

# SABD GURU TO GRANTH GURU AN INDEPTH STUDY

*By Devinder Singh Chahal*

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*A Review by Hardev Singh Virk\**

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Professor Devinder Singh Chahal had a long innings as a research scientist in the field of Microbiology. After his retirement in 1996 from University of Quebec at Laval (Montreal), he set up Institute for Understanding Sikhism and is Editor of its house journal. He has created a *niche* for himself for his scientific and logical interpretation of Gurbani. The book under review has been written keeping in view the quadricentennial celebration of compilation and installation (*Parkash Divas*) of Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS). The book has been released by Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, executive member SGPC at International Seminar during September in Laval(Montreal) to coincide with the global celebrations of AGGS. His book on "JAP: The Essence of Nankian Philosophy" was released last year and has been reviewed in *The Sikh Review* (August issue).

In his Foreword, Dr. Dharam Singh of Punjabi University, Patiala, has defined Sikhism as a monotheistic religion and evaluated the role of Sabd Guru. He laments that most of the Sikhs stop at reciting the hymns in AGGS without making any effort to comprehend their meaning or to put that into practice. They treat it like an idol and perform various rituals by way of its worship. The Scripture is venerable, but is not an idol to be worshipped.

Dr. Chahal took up cudgels to promote the concept of *Sabd Guru* and organized an International Seminar at Laval (Montreal) in September 2002 on this theme. His paper "Sabd Guru to Granth Guru" presented at this seminar forms the nucleus of this monograph. In the introduction, the author mentions about his mission in writing this monograph (p.1). " The time has come to analyse the causes of Sikhism becoming a *ritualistic* religion. There could be many causes but I think that the intrinsic values of 'Sabd', and 'Guru' have not been understood by Sikh theologians, Sikh researchers, and the Sikhs at large. Consequently , with the passing of time more and more attention started to be paid towards rituals around the Granth Guru (AGGS) than on deliberation and comprehension of the "Sabd Guru". He quotes Gurbani in support of his thesis (p.52):

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨੋ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਵੇਖਦਾ ਜੇਤਾ ਜਗਤੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥

ਡਿਠੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜਿਚਰੁ ਸਬਦਿ ਨ ਕਰੇ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

(AGGS, M.3, P. 594)

In Chapter 1, the author has taken the trouble to explain 'Nanakian Methodology' for better understanding of Gurbani and Nanakian Philosophy, a term coined by the author. This chapter serves as a guide to interpret Gurbani correctly.

Chapter II explains the concept of 'Sabd Guru'. Dr. Chahal elaborates systematically the meanings of 'Sabd', 'Bani', 'Guru' to hammer his concept of 'Sabd Guru'. Gurbani verses are quoted profusely to explain the meanings and mutual relationship between these terms. The conclusions of Chapter II are quite interesting (P 29) : 'Sabd has many meanings depending on the context in which it has been used. For example, word, sound, speech, conversation, philosophy, purifier, vehicle to realize God and it also means Guru. 'Sabd' and 'Bani' are interchangeable words, therefore 'Bani' is 'Guru' and 'Guru' is 'Bani', and it is the Guru who says the Bani. Consequently 'Sabd' realized by Guru Nanak, is the 'Guru'. Guru Nanak himself has declared that 'sabd' is his 'Guru' during his debate with the Sidhas recorded in AGGS under the title 'Sidh-Gosht':

ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ ॥ (AGGS, M 1, P 943)

"Sabd is Guru, consciousness and intention toward it make one its disciple (Sikh)." The author is highly critical of Sikh theologians, historians and translators of Gurbani (AGGS) who deliberately introduced distortions to replace the concept of 'Sabd Guru' with 'Granth Guru'. He has quoted from available sources of Sikh literature and tried to clear the mist using his scientific and logical method of interpretation.

The central theme of this chapter, declaration of Granth as Guru is summed up as follows:

"It means, the day in 1604 CE the Granth was compiled it was equated to the Guru because of the fact that 'Sabd' was already called as 'Guru' by Guru Nanak in his teachings. Since the preachings of Sabd was carried on from this Granth by Guru Arjun and by all other Gurus who succeeded to the House of Nanak, therefore, the Granth is 'Guru' ipso facto the 'Sabd Guru' is enshrined in it".

