. There is in every male, elements of female, and in every female, elements of male; this mystery can be discerned only by the *Brahm Gyani*, by the wisest. In other words, this binary opposition is resolved. They are simply human beings. Modern psycho-analysis has affirmed what Baba Nanak proclaimed more than five hundred years ago.

And in *Raag Ramkali*, Baba Nanak tells the yogis *Aasti naasti eko nao*. To believe or not to believe is one and the same thing. This is the transcendental



the common humanity in the name of religion. He categorically denounces all *rahat maryada* of *brahmins*, *yogis*, *siddhas*, and various sects of various religions. What matters for Baba Nanak is *Sach*, the Sublime Truth that is the rhyme and reason of all life, of all creation, of Brahmand. *Sati*, *santokh*, *sahaj*, *sanjam* : truth, steady serenity and sobriety are the conceptual hallmarks of his theology.

The Ultimate Truth

Finally, we come to the Cosmic, transcendental level. It is the level of discerning, of comprehension, where all binary oppositions are resolved. At the empirical level, there is birth and death, *Jo aia so chalsi*; at the cosmic level, *Na ko awe na ko jae*, even, *Na ko hoia na ko hoe*. None comes, none leaves. In fact, the very differentiation of existence and non-existence

level of discernment where such distinctions become meaningless. Whether one believes in the eternity of spirit, *advaita*, or in the eternity of matter, *samkhya*, (in Western tradition, Plato/Aristotle), this conceptual opposition is resolved in the transcendental dialectic.

This is the level of meditation, going beyond observation, perception and reflection, going beyond the contradictions of this empirical world, where we arrive at the Unique, Spiritual, Existential State of *Sach*, of Sublime Truth.

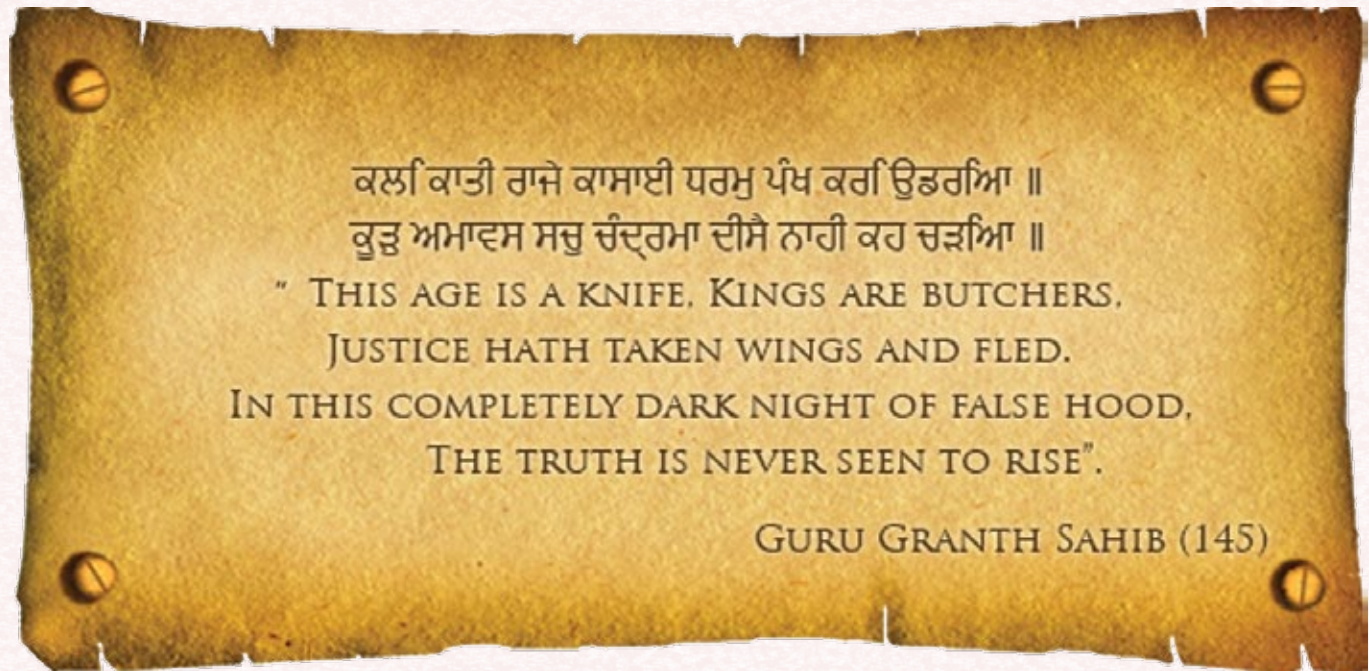
Aadi Sach, jugaadi Sach, hai bhi Sach, Nanak, hosi bhi Sach.

Harjeet Singh Gill
Professor Emeritus, JNU.

Colonel Nirmal Singh on

Decoding the Babarvani

*eaethee maar pee karalaanae thai(n) kee dharadh n aaeiaa
karathaa thoo(n) sabhanaa kaa soee*



As we celebrate the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak in November 2019, it has so happened that this anniversary is accompanied by the development which Sikhs had longed for since 1947 : facility for visa-free travel to Kartarpur Sahib where Guru Nanak spent his last 17 years and evolved the concept of the *Sangat*, the foundational unit on which edifice of the Sikh community has been consolidated.

