



Guru Granth Sahib as Interfaith Divine Scripture

Sikhism is not an 'ism', as such, but a spiritual way of life for the entire mankind to become divine.

Guru Granth Sahib, the holy Sikh scripture, contains the divine 'Words' (hymns) of those God-conscious persons, who merged with the divine by treading on the divine path and by meditating on the Divine Name.

The divine concept of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith, is that the Divine 'Word' is the Guru and the *Surt(i)* (tune of mind), which is egoistic, is the disciple of the Divine 'Word'. **{Shabad Guru Surt(i) dhun chela. (943)}** The *Surt(i)*, by meditating on the divine 'Word', would shed its ego and become divine. One divine sentence incorporated in *Guru Granth Sahib* sums up this concept:

Dubidha chhod Bha-ai Nirankari (685)

{O Man! Shed duality (ego) and you are God.}

In Mathematical equation it will be:

MAN – EGO = GOD

This is the universal truth and the divine path treaded by the mankind to become divine, irrespective of any caste, creed, religion, region, age or sex.

Today, we hold many conferences and seminars for interfaith, but nobody has tried to explain the world that *Guru Granth Sahib* itself is the divine scripture of the 35 God-conscious persons, who belonged initially to different castes, creeds, religions and regions. Similarly, nobody could define the magnanimity of *Guru Granth Sahib*, in which the divine verses of only six Sikh Gurus out of the ten Sikh Gurus, have been incorporated. Whereas, the divine hymns of 15 Saints

belonging to different caste, creed, culture, religion and social status also find a place of honor. Out of these 4 were initially following the Muslim faith. Then we have high caste *Brahmins*, a King; and also a barber, cobbler, weaver and a butcher, who were considered belonging to low caste. Besides, the divine verses of 11 *Bhatts* (high-caste *Brahmins*), who became divine after great struggle in search of truth, also figure in *Guru Granth Sahib*. These *Bhatts* met the Sikh Gurus in Amritsar and they were enlightened by the Gurus, who were then considered the Gurus only of the Sikh sect by the common man.

No divine scripture of any religion has a single divine 'Word', by an individual belonging to the other religion, caste, creed or region. Everyone would be astonished to know that whenever a Sikh bows before *Guru Granth Sahib*, he is not only showing respect to the Sikh Gurus but also to all those belonging to different communities, castes, creeds and religions, as mentioned above. Guru Nanak has, thus, inculcated the gist of spirituality amongst his followers, i.e., Sikhs, who are the students of spirituality or seekers of truth. Any seeker of truth (*Jagiasoo* – student) belonging to any religion, caste, creed or sex can tread on the divine path by reciting the divine 'Name' with full devotion and dedication.

In short, submitting completely to the divine by shedding his ego, one can attain the stage of divine wisdom, i.e., helm of the *Nirankar* (figureless stage, which is called all-pervading Almighty God). Whosoever reaches this stage, merges with God and gets the supreme divine bliss:

Nirankar ke des jaahe taa sukh laheh mahal. (595)

(When you arrive in the land of the Formless Lord, you shall find peace in the Mansion of His Presence.)

Whosoever, reaches this stage of life, rises above the bondage of caste, creed, rituals and customs and merges with God, who has no religion. All the God-conscious persons reach this stage even by following initially their own religious customs and way of meditation.

This is the gist of the theme of spirituality. Whosoever follows the divine teachings and principles of *Guru Granth Sahib*, will become a member of the interfaith community, who have reached the kingdom of the divine (*Nirankar ke des*), which has been aptly described as *Begumpura* (the city without sorrow) by *Bhagat Ravidas*, who was though a cobbler by profession but attained this kingdom and merged with the divine.

Hence we pray with folded hands to the entire mankind that they should consider *Guru Granth Sahib* as interfaith divine scripture.

On 10 December, 1948, United Nation's General Assembly passed resolution No. 217-A on human rights, stating, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Guru Granth Sahib already preaches all this vehemently and in much clearer and stronger terms. Guru Nanak had declared as early as in 16th Century:

Sabh meh jyot jyot hai soye Tis de chaanan sab meh chaanan hoye. (663)

(The divine light is within everyone; it is that Light which shines within one and all.)

