

Guru Har Krishan: A beacon of hope for suffering humanity

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IN THE REALM OF WORLD religions, the installation of a five-year old lad as the spiritual head of the 200-year-old faith founded by Guru Nanak may be a rare phenomenon, not without its stupendous spiritual responsibility and burden. Though younger to Ram Rai, his elder brother, by nine years, Guru Har Krishan was appointed the 8th Sikh Guru by his father, Guru Har Rai before he passed away.

Guruship in Sikhism was rarely bestowed on the first born. The first three Gurus ignored the claims of their sons and picked their most enlightened disciples as their spiritual successors.

Born in 1656, Guru Har Krishan was the natural heir to his father's pontifical throne for his amazing spiritual attainments and saintliness. Though young in years, he displayed divine wisdom and sagacity, inspiring his devotees to worship and practice Nanak's faith and doctrines.

He surprised everyone by upholding the sanctity and purity of his faith with grace and dignity and soon received the veneration of his followers by his deep spiritual insight, love of God and the love for suffering humanity.

The Guru preached humility and love and worship of God. He said, "we must treat the lowliest of the low as our equal in human society." The Sikh Faith, he said, is the faith of all castes, creeds and nationalities. Even at that early age, he remembered a great many hymns of the earlier Gurus and recited them with amazing zeal.

Guru Har Rai advised his young son Har Krishan never to appear before Emperor Aurangzeb. The emperor asked Raja Jai Singh to get Guru Har Krishan to see him in Delhi. Raja Jai Singh was known for his devotion to the Sikh Faith. The Guru agreed to visit Delhi only when he was assured that he would not have to see the Emperor but only to meet and bless his devotees.

On his arrival in Delhi, the Guru and his party were guests of Raja Jai Singh in his *haveli*, or palace, now known as the historic Gurdwara Bangla Sahib dedicated by the Raja to the eternal memory of Guru Har Krishan.

During his extended stay in Delhi, cholera and small pox epidemics of alarming proportions broke out in the city. The Guru brought consolation and comfort to the afflicted by personally visiting the stricken localities and distributing medicinal herbs and pure water sanctified with prayers to every sick person which cured innumerable men, women and children. Both Hindus and Muslims touched by this miracle of healing, hailed him as their saviour.

The Guru's miraculous healing instilled faith that God's mercy could be invoked through sincere prayer and devotion. Emperor Aurangzeb was himself thunderstruck to learn about the divine healing powers of the *Bala-Pir* (child prophet). Legend has it that the Guru's sanctified water had cured a seriously ill member of the royal family.

While in Delhi, Guru Har Krishan won the hearts of people of all faiths by his concern for suffering humanity. In Guru Har Krishan's calm and radiant personality, people found a healer of their sorrows. They came in pain and agony and went back full of hope and faith.

It was a divine paradox that he himself died of small pox to fulfill God's will and to ward off threats and coercive pressures from Emperor Aurangzeb to appear in his court.

During the two-and-half years of his pontificate, Guru Har Krishan undauntedly upheld the sanctity and purity of the Sikh faith with trust in the God's grace and power.

The fervour and devotion with which the people of Delhi, particularly the Sikh community, celebrate the *Gurpurab* of Guru Har Krishan is to be seen to be believed.

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Universality of Guru Granth Sahib: A Comparative Study

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GURU GRANTH SAHIB IS purely monotheistic in its approach to creation and divinity. It dwells on one all-pervasive creative spirit, people call God, *Par Brahma*, Allah, Ram or Waheguru. All other deities, panoply of spirits, angels, if any, are His servants. Only God is immortal and unborn. All the other deities are mortal and prone to death. "Why serve others, who undergo pangs of birth and death?" He neither has father nor mother, nor sons, nor brothers nor rivals. He does not seek the advice of another and does all by Himself whatever he wants to do." Thus Guru Granth Sahib does not believe in a special Son of God, but respects all prophets as messengers of One Being. Furthermore, Guru Granth Sahib being free from inhibitions of any kind regarding the way of life and its adaptability in all the regions of the world vouches for the spirit of universality. It does not stand for a religion of the chosen people (like Judaism); instead, it defines the religion of the whole humanity consisting of loving conviction and good will for fellow humans. It rises above all the regional barriers. "The True Guru wishes the well-being of all the creation."