Guru Nanak envisioned Sikhi as an activist faith. Right from the beginning, the Gurus preached that people be engaged with issues of worldly life by taking righteous positions in the pervasive environment of conflict and strife. The Guru says that no one is free of conflict and strife (*Bin bād birodhēh koī nāhī – Maru M I, p. 1025*) for conflict is the creation of God like are fire, hunger and thirst (*Agan upāī vād bhukh tihāī – Var Malar ki, M I, p. 1282*). During his later years at Kartarpur, Guru Nanak was witness to the Mughal

Babar's invasions which resulted in changing of the rule and character of Hindustan from the Lodhis to Mughals. These were major happenings and the concomitant suffering of people touched the Guru deeply.

Guru Nanak's four compositions, known as *Babarvani* give a glimpse of the sense of these cataclysmic events. These verses are not a historical account but a rendering of the play of divine will and divine justice in a setting of deep agony and trauma with its mixture of sin, blood and tragedy which jolts the conscious of the reader on the tearing effect of such conflict on the body fabric of a society.

Our Endeavour

With Babarvani text as the prime source, our endeavour would be to search for what Guru Nanak sees as the characteristics and characterisation of conflicts from the position of society bearing the brunt and fallout

of conflict within the matrix of human limitations and bondage, the moral and ethical mores and related longing for divine justice.

There expectedly would be lessons to learn from this disambiguation that could guide us explore the areas of legislative, judicial and legal processes to identify where and how interventions by Sikh activism might benefit the cause of justice and equity in the extant societies that we live in and satisfy our urge for seeking the good of one and all.

Babarvani – A Close, Quick Look

A close look at the four Babarvani compositions suggested that the Verse in *Asa* on p.360 offers the defining stratification of characteristics and characterisation of conflict that Guru Nanak sees in the invasion by Babar. His enunciation flows out of the underlying narrative describing the fate of the ruling elite and people, particularly women, of Hindustan and hint of Babar's motivation for the invasion. The other two Babarvani verses in *Asa* [p. 417/11, p. 417-8/12] elaborate upon the past and present of the vanquished

princes, lay people, captive women, the latter being pampered and protected but now exposed to the worst form of rapine molestation by the invaders. The verses, interspersed with deeply felt spiritual reflections, are narrated by the Guru through the prism of divine justice as determinant of the fate of all people, high or low, men or women, Muslim or Hindu or any other. A gap in the narrative is closed by the verse in *Tilang* [p. 722].

The Event – Textual Extracts

Asa M I, p. 360: The Creator has chosen to dispatch Mughal hordes as messengers of death to terrorise Hindustan. Did you not feel compassion hearing the shrieks of victims of invaders oppression and this priceless country laid to waste ? ‘O Creator



Lord, You are the Master of all. If the powerful strike out against the powerful, then it may not cause grief to any. But if a ravenous tiger attacks a flock of sheep and kills them, then its Master must answer : One may give himself a great name, and revel in the pleasures of the mind, but in the eyes of the Lord, he is just a worm, for all the corn that he eats : *khuraasaan khasamaanaa keeaa hi(n) dhusathan ddaraaeiaa aapai dhos n dhaeae karathaa jam kar mugal charraaeiaa eaethee maar pee karalaanae thai(n) kee dharadh n aaeiaa karathaa thoo(n) sabhanaa kaa soee jae sakathaa sakathae ko maarae thaa man ros n hoee sakathaa seehu maarae pai vagai khasamai saa purasaee -- jae ko naao dharaaeae vaddaa saadh karae man bhaanae khasamai nadharee keerraa aavai jaethae chugai dhaanae.*



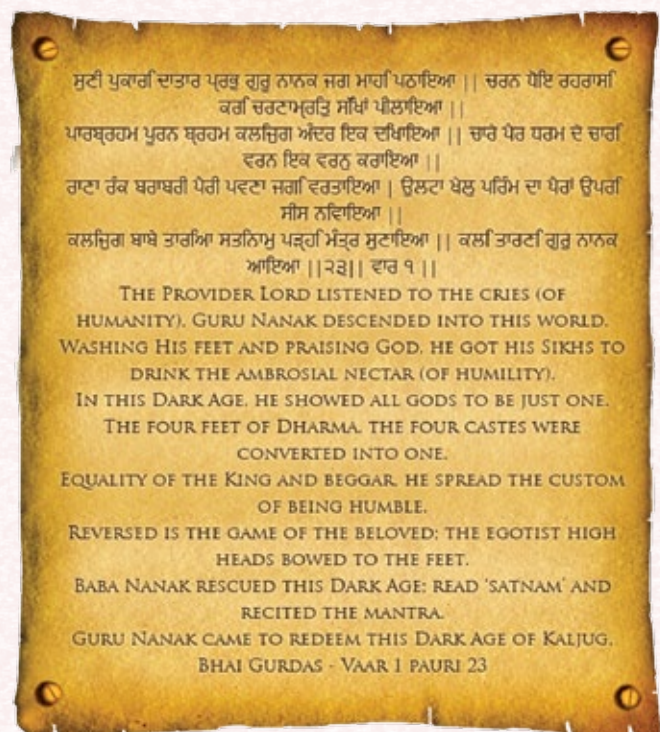
Asa M I, p. 417/11: They, who once wore beautiful tresses, their braided heads were shaved and ropes put around their necks [to be dragged]. Their wealth and youthful beauty, source of much pleasure, now became their enemies. Orders was given to the soldiers, who dishonoured them, and carried them away. If one focuses on the Lord beforehand, why then would he be punished? The kings had lost higher consciousness, reveling in pleasure and sensuality. With Babar's rule proclaimed, even the princes have no food to eat: *jin sir sohan patteeaa maa(n)gee paae sa(n)dhhoor sae sir kaathee mu(n) neeanih gal vich aavai dhhoorr--- dhhan joban dhue vairee hoeae jinhee rakhae ra(n)g laae dhoothaa no furamaaeiaa lai chalaе path gavaae --- ago dhaе jae chaetheeai thaa(n) kaaеith milai sajaae --- sahaа(n) surath gavaaeaa ra(n)g thamaasai chaе baabaravaani fir gee kueir n rottee khaae.*