Guru Nanak considered everyone else better than himself. He gave them equal respect and regard, as he considered all having been created by the same God, whose light enlivened all His creation. The Guru had *Bhai* Bala, a Hindu and *Bhai* Mardana, a Muslim, as his companions for most part of his four long *Udasis* (spiritual travels). For him, no one was lowly:

Sab kau oochaa aakhee-ai neech na dees-ai koe

Iknaï bhaand saaji-ei ik chaanan tih loe. (62)

{Call everyone exalted; no one seems lowly. The one Lord has fashioned the vessels (human bodies) and One Light pervades in all the three worlds.}

History is witness to the period, when Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's army unleashed awful cruelty and tyranny on downtrodden and innocent people of the country. To save the masses from these miseries, Guru Gobind Singh fought several battles with the Mughal army. In the battlefield, the tenth Master deputed his most devoted Sikh, *Bhai* Kanhaiya to serve water to the injured soldiers from both sides, irrespective of their religion, caste or creed or allegiance. The injured Mughal soldiers, after getting water, used to gain strength to fight the Sikh soldiers, which was not relished by the latter, who complained to the Guru. When the so-called 'traitor' was summoned before the Guru, he humbly submitted:

"O Divine Master! I have not served water to the enemy. I serve water to you and not to any friend or foe, because I perceive your divine light in everyone. I learned this divine lesson from you my Master and it is imbued in my heart to see

all-in-one and one-in-all. That is why I serve all, irrespective of their faith and affiliation, being the children of one Divine Father”:

Sabh-ai saajheewaal sadaa-i-n Toon kis-ei na diseh baaharaa jeeo. (97)

(All humans form a common fellowship and are partakers of your grace. O Lord! You are alien to no one.)

This is a unique example in the world, where a friend and a foe are treated alike. In fact through the gracious deeds of *Bhai Kanhaiya*, Guru Gobind Singh laid the foundation of the so-called divine Red Cross, which is beyond the imagination of the present day Red Cross founded by Sir Henry Durant about 160 years later, because the present day Red Cross is a separate neutral organization accepted by all, which treats the injured in the battlefield of both the armies of the fighting countries.

If everybody follows the teachings of *Guru Granth Sahib* in letter and spirit, then there will be universal brotherhood and divine peace on this earth. We can only pray and hope that those days are not far when we, the entire world community, would tread on this divine path to establish heaven on this planet.

In this context, we may cite the example of Sant Attar Singh *Mastuana Wale*, who was considered the divine Saint by one and all. He was born in 1866 and after meditating on the divine name merged with the Almighty Lord and served mankind irrespective of any religion, caste or creed. He perceived that scientific era is fast approaching and it would lead mankind to distraction from the divine path. He visualized that the Western world is teaching mere ‘literacy’ to explore scientific discoveries, which would ultimately tamper with Nature. He felt the need for combining the spiritual values and teachings with ‘literacy’ so that it becomes value-based ‘education’ (*Vidya*) for the betterment of future generations. A ‘literate’ person is the most duffer, because he is selfish and egoistic. ‘Literacy’ without spirituality has been vehemently condemned in *Guru Granth Sahib*:

Parhi-aa moorakh aakhee-ei Jis lab lobh ahankaaraa. (140)

(That scholar who is full of greed, avarice, pride and ego, is known to be a fool.)

On the other hand, *Vidya* (value-based education) has been eulogized in *Guru Granth Sahib*:

Vidi-aa veechaaree taan par-upkaaree. (356)

(True learning is that which induces in the mind the service of mankind.)

That is why the great patriot and a revered leader of the Hindus *Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya* along with all the *Rajas* and *Maharajas* and the Saints requested the great Saint of the era, Sant Attar Singh to lay the foundation of the *Banaras Hindu University*. So much so that he went to Mastuana from Sangrur railway station bare-footed by covering 8 kilometers to bow before the Saint and request him to lay the foundation, which the latter accepted. Later, on a specific request, he sent his disciple Sant Teja Singh as the Principal of the Teachers' Training College for sometime, before the latter took over the reigns of Akal College, Mastuana.

After Guru Gobind Singh, Sant Attar Singh was the first, who felt the need of holistic education and opened the first girls' school in the far-flung backward area of Mastuana, a hitherto unknown remote place. Later on, a boys' school was also opened. He laid great stress on value-based education. His beloved devotee, Sant Teja Singh, who was M.A. L.B. from Punjab and A.M. from Harvard, following the footsteps of his mentor, continued the good work by carrying forward the mission. Sant Teja Singh discovered Baru Sahib, which was blessed by Guru Gobind Singh when he visited Nahan with the hill *Raja Medni Prasad*. In the year 1956, Santji laid the foundation of this *Braham Vidya*, which will become the *Braham Vidya University* under the aegis of The Kalgidhar Trust.

After he merged with the divine light, his followers started Akal Academy, an English medium school at Baru Sahib in 1986, with just 5 students. It later became a full-fledged residential school affiliated to CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), Govt. of India. And now its status has been raised to a university, which was sanctioned by the Government and UGC under the name of *Eternal University*.

At present, there are 6 colleges and about 60 schools established by the Trust in Northern states of India viz., Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, where value-based education is being imparted to students from all over the globe irrespective of caste, creed or religion. In its flagship Akal Academy at Baru Sahib, more than a hundred students hail from America.