Guru Granth Sahib rejects all ritualism, formalism and symbolism. The adherents of most of religions perform various rites and ceremonies in order to appease their deities or achieve their objectives. All the Brahministic intermediaries and cadres of priesthood exploiting the masses in the name of religion, have been castigated as self-serving and hypocritical. Guru Granth Sahib has no belief in any sacrament except *Guru-Kripa* or Divine Grace.

Guru Granth Sahib focusses all its attention on the unfoldment of the discipline for the attainment of communion with Par brahma - the Transcendent One. The emphasis has been laid on the adoption of godly qualities by the seeker.

Guru Granth Sahib questions the prevalent - largely speculative - theories of creation and scans the universe as the wondrous work of the Creator whose very being pulsates everywhere in His Creation. All the beliefs regarding the origin of creation are at best guesswork. The extent and expanse of the Creation of the Infinite Lord cannot be delimited. The created phenomena, from the minutest to the greatest, is under the boundless surveillance of the Lord.

Guru Granth Sahib lays great emphasis on human endeavour, honest and sincere labour. Its religion is the religion of workers and householders. Therefore it decries renunciation and all types of ascetic practices as escapism, and inflicting pain on oneself (or others) as unnecessary and cruel.

Guru Granth Sahib advocates the equality of all human beings, irrespective of birth and gender. The woman is, in no way, inferior to man. Guru Granth Sahib rejects all distinctions of caste and colour. The *Varnashrama* Dharma of Hinduism, propagating the distinctions of caste and advocating various stages of life, has been roundly and repeatedly criticised. The untouchability, thus, becomes a slur on society.

The state has to play its part in the provisions of food, shelter and clothing to the members of the society. There can be no devotion if the individual is not anxiety-free about his requirements.

Guru Granth Sahib presents a balanced combination of action (*karma*), devotion (*bhakti*) and knowledge (*gyan*). It is essentially a religion of devotion. Whereas the body has to work for the wellbeing of the family and society, the mind has to remain in tune with the Lord. Service is, thus, the motto of an adherent of Guru Granth Sahib. His best service towards the Guru and the Lord is the remembrance of the Name. One must also share his earnings (preferably tithe) with the deserving and needy. The core of the teaching of Guru Granth Sahib is *Nam Japna* (remembrance of the Name of the Lord), *Kirt Karni* (the honest labour) and *Wand Chhakna* (sharing of the earnings).

The religion of Guru Granth Sahib is most practical. The devotee overbrims with love and devotion. He visualises the Lord all around him in multifarious forms and guises. The whole world appears as a family to him. The earth is an abode of Dharma for him. He passes his whole life under the dense shade of his Guru, who is Dharma-incarnate.

A unique aspect of Guru Granth, as compared with other scriptures of the world, is its inspirational melody and message, as an embodiment of the Spirit of the Gurus and Saints, whose word is reverentially - if selectively - included in it. It is the Shabad Guru: "The Book is the abode of God."

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Role of Sikh Women in the 21st Century

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IN FEBRUARY 2003, TWO SIKH women from UK, Bibi Manjindar Kaur and Lakhveer Kaur brought to the attention of the Sikh nation the discrimination meted out to the Sikh women in Sri Harmandar Sahib. They were treated as inferior to men and not allowed to touch the *Palki Sahib*, perform *Shabad Keertan*, or even sit besides the *Ragis*. The cleaning service inside the sanctum sanctorum was performed in 1996, but it has remained only as a token. The right to complete equality had been bestowed on women by the founder Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji as far back as the 15th century. The Sikh Nari Manch, UK congratulates these Sikh women who are demanding equal rights to perform every type of Seva in Sri Harmandar Sahib Ji, gives its full support to them and prays for that time when those rights given to us by our Guru Ji are restored to us.