Asa M I, p. 417-8/12: Men whose letters were torn in the Lord's Court were destined to die. Women - Hindu, Muslim, Bhatti, Thakur - had their robes shredded away. Husbands of others did not return

home. They came to dwell in the cremation ground - how did they pass their night ? For the sake of wealth, so many were ruined and so many have been disgraced. It was not gathered without sin, and it does not go along with the dead. Those, whom the Creator Lord would destroy - He first strips them of virtue : *jinh kee cheeree dharageh paattee thinhaa maranaa bhaae eik hi(n)dhavaanee avar thurakaanee bhattiaanee t(h)akuraanee eikanhaa paeran sir khur paattae eikanhaa vaas masaaanee jinh kae ba(n)kae gharee n aaeiaa thinh kio rain vihaanee --- eis jar kaaran ghaanee viguthee ein jar ghaanee khuaaee paapaa baajhahu hovai naahee mueiaa saathh n jaaee jis no aap khuaaee karathaa khus leae cha(n)giaee.*

Viewing the Event for Defining Features

The Guru adduces that God had willed the Mughal invasion to terrorise and punish Hindustan. The Lodhis, who had lost their higher conscious by reveling in pleasure and sensuality, fought a desultory battle with a matched adversary and were punished for their misdeeds. The Babarvani verses do not betray any sense of [ros] resentment, anger or injustice at what happened to the Lodhi ruling elite, the Guru only says that even the princes had no food to eat under Babar's dispensation.



The Mughals on the other hand, killed wantonly like a ravenous tiger mauling a flock of sheep and indulged in rapine at the instance of their master. So even as Mughals acted as agents of the divine Will, their oppression and dishonouring of women remained an unresolved conundrum on fitting divine response. The ‘master’ of invaders needed to be held accountable for his ambition and his demonstrated disregard for human dignity.

With the above characteristics defining the conflict, the characterisation of conflict from vantage of the relative power of the two sides flows almost naturally. Guru Nanak has set it out in a short, pithy couplet: *jae sakathaa sakathae ko maarae thaa man ros n hoe, sakathaa seehu maarae pai vagai khasamai saa purasaaee.*

The Guru envisions two clear cut situations : the second may be a more political objective as evident from the following on the term *sakta*.

(This term has been used by Guru Nanak only in the SGGS. Of the four usages, in one the term has been used for God saying Āpe saktā āpe surtā saktī jagat paroveh - You Yourself are all-powerful, and You Yourself are the intuitive knower, by whose power the whole world is strung. Derived from the term shakti, sakta is the one who has shakti or is powerful on his

own or is in position to unleash power over others. It has been used twice in conjunction with sinh – tiger – which could be interpreted to refer to the base instinct of the tiger to kill to assert power rather than satisfy hunger. In our context it could imply Babar’s egotistical use of power not to subdue but to terrorize populace of Hindustan).

Reason Wells Up : Faith Answers

The Guru sees, feels the pain and his enquiring mind raises many questions on the events playing out. He wonders that when tragic events hit the suffering humanity, why the One who created and attached mortals to pleasures, sits alone, and watches it play out.

That does not look right and he chides God by asking “did He not feel any compassion hearing the screams of people being slaughtered? Nanak wonders if the Creator Himself acts, and causes others to act. He issues the commands, and is pleased with them [then] what is the mankind to do? To whom should they complain? To whom should they go and cry ?”

And he answers “We receive what is written in our destiny. Pleasure and pain come by His will --- The Lord and Master is true, and true is His justice”.

That hope of receiving His justice must not be belied, that is the question *Babarvani* has yet to fully answer.

The Answer

So, the answer needed is Divine accountability of the Master for excesses by soldiers under his command. *Tilang*, M I, p. 722 helps us here. Guru Nanak addressing Lalo, says that the Divine word as revealed to him indicts Babar’s invading horde as a party of sin descending from Kabul forcibly demanding control over this land. So in God’s reckoning the punishers He sent turned vandals and rapists and their master needed to be held accountable.



(<https://madrascourier.com/insight/when-babur-met-guru-nanak/>)



Before announcing punishment to the master, Guru Nanak goes on to say that Hindustan will remember his words when its body-fabric is torn to shreds and predicts that coming in seventy-eight (1521), Mughals will lose their rule and be made to depart in ninety-seven (1540), as another disciple of man will rise to enforce this divine will : *jaise mai aavai khasam kee baanee thaisarraa karee giaan vae laalo paap ki janj lai kaabulon dhhaya joree mangai daan ve lalo—kaaeiaa kaparr ttuk ttuk hosee hidhusathan samaalasee bola—aavan at(h)atharai jaan sathanavai hor bhee out(h)asee maradh kaa chaelaa.*

He ends on a reassuring note “true is the Master and true is His justice and He issues His commands as He deems just” : *sachaa so saahib sach thapaavas sacharraa niaao karaeg masolaa.*

And so it happened. Eight months into the passing of Guru Nanak, on 17 May 1540, Sher Shah Suri decisively defeated Humayun who had to flee with not a soldier on his side. God so did respond to the cries of victims and the chide by Guru Nanak to deliver was fitting divine justice!