A stylistic analysis of *Guru Granth Sahib* reveals pan-Indian underpinnings and a full-fledged analysis of this complex text in terms of its detailed structural and functional features poses a great challenge. A striking feature of the holy *Granth* is the use of many languages within the same text – a multilingual phenomenon typical of South Asia. It may be pointed out that another remarkable aspect of this text is its functional use of many languages, making it a text that signifies multilingual India even in the Middle Ages.

All the saints and sages used different languages but their spiritual intent is similar. The dominant languages used are the *Saadhu Bhaasha*, with Braj as base code and Punjabi, both Western and Eastern varieties. Then we find the use of Sanskrit, termed as Sahiskriti, a variety believed to have been the universal India-wide medium of exchange of serious thought between different saints. Persian, Sindhi and various dialects of Hindi, particularly Braj have also been made use of.

Guru Granth Sahib, thus, reveals a symphony of different languages of the sub-continent. The numerous linguistic variations manifest the state of flux in which the Indian languages were, before they got stabilized into their present modern form.

The selection of the *Baani* with cosmic ramifications from amongst the saint-poets hailing from different parts of the sub-continent not only makes this great *Granth* a pan-Indian text but also indirectly highlights the geographical boundary of India. Further, these selections spanning a period of around 500 years provide a unique philosophical depth that link the contemporary to the ancient times. All this makes *Guru Granth Sahib* as interfaith divine scripture.

The most important aspect of Sikhism as interfaith is that the Sikh Gurus never encouraged conversions. They always preached the followers of other faiths to remain committed to the values propagated by their respective religions and thereby become real seekers of truth. Again, whatever the Gurus preached to the Sikh disciples, they likewise preached their Hindu and Muslim brethren also. If Guru Nanak had Bala and Mardana as his companions; Lehna, a petty trader and a staunch follower of Mata Vaishno Devi, became his disciple and ultimately, owing to his sheer obedience became Guru Nanak's successor, as the second Sikh Guru. Similarly, Sain Mian Mir, a renowned Muslim Faqir was attracted by Guru Arjan and served him so much that he was asked by the Guru to lay the foundation-stone of Harmandir Sahib, in Amritsar. Guru Hargobind adopted Pende Khan, a young Muslim orphan, who subsequently became a great warrior-General of the Guru's army, by remaining a Muslim. History is witness to the fact that when the Guru developed a new township, Hargobindpura and established a Gurdwara for the benefit of the Sikh devotees, he also got a Masjid built for the Muslim community. Guru Tegh Bahadur scaled new heights, when as a benefactor, he sacrificed his life for saving the Hindu religion. Guru Gobind Singh fought several battles, but did not annex an inch of the enemy's land. His followers included many Muslims, including Pir Budhu Shah, Sayyad Beg and Sayd Khan.

The Gurus had advice for one and sundry. To an ascetic, the Guru preaches:

So san-e-aasee jo Satgur s-aiv-ei vichhau aap gava-ai. (1013)

(He alone is a Sannyasi, who serves the True Guru, and removes his self-conceit from within.)

For the *Pandit*, he says:

So Pandit jo mann parbbhod-ei Ram Naam Aatam meh sodh-ei. (274)

(He is a true Pandit, a religious scholar, who instructs his own mind.)

For the *Brahmin*, the Guru has this to suggest:

So Brahmin jo Braham beechaar-ei. (662)

(He alone is a Brahmin, who contemplates God.)

And for the Vaishnav, he has this to offer:

Baisno so jis oopar suparsann Bisan kee maa-e-aa t-ai hoe bhinn. (274)

(The true Vaishnav, the devotee of Vishnu, is the one with whom God is thoroughly pleased.)

For the Jogi he says:

Satgur s-aiv-ai so Jogi hoe. (223)

(Those who serve the True Guru are the Yogis.)

For a Muslim, the Guru says:

Musalmaan mo-am dil hov-ei Antar kee mall dil t-ai dhov-ei. (1084)

(To be Muslim is to be kind-hearted and wash away pollution from within the heart.)

Similarly to a Mullah, the Guru suggests:

So Mullahn jo mann se-ou larh-ei Gur updes kaal sio jur-ei (1159)

(He alone is a Mullah, who struggles with his mind and through the Guru's Teachings, fights with death.)

For a Qazi, the Guru says:

Sach kamaav-ei soyee Qazi. (1084)

(He alone is a Qazi, who practices the Truth.)

For a Sheikh, the Guru has this to offer:

Soee S-aikh masaa-ik Haji So bandaa jis najar naraa. (1084)

(He alone is a Sheikh, a preacher, a Haji and he alone is God's slave, who is blessed with God's Grace.)

And to a Haji, the Guru preaches:

Jo dil sodh-ei soee Haji. (1084)

(He alone is a Haji, a pilgrim to Mecca, who purifies his heart.)

Hence *Guru Granth Sahib* is the only truly interfaith scripture of the world and can be said to be belonging to the entire humanity.

