

# Relevance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib for Today

*Dr.S.Vanathu Antoni\**

\* *Department of Philosophy, Arul Anandar College, Karumathur 625 514.*

**Introduction:** Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the youngest of the world scriptures is four hundred years young. It was compiled by the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjun, as Adi Granth in 1604. Four centuries have tested the authenticity of the Holy Book and it has come out successful, being recognized by more and more people all over the world as a text for harmonious living. It has attained the status of a testament of cultural refinement, spiritual upliftment and universal humanism. This essay aims to revisit the multi- storeyed mansion of the Sikh Scripture in order to expose its refreshing relevance for today and for the third millennium. The commemoration of the four hundredth year of its compilation invites one and all to delve deep into the depths of its eminence and bring out pearls of great value to enrich humanity towards excellence and nobility.

The Holy Book constructively engages the reader to draw upon its practical wisdom to address the issues confronting humanity. The noted historian Arnold Toynbee has this to say about the relevance of the work. 'The Guru Granth Sahib is remarkable for several reasons. Of all the known religious scriptures, this Book is the most highly venerated. The Guru Granth Sahib is the Sikh's perpetual Guru, spiritual guide. In this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion and its scripture, the Guru Granth, will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world'.

It is proposed to examine the relevance of the holy work with reference to ten significant and most pressing areas which together constitute the problematic. The ten mega- needs, rather meta-needs which constructively engage the Sri Guru Granth are the following: (1) Need for resolving cultural polyvalence. (2) Need for re-cognizing plurality of definitions. (3) Need for relishing open- ended dialogues on the Surplus. (4) Need for respecting relationality of faiths. (5) Need for replenishing the earth with significance. (6) Need for romanticizing rootedness. (7) Need for recovering the semiotics of physical wholeness. (8) Need for re-storing value to facts. (9) Need for resonating faiths for harmony, and (10) Need for realizing the good and the beautiful. This may serve as a philosophical deca-logue or a catalogue of meta-needs and point of departure to construct the future discourse in search of relevance.

**Need for Resolving Cultural Polyvalence:** If one were to go prophetic, the destiny of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be presided over by the Afro-Asian woman and her aspirations. She would decide the mode of production and reproduction. As Globalization is sweeping across the world, what with culture, education and economy creating opportunities for some and depriving the chances of survival for many, the women in Asia, particularly in India and China along with their African counterparts are prepared to take up the challenge head on. They have the steely will to globalize their food, dress and aesthetic values through the type of education they accept and adopt. Their democratic aspirations for a fair share in job opportunities to their offspring and an increase in the quality of life is likely to be enhanced by the English education they embrace for them. While the mother tongue gives them a sense of identity, English empowers them towards excellence and employment. The matricentric and materialistic motif of the Afro-Asian would no longer be considered as maya but the potency or sakti to transform the world and resolve the cultural polyvalence. 'Maya is a woman with scowling face and cruel looks. Such a woman has the lord created; The whole world has she swallowed'. (SGGS.837).

It is the women's movements and the Self- Help Groups (SHG) which will serve as basic human communities (BHC) to bring about the necessary changes in approach, attitude and

action patterns so that men of power and authority are converted and challenged to cultivate in the fields of their body and mind virtues of equality and equanimity. 'Such a holy one may make of my mind and body pure fields; And with divine amrita irrigate them'. (SGGS.1460). Wholeness which is nothing but the attainment of feminine and maternal consciousness, the natural characteristic of the woman and which a man only can attain through hard labour and *tapas* will become available to all because the joy of harvesting is a community mode of celebrating the oneness of humanity. The fundamental culture cannot be anything other than that of agriculture, a discovery of the woman, through which the world is fed and fellowship increased manifold. 'One ploughs, another sows, a third the grain harvests' (SGGS.1764).