My imagination tells me Guru Nanak was greeted in the divine court by the comment *meri baandi bhagat chhadaavae, bandhi bhagat n chhootae mohae* – Namdev, p. 1252

Other comments on Babarvani

Babarvani is a unique text in many ways. It is based on actual happenings of epic proportion but the Guru kept it very brief. It presents the traumatic effects of the rapine let loose by soldiery on the women

of a vanquished people and concomitant killing of defending soldiers that also most intimately affected women, with great poetic irony. One senses their trauma and the empathy of the Guru : *khon kae sohilaee gaaveeahi naanak.* Who could have put it so poignantly?

The Guru identified accountability of the Master as key in a situation where soldiers are used to chasten or control unarmed civilians, more especially women. This incidentally is a more widely occurring mode in contemporary aid-to-civil power situations, which are commonplace in developing societies, and where often the armed forces are alleged to have used excessive force or the conduct of some the soldiers has been questioned. Most societies have reported cases of hate crimes by individuals and acts of violence like lynching or molestation by a gang or a mob. The provision for culpability of leaders, if found instigating violence, could be asked to be put on legislative agenda by judicial activists. Such legislation could have a deterrent effect and help reduce its incidences.

Guru Nanak was concerned that God took Khorasan (sometimes called Greater Khorasan, is the historical region which formed the northeast province of Greater Iran. The name signifies ‘the Land of the Sun’ or ‘the Eastern Province’ and comprised the present territories of northeastern Iran, parts of Afghanistan and much of Central Asia under protection and sent the Mughals to punish and terrorise Hindustan. The Guru also characterised



Greater Khorasan, north-west of the Indian subcontinent

his prediction about Mughals being driven out as divine justice. His poignant lament: *Lāhour sahar jahar kahar savā pahar* – the city of Lahore suffered terrible destruction for four hours [p. 1412] and is also said to be linked to Babar’s excesses. The Guru obviously loved Hindustan. He loved Lahore and he was deeply pained by suffering of all the victims, Muslims or Hindus, high or low, men or women. He truly was an inclusive lover of Hindustan.

Sikh Thought Linked to Conflict

In the very vast canvas of his writings Guru Nanak has touched variously on conflicts of His time. *Babarvani* however breaks new ground in understanding the dynamics of conflict in the matrix of life. Guru Hargobind institutionalised the Sikh imperative of righteous response to provocation, a call to *aachaar* with *veechaar*.

Guru Gobind Singh further refined this. He clarified that *veechaar* needed a trigger to turn *aachaar* and the trigger was *ros*. He has written that “when edge of the arrow touched my body, it kindled my resentment” and the Guru joined the battle actively (*Jabai baan laagyo Tabai ros jaagyo* – Dasam Granth, p. 148)..

Guru Gobind Singh also defined the principles for joining the conflict. He says in *Zafarnama* (the numbers in parenthesis are verse numbers of the *Zafarnama*

text – original in Persian) to Aurangzeb that it is not chivalry that in war countless hosts pounce upon just a few on opposing side. (41) At that stage one can join battle to fight the aggressors, (21) or if situation is past every other remedy it is righteous to unsheathe the sword to defend and to dispel the aggressor. (22) If the situation is otherwise, have nothing to do with the battle (23)

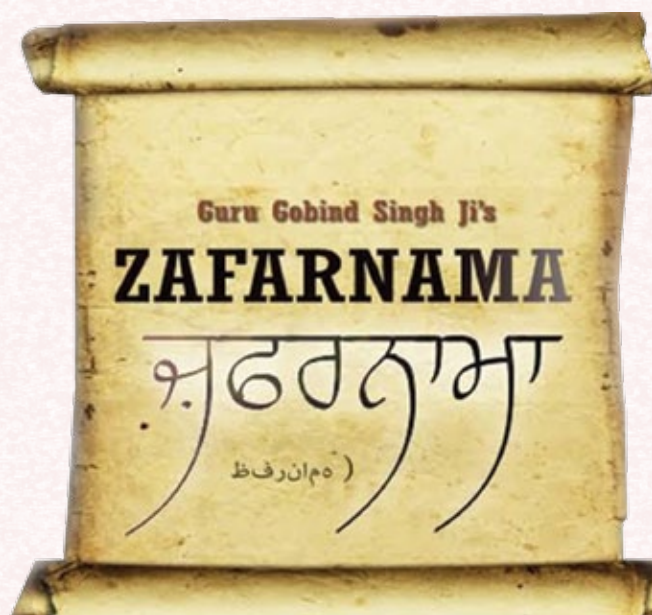
The following verses in *Zafarnama* resonate with the *Babarvani* text, witness : “Do not hurt or molest those who had not aggressed against you. (28) Bravery does not consist in putting out a few sparks and in the process stir up a fire to rage all the more. (79) God could not have wished for a King to create strife but instead to promote peace, harmony and tranquility among the people. (65) Nor should the ruler use his strength, power and resources to harass, suppress or deprive the weak. This will only weaken the society, erode his ability to rule effectively and make the State unsafe. (109) He should not recklessly shed blood of others lest heaven’s rage should befall him. (69)”.

It would be evident that Guru Nanak defined the foundational concept of ethics and justice in conflict. Gurus Hargobind and Gobind Singh laid the related operating systems.

The Contemporary Scene

Discussions around the world on peace and societal harmony have increased astronomically, even as the 20th Century is said to have been the bloodiest in human history. We are now on the cusp of completing the first two decades of the 21st Century and are observing the walls of protective nationalism being re-erected. The dream of an integrated global society with broad sharing of concerns for human well being and freedom of choice seems to have receded almost irretrievably.

While research into types of human conflict and peace studies is afoot in many societies, mankind seems to be at a stage when new modes of pursuing conflict are outpacing the development of strategies to manage their known causes. The fundamental twin typology that was addressed by Guru Nanak is still the same, though the variants have multiplied.



