

Sukhmani: Its Lyrical Beauty and Ethical Significance

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Its lyrical beauty apart, Sukhmani is a profoundly significant scriptural text for all devotees of the Sikh faith and indeed for all humanity. It is recited in the early hours of the morning. Generally it takes more than 90 minutes to recite it. Any one who reads it with love, faith and devotion opens the doors of the treasure of eternal bliss and the very spring of peace, the reason being that the author (Sri Guru Arjun Dev ji) has poured into this composition his very spirit which was peace itself. This peace he had got from his constant communication with God. It is a treasure of the rarest kind of happiness and bliss.

Indeed Sukhmani is one of the masterpieces of Sri Guru Arjun Dev ji. It is complete in all respects and it enjoys its independent status. The major ethical and spiritual ideas of Guru Arjun Dev ji are believed to have been treasured in it. Sri Guru Arjun Dev ji preached the message of universal peace to all the inhabitants of the world. The Sukhmani urges that in order to attain peace of mind a man should make it a constant practice to remember the Name of God. The remembrance will put a sort of fence, so to say, around him which no worldly trouble or evil can break. According to S.S.Johar, "The Psalm of peace, its aim is to give solace to the mind. Guru Arjun, the composer of Sukhmani says 'He who listens to it with love and gives it a place in his heart shall enable himself to commune with the Lord.'" A person tired of life or deeply entrenched in sorrow or in remorse or in anxiety derives consolation and peace from reading Sukhmani.

The beginning of the composition opens with innovation to the Shabad_Guru who is the source of bliss: 'Awid gurey nmh] jugwid gurey nmh] siggurey nmh] sRI gurdyvey nmh]'(sRI gurU gRMQ swihb, AMg 262) Here Sri Guru Arjun Dev ji has made a departure from the prevalent Hindu tradition which refers to Personal God and gods. It also refers to the personal Guru-ship and the particular Gurus. Here the Guru emphasizes on *Naam Simran* as the only way to God realization is only Nam-Simran: 'ismrau ismir ismir suKu pwwau]' (AMg 262)

When and where written: It is believed in Sikh tradition that the great Guru composed Sukhmani at Amritsar, while he was in a process of preparing the Holy Scripture for humanity by which he preached the message of universal peace, to all the inhabitants of the world. Sukhmani is arranged in the Gauri raag of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (262-296)

Structure: This composition is in 24 *ashtpadis* and each consists of eight stanzas along with a sloak at the beginning just to give the theme of the canto concerned.

Meaning of the heading 'Sukhmani': Different scholars have given their interpretations regarding the significance of the heading of this composition. Some are of the erroneous view that the word Sukhmani represents the yogic term 'sukhmana' (suKmnw), a mythical vein (nwVI) which is situated where 'ira' and 'pingula' (ieVw Aqy ipMglw) join together. It seems to be a wrong interpretation because in the Guru Granth Sahib all the Gurus are against 'hath yoga' which emphasises 'pranyam' (pRwxXwm) and other 'aasans' (Awsx) - physical postures.

Perhaps it would be a better and safer interpretation if we say that Sukhmani refers to the highest state of spiritual bliss. This interpretation would be in cognigance with the Sikh thought and it would also explain the contents of the composition. Some scholars also agree to this interpretation. Prof. G.S.Talib calls this composition a 'Jewel of Bliss' or joys. It deals with the essentials of Sikhism and devotional philosophy of man. It breeds the spirit of universal brotherhood, peace and love. Principal Teja Singh in his book 'The Psalm of

Peace' translated his version of Sukhmani. He states in the introduction that this composition is based on the basic unity of mankind which is derived from the unity of Truth. This argument seems to be in agreement with the fundamental thought of Sikhism. Sikhism builds its philosophical structure of non-dual Reality which is both manifest and unmanifest. If Reality is one and there is unity of Truth then humanity can be considered as manifestation of the Ultimate Reality. Therefore, Sukhmani throws light on different manifestations of Reality which is in essence based on the unity of non-dual Reality.

This composition comes forth with an invigorating (reviving) spirit to inspire human consciousness against all falsehood, evil and ignorance. It is a great consoler of the mind. Therefore, it has been given the heading of Sukhmani which gives the message of love, peace and harmony. In order to justify the above argument we may give in brief the summary of the whole composition emphasizing different aspects which have been mentioned in the contents.

