

# “So-dar” - Gateway to God: some reflections

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Guru Nanak sets out, in the Japji's 27<sup>th</sup> Cantos, to delve into God's abode both in space and within the recesses of all life – in our heart, like cosmic music.

ਗਾਵਹਿ ਤੁਹਨੇ ਪਉਣੁ ਪਾਣੀ ਬੈਸੈਤਰ: The earth's elements are part of the celestial symphony. We find the same idea reiterated by Guru Ram Das Ji in the following words:

O my mind, the earth, the planets and the heavens, they all worship God.

The air, the water and the fire sing ever His praises.

The woods, the vegetation, and all that you perceive with your senses, contemplate His Name.

My mind, he who through the Guru's Word, applies his mind to Lord's devotion, is glorified at His Door. (SGGS 540:08)

ਚਿਤੁ ਗੁਪਤ (Chita-Gupt): According to ancient Indian lore, Chitrugupt is a twin assistant working in the office of Dharma Raj (Lord Justiciar) who maintains account of good and bad acts of human beings, on a huge register, named Agar-sandhani. Of the several Puranic tales relating to the origin and functions of Chitra, we mention only one here. Lord Brahma, after creating the Brahmin out of his head; the Kshatriya out of his torso; the Vaishyas out of his legs, and the Shudra out of his feet, assigned them their respective duties. When the work of creation was complete Brahma went into a deep trance. On waking up, to his utter amazement, he saw standing before him a human being, whom he never brought into existence. This person was multi-coloured and held pen and inkpot in his hands. The latter asked Brahma as to his own name, and the duties he was required to perform.

As he was multi-colored, Brahma named him Chitra. As he had a pen and an inkpot in his possession, he was assigned the task of writing down the right and the wrong deeds of humanity.

It is to be noted, whereas the origin of the four castes of the Hindus was the result of the deliberate act of Brahma, the coming into being of Chitra was an accident of nature, on which Brahma had no control. But since he came out of his body (as there was no other place for anyone to come to life), Brahma called him Kayashth (kaya = body, asth = out of). Here in The Jap, Chitra and Gupt are given two separate words, instead of one. Further, their last letters (r and q) have vowel sign 'ankur' ( = ) attached to them, which make them represent two distinct entities, as per a grammatical rule of the Sikh scripture.

By making a mention of the 'recording angels,' the Guru brings home to man the important point that the deeds once done are not lost in the abyss of nothingness. Instead, they resurrect and appear later in the form of rewards and retributions.

The reader needs to keep in mind one significant character of the Sikh scripture which distinguishes it from many scriptural texts held sacred by the Hindus. While the latter provide very extensive accounts revolving around the lives of mythical spiritual beings, the former employs mythical terms in a practical way, utilizing only their general sense. To illustrate: when the term 'Indra' is used in the Sikh scripture it is used in the sense of the god-king (the king of Heaven), or the rain-god. In contrast, the Hindu books indulge in many long stories bringing out many facets of Indra's personality. We are told, for example, that though himself a great devotee of God and endowed with many good qualities, Indra is extremely jealous in nature; He becomes terrified to behold any other devotee greater than himself. He fears that the latter, by virtue of his deep devotion for God, might one day

replace him as the ruler of Heaven. In order to avert this happening, he does many things which, judged by any standard of behaviour, are most unethical.

ਧਰਮ Dharma is the Lord of Justice. ਈਸ਼ਰੁ ਬਰਮਾ ਦੇਵੀ i.e. Ishwar, Brahma, Devi: The mythically Parvati is the consort of Shiva, and the mother of Kama. Kama is the god of love – Cupid – in Hindu thought. As Guru Nanak had to deal with and examine the spiritual beliefs of the people around him, he had to talk out of necessity, about the gods and goddesses held in veneration by them. From this simple fact that he makes frequent references to Hindu deities one should not make the assumption that they are, in fact, the objects of Nanak's adoration. Far from accepting them as the fit objects of human worship, Guru Nanak in many ways attempts to weaken their mythical hold on the minds of the masses. First, he points out that there is not just one Brahma or one Vishnu, but there are countless number of such beings in the universe. Secondly, Brahma who is conceived by the Hindus as the creator of the universe, is regarded by Guru Nanak himself a creature of God. "God also created Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva." (1036:06). Thirdly, he affirms that the Brahmas, the Vishnus and the Shivas, are subject to temptation and thus liable to evil and error. "All the gods the goddesses have been lured away by the objects of temptation." (227:04).

The implication of Guru Nanak's reasoning is quite clear. If gods do not differ in any significant manner from human beings, then, is there any good reason for them to serve as the objects of human worship? Guru Nanak worshipped only the One Perfect Being, whom he called 'the Formless' (inrMkwr) and he exhorted others to do the same. For, no good can ever come out of idolizing those beings who fall short of perfection and stand in need of improving their own lot.

The term 'sidh' (ਸਿਧ) refers to that yogi who, as a result of his persistent practice of concentration, has been able to develop super-normal powers (ਸਿਧੀਆ) of his mind. ਅਠਸਠਿ ਤੀਰਥ or 68 places of pilgrimage refers to centres deemed sacred by the adherents of Hindu faith. Guru Nanak does not subscribe to the orthodox Indian view that a physical bath at such places results in spiritual rejuvenation of the individual. On the contrary, he advocates the renewal of one's inner mind and soul with the holy nectar of Lord's Name.

The four sources of life on the planet Earth (ਖਾਣੀ ਚਾਰੇ) are, (i) The egg, (ii) the womb, (iii) The sweat, and (iv) the soil, from which comes out vegetation of all kinds.

The term '*khāni*', which we have translated above as 'source', literally means 'mine', from which are excavated different kinds of minerals. As we will proceed further, we will note that the above given four sources from which life originates, pertains only to the planet Earth, and not to the whole universe.

The term *khand* (ਖੰਡ) literally meaning a region has been used by Guru Nanak in different contexts in three different senses, viz., (i) the five spiritual stages of the seeker after Truth, (ii) the nine divisions of the earth, and (iii) the regions in the universe which are said to be countless in number. Here the term is used in the last sense.

The term *mandal* (ਮੰਡਲ) literally meaning an object spherical in shape, here stands for a unit comprising of large number of all kinds of luminous objects visible in the sky and their general background. This term is to be distinguished from ancient astronomers notion of 'a spherical transparent shell in which are set the various heavenly bodies'. The use of the word 'set' by the ancient astronomers connotes as if the sun and the moon are the objects fixed in space and thus devoid of movements of their own. Guru Nanak, however, clearly states that these heavenly bodies are ever on the run on their course in the limitless space. "Under the Lord's awe (order) are the sun and the moon. They continue their onward

journey endlessly and thus cover myriads of miles,” (464:14).

Again, whereas the ancient astronomers had in their view just one sphere or orb, according to Guru Nanak, there are millions, nay countless number of such orbs and spheres in existence.

**The Universe:** It is rather astonishing that Guru Nanak, speaking in early 16<sup>th</sup> century (C.E.) used the plural word ‘universes’, instead of the singular ‘universe’. The Sikh scripture provides several instances of the use of this word in this manner. We are not aware if any religious leader, or scientist, in the East or in the West, has ever used the plural form of this word in literature.