There is significant Sikh involvement in peace and societal harmony-related initiatives by the many interfaith and multicultural groups in the Western Diaspora. I found a great deal of interest in the audiences but our institutional involvement and follow up is inadequate. This must change in time and our engagement perhaps must also motivate us to research our own traditions and its potential contribution to refine and moderate change, including the legislative.

The Sikhs, as a community, do have to cope with situations of unequal power or clout against mainstream agencies and organs of power elite in all societies because of their limited resources. We should be propagating the timeless counsel of Guru Nanak that if powerful adversaries pulverise the weak and vulnerable, the master of the offending group must be held accountable for abetting the crime in addition to the perpetrators. The 1984 Sikh holocaust is not the only case waiting for such accountability. Tragically in

India, mob violence, rape and hate crimes are everyday occurrences, but the masters remain free.

The Guru sees that there are situations in life when conflict cannot be avoided or contained for a “rightful cause”. The paradox is that any uncontrolled force can turn into an evil one, worse than the force it started off to contain. Use of force must be carefully calibrated for it takes little time for the wardens to turn rapists and killers.

Such is life and its bondage, but one must continue in the endeavour to help usher changes in our societies so that our successors are less burdened with anxieties of disruption of peace and harmony and not destined to live through the traumas of 1947 and 1984.

Guru Rakha !

Nirmal Singh
enveen@yahoo.com



All images from the Internet

True spirit of Kartarpur

‘An entreaty to the Almighty to enable followers of Guru Nanak to have freedom to worship at the gurdwaras that have been taken away from the Panth’ is integral part of the Sikh daily prayer, Ardaas.



Such *Ardaas* arose after the partition which tore the Punjab apart with its people, rendering many of Sikhism's most sacred spaces inaccessible to the vast majority of its followers, "exiled" now to the eastern part of the land of five rivers.

Gurdwaras remaining in Pakistan are Nankana Sahib, where Guru Nanak was born and Kartarpur, the town which the Guru founded and lived in for two decades and where he breathed his last, after finding and naming his successor. These are certainly the most important historical Gurdwaras associated with the founder of the Sikh faith, even though there are many other Gurdwaras connected with Guru Nanak and his successors that have been inaccessible to Sikhs from India since 1947. The longing to pay obeisance there was the fore-mentioned addition to the *Ardaas*. Thus the excitement and jubilation seen among the Sikhs on the opportunity to visit their sacred space is palpable, more so since it was timed to coincide with the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak.

The Genesis

It would be instructive to take an imaginative trip to when Kartarpur, literally the Abode of God, was founded, and where began a settlement of those who committed themselves and their families to the Guru and his teachings. The Guru's mother, Mata Tripta, his wife Bibi Sulakhni, and sons Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das lived among them. They led lives typical of Punjabi farmers, the day shaped by the needs that come with tilling of the land and attending to other worldly chores. The Guru, his family and his followers lived life as it ought to be lived.

What kind of followers were these? Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, says they were *sants*, people who are and live by the 'Truth'. Kartarpur attracted many, however only the committed ones stayed and engaged in honest labour, even as they devoted themselves to the Creator. Guru Nanak's *bani* was recited everyday as they sought to align the material and spiritual aspects of righteous living.

The Guru met all who came to meet him, the curious, the seekers and the followers. The Guru's *bani* was written, recited and sung. Guru Nanak was spending time with his family, which had been separated from him during the long *udasis* that took him to what is now Sri Lanka in the south, to Tibet in the north, Assam in the east and Saudi Arabia in the west.

Piety prevailed. Recognising the truth of the Oneness of God and his creation, living a truthful life, devoted to spiritual pursuits and sustainable living, this was utopia, except that it was tangible. Here were the beginnings of *sangat*, *pangat* and *langar*, practices that were later to become institutionalised.

The collective spirit of the *sangat* of Kartarpur spread from this town founded by Guru Nanak to reach out to the entire world. The spirit transcended the physical. Guru Nanak's successors founded new towns. They all sought to approximate the environment that began at Kartarpur.

The Darbar Sahib

The Gurdwara at Kartarpur occupies a special place in Sikh ethos, and was well-tended till 1947. Just before Partition of the Punjab, Sikh leaders forcefully presented their case for free access to historic Sikh Gurdwaras that were to become part of the new country of Pakistan. Justice Teja Singh, in his submission to the Boundary Commission said : "for

the Sikhs, the city of Amritsar, the city of Nankana Sahib in Sheikhupura district, the city of Kartarpur in Shahargarh tehsil in Gurdaspur district, are their Mecca and Medina, their Hardwar and Benares." All pleas, even a massive protest at Nanakana Sahib that cost several lives, were of no avail. After the Partition, the Gurdwaras and the properties attached to them were considered as "evacuee property."

Then for the next seven decades, evolving geopolitical equations and potential religious tourism changed the scenario somewhat but the physical spaces remained mired in Indo-Pak relations.

Now, the months leading to Guru Nanak's 550th year of birth, have been of hope for the Sikhs. The physical structure of Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur and the environs have been magically transformed, Sultanpur Lodhi has been spruced up splendidly and new roads laid to accommodate the expectedly large flow of pilgrims. Various protocols have been chalked out, differences brushed under the carpet and arrangements made for pilgrims. As for ordinary Sikhs, they were just yearning for the day they could pay obeisance at the historic Gurdwara at Kartarpur Sahib.

Marking 550 years

Guru Nanak's Kartarpur was the venue of realisation and implementation of the principle of Oneness of the Creator and His creation. It was the place of dignity





where artificial inequalities, brought about by caste and gender discrimination, were eliminated, priestly classes and others with pretensions of worldly status were negated by the declaration and acceptance of divinity in everyone : Guru Nanak's followers were expected to thus extend themselves, spiritually, socially, and physically.

