

# **Guru Granth Sahib: Living Voice of God**

**DR. GURDARSHAN SINGH DHILLON\***

*\* Professor of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh. Res: 2059 Sector 15C, Chandigarh. 160015.*

THE INSTALLATION OF THE GRANTH SAHIB in the sanctum sanctorum of the Sikhs, "Darbar Sahib" at Amritsar, by Guru Arjun, the Fifth Master was truly a landmark in the history of the Sikh faith. It was an essential step towards the unification - as well as catholicity of the Sikh society. It enabled the Sikhs to unite under the banner of their Gurus. It bestowed upon them their distinctive identity and set the faith clear from the trammels of the earlier religious tradition. Eversince, the Sikhs have made use of the Gurbani to bless, console and guide them in their joys and sorrows through many generations.

With its divine message addressed to the entire mankind, the Sikh Scripture reflects the sincerest endeavours of the Gurus, the Bhaktas and Saints across the land to lift mankind to higher planes of thought and action. It is an infinite mine of spirituality, a repository of eternal truths whose appeal transcends national and racial boundaries. Belief in one God and approach to Him through love and service are the essential features of Sikhism.

The divine message, expressed through simple, easy and live-invigorating hymns, is addressed to the entire mankind. The Gurus speak with the voice of authority as their moral and metaphysical convictions spring from their revelatory experiences. The mission pioneered by Guru Nanak transcended earlier dispensations by virtue of its unique world-view which advocated a social context for the practice of religion. This provides the key to the understanding of Guru's thesis of love, service and social responsibility. Ideology propounded by the Guru is revolutionary in nature. It is not an abstract creed. Rather it is a dynamic philosophy of the 'Deed', proclaiming and preaching that spiritual path can be trodden not through mere worship of God but by remaining God-centred, while performing the affairs of the world. A man of religion has an obligation to society. He cannot escape from it through a retreat from reality.

Core beliefs of the Gurus, as expressed in the Granth Sahib, regarding God, nature of the world, the purpose of life and man's relationship with society have been instrumental in directing the socio-political life of the Sikhs and have had a direct bearing on their eventful history. The Granth Sahib has been looked upon as the 'living voice of the Gurus.' It is the spiritual foundation upon which the glory of the new Faith has been reared by the blood of prophets and martyrs. All that is noble, grand and beautiful in the Sikh history is the product of Scriptural ideology. It is the sublime gospel of the Gurus that has enabled the Sikhs to remain in the vanguard of struggle for freedom, justice and human dignity. It was on the basis of the liberating principle that the Sikhs sustained themselves and survived in the hostile environment of the eighteenth century. As standard bearers of truth, righteousness, social dignity and human rights, the Sikhs were filled with a rare fighting zeal and unflinching faith in the Guru's word. They played Guru Nanak's challenging 'game of love' as worthy players, maintaining their high reputation for steadfastness, tenacity of purpose and death-defying courage. They rose into higher and still higher splendour from every attempt to crush them. Guru's Holy Word, which had a unique

place in the Sikh psyche, was an important factor in keeping alive the value of humanism and social ethics. The rarest action of serving water even to one's enemies received its impulse from the Guru's ideology. It was the light radiated by this ideology that turned the Sikhs into a virile, chivalrous and enterprising community - a force to be reckoned with. It enabled the Sikhs to develop a well-knit organization which has wielded a strong influence on the socio-political life of the country, entirely out of all proportion to their small numerical strength. The Sikhs carved their way to glory by wresting Punjab and the adjoining areas upto the North West Frontier from the clutches of the Afghan predators, thus stemming the tide of invasions which had played havoc on the Indian borders for hundreds of years.

The Guru Granth is unique among the scriptures of the world as it has been formally elevated to the status of the Guru. It was the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh, who put an end to the institution of the Guru in human form, and vested the Guruship in the Granth Sahib. The idea of conferring this unique status on Granth Sahib is linked with repeated emphasis in the *Bani* on the Revelation of Truth through the Guru's Word (Shabad). In the Sikh system there is no place for ritualism, ceremonialism or idol-worship. God's eternal form is Shabad the Holy Revelatory Word. God can be realized through this medium and not through any visible object or person. God's essence is best captured through the medium of words of cosmic symphony. They are the purest vehicles of sublime experiences. Comprehension of God deepens through the repetition of Guru's word which vibrates in the pages of the Granth Sahib. Truth as revealed in the Holy word is valid for all times. Thus the Granth Sahib became the eternal, unchanging and unchallenged Guru of the Sikhs. It was yet another superb act of supreme wisdom and foresight on the part of the tenth Guru to merge his personality with the collective personality of the Sikhs which he called the Guru-Panth. Guru-Panth was entrusted with the onerous task of performing empirical responsibilities through the practice of Truth as revealed in the Holy word.

Many religious philosophies reflect the spirit, the ideal and purpose of a given historical period and lose their appeal with the passage of time. But the gospel, of the Gurus, has eternal validity as it presents the ideal of a universal religion which has far-reaching implications.

Guru Granth Sahib is a unique text, carrying the compositions of not only the Gurus but also that of the Hindu and Muslim saints. It is the embodiment of a new type of spirituality, giving priority to ethical and moral concerns rather than narrow sectarian interests of a particular religion. Sikhism is not an exclusive religion. Exponents of Judaism, Islam and Christianity assert that the only true and exclusive Truth of God is found in their respective scriptures as it has been finally revealed in a unique and final act *at a single point in space-time*. They mean to say that any new religion or even a new interpretation of religion must be based on the evidence already contained in this final and unique act. A similar claim has been made by the exponents of the Vedas. Gurus, on the other hand, assert that divinity or Truth of God is embedded in the very heart of man. The function of religion is to aid humanity to realize its own true divine nature.

This realization binds a person indissolubly to the Truth within, lifts him to higher planes of thought and action and brings about a transformation in his personality. It exalts a person's worth and dignity and makes him a more worthy player in the game

of life. The realization of one's self becomes tantamount to realization of the Supreme Soul or God. It leads to greater love for God and fellow beings in this world. Guru conceded the direct access to spiritual knowledge to all human beings, without the intermediary role of the priests. This concept has a universal appeal as it can satisfy the highest cravings of all human beings. Mankind is at present passing through a period of flux and change. With the dawn of the new century, the world is experiencing the birth pangs of a new age - a new era in human affairs in which nationalism is likely to be replaced by a universal perspective. At this juncture Guru's gospel can serve as a beacon of light and help mankind to establish a just, liberal, cosmopolitan and altruistic world order.

The Sikhs can use this occasion to promote peaceful co-existence, harmony and social justice, reduce global tensions and enhance the awareness of ethical and moral values in consonance with the universal message of Guru Granth Sahib. They should also express their firm resolve to make use of this occasion to address the social, educational and cultural issues in the perspective of the 21st century. The enthusiasm of the Sikhs for celebrating this historic event reflects their response to the sacred memory of their Gurus, a deep and abiding commitment to their faith and a joyous participation in their heritage.