Today the Sikhism is not limited to Punjab only, and the Sikhs live in all corners of the world and is an international faith. When the women in Punjab have not done anything about these rights, no wonder that women from western countries had to do something. Satguru be with these women and give them strength to carry on their protest until such time that these rights are restored.

It is only in the 21st century, that Christian women have been given the rights to preach in Anglican churches, and are still struggling for their rights to preach in Catholic churches in Britain. The Sikh women who were blessed with these rights from the very beginning, desperately need to urge the restoration and enforcement of these rights. It must be a complete reformation and not just the tokenism for show. There should be committed and capable *Ragi Jathas* of women who can perform *Shabad Keertan*, according to *Maryada* in *ragas*, and should be willing to do regular *seva*, and must be employed alongside the male *Ragi Jathas*. Only then will our rights have truly been restored to us and enforced.

To be honest, this problem of equality of women is not only for the women, it is of the whole Sikh nation as it is a main principle of *Sikhi*. The Sikh women do not just face these discriminations in Sri Harmandar Sahib only; they face so many more discriminations in the Gurdwaras all over the world and no one seems to take any notice at all. The Sikh Nari Manch UK will like to bring some of these discriminations to the forefront and ask the Sikh nation to think about and sort them out.

When Guru Gobind Singh performed the first *Amrit Sanchaar*, he welcomed Mata Jito Ji adding *patasay* (sugar bubbles) to the *Amrit*, in order for the Sikhs to retain their humility and sweetness, alongside their infinite courage and bravery. Why this role has been taken away from Sikh women? Not only have the Sikh women been denied the right to be amongst the "*Panj Pyare*", their right to add the sweetness has also been taken away. Could this be the reason why our *Amritdhari* Singhs, who have overridden Guru Gobind Singh Ji's authority, have completely lost their humility, and have fallen to the lowest level by resorting to fighting in the precincts of Sri Harmandar Sahib recently, that was televised internationally?

At the time of initiation, all Sikh men and women are required partake of Amrit from the same vessel. Why is there then the discrepancy in Sri Harmandar Sahib, where women are not included when Parshad is distributed to "*Panj Pyare*"? In many Gurdwaras, run by so-called spiritual leaders there is discrimination where a married Sikh male is "allowed" to partake Amrit (*Khanday di Pahul*), but a married Sikh female is "forbidden" to do so unless she is accompanied by her husband.

If we take note of the tenets of Sikhism, the bigotry that exists in some of the Gurdwaras is appalling. In many Gurdwaras in UK (and many other countries) the women are “allowed” to cook, clean, wash dishes and do the laundry, but are not allowed even to cast their shadow on the “*Sach Khand*” (sanctorum). Ironically, those same women are given permission to do “*Akhand Path*” in the same building in order to boost the coffers of the Gurdwara funds! Why this hypocrisy?

In many Gurdwaras women are allowed to do all types of *seva*, but are not allowed to become “members” or cast their votes in selecting the management committee of the Gurdwara.

All calendars, diaries and *jantries* produced by the Sikh organisations lacked the names and dates of our Sikh heroines, whilst they include the dates of irrelevant individuals. **Now the Nankshahi Calendar has been introduced as a Sikh calendar from 14th of April this year, but our leaders have forgotten the real philosophy of Sikhism. The equality of gender is the basic principle of Sikhism and it is strange that the calendar is named after Guru Nanak Dev Ji who admonished the menfolk by writing this Shabad in *Asa di Var*; so *kyon munda aakheeyai jit junmeh raajaan*”.**

No wonder today’s Sikh girls are openly refuse to marry a man with the turban as they are not given any Sikh female role models to look up to. Most of the photographs seen in the Sikh organisations/Gurdwaras are of male role models and none of the female role models are popularised either by photographs or by celebrating their days. The Sikh Nari Manch (UK) has written to Jathedar Sahib and has strongly recommended that following five names of the historical women must be included in the Nanakshahi Calendar: (1) Jagat Mata – Mata Tripta Ji. (2) Mother of Khalsa – Mata Sahib Kaur Ji. (3) The grand dame of martyrs – Mata Gujri Ji, (4) The only women mentioned in Guru Granth sacred religious book – Mata Khivi Ji. (5) First Sikh woman commander – Mata Bhag Kaur Ji.