The 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak's birth is an occasion for all his followers to present a united front in consonance with this vision, to be exemplars of his teachings, and to produce literature that would allow others to learn about the founder of Sikhism.

The Guru's vision was of oneness. Unfortunately, many of those who seek to speak in his name today are far from being unified. Finding a shadow of a vision in the programmes that have been rolled out would be quite a task. The squabble for credit is as ill-founded as it is distasteful. We tend to blame leaders. Writing as a Sikh, it is time to introspect : do we stay true to the core of the Guru's teachings in our everyday lives? Are we not reducing ourselves by performing rituals without reflecting on and following the instructions of the Guru?

(Eastern) Punjab has naturally the largest concentration of Sikhs in the world today but is a state where the environment is exploited; stubble

burning poisons the atmosphere and increasingly inadequate education, lack of moral compass and substance abuse contaminates the future generations.

We imbibe of the Guru's teachings but in a superficial manner. Now is the time to be the real followers of the Guru, to identify with the poor and eschew consumerism that has gripped us.

The world admires the spirit of Sikhs who would want to perform *Sewa* at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur. Just as there is a narrow corridor that links us to the place where the Guru taught us how to live, there is also a narrow corridor that allows us to transcend the distance we have, unfortunately, moved away from, essence of the Guru's teachings.

Real obeisance to the Guru would be to devote ourselves to his teachings. To stand out because of the strength of character. To conquer the ego and bow before the Almighty rather than temporary temporal masters. Let the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak be the occasion that starts the process of true metamorphosis of his followers.

Roopinder Singh
Courtesy : The Tribune



(Images from the Internet)

First person accounts

Darshan at Kartarpur Sahib

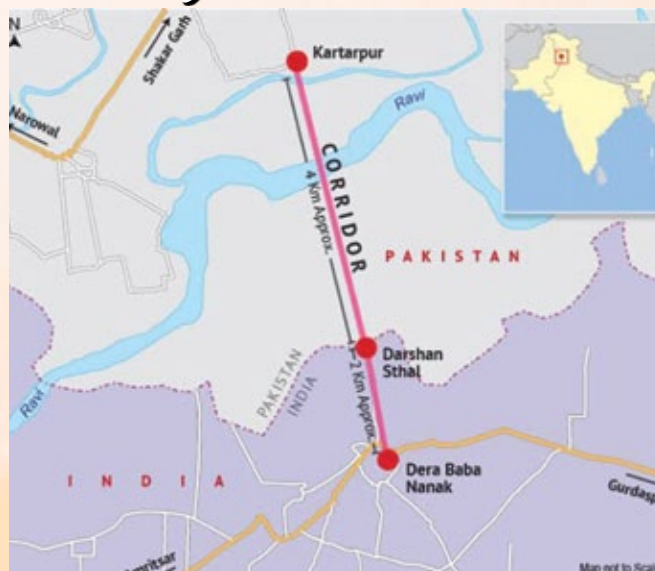


Rajmeet Singh's "lifetime of experience"

I still recall how amid the demand for a corridor to Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan, binoculars were installed instead on a raised platform across the border by India's BSF in 2004, to allow devotees to have *darshans*



On the Indian side, gates yet to open...



... and then gates swing open on the Pakistani side

of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib. Though not an actual darshan, clear visibility of the shrine from the Indian side was some solace for the devotees (see *Nishaan Issue IV/2018*). Some 15 years later the obstacle between the revered shrine and the Indian border has gone, reducing the travel time to just 30 minutes. We were among those blessed ones who were part of the first *jatha* that went through the corridor to pay obeisance at the revered

Gurdwara Darbar Sahib on 9 November 2019 . An upsurge of emotions was all pervasive.

Even as the immigration check and other related formalities at the Indian side of the ICP were in progress before the walk-through, the divine aura of Guru Nanak was at play as politicians cutting across party lines came together for the memorable journey. Expressing his feelings, Anandpur Sahib MP Manish Tewari said it was a spiritual journey, “nothing political about it.” Reminding politicians to work for peace and prosperity on both sides, NRI Gurdeep Singh Randhawa, who came from Germany to be part of the



Bhai Mohinder Singh from Birmingham

first *jatha*, said the entire world was watching closely as to how the corridor would help bring peace and economic development on both sides of the Indo-Pak border.

Between 10 am and 1 pmon 9 November 2019, the patience of the *jatha* members was tested as the immigration staff at the ICP waited for Prime Minister

Narendra Modi to inaugurate the corridor and flag off the first *Jatha*. It was well after 2 pm that the gates on the Indian side of the border were finally opened for commencement of the spiritual journey. We walked for a short distance over a temporary road, as the bridge over the rivulet is yet to be built, and Pakistan’s Chenab Rangers opened their gates and welcomed us with much courtesy.

All arrangements on ‘the other side’ of the border were impressive. Adequate number of electric carts and low-floor buses were pressed into service to take the pilgrims to the immigration terminal, which had 110 counters, as compared to 50 on the Indian side. Some of the devotees preferred to walk up to the immigration terminal, chanting hymns in reverence.



Excellent arrangements for transportation

Since the entry was without charge on this inaugural day, it took very little time for the authorities to issue entry slips and complete immigration checks. Playing the perfect host, Pakistan PM Imran Khan travelled up to the immigration terminal on a low-floor bus to welcome the VIP members of the *jatha*, including former PM Dr Manmohan Singh and his wife Gursharan Kaur, Union Ministers Hardeep Singh Puri and Harsimrat Kaur Badal, CM Capt Amarinder Singh and MLA Navjot Singh Sidhu, besides others.

