

Gospel of Guru Granth: Scripture for all Mankind

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THE 399TH PRAKASH UTSAV (installation ceremony) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib would be celebrated on August 28, 2003 with religious fervour and devotion at various Gurdwaras in India and abroad. *Shabad Kirtans* (singing of divine hymns) and recitation of *Gurbani* (Gurus' hymns) will be followed by *Guru ka Langar* (free community lunch).

The year 2004 will mark the 400th year of compilation of the holy Granth to be celebrated with great devotion and enthusiasm.

Among the scriptures of the major world religions, the Sikh Scripture has the pride of place. It is the only Scripture which records the teachings of the Sikh Gurus by the Gurus themselves.

Eminent historians and scholars like Prof. Arnold Toynbee and Miss Pearl Buck, Nobel Laureate, acclaimed the uniqueness of the Sikh scripture by describing it as "the mankind's common spiritual treasure" with a "rare power of appeal to the heart and mind". The religion that emerges from reading the holy Granth is the universal religion of man which, according to Guru Nanak, "is one and common for all human beings" and implies "a common course of conduct for all its votaries".

Scholars and intellectuals from all over the world, including the USA and Canada, who took part in the first ever international Conference on "Sri Guru Granth Sahib: World's first Interfaith Scripture" held in February 2000 at Amritsar, dwelt on the significance of Guru Granth Sahib as a "universal scripture"; an "interfaith unifier" and a "practical model for human welfare meant for the whole human race".

It was the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev, who compiled the *Adi Granth* (original edition) four centuries ago. He worked ceaselessly for five years for its compilation which included not only the hymns (teachings) of the first four Gurus and his own but also a selection of compositions of medieval bards and bhaktas (saints), both Hindu and Muslim, from different strata of society, the so-called high castes and low castes, like the Muslim sufi saints, Sheikh Farid and Kabir, and Hindu saints, Namdeva and Ravidas who spoke out against social injustice and expressed love and concern for fellow humans.

Guru Arjun had the construction of Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) completed in 1601 before installing, in 1604, the *Adi Granth* in the centre of the inner sanctuary of Harimandir with due honour and ceremony. Baba Budha, a venerable old Sikh theologian and historian, was the first *Granthi* (priest).

Himself a great lyricist, Guru Arjun set to music all the hymns and compositions in various *ragas* (musical meters), and transcribed in Gurmukhi. Legend has it that Emperor Akbar had complimented Guru Arjun on the compilation of the Holy Granth.

The *Adi Granth* was recompiled by Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and last Guru, in 1704 in order to incorporate the hymns of the Ninth revered Guru Teg Bahadur, his father. He did not enter his own hymns, which comprise a separate volume called the *Dasam Granth*, the Tenth Guru's book. Guru Gobind Singh meticulously followed the pattern and order set by the Fifth Guru who codified the *Adi Granth*.

Before his demise, Guru Gobind Singh, a true visionary and genius, ended the line of living Gurus and declared Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the Supreme living Guru of the Sikhs, enjoining upon his followers: "*Guru manyo granth pragat guru'n ki deh*" (reckon Guru Granth as the visible living Guru).

The holy scripture has ever since been revered as the embodiment of the Gurus' teachings and the spiritual guide of the Sikhs for all time. The *Gurbani* (Gurus Word) is regarded as sacred and of divine origin. It is the revealer of the divine truth. And the believers have always found calm and peace of mind and the spiritual strength to tackle their problems. The scripture shows ways and means of eliminating human suffering and anguish of man.

Being themselves divine philosopher-poets, Guru Nanak and the succeeding Gurus used their innate poetic insights to express their divine feelings. Their hymns in praise of the Lord, the Oneness of God, universal love and brotherhood, truthful living and equality of mankind are deeply moving. As such, the *Gurbani* is an ocean of inspiring thought.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib begins with the opening rhyme of Guru Nanak's celestial hymn Japji Sahib, one of his literary creations, recited by the devotees in the wee hours (*amrit vela*) daily. It defines the concept of God and describes His attributes as the one God, the Supreme Truth, Creator, without fear and hate, omnipresent... The praise and love of God that emerges from these hymns is itself a contemplation of truth and love and worship of God who is the father of all of us and we, His children are, therefore, brothers and sisters. It preaches universal love and respect for the beliefs and faiths of others.

The *Gurbani* deprecates discrimination on grounds of religion and caste by birth. Love and respect for human beings, despite their distinctive religions and beliefs, as they are all equal before the Creator is urged. Meaningless rituals, ceremonials and orthodoxy are disapproved.

Emphasis on a high moral conduct is laid to realise the ecstasy and delight of the spiritual experience when one's individual existence merges with the Infinite Being. According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, this spiritual experience invests the individual with a vision of divine presence in all human beings and motivates him to dedicate himself to the welfare of man. The experience transforms him into an ideal man of benevolence who, besides being divine-oriented, is in effect socially oriented.

It is only through love of humanity, through service, benevolence and compassion that love of human beings and God becomes possible, says the *Gurbani*.

Renunciation of the world is rejected. "Be in the world but not worldly" is stressed. A man must perform his duty as a member of the society in which he lives and leads a good pious householder's life. Good conduct and virtuous deeds and normal family life is advised. "Loving God and doing noble deeds is the true religion," says the *Gurbani*.

All through the scripture runs an incessant stream of love of God, *Naam Simran* (contemplation of His Name) and surrender of self.

Contemplation and service of humanity, equality of mankind, love and respect for all humans whatever their religion and peace and harmony are repeatedly emphasised in the holy Sikh Scripture.

This is a divine message unmistakably addressed to all mankind which remains uniquely significant for all time. It has a crucial relevance to the present times.

