

# Inner Dynamics of Guru Granth Sahib

**Dr. N. Muthu Mohan\***

\* Reader & Head, Guru Nanak Devji Chair, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai. 625021. Tamil Nadu.

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One of the definitive aspects of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is that it does not consider the *literal* as dichotomous to the *scriptural*. The over-all philosophical vantage point of Sikhism that it is a philosophy of *Miri-Piri* justifies the above statement. We mean by this that Sikhism fundamentally overcomes the dualism of spiritual and temporal that was present in traditional religions and philosophies of the world and prefers to lay the basement of a new way of thinking that poses a unified philosophy of existence. In the light of the principle of unity of spiritual and temporal, the present topic assumes a special meaning, namely the unity of scriptural and literal truths in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Although the scriptural and the literal can not be placed in the same plane, there is a certain continuity between the scriptural and the literal. The scriptural may be looking at the literal sympathetically. The literally high may be touching the spiritually profound.

The present paper@ is an attempt to discuss the scriptural and literal truth of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. As it has been prefaced, the scriptural and literal are approached in their unity and in their continuity.

## **The Scripture as Gurubani:**

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the treasure house of the Word of the Gurus. The Sikh tradition cherishes it as the spoken word of the Gurus. Better to say, the scripture contains the melodious hymns of the Gurus. The scripture is the reservoir of inspirational experiences of the Gurus. It is the receptacle of the wisdom of the Gurus gained through the divine and temporal experiences of the Gurus. For generations of Sikhs, the scripture was - and is - recited to evoke the message and emotional memory registered in the scripture.

The Sikh scripture in the above sense is the *Sabda* of the Gurus. *Sabda* is a term that hails from the vedic tradition. The Vedas claim that the word was revealed to the rishis, a selected few, to be transmitted again to a selected section of people. The Vedas claim that it is *apaurushya*, non-human or beyond human. To delete the idea that the vedic hymns were recited by people, they were attributed another feature that they were *srutis*, that they were heard. The Sikh conception of *Sabda*, I hope, has a little different connotation from its vedic counterpart. By all probability, there is something human when we say that it is the word of the Guru. Otherwise said, the *Sabda* in Sikh tradition means a continuum of the divine and human. The term so overwhelmingly acknowledged in Sikh tradition, Gurbani, brilliantly records this fact. While the term

*sabda pramana* in vedic tradition stands to indicate the closure of the text, the term Gurbani in Sikh tradition opens up the scripture to more and more experiential reading of the humans.

I am reminded of a tradition that exists among the Tamils, particularly in the Tamil Bhakti tradition, that the devotional hymns are called with a general name, *Vaaymozhi*, literally means the speech uttered by the mouth. *Vaaymozhi* is a term used to indicate the devotional hymns composed by the Tamil Saivite and vaishnavite saints. They are not considered thoroughly as the word of God, but are inspired by the divine experiences of the Saints. The Tamils, may be, desired to distinguish their tradition from the vedic one which took pride in being *sruti* oriented, and consequently, named theirs as spoken or recited. Due to the fact that they were sung by the devotees, the Tamils do not think that they are in anyway lower in religious status. The term *Vaaymozhi* also associates the devotional songs with the Tamil language in which they have been articulated. The spoken words of the Tamil saints stand to witness the identity of the Tamil devotionalism that it is associated with the land and the language. I think that when we use the term Gurbani to indicate the Sikh scripture, it implies that the Sikh scripture accommodates the moment of divine revelation along with the moment of human where the Guru is involved in the divine experience as well as the moment of cultural specificity related with the land and the language. We do not intend to localize the otherwise universal message of the Sikh Gurus, but only stipulate the cultural articulation of the former.

The Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh announced that the Sikhs then onwards should address the scripture as to the 'living Guru.' In the history of religions, mostly all the scriptures are sealed and made impersonal. The Sikh scripture achieves a different history by declaring the scripture to be the 'living Guru'. The characterization that the scripture is the living Guru makes the scripture personal. That is, the scripture combines both the aspects of impersonal and personal. Pure objectivity is negated in Sikh tradition as one sided and a unity of subjective and objective has been accomplished. The scripture becomes dearer and nearer to every Sikh. The Sikh lives with his or her Guru. The Guru participates in the every day life of the Sikh. Every Sikh addresses the Scripture as the living Guru and takes intimate counseling from the Guru. This is a unique status the scripture achieves.