When we finally entered the pious premises of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, there was an upsurge of emotion among the devotees, who were awestruck by



Kartarpur Sahib complex, under completion

the sheer scale of the quality makeover given to the shrine. Initially built in 1925 at a cost of Rs 1,35,600, donated by the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh,

it was repaired by the Pakistan Government in 1995, and fully restored in 2004. From the initial four acres, the Gurdwara premises now extends up to 42 acres, with over 3.5 lakh sq ft of white marble flooring around the main complex itself.



Speeches at the inauguration on 9 November 2019

Unmindful of Imran Khan and his Cabinet colleagues raising other issues at the inaugural function, we were all too immersed in cherishing every moment of our two-and-a-half hour stay at the shrine. Dr Manmohan Singh and Capt Amarinder Singh were reportedly “soaked in eternal bliss”, while Navjot Singh Sidhu was literally mobbed by the crowds, as everyone, including Imran Khan, credited him for the initiative.

The clock struck 5 pm and it was time to return. We definitely did not want to leave the place and wanted some more time to energise ourselves spiritually. Handshakes and hugs were exchanged with Pakistani Rangers and other officials, as everyone returning home, thanked their hosts for what will surely remain one of the most memorable days of their lives.

From The Tribune



Remarkable work by Pakistani authorities in creating a new Kartarpur Sahib in just ten months

Vibhor Mohan writes :

Such a long journey! But in the end, all it took to end those 72 years of longing was a six-minute bus ride. My trip to Kartarpur Sahib, or Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, on 9 November 2019 was as much about experiencing the power of emotions gushing forth as it was about witnessing history being made. The Kartarpur corridor runs through vast fields, with security personnel lining the flanks of a road with barbed-wire fences on either side. There are high railings close to the gate that opens to the Kartarpur Gurdwara complex.

For the pilgrims, the sight of the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur from far was in itself so overwhelming that they couldn't hold back. In their eagerness to reach the shrine, many of them almost sprinted towards the deluxe buses waiting for them. It took less than the time one would possibly need to walk across a paddy field for the convoy to arrive at its destination. Inside the Gurdwara, some of the pilgrims settled down to watch the inauguration by Pakistan PM Imran Khan on a large screen. Others spent time visiting the gallery at the shrine or partaking of the food being served at the *langar*.

A large number of local Sikhs and those from abroad had also converged on the Gurdwara to witness the historic occasion, many of them cheering Imran and his guest, Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu, amid the din of loudspeakers. One of the highlights of visiting the sacred site where Guru Nanak had spent almost two decades, was darshan at the well from which he is believed to have drawn water from for his daily needs.

It was also the culmination of an exciting day in prospect when we had started from Amritsar, where many journalists travelling from Chandigarh were forced to camp amid heavy rain and winds that damaged parts of the "tent city" in the sleepy border town of Dera Baba Nanak, the last place on the Indian side, east of the river Ravi.

This was from where pilgrims could take the Kartarpur corridor to cross over to the Pakistan side,



Thousands were present at the Kartarpur Sahib complex on 9 November 2019



Young Pakistani Sikhs from Peshawar at Kartarpur Sahib

about one-and-a-half hours from Amritsar. Members of the first *jatha* of 562 pilgrims had been eagerly awaiting since that morning for inauguration of the corridor on the Indian side by PM Narendra Modi, signalling the start of an emotional journey to Guru Nanak's '*karmabhoomi*' through a route that took 72 years to open.

The *jatha* was a mix of MLAs and MPs of various parties, besides prominent Sikhs, including NRIs invited by the Centre, many of whom were accompanied by their families. Amid blaring of VIP sirens, Dera Baba Nanak was overwhelmed by traffic chaos as local



Leaving Kartarpur Sahib in luxury buses, back to Dera Bala Nanak, and India

police personnel tried hard to implement their plans and provide a smooth journey to the newly-constructed passenger terminal for the *jatha* members.

The airport-style check-in was smooth as the expansive immigration area had adequate number of counters. Passports were just for identity proof and were not stamped. A printout of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA), generated on basis of the online form filled by the pilgrims, was the only other document required, unless an OCI card was applicable.

As the usual buzz died down and some of the pilgrims started to get anxious, news of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh arriving brought the crowd back to life and impatient *jatha* members now getting anxious to cross over. On the other side of the passenger terminal, most of us walked to the last gate before the border.

The first day had its share of teething troubles as security personnel failed to bring together the group of '31 dignitaries', who were to be sent for security check before the others could move. Some of the pilgrims then tried to reach the border first in their eagerness to reach Kartarpur Sahib by pushing at the gates. After about half an hour, things finally began moving following the move ahead of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and some other 'VVIPs'.

On other side of the border, pilgrims got a very warm welcome from Pakistani immigration and other officials. The procedure was swift, the pilgrims only gave their biometrics and got their passports scanned but these were not stamped before the pilgrims moved for the 'last mile' drive to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, being provided transportation in smart new buses, electric vehicles and luxury sedans.

The several hours spent at the Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara was overwhelming, many pilgrims later describing themselves as being in a trance. And as the day ended, and the destination was left behind, the all-consuming feeling was one of a wonderful dream fulfilled.

*From The Times of India
Images by Nishaan's Editor at
Kartarpur Sahib, 9 November 2019*

Darshan at Kartarpur Sahib: 9 November 2019



On the passing of Guru Nanak, the community was divided on whether he was their Guru or their *Pir*. The Muslims wanted to entomb the mortal remains while the Hindus wanted to cremate. But, according to legend, Guru Nanak's body was turned into flowers, which were then divided between the two communities.



The Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur has the holy Granth Sahib where obeisance is paid as also the *mazar*, visited with great reverence by the communities.

Images taken at Kartarpur Sahib on 9 November 2019

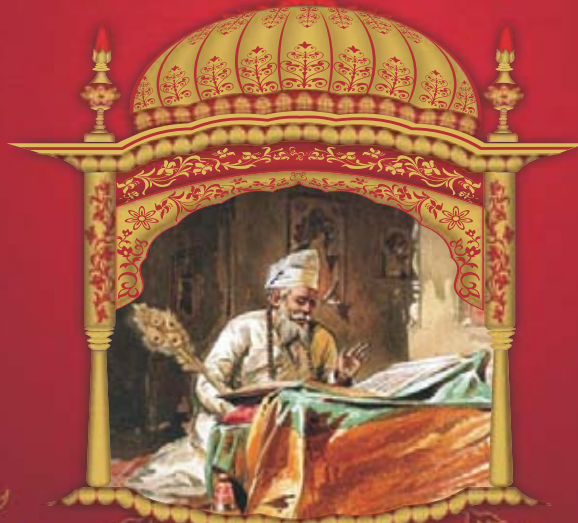


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Dr. Mohinder Singh

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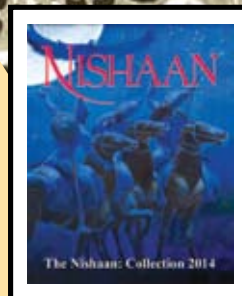
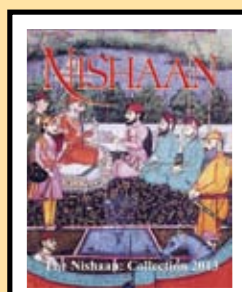
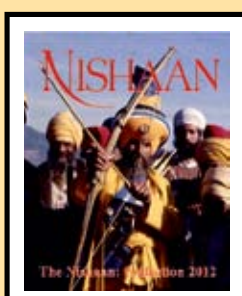
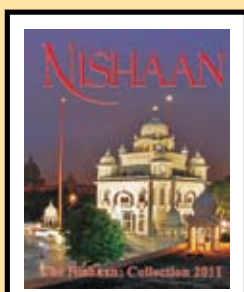
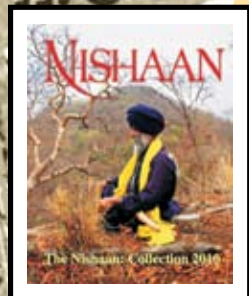
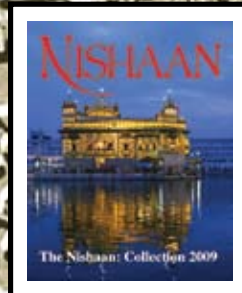
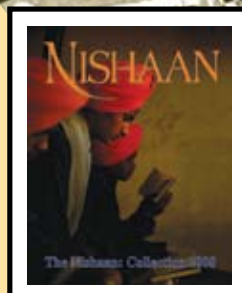
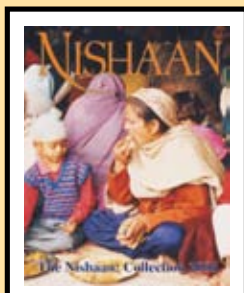
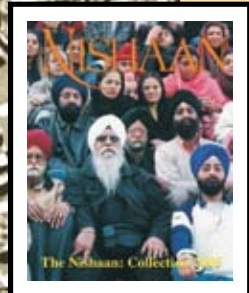
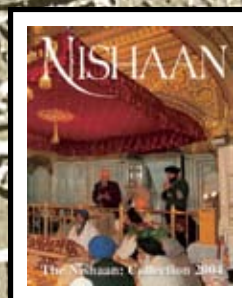
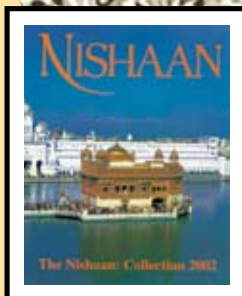
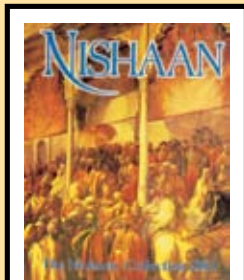
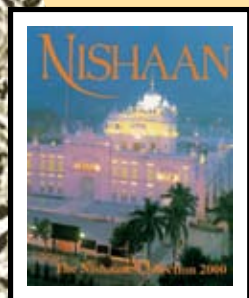


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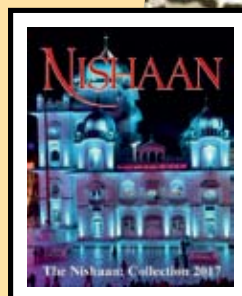
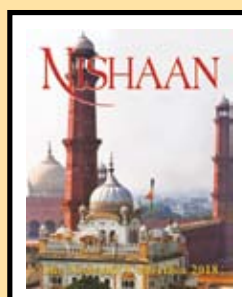
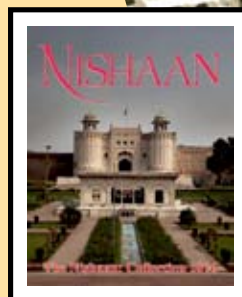
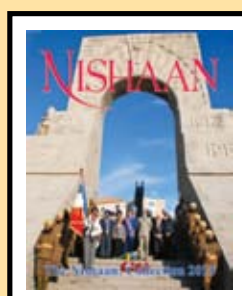
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