

Guru-Granth Sahib: Scripture for Humanity

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THE CORE MESSAGE OF GURBANI originates in 1499 A.D. when the youthful Guru Nanak pronounced **Mool Mantra**, the divinely inspired message after continuous meditation for three days. It reveals the nature of God which has been explained in the scripture. The sound of 'Omkara' or *Pranava* – has been adopted by prefixing the numeral '1' with it. The mantra thus emphasizes Oneness of God. The basic attribute of God is its permanent existence denoted by *satinama*. It has been further explained in the saloka:

ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ ॥

ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥

*God was there before the creation, He is True through the ages,
He is True at present and He shall be true in the ages to come."*

The mantra enumerates six other attributes of God as the Creator (*karta Purakh*), without fear, without enmity, beyond the ambit of time, not born from womb and self-existent. The mantra also indicates the way of realization by the benevolence of the Guru (*Gurprasad*). The Mool Mantra thus contains the four basic attributes of God as mentioned in the Chapter (*Sureh*) 112 of pure surrender (*Al-Ikhlās*) or monotheism (*tauḥid*) of Quran Majid. Say He is the One AHD (1); the independent, carefree SAMAD (2); He begot none, nor was He begotten (3); Nor anyone is equal to Him. (4). The voice of tauḥid was thus again heard from Punjab.

“iPr auTI AwiKr sdw qoihd kl pMjwb sy
ihMd ko iek mrdy kwiml ny jgwieAw ^vwb sy” (Mohd. Iqbal)

After this intuitive knowledge, Guru Nanak started his long journeys of renunciation (*Udasi*) and spent the prime of his life in these journeys. His purpose was to resolve the conflict between the two cultures of Islam and Hinduism. He pointed to the soundness of basic teachings of both the religions which were helpful in peaceful co-existence. He had with him two attendants – one of them Bhai Mardana had instrument of music – *rabab* with him. Mardana used to play the *rabab* when the Guru recited the hymns in praise of God. The other attendant was Bhai Bala who was helpful in recording the memoirs of Guru Nanak's life by the second Guru Angad Dev Ji.

In Guru Granth Sahib we have 974 hymns of Guru Nanak. After finishing the journeys Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur at the bank of river Ravi. It is stated that Japuji the masterpiece of Guru Nanak's *bani* was composed at Kartarpur.

The message of Guru Nanak has been expounded by the Four successive Gurus. Thus we have 63 salokas of Guru Angad, the second Guru, whose 5th birth centenary has been celebrated this year. The Third Guru Amar Das was more prolific in writing. His masterpiece, *Anand Sahib* is a composition of 40 stanzas. *Anand Sahib* begins with the joy of the arrival of the Lord (Satguru) and then the way of the realization of God has been narrated in a concise form in musical stanzas

(*pauris*). *Anand Sahib* finds a place in five prominent banis of daily prayer and its first five and the 40th stanzas are recited at the end of daily kirtan.

The first three Gurus defined the framework of the New Religion - Guru Nanak provided the basic teachings, Guru Angad developed the script for writing the hymns, Guru Amar Das developed a system of community kirtan (*sangat*) and community free kitchen (*langar*). The credit for founding the holy city and beginning the work of Sarovar goes to the fourth Guru Ram Das. He composed the famous Chhand (LAVAN) in four stages indicating God as bridegroom and a devotee as bride. This Chhand suits the spiritual background required for family life and is recited at the time of marriage ceremony in Sikh religion. Guru Ram Das also presented the daily routine of a pious person and used the word Sikh for the true disciple, "*Guru Satguru ka jo Sikh akhaye, sou bhalke uth hari naam dhaey.*"

Guru Amar Das - the maternal grand father, blessed his grandson Guru Arjun Dev as the ship of Gurubani to cross the sea of life and be free from life and death. Guru Arjun Dev was a spiritual and literary genius. He brought the *bani* of the predecessors from Govindwal and arranged it in order of musical measures. The compilation work took three years (1601 - 1604). Meanwhile the work of *sarovar* and the Harimandir was also completed and finally the Guru Granth Sahib was installed in it on the first day of the month, Bhadarpada, or Bhadon. The date in that year according to Indian calendar coincides with 16th of August 1604.