### **An Alternative Scripture:**

The term alternative presupposes the existence of other scriptures, possibly even dominant scriptures. It may be so that the term dominant is an aberration in the history of religions. But fortuitously, it was real in the context of the birth of Sikhism that the Sikh scripture emerged as an alternative to two other religious trends, namely, Hinduism and Islam which had exhibited strong moments of domination in the history. Sikhism openly declares that it is the Third Path. The Varnashrama Dharma associated with the reciting and preaching of the Vedas and extended to all economic and social ways of living of people is repudiated by the Sikh scripture. As well as the Islamic rigidity: that there could be no more revelations after that of Prophet Mohammed is discarded by the

Sikh scripture. In Indian context, the political domination of the time by the Moghul rulers had also compelled the Sikhs to go beyond the former's standpoints. The Vedic and the Islamic traditions ascribed a very rigid status to their scriptures. There were conscious attempts in Vedic tradition to prohibit the spread of the scripture by constructing cultural - even physical - barriers among the peoples of the land. The *Tripitakas* of Buddhism and the Jaina writings do not ascribe rigid status to their scriptures. As these two schools do not subscribe to the concept of God, their scripture comes under the category of *paurushya*, man-made, to use the vedic terminology. The *Tripitakas* and the Jaina works are to be understood as no more than the enlightened words of Lord Buddha and Mahavira.

The Bhakti traditions of Medieval India did produce certain sacred texts, namely, the eighteen *Mahapuranas*. They form the corpus of religious literature associated with the Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions. The *Mahapuranas* describe in all detail the birth, life and mysteries of the gods and their *avatars*. The enormous mythologies of the *avatars* became the object of veneration and worship, thus giving birth to the popular cults of all varieties. In the given Bhakti tradition, the Word lost its meaning in the ocean of mythology. It became impossible to concentrate upon the word, the mythology occupying the entire sacred space. Soon the Bhakti tradition was made to adapt to the feudal ideology, made to slip back into the same track, thus alienating the people from the fold of the divine. The temple and the *mutts* became the agencies of conservative feudal social relations. Bhakti also underwent the process of Sanskritization, thus re-enforcing the *varnic* order of hierarchization into the devotional culture.

**Sikhism and the making of the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, represent the return of the democratic spirit allied with the interests of the common masses of people. The Granth Sahib exemplifies the social yearnings and spiritual expectations that emerged from below. The Gurus gave shape to those aspirations and anticipations of the people. The scripture of the Sikhs is the embodiment of this process. The making of Sri Guru Granth Sahib as a scripture is an attempt to lay the foundations of a scriptural tradition open to all the people. In more than one sense, the Sikh scripture could be evaluated as an alternative scripture. In Indian history, it was the first scripture that was composed in the people's language to spread the universal religious message to people of all walks of life. Neither the Sikh scripture passes any strictures against the religious message of any other religion of the past or future.** The Sikh scripture does not believe that either Sanskrit or Arabic is the exclusive divine vehicle to carry the religious message. It treats them both as equal to articulate the religious experiences of the Gurus. The Sikh scripture freely uses the Hindu and Islamic nomenclatures to describe God and to express the religious experiences.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib occupies a philosophical position that opens up the closures typical of many classical schools of thought. The soul reaches out to the body, the transcendental glances out to the immanent, the being excels its unsurpassable limits. The religious reaches out to the social. The spiritual travels into the temporal dwelling. In one's own being, transcending the barriers means the deconstructing of the self, in

Sikh terminology this means the deconstruction of the ego, the *haumain*. The humans are advised to go beyond his or her secluded limits and to reach out to the other, to become the social. In the historical context of Sikhism, the limits of the humans were the caste barriers constructed by the previous ideologies. The deconstruction of the ego indicates that the person must reach out of this shell and a social egalitarianism is proposed.

### **Dialogue as Tool of Humanism:**

The metaphor of *yatra* attests the spirit of dialogism of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Above all, it is the dialogic attitude to earthly problems and temporality. History of religions tells us that most of the religions dwell in the metaphysical realm and lose sight of the earthly problems. This phenomenon in the history of religions goes with the name logocentrism. An uncrossable barrier is built between the sacred and profane, between spirituality and temporality. Sikhism is not a religion of pure metaphysics. It is not a religion of ascetics or asceticism. The Guru Granth Sahib contains sharp criticism addressed to the ascetics who go out for begging for their daily food. As such, pure metaphysics makes a religion insensitive to ethical problems and injustices. Guru Granth Sahib opens itself up to ethics and to themes of social justice.

The dialogism of the Sikh scripture is registered also in the exploration of inter-religious space by the Sikh Gurus. Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a unique text of inter-religious spirituality unknown in the history of world religions. It carries the compositions not only of the Sikh Gurus but also that of the Hindu and Islamic saints. Moreover, the Hindus and Muslims are advised to follow the best of their religious traditions truly and honestly without falling prey to ritualism and dogmatism. **The inter-religious spirituality of the Granth Sahib finds expressed in giving priority to ethical concerns than to the sectarian interests of the particular religion.**

### **The Scripture as Returning of God:**

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a post-medieval or a post-Bhakti scripture. As we mentioned earlier, Sikhism was born after Bhakti reached its institutionalized form. The Siddhas revolted against this process, evoked the ethical consciousness against the externalities of the popular religions, but the Siddhas themselves becoming ascetics and secluded, got involved in mystical practices. The extremities of mysticism converted the Siddhas and the Sufis into egoists of religious type, thus making them aloof from the masses.