If the right dates for these women cannot be found, then different days could be fixed to celebrate their memorial days to give inspiration to younger generations.

The Sikh Nari Manch UK is perhaps the first Sikh organisation that has been working to reunite Sikh women with their heritage. It has been celebrating the days of prominent Sikh women since 1999. It requests - and encourages - other Gurdwaras to devote at least one day a year to celebrate and popularise Sikh female role models. It has researched and obtained the dates available from the Sikh literature and has been able to produce calendars with this information on our Sikh heroines. At least ten thousand calendars of Sikh heroines, such as Mata Sahib Kaur Ji, Mata Tripta Ji and Mata Bhag Kaur are produced and distributed every year.

In the 18th century, Mata Bhago Ji led the forty deserters back to Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and, in the 21st century, the SNM is encouraging all Sikh women, mothers, daughters and sisters to take Mata Bhag Kaur Ji’s example and bring the thousands of wayward Sikhs back to the Sikhi and Guru’s fold. To give the message of *Sikhi* on a wider level the SNM takes part in multi-faith events. It has also distributed thousands of bilingual *Gurbani* posters such as, “Fundamental Prayer” (*Mool Muntra*) and “Meal Times Prayer” to Sikh youth, families, prisons, hospitals and schools.

Today on international shores, all Sikhs should aim to eradicate existing discriminatory practices, so that at least after 500 years, the Sikh women should have the real rights to do every type of *Seva* in all the Gurdwaras of the world. In the 21st century, prominent Sikh philosophers, Panchayats, leaders and women need to come together to think about the future of the Sikhs in order that the Sikh Panth can flourish. Today's Sikh nation is an international community and should therefore make decisions relevant to Sikhs with a mature approach that is deserving of our highly successful, articulate and international Sikh society.

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Imperatives of Conflict Resolution among Sikhs

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WHAT IS OUR EDUCATIONAL system for our youth and for ourselves? What is the *sangat's* view on handling the issue of saints? What is our policy on consolidation of our literary works? Whom is the Panth today looking at, or for, to do this work?

I feel these are the issues on the surface. We, as a community and as a society, are battling much more fundamental issues within us. In my perception, although we can always point to the enemy outside of us, we have no one else to blame but ourselves. We have enough energy and direction within us to overcome the situations of an external enemy. The only reason we have not done so is lack of clarity and direction on our part.

Vishavjit mentions blueprint for education there are many forces that, for varied reasons, are trying to manipulate the frontal view of the Khalsa Panth to suit them. Are we to allow this to happen, or should we take stock of our home and put it in order? Do we need to look after the varied aspects of our ideology and its projection? Needless to say, so far we have had a dismal record on these issues. At the root of these circumstances lies the problem, within us. I am not saying that our enemies are not real, but that we have enough mettle and intelligence to deal with them, if we get down to it. I would like to say more about the external enemy, but would like to first give the *sangat* my perspective.

Quit Caste Mentality:

As a community, we have yet not been able to break away from caste practices. Our politics, our daily lives, our marriages and life in Punjab and outside, even today, is caste based. We all know the Jat - non-Jat issue is alive, even today. At the root of all this lies our greed. Whenever we feel caste practice can help us, we use it to the hilt, and I say with regret that, even today in the villages in Punjab the face of caste system lives in falsepride. This is our fault; we cannot blame others for it.

Fundamentally, we are followers of *Miri* and *Piri*, a balance in life between spirituality and the material world in our way. In all this, the foundation is our awakened spirit.