Guru Granth Sahib is a voluminous sacred scripture, nearly four times the famous *Ram-charit-manas* by Tulsidas, and it takes 48 hours in *Akhand Path* continuous reading. It has three parts of unequal length. The Introductory part before the Ragas is only of 13 pages, with Japuji and 14 hymns. The hymns selected from the various ragas are the basis of evening banis of Rahiras and Kirtan Sohila. The main part from Page 13 to 1351 consists of thirty one divisions based on Ragas. The last 80 pages cover the slokas of Kabir, Farid and the Gurus, and the Swaiyyas and Chhappais (4 line or 6 line verses) by Guru Arjun and the Court poets (Bhattas). At the time of 1st installation the number of Ragas was Thirty only. Guru Gobind Singh, during his stay at Damadama Sahib for 9 months in 1706, inserted 58 Sabads in relevant ragas (including 4 sabads in newly added 31st Raga JAIJAI VANTI) and 57 slokas in the end, written by Guru Teg Bahadur and thus the final version of the Granth was completed.

Though the number of contributors in Guru Granth Sahib is 36, yet the major contribution is of 10 saints, the Six Gurus (I to V and IX) and the Four Bhaktas (Kabir, Farid, Namdev and Ravidas). The total number of Bhaktas included is 15. **It has been now established that Bani of Bhaktas was available with Gurus since the time of Nanak. The Gurus were well conversant with Bani of the Bhaktas and included those bhajans or padas of saints which were in conformity with their teachings of oneness of God, life of spiritual and ethical values and universal brotherhood.** They added comments or correction if they differed from any basic idea of Kabir or Farid. It is the liberal attitude of the Guru's who acknowledged and honoured the realization of God by the saints and instructed the followers to listen to it. ਸੰਤਨ ਕੀ ਸੁਣਿ ਸਾਚੀ ਸਾਖੀ ॥ ਸੋ ਬੋਲਹਿ ਜੋ ਪੇਖਹਿ ਆਖੀ ॥ [SGGS : 894] (*Santan Ki Suni Sachi Sakhi. So bolehi jo pekhe akhi*)

We may take note of the various types of verses (metres or *chhand*) used by the Gurus. These are five types of metres adopted by the Gurus - three of them, the *Sabad*, the *Sloka* and the *Chaupai* are common with Hindi and other languages while the other two *Chhand* and *Pauri* are specific to Punjabi language. The *Sabads* are like the *bhajans* (or *padas*) of Tulsidas and Mira in Hindi. The richness of the *Sabads* consists in the arrangement of thought and expression. According to the number of stanzas these are named as *Chaupade*, *Ashtapadi* and *Solahe*. The *Chaupades* have generally four stanzas with the addition of two lines of refrain (*Tek* or *Rahau*) to be repeated in music after each stanza. The *Ashtapadis* have Eight or more stanzas with a broader scope of expression. The *Solahes* have been edited in Rag Maroo and deal with the philosophic ideas of the nature of God and His creation of universe.

The term *Saloka* has been adopted from Sanskrit and a reader may for his convenience term it a *doha* or couplet in Hindi. The number of *Salokas* in Guru Granth Sahib is nearly 1400. The emphasis of a *Saloka* is more on expression of idea than on musical appeal. We have simple couplet type *Salokas* of Sheikh Farid, Kabir and Guru Tegh Bahadur. The *Salokas* of other Gurus are like the jewels of different size and colours reflecting the spiritual vision, with rare literary beauty. The *Salokas* by Guru Nanak have no parallel in world literature and need to be popularized by trans-creation of the ideas in different languages.