Contents: In the first three (1-3) *ashtapadis*, the Guru mentions the advantages of repeating the Name of God. In cantos four to eleven (4-11) Guru Arjun expresses his thoughts on God-man. Cantos twelve to twenty (12-20) mentions the process by which God's grace can be won, that is, by self surrender or resignation to the Will of God. God is all truth. The Guru inspires the disciples with love of the Name, meditation. In the last four cantos (21-24) the Guru elucidates the Name. Name covers both the personal and absolute aspects of God. The Lord is present in His creation. In the absolute form God is not subject to matter, time or space, God transcends and unifies all.

Theme: The major theme is given in the first and the second *pada*. It is the following: 'suKmnI suK AMimRq pRB nwmUj Bgq jnw ky min ibsRwm]'(AMg 262) This shows that the peace can only be obtained by the recitation of the divine. This recitation ensures our contact with God and serves as a channel for the outflow of Guru's virtue into ourselves. It is much evident that *Naam Simran* is the main theme. *Naam* is the treasure. If Reality is one unity, Truth or humanity must manifest their respective unities. All such unities are viewed within one Divine unity of the Almighty God... Sukhmani reveals with the dynamic nature of non-dual Being which manifests unmanifest form and when it assumes the form it marks the beginning of different yugas. Whenever it is in the manifest form it is expressing itself through the Divine Law which is expressed through the 'sabad' or 'satguru'. These three forms of one Reality are respectfully invoked in order to *Naam Simran*.

In the 2nd *ashtpadi*, we come across that the Ultimate Reality pervades in every element/creature. This fact of all pervasive Reality is realized through *Naam Simran* which is the subtle creative energy, the cause of all manifest forms. It also functions upon human mind to make him realize the Ultimate Creator. In the 3rd *ashtpadi*, the Guru makes a sharp comparison with other forms of worship based upon the previous scriptures of the Hindus and other religions. Guru has made it clear that he has studied many revealed and other scriptures but *Naam Simran* is superior to all other religious observances: 'bhu SwsqRu bhu isimRqI pyKy srb FMFoil]pUjis nwhI hir hry nwnk nwm Amol]'(AMg 265) *Naam-Simran* is above all other means. Guru Arjun Dev openly criticises rituals, renunciation and ascetic practices. He is of the view point that if one is to get rid of pain and suffering, one is to practice *Naam-Simran* in the real spirit of the term (word). In the 8th *chaupai* of the 3rd *ashtpadi* Guru pin points that Hari's name is far superior to other means of God-realization. In the last four *ashtpadis* (21 to 24) Sri Guru Arjun Dev ji concentrates on the conception of *Naam* which is the fountain of spiritual Bliss- Sukhmani.

In the 4th *ashtpadi* Guru Arjun represents the human situation: man is portrayed weak and a completely dependent on almighty creator and the *Ashtpadi's* opening Sloak says that the

individual is without any qualities and is child like also. Therefore, it is advisable for him to remember the creator who is always within and helps him to emancipate: 'inrgunlAwr ieAwinAw so pRBu sdw smwil] ijin klAw iqsu cliq rKu nwnk inbhl nwil]'(AMg 266) Owing to weak, man is prospective to Almighty to surrender himself: 'qU Twkuru qum pih Ardwis] jlau ipMfu sB qyrl rwis]'(AMg 277)Owing to weak nature, man is attracted by worldly things. With the result he forgets the Creator and is engrossed in the creation only. Thereafter Sri Guru Arjun Dev brings in the idea of grace and mercy as the only source of inspiration to come out of clutches of Maya. For this purpose complete self surrender is expected of a spiritual aspirant for the true Guru. All evils like anger, greed, desires, attachment and I-consciousness are succumbed to Guru's will.

The Guru qualifies this statement that Truth and Truthfulness are very significant in the way of realisation. Truth can be realised in the company of realised persons 'swDsMiMg mlu sglI Koq' (AMg 271) (Here 'mal' means ignorance)

Having accepted that man is weak Guru Arjun Dev introduces the concept of Grace in the 6th and 7th *Ashtpadis*. Grace is such a multi-dimensional concept which has many aspects in different perspectives. It helps man evolve and develop spiritually, socially and other ways also.