The mystics even declared that 'I am God', similar in tune with the Vedantic saying "*Aham Brahmasmi*". It is again a philosophy of aloneness, a self assumed superiority. Some of the mystic schools turned into mere occult sects. Philosophically, the mystics followed a path untouched by the earthly reality and closed themselves in the search of Being in itself.

This is the entry point of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak entered into debates with the recluse yogis and other seekers. He demanded them to open up the Being for the

world. The idea of God makes a grand return in Guru's poetry. The God in Granth Sahib is no more mere idea of Brahman, or *sunyata* of the transcendental space. **God returns with all the varieties and beauties of earthly life. God is love personified. God is life for the lifeless. As somebody else remarked later in a different tone, God is the heart of the heartless world. He is light in wild darkness. In Sikh metaphor, God is rain in the drought desert. God becomes everything to the people who were emptied of all energies and hope. Life is regained by millions of people with the return of God in Guru Granth Sahib. The humans are enlightened by the truth found in favour of them by the Gurus. The Gurus kindled the passion of life immanent in every living being. God is freedom to the people who were crushed by the atrocities of rulers and other structural insults. The Gurus declare that God renders honor, hope and meaning to the suffering people.**

The God of Guru Granth does not advise the people to tolerate the insults and oppressions perpetrated upon them. The God of Guru Granth Sahib infuses into the people the spirit of self-dignity and rightful honor. The God of Granth Sahib tells the people that truth is no more with the oppressors, it is with them, with the lowest of the low. Guru Nanak assures that he too is with them, that the SatGuru is always with the people. Every Sikh Guru true to the leadership of Guru Nanak stood with the people. Is it not that Guru Gobind Singh declared that the Khalsa is his own image? The Gurus restored truth, love and honor to the people. The Gurus called the people to embrace God, and thereby regain everything they had lost. At no time it is necessary to lose all hope. At no time it is necessary to get frustrated. **The Sikhs are advised by the Granth Sahib to be cheerful and look at the odds of life with optimism (*Chardhi Kala*). The Sikhs are called upon to consult the Granth Sahib everyday for inspiration, energy and enthusiasm to fight evil. The Guru informs the disciples that the imperialist powers cannot enjoy superiority for a long time and equally asks the people to keep vigilance. The awareness of truth and love and justice is the greatest power God has granted to the humans.**

### **The Scripture as Unity of Aesthetics, Morality and Praxis:**

There is an intensive search and even a cry for truth in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The search goes beyond all established ways of religions. There is no fixed methodology, like renunciation or meditation, followed by the Gurus. The path is not at all intellectual, like reading the *Sastras* and enter into hair-splitting arguments of logical niceties. The only thing we find is that the Gurus went and met the thickness of experiences of life. The experiences are allowed to get fermented within the spontaneity of the intuitive mind. **But the mind of the Guru is a humane one. It suffers for the sufferings of the people. The Guru was one with the people. His affection to the people was total. From this total state of love and oneness emerges a holistic philosophy.** The Guru Granth Sahib has registered this total picture. It is a scripture of unity of aesthetics, morality and praxis. The simplicity of the Granth's poetry attests to the truth and compassion of the Guru experience. There is a moment of uncontrolled spontaneity deep-structured in the poetry of Guru Granth. The spontaneity of the *sahaja* mind of the

Gurus takes the Guru poetry well away from the classicalized or sanskritized literary forms. It is truth in the truest language of experience.

T.S.Eliot once mentioned that the true poetry merges the morality and the aesthetics. The human concern elevates the poetry into a higher kind of morality. T.S.Eliot continues to say, "The profound moral quality of literature does not proceed from the author's conscious moral judgements, for these judgements are of the surface mind, of the personality. Yet all first-rate poetry is occupied with morality. If conscious mind is not the carrier of the moral or aesthetic option, how to explain the output that it is of profound unity of morality and aesthetics. The answer lies in the fact that the commitment of the author is total, conscious as well as unconscious. **The Gurus so completely dedicated themselves to the cause that their poetry voluntarily touches the aesthetic and ethical heights. When the Gurus opened up their mystic poetry to the human sufferings of the people and to the earthly dimensions of religiosity, it spontaneously reached to the new moralistic codes and to the beauty of life on earth.** The Gurus repeatedly utter that life on earth is the greatest gift to the humans. God has infused his/her abundant creativity into life on earth. God safeguards life as a responsible gardener or a farmer. God has sowed the best of the seeds into the world and he rains for their fertile growth. The life is a tree in bloom, alive and ever fresh, resplendent in its variety and beauty.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is marvelous poetry that celebrates life on earth in the most beautiful colors. However, what makes the life suffer torments, miseries and agonies? Guru Granth Sahib says that it is the *haumain* of the individuals and the social groups of vested interests. The Granth Sahib calls the people to reconstruct the blissful Life on earth. It calls upon the people to make life ethical, just and humane.

It is a possible task. Men and women must dedicate themselves to this task. Not meditating upon this end but to act for this end is the way to live a meaningful life. Morality, aesthetics and praxis must come together. Our practice must strive for the ethical, just and beautiful on earth. This is the grand message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