The form of *Chaupai* a metre of four (*charnas*) with 16 *matras* is used in the stanzas of *Sabads* and *Saloka*. Two *charanas* of *chaupai*, written in one line, are known as *ardhali* *Sukhmani*, the masterpiece of Guru Arjun Dev Ji consists of 24 *ashtapadis*. Guru Arjun Dev presents an idea in a *saloka*, and then explains it in Eight stanzas of five lines each. Each line consists of half of a *chaupai* (*Ardhali*). Thus forty lines, following a *saloka* consist of 20 *chupais*. Tulsidas, in his *Ram Charit Manas* has followed the style of *doha-chaupai* with each *doha* followed after 4 *chaupais*. Guru Arjun Dev Ji used the scheme having the sub-group of a *pada* of 5 lines and the *saloka* followed after 8 *Padas*. A traditional devotee may discover a double garland (108 X 2) of 216 jewels, consisting of 192 *padas* and 24 *salokas*. The jewels have been strung together with the thread of the name of God, the *rahau* of *Sukhmani* is the thread:

ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਸੁਖ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

ਭਗਤ ਜਨਾ ਕੈ ਮਨਿ ਬਿਸ੍ਰਾਮ ॥ [SGGS : 262]

“*Sukhmani Sukh amrit prabhu nam... Bhagat jana kai munn bisram*”

This beautifully designed pattern of *Sukhmani* (the Jewel of Bliss) has helped Guru Arjun Dev to present the spiritual teachings and philosophical thought under 24 headings, each explained with exquisite rhythmic flow in simple easy language in 40 lines. In whatsoever condition a person may be, he may turn to *Sukhmani* and be relieved of every kind of tension by remembering the name of God.

We now turn to two specific metres of Punjabi. The form of *Pauri* was used in the heroic songs (*Vars*), sung in praise of brave persons. The heroic songs in Marathi are known as *Pawade*. The Gurus used the tradition of *Var* for the praise of God. There are twenty two *Vars* in all. Two of them, the *Var* of *Satta* and *Balwand* and the

Basant Ki Var are without salokas. 20 Compositions of *Var* cover about one tenth part of Guru Granth Sahib. Two Vars of Guru Nanak in Rag Asa and Rag Majh express his social commitment and anguish against injustice of the rulers.

The Var of Rag Asa fills the reader with amazement when Guru Nanak explains the high philosophical thought in everyday language. The cosmic dance of Time with Sri Krishna and Gopis representing *prahar* (3 hours) and *gharhi* (24 minutes) short duration of time.,respectively, goes unnoticed by the audience considering it a doggerel in local language. Var is sung in every Gurdwara in the form of kirtan including Harimandir Sahib. In the kirtan one stanza in serial order from a set of Six chhands (Containing 24 stanzas) by Guru Ram Das in Rag Asa, is associated and recited along with each *Pauri* of the *Var* which also contain 24 *Pauris*.

Pauri has also been used in serious lengthy composition by Guru Nanak in Japu Ji, *Sidh Gost* and Onkar bani. Guru Amar Das's Anand Sahib referred above is also in the form of Pauri stanzas. Guru Arjun Dev Ji used it in *Barahmaha* and *Bawan Akhri* also. *Baramaha* in Rag Majh is a *bani* of 14 stanzas relating the condition of a devotee eagerly waiting to meet the Lord, written in *barah masa* tradition of Indian Literature. **The appeal of this *bani* lies in the intimacy and the simplicity with which the mystical relations of a devotee with his Lord has been harmonized with vicissitude of seasons during the year with month as a unit. Barahmaha read on the first day of the month according to Indian Calendar revivifies our relation with God.**