Chapter IV deals with deceptions or distortions introduced in the conceptual framework of the Sikh congregations by misinterpretation of historical evidence or willfully by priestly class, motivated by Brahmanical traditions prevalent in cultural environment of Sikh Society. The author laments (P 49). "The irony is that the Sikhs are following the historical information where the 'Sabd Guru' has been successfully changed to 'Granth Guru' to 'Visible Body of the Guru' to 'Darshan Guru'. Consequently, the Sikhs started to pay more and more attention to ritualistic aspects of the 'Granth Guru' than to the deliberation of the philosophy given in the Sabd Guru."

The author has identified the couplet from the Rehit Nama Bhai Prahlaad Singh as the root cause of this distortion, namely, promoting 'Granth Guru' vis a vis 'Sabd Guru' in Sikh society. This couplet is recited in almost all Gurdwaras and it is attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master who declared Guru Granth as 'Sabd Guru' of the Sikhs.

AwigXw Bel Akwl kl qBY clwXo pMQ  
SB is~Kn ko hukm hY gurU mwnXo gRMQ ]

"With the order of God the Panth was created.

It is ordained to all the Sikhs to accept the Granth as their Guru."

(Rehitnama Bhai Prahlaad Singh)

In my critical review process, I have been impressed by the analytical approach of the author to establish the concept of 'Sabd Guru'. However, I do not agree with his thesis that Guru Granth was declared as Guru of the Sikhs by Guru Arjun in 1604 CE. It was Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 at Nander, who closed the chapter of Personal Guruship and bestowed the *Gurugaddi* upon Guru Granth as 'Sabd Guru' and 'Khalsa Panth' as 'Visible Body of the Guru'. I also feel that author takes some liberty in interpretation of Gurbani, only two examples will suffice to prove my point :

(On P. 21)

ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਨ੍ ਕਉ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਤਿਨ੍ ਕਾ ਲੇਖਾ ਨਿਬੜਿਆ ॥

(AGGS, M.3, P 435)

Again on page 39, the author translates the message of Guru Hargobind to Guru Har Rai as follows:

rhl jwm inis jwgn kljY [[ m'jn nwm ivKYN mn dljY [[

(Gur Bilas Patshai 6, P. 796)

"By contemplating day and night he (Nanak) realized the collyrium Naam (philosophy)"

Mahan Kosh of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha helps us to translate this stanza correctly as follows :

"My son, rise one *pehar* before the sun rise (Amritvela) and meditate on Naam with full concentration of mind."

□

## **EGZAN GURU HARGOBIND SAHIB (PUNJABI)**

*By Jasbir Singh Sarna (Ph.D.)*

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*Pages: 120 Price: Rs. 190/-*

*A Review by Brig. Hardit Singh\* (Retd.)*

Guru Hargobind Sahib's life is widely covered both by Punjabi and English writers, notably Bhai Gian Singh, Bhai Santokh Singh, Bhai Vir Singh and S. Satbir Singh. The English historians are J.D. Cunningham, M.A. Macauliffe, Dr. Trilochan Singh, S. Khushwant Singh, Hari Ram Gupta and Dr. H.L. Agnihotri. In spite of all these works, the Guru's period of detention in the Gwalior Fort remains undetermined. It varies from 40 days (by Bhai Gian Singh) to 12 years by Mohsin Fani. The author, mainly based on Bhai Vehis, puts it at 6 years. The famous historian Dr. Kirpal Singh has also calculated it at 6 years, but there is yet no finality. Emperor Jahangir, according to Hari Ram Gupta, wanted to confine him for a few days in a disciplinary jail so that his brain and temper may be somewhat rectified. The Emperor was discomfited with the establishment of the Akal Takht, militarisation of the Sikhs and the regality attached to the 'gur-gaddi'.

Bhai Gurdas Var 26 (Page 26 of the Book under review) has been grossly misinterpreted and misunderstood by many scholars. Hunting and other royal pursuits by the Guru have been taken by them as a departure from Guru Nanak's

mission and advocacy of meat eating amongst the Sikhs. The author by giving the names of important Sikhs and their deeds (Pages 57 to 73) and the Guru's travels to spread Guru Nanak's mission (Pages 74 to 118) has proved that Guru Hargobind Sahib was equally keen to spread Sikhism extensively in North India. In his two 'Hukamnamas' (edicts) given on Pages 53 to 56, the Guru had asked the Sikhs "not to go anywhere near meat and fish – *Maas machchi de nere nahin awna*" has also demolished this meat eating insinuation.