Over the past few decades we have lost our way. When we use the phrase, "our religion and politics cannot be separated", we simultaneously allow the community to be used by our politically ambitious people. The result is that we see only politics and no spirituality. Even our Darbar Sahib, our spiritual centers are full of politics.

Even today, women are not permitted to do seva in the Darbar Sahib. Why? We are not able to clear away the politics and implement our ideology. A lost community of an awakened Guru!

Spirit has no politics:

If you have been to the Darbar Sahib and studied the construction of the Akal Takht, you will see it gives us guidance. The Akal Takht is built at an angle to the Darbar Sahib. If an individual goes to pay obeisance at the Akal Takht, they never have their back towards the Darbar Sahib. The message is clear and holds true in any arena of the world. We must never have our back to Guru and our spiritual energy and our awakened spirit, Gurushabad must guide our every action. Darbar Sahib is our spiritual seat and when we deal with politics, it must guide us. I think we as a community, in fact, do just the opposite. We have only politics in our lives and no spiritual energy in them. Even in that, we are losers because it is politics based on the individual.

In my view, the more we work on *Shabad*, its understanding and its practice, as an individual and as a community, the closer we will be to our reality, what we are, rather than what we have become today.

The issue of women is more than astonishing. It really proves that, though we bow to our Guru, we obey him not. The sex ratio in Punjab is the worst in India.

Leave alone being enlightened, we have regressed compared to even the normal progress of humanity, although our Gurus were far ahead of their time.

Think Tank:

We have no central “think tank” or body. Can we have it? Do we need to have it? Is it important to have it? I cannot answer these questions as an individual. I can only give my view.

If you have visited the Darbar Sahib Complex, you can see the *bungas* or high pillars there. These are *bungas* of the different *misls* we had. They would come there, tie their horses, leave their arms outside and enter the Darbar Sahib.

Once they went in, they came out with a consensus. This practice was followed for long. Is this not the Khalsa way? *Gurmata*s were regularly held and one direction was formed. Today we have no uniting energy amongst us. Our Gurdwara management system is political, based on voting. This, single handedly, has been our biggest problem. In Gurdwara politics, in Delhi at least I know, wine and money are the lure of voting. Is this what we want?

Undoubtedly, we need to change our Gurdwara management system. These are governing bodies, not bodies of business for individuals. These individuals, who come to power, control the policies, our education, the Gurdwara management, literary works and our political future. Can we then allow this to go on, like this?

Vishavjit named some Saints, (Sant) Attar Singhji is one of them. I feel, we must have a “guiding principle” to deal with the issue of saints. I have lived in Punjab and have been closely aware of the Sant community, its advantages and its disadvantages. (Sant) Niranjan Singh ji, Shiromani Kathakar, whom I lived with, once mentioned, “Every person who can grab some land, wear a ‘*choga*’ down to his knees, or even lower, is thereafter called ‘Baba’.” This is the ignorance of our village

community and in some ways is reflective of our poor education system. I think it is time we address our issues and take stock of these problems.

If we had a scrutinizing body and also some form of standards fixed for those that we can call 'saints', then there will be lesser room for charlatans. Our youth, which is always hungry for more recent role models, will have some references. We have left a void for our own people to be educated spiritually, the result is that charlatans are having a field day and we are losing out. Youth is getting disillusioned. This is my suggestion and I think whatever be the *sangat's* view, the issue should not be left undecided. One of the most important issues that Vishavjit has highlighted is our education system.

New Education:

Our Gurdwara management committees run the education institutions we have. We all know that these bodies are highly political and have become more of a problem, than the solution. These schools have little - or no - Sikh spiritual presence in them. In fact, our academic record is also a freely-falling graph, with no bottom. As of now, these institutions are poor and mediocre in standard. They have little room for progress under the prevalent system.

(Sant) Attar Singh gave us a formula, let us create standards for excellent academic education and merge it with *Gurmat Gyan*. Let us create individuals who can excel in this world and be the Khalsa at the same time.