**Need for Re-cognizing Plurality of Definitions:** While global economy has epitomized the American power and policing of the world the legitimate aspirations of smaller nations to play their role as equal partners in the remaking of the world necessitates that political and cultural multiplicities are duly recognized. This recognition fundamentally rests on the assumption that humanity is basically one and that each individual has the choice to define and design one's destiny in the way one desires. Plurality of such definitions further rests on the premise that there exists a dialectical dialogue between the one and the many within the Ultimate - He Himself is the formless and in many forms manifest; Himself the Unattributed and the attributed; Himself is the sole and the multiple' (SGGS.509).

It is like entering into a pool wherein except for the freshness and coolness of the water no other differentiations really matter. The ocean which is home for multitudes of life forms may inspire the little fish to ask the mother; 'Yes, but where is the ocean?' 'That is where you are in'. In the ocean of the divine name every definition has a meaning and purpose. 'In the holy pool of Thy Name are contained Shastras, Smritis and Vedas' (SGGS.895).

As variety and multiplicity is the basic datum of life it is wonderful and marvellous to accept and arrange every detail on the physical and mental space to become creative and buoyant for the spontaneous fulfillment of one's desires and ambitions in the way the divine has ordained. 'Marvellous the multiplicity of creation, wonderful their distinctions; Marvellous creation's forms, wonderful its variety' (SGGS.983).

Every definition is the summary of an explanation. And every explanation is the road to expansion. Expansion has its own time and contraction has its own season. Recognizing the plurality of definitions is the necessary condition for the recognition of contraction into the One. Definitions contract into pearls of wisdom in the divine pool. 'From the One sole Reality has multiplicity appeared; The one alone in the universe operates, none other should one seek in multiplicity to view the One' (SGGS.1740).

**Need for Relishing Open-ended Dialogues on the Surplus:** Search for the sight of the cloud of unknowing, the original cloud, quest for the fragrance of the crystal clear water, longing for the taste of the morning moon on the mountain, thirst for the touch of the dew-decked blade of the grass and the pining for the melodies of the snow-covered peaks has always propelled the human spirit to crave the heavens as the fulfillment of the unfulfilled longings. The present beckons the humans not to go after the imaginary paradise but to actualize what obtains in paradise in the here and now. 'I know not where is paradise situated; Although all express the desire to reach there' (SGGS.680)

Discourse on the Surplus in human experience needs to be conducted not in the absoluteness of the unforeseeable future but in the quiet and solitude of the human heart, at the heart of the world wherein the divine throbs with density and vitality. 'While the mind after hope of paradise hankers; At the divine feet finds no repose' (SGGS.680). Creation of a joy-filled home and food-filled hearth makes a natural claim as the foretaste of the

heavens. Amidst familial virtues of steadfastness, fidelity and fellowship are the seeds of bliss sown. 'In the husband's home has she realized truth; and spontaneously the spouse got to know'(SGGS.762). The world becomes one's home and the vast expanse of the sea-shore serves as the orchard in which a person is firmly rooted in the depth of the divine but constantly looks to the farthest reach of the beacon which is the utter loftiness of God as the goal. 'Man is like a tree growing in sea –shore; Yet immortal his root can become by absorption, In god's loftiness' (SGGS.1736).

**Need for Respecting Relationality of Faiths:** Where absolutist claims for the truth of one's own faith have had a field day, the present century calls for a radical reexamination of such claims, given the nature of interface between faiths and interfaith dialogues and intrafaith musings. If the future were to really belong to the divine then the narrow boundary walls of each individual religion must get demolished and a new understanding about the relationality of faiths with no claims to superiority must be built. If God were the guardian of the world then all faiths cannot but be the outspread branches of one tree. 'Himself the Tree, with outspread branches; Of this cultivation is He Himself the guardian' (SGGS.823). God is seen as the vessel, present and available, to everyone who would like to take shelter in it. With outstretched arms does the Divine embrace the whole humanity without any distinction or discrimination. All that has been, all that is and all that will be will find an equal share in the protective providence of God. 'Himself in each being (vessel ) immanent, Himself the hidden reality, Himself the visible forms; Attributed and Unattributed are two forms (Names) devised; Both in unison one Reality formulate' (SGGS.823).