In the 8th *Ashtpadi* the ideal man (bRhm igAwnl) of Guru Arjun Dev has been projected. Braham Gyani is a perfect person who completely identifies himself with the Ultimate Primal Source.

In the 9th and 10th *Ashtpadis* comparison with other sects has been given in which the realization of Reality would not be possible. Different Saints, devotees belonging to different sects could have the partial vision of Truth but all of them are incapable to realise Him. They beg for His grace to gain strength. He is all in all and non-dual as well. He pervades every where without any discontinuity.

In the sloak of *Ashtpadi* 17th the Guru outlines the basic structures of all comprehensive view of Reality. Like Guru Nanak's first sloak of the Japuji Guru Arjun Dev says that Reality Is true in the beginning, in the unmanifested state, and in the manifested form ('Awid scu jugwid scu] hY iB scu nwnk hosl BI scu'])(AMg 285). And this fact about Truthfulness of Reality has self evident in the present and in the future as well. And in the *Ashtpadi* the Guru says the form of Being is true (siq srUp) .When one understands it, one tries to realise this true form. Then the spiritual aspirant develops from within all qualities of Truth realization. All elements with *gyan* are transformed into reality itself ('siq purK ijn jwinAw siqguru iqsqw nwau') (AMg 286). And in the *Ashtpadi* 16th Guru also describes the transcendent nature of the Reality which is beyond form and contrary colours and the three strands of the Reality ('rUp n ryK n rMgu ikCu iqRh gux qy pRB iBMn') (AMg 283). It should not be misunderstood that Guru Arjun Dev believed only in transcendent. He tries to reconcile the unmanifest and manifest aspects of Reality which indicates that he is developing a dynamic view of Reality. In nutshell Guru Arjun Dev presents his view that the Ultimate Reality is dynamic and non-dual which is both unmanifest and manifest.

An ideal man is expected to be one with Ultimate Reality. Guru calls such a person '*sat purkh*' (siq purK). '*Sat purkh*' in a personified sense is a creative principle in all the universe including living and non-living units of the Reality. The realisation of *sat purkh* is the key idea of Sukhmani Sahib. With this view the Guru emphasises on *Naam-Simran* again and again. Simran is the only fruitful activity which a person is expected to perform while living in this world. All other things do not help man to realise the Reality. Hari Nam (hir nwm) is the real wealth. In the sloak of *ashtpadi* 20th, the term 'iPrieg iPrieg' wandering in the original context can be interpreted from two stand points. First, as man has undergone before this

birth so many births. Second, after adopting different means of realization the devotee has come to know that *Naam-Simran* is the last resort.

In the last four *ashtpadis* Guru concludes that *Naam* stands for 'shabad' which is used to describe manifest attributes of the Real. The Real is a dynamic Reality which is both Nirguna and Sarguna, when it assumes the manifest form it becomes the *Naam* as Personal Unity with infinite attributes. The remembrance of these attributes through *Naam* (Sbd) help human consciousness (suriq) to develop from a form of multiplicity and duality (dUjw BwE) and finally the state of complete union with Reality is realised. Hence the scripture if recited with loving devotion works on human mind in the power of *Naam* and *Shabad* and the ultimate outcome is total spiritual Bliss, i.e. the ultimate equipoise.

"Thus we can say that the central theme of the Sukhmani is *Naam Simran*. It brings the treasure of all kinds of happiness and pleasure. When a man worships God in the real sense, he attains eternal bliss. Some good qualities are cultivated in the man's personality which make him eligible to get other themes (grace of God, Love and dedication, nature of ideal man, 'Sargun' and 'Nirgun' aspect of God etc.) which are also incorporated by the Guru are subordinate to this major one. When a man leans towards *Naam Simran* he becomes free from the cycle of death and rebirth and gets the eternal state tranquillity of *Sehaj*.

There is something in the sincerity of the mental approach, a deep pathos and the poetical cadence which pierce the heart of the reader. It has a soothing effect on the nerves of those shattered by a life of hurry and furious activity. **There is in it the still music of humanity, a lyrical cry rising from the heart that has known suffering and has found peace.**

The Sukhmani benefits the psyche of every reader to a great extent. The recital makes one joyous and refreshed, soothed and renewed, with every stanza because it travels straight to the heart where dwells the spirit of Guru Arjun.

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