For this, in the early 1900's, he sent out (Sant) Teja Singh to Harvard University in the United States of America, to learn child psychology and child education. He himself was there to guide the spiritual development of the children. But politics and the caste system threw a spanner in the attempt. The result is what we are today. The vision can become a reality but, for that, we must be free from petty politics and free our education from Gurdwara Management control.

Fund Warfare:

In the past few decades we have achieved a lot. The Singh Sabha movement freed the Gurudwaras and now we have the control. However, now we have other problems. Our greed for the Guru's '*Golak*', greed for community funds. For sure, we have made certain decisions, which we have paid a heavy price for over time. I do not know if we can or should blame any individual. It is these decisions which have put us into a darker pit, from which we seem not able to climb out.

Although our present problems are immense and the issues are real and grave, yet with the strength of Khalsa spirit we must individually and collectively address these problems. All the problems we have can, and will, be resolved. But, in my view, there is an issue at the root of it all.

We have battled much heavier odds as far as the external enemy is concerned. There have been times where we have survived and lived our ideology despite abject torture and absolute disasters that stared us in the face. There have been times when we were written off as entities. Yet, we emerged back, as we always will. This is our strength.

Chained Hero:

I sit only a twenty-minute drive away from the place where, about 300 years ago (1716 A.D.), a Khalsa chief's son's heart was cut out and put into the mouth of his father, still warm. The spirit of this Sikh warrior, Gurbax Singh ji, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, was undaunted. His inspiration stands like a rock, braving the winds of time.

Only a few decades before Banda Singh Bahadur, another place, which is twenty minutes to the North of where I sit right now, is witness to the sawing into two of Bhai Mati Dass. A witness to the incident tells us about it. How the love for the Guru took away and drowned the pain of Bhai Sahib. With a quizzical smile, Bhai Mati Dass tells the executioner not to waver for he feels no pain, his attention is absorbed in Guru Tegh Bahadur. The *Janam Sakhi* writes:

“*Douyae Tun Tai Japji Padah, dekhat subh acharj badaey.*”

(Being sawed into two, the two halves of Bhai Mati Dass is still reciting the Japji; astonished is every one to see this happening.)

These are the examples of Sikhs, transformed by the presence and touch of the Guru. We can all recollect numerous such examples.

Grace: Abounding:

I don't believe this experience is distant from us. It is within us, only we have become insensitive to its presence within us. The root of our transformation is not removed, but we have turned our back to it. In no way has the magic of our Guru's Darbar become any different from then. It is only that we don't offer ourselves to it in the same way as these and many other Sikhs did. They reached the pinnacle of human progression, through '*Gurprasad*', our Guru's blessings.

We have broken away from our *Shabad Guru*, its guidance, its knowledge, experience and practice. To try to bring about a change in our society, without working on the basic issue of *Shabad*, is like trying to color the leaves of trees with paint while its roots are drying.

'*Gurushabad*' is at the core of our being. Sahib awakened us and told us to live with the *sangat* of *Naam*, *Shabad*, and *Hukam*. He set us on our way with the guidance, the staff of *Naam*, our eyes, *Surat-Shabad*. In my perception we, right now, are like a blind wanderer without a staff. This is our state, without the practice of *Gurushabad*.

The awakened Khalsa community of tomorrow will live in *Shabad*. Their children and society will walk this world in free spirit, as Guru's Nanak's Sikhs. Guiding the world to the unity it needs to see within itself. All this when we bow to our Guru and obey.

It is never too late and never will be, but why not do this now? Why not rise from our slumber, today? Why not bring about a revolution in our community - be the Khalsa! Bring into practice what we should. Why not take the sword of our spirit and execute the transformation in us, as individuals and as a community. I remember a *Shabad* of Guru that inspires me on this occasion.

Shalok, Kabeer:

The battle-drum beats in the sky of the mind; aim is taken and the wound is inflicted. The spiritual warriors enter the field of battle; now is the time to fight! || 1
|| That person alone is known as a spiritual hero, who fights in defense of the weak and meek. They may be cut apart, piece-by-piece, but they never leave the field of battle. || 2 || 2 ||

