

# The Mystique of Guru Granth Sahib

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I do not claim any in-depth knowledge of the great and wonderful contents of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Indeed I am no scholar but a lay student of *Guru Bani* for which I have greater love than even for the contents of several *Upanishads* which I have studied carefully. If anything Sri Guru Granth Sahib is my key to understanding the *Upanishads* even as the *Upanishads* are the key to my understanding of *Guru Bani*. While a dictionary is directly helpful in studying all Sanskrit literature, that is not the case with Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which is ineffably mystical in many parts, even within each *shabad*. The *Japuji* is couched in the most extraordinary diction pregnant with philosophical verities. It demands immense patience and effort to comprehend or research its contents. Even the term *Panch Parvan* conveys, to me, a meaning which may not be acceptable to most commentators.

The *Gurbani* is an unfathomable ocean. By now, luckily English translations by eminent authors are fairly extant. In the UNESCO collections of representative works, "*The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*" is an outstanding creation. Its Tercentenary Edition (Orient Longman) features a Foreword to the First Edition that came from the pen of none other than Arnold Toynbee, and the eminent philosopher and President of India, Dr S. Radhakrishnan. In Punjabi, of course, Dr. Sahib Singh's 10-volume treatise is an all-time monumental work. Who can doubt the latter's brilliant erudition and immense labour? His is an unblemished record in the service of the ambrosial message of *Gurbani*.

However, a little error may inadvertently creep in on a page or two of the thousands upon thousands of pages, and someone may take chance notice. Here's a stray example. Says the wondrous *Sukhmani* stanza 7:

*Sadh(u) ki sobha oonch te oochi.*

*Sadh(u) ki sobha mooch te moochi.*

The second line appears not to repeat the sense conveyed by the first line. The learned author avers that *mooch* means *oonch* as well. I have my doubt about it, though I claim near-zero authority on any language. Could it mean 'beautiful'?

What has perplexed me most is the mystery which surrounds the utterance of the sacred *shabad* which is reverently repeated everyday by the millions of devotees, while reciting the evening prayer, *Sodar Rehiras*. Kindly turn to page 58 of '*The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*' (UNESCO). Spake Guru Nanak:

*"tit sarvarde bhai lai nivasa", i.e. "Man though dwellest in the world that is as a pool whose waters God hath made as hot as fire stuck in the mire of worldly lust..."*

Does this interpretation square up with the *shabads* 1 to 7 and 9 (*bhai parapat manukh dehuria*)?

The key word in the *shabad* is *pankaj* which means ‘one born of mud’, i.e. the lotus flower; *sarovar* is a little wayside pool which is rain-fed, *Pankaj* is not sown there by anyone; it grows on its own, from mud, *pani* and *pavak* moisture below and energy from sun overhead. Its broad leaves float on the surface of the pool. However, they do not get wet, even though buffeted by rain and wind.

*Sri Raag M.1* (Page 59 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib): *Re mann aisi Har(i) sion preet kar*

*Sodar Rehiras*, refers to *kamal*, the lotus which signifies ‘pure fragrance and supreme beauty and devotion’. The lotus opens with sunrise and wraps itself up at sunset. It is born of the mud (*pank*), and the life-giving water and the rays of the sun. The life of the *gurmukh* is best illustrated by the lotus.

The late Sardar Ranbir Singh’s ‘*The Sikh way of Life*’, on page 105, has a beautiful passage:

‘From a heap of rubbish on the roadside  
A lily blooms, fragrant and pleasing;  
A lotus with its roots in mud,  
Its leaves resting delicately  
On the rippled water of existence.  
The white petals spread to the free world of air,  
And its golden heart pointing to the sun,  
The centre of life,  
From a mass of blinded mortals:  
Thus arises the disciple of the Divine        Master ,  
Shining with exceeding spiritual glory on his face.’

*The Sikh Review*, July 2000, page 9, says: "The Guru has revealed the central truth... It is love of God and service of humanity. The Sikh way of life, so to say, is the art of living a pure and beautiful life by abiding in its true source like that of a flower on its stem, emitting its fragrance and sweetness all around." This indeed, is the message of the term’s ‘*tit sarvarde...*’ sung by Guru Nanak. To aver that it refers to "an ocean of boiling water of ‘*trishna*’ is the antithesis of it!

All the nine hymns of *Sodar Rehiras* fit beautifully, one into another. Guru Nanak's is not a prose writing. Brevity is the very soul of his mystic poetry. It must be delved into deeply to capture the true essence. The *shabad* has been selected wisely for inclusion in the evening prayer. Neither the poet nor the compiler has made a mistake.

Take, for example, *suniya dhart(i) dhaval akas*"; it means three regions of the universe, 'Dharti', below, 'Akash' above and 'Dhaval' - between them, i.e. 'Antariksh'. The term *dhaval* needs careful handling. Could there be a 'clearing house' for the meaning of such terse 'mystical' terms?