The last metre used in Guru Granth Sahib is Chhand. The Chhand consists of 4 or 5 stanzas, each having 5 lines. The second half of the second line is taken up and repeated in third line. Similarly in the last line the first half of the first line is repeated to confirm the idea expressed in the stanzas. The local chhands are usually sung on the occasion of marriage. The Gurus used the chhand to express their intense longing for the Lord. Besides the simple chhand there are *pahre* (the four stages of life based on the 4 *pahars* of the day) and *Karhale* (the songs of the camel-man – the mind used as camel). The *chhand* of Guru Ram Das relating to the Four stages of God realization has been already referred. A composition of twelve months with Seventeen stanzas by Guru Nanak has been compiled in Rag Tukhari. In Rag Asa we have a song of ten stanzas in the form of *Chhand* by Guru Amar Das, addressed to mind (mana). Guru Amar Das addresses the similitude of the light of the mind and the light of God. The origin of mind is from the source of light.

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥

[SGGS : 441]

“*Man too(n) jot(i) saroop(u) hain apna mool(u) pachhan(u)*”

While considering the various kinds of metres we have a side view of the contents of Guru Granth Sahib. The arrangement of *Bani* in Ragas has been made in the order of the metres and the contributors. First, we have the Sabads of Gurus in order of succession. As each Guru has used the word ‘Nanak’ in his writings, the authorship has been indicated with the heading Mahalla (Guru as beloved of Lord) added with the number in order of succession. Mahalla- 1, read as Mahalla Pahla, indicates Guru Nanak. Mahalla-9 indicates the *sabad* or *saloka* by Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur. After *Chaupade* we have ashtapadis and other compositions by the Gurus.

The *Var* follows *sabad*, *chhand*, etc. After the Bani of the Gurus the Bani of Bhaktas has been given.

Every religion consists of three components - the philosophical thought, the moral teachings and the ritualistic activities. At the level of philosophical thinking every religion speaks of the One truth and universal brotherhood. The Sikh panth emphasizes the Oneness of God. The Sikh Gurus have no hesitation in adopting the traditional name of Ram or Hari or Allah, but the emphasis is that there is no incarnation of God in human form. **The *Akal Purakh* is not born as a human being. The most prevalent name of God as *Wahe-Guru* occurs in the swaiya of Bhatt Gayand.**

ਸੇਵਕ ਕੈ ਭਰਪੂਰ ਜੁਗੁ ਜੁਗੁ ਵਾਹਗੁਰੂ ਤੇਰਾ ਸਭੁ ਸਦਕਾ ॥

[SGGS : 1403]

It is an expression in the form of wonder (*vismad*) expressed at the vision of God. In Arabic it may be supposed to denote the praise or thankfulness (*Sifat* and *Salah*) of God. Guru Amar Das has used the word '*wahu wahu*' to express the praise of the Almighty in sloka of *Var Gujar*.

ਵਾਹੁ ਵਾਹੁ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਸਚੁ ਹੈ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਜਾ ਕਾ ਨਾਉ ॥

ਵਾਹੁ ਵਾਹੁ ਜਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਭਰਪੂਰੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਜਾਇ ॥

[SGGS : 515]

Bhai Gurdas Ji has referred to Wahe Guru as "Gurmantra" in *Var 13 Pauri(2)*

vwh gurU gurmMqr hY jpu haumY Koel]

The emphasis of *Gurbani* on universal brotherhood is evident in the *sabad* of Guru Arjun Dev Ji (*Ekū pita ekas ke ham barika*) and Kabir (*Ek nur te sab jag upajiyā*). Sant Namdeva goes a step further and establishes a link between all living beings -an ant as well as an elephant are the pots made from one clay, and none is speaking in them other than the Lord God:

ਸਭੈ ਘਟਿ ਰਾਮੁ ਬੋਲੈ ਰਾਮਾ ਬੋਲੈ ॥

ਰਾਮ ਬਿਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੋਲੈ ਰੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਏਕਲ ਮਾਟੀ ਕੁੰਜਰ ਚੀਟੀ ਭਾਜਨ ਹੈ ਬਹੁ ਨਾਨਾ ਰੇ ॥

[SGGS : 988]