Be it the Most Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, or the Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, be it the One or the Many, the divine is the most fragrant Flower of which the three aspects blend into One. Where is the need for one over the other or one under the other? Ignorance veils the transparency of the divine. 'Brahma is the petal, Vishnu the twig, Shiva is the flower' (SGGS1017).

Relationality of faiths is further emphasized by the metaphor of the cloth whose warp and woof is nothing but the divine presence all over. The concept of divine utility and God as spiritual capital at the service of the humans sends out a loud and clear message that faiths are to be understood and experienced as contiguous spiritual spaces in the geo-physical areas. 'The world's warp and woof has He woven; From Him emanating all that happens' (SGGS.1737).

**Need for Replenishing the Earth with Significance:** Metaphysical speculations both in the West and in the East have divested the earth of its intrinsic worth and significance. Excessive concern with the other world has led to the under-estimation of this world. Extremely ascetic spiritualities have further described the world as the abode of sin and evil. It is in this context the Guru Granth comes to the rescue of the moderns. It seeks to refill the earth with beauty and bounty of the divine. Divine munificence, manifestation and benediction fill the earth. 'All that is created is his manifestation; No place is of his manifestation devoid' (SGGS.10). The cool of the evening and the delectable ooze of the ambrosial nectar from the morning blossoms cannot but invade the senses and inspire the Divine itself to cherish and delight in its own making. 'All Creation Thou doest cherish' (SGGS 15).

God's love for the earth and the divine delight in creation and the infinite number of species is the paradigm for the humans to love, cherish, safeguard, sustain and steward the earth with all her riches. It becomes all the more reasonable that the humans as moral agents have an ethical and environmental responsibility to watch over the earth. 'In innumerable aspects, categories; And species has He made the creation' (SGGS.16) 'He has created

the universe and watches over it' (SGGS.18). 'With Lord, all-pervasive, are all places filled' (SGGS.102).

The life of the universe, the life of the humans and the life of the divine are intimately interbounded. There cannot be a greater declaration for eco- ethic than the identity between the universe and the divine. 'The bountiful Life of the universe, By grace of the Life of the universe' (SGGS.754). 'Says the Lord, this world and I are identical' (SGGS.1446).

**Need for Romanticizing Rootedness:** Care for the earth calls for a romance of rootedness from the humans. The anyonia, interpenetrating maithuna, characteristic of the husband and wife is the model for the relationship that must exist between the world and the humans. While firmly rooted on the earth one must romanticize the joys of the future and work to achieve them. One must dream of the dawn of the universal good and labour to make it a reality in the supreme and quiet confidence that the Lord labours alongside to bring the earth to its fruition. 'Everlasting bliss in matrimony with the Lord have I found' (SGGS.794). 'The Lord is my husband, I his wife' (SGGS.1026). In the truly Sankhya sense the first couple in this case, not the lame purusa and the blind prakrti but the healthy and hearty co-eval couple namely Nature and God are the parents of the universe. 'In the universe One sole Male, The whole creation is females' (SGGS.1249).

**Need for Recovering the Semiotics of the Physical Wholeness:** Health, Holiness and Wholeness are interconnected in the web of well being of body, mind and soul. Sanity, sanctity, and *sehaj* are the most natural human conditions. There have been attempts to compartmentalize the overall well being into body space, mind space and soul space with specialists for each domain. Physicians, counsellors and spiritual masters claim exclusive authority and competence in their respective areas and rightly so. The Guru Granth sets out to open up the implications of holiness tracing its origin to the divine. 'Thou source of all art holy, Nothing in the world is unholy' (SGGS298).

Just as the fountainhead is holy, so is the entire flow of life in the universe because within the cosmic family the human being is firmly rooted. Cosmic wholeness and human holiness are intimately integrated into one movement. 'Air is the supreme Master, water, the progenitor; The great earth mother, Day and night are nurses in whose lap plays, The entire universe' (SGGS.302). 'The world all is the divine Lord's field, Creation has He Himself set to cultivate it' (SGGS.631).

With the holiness of the universe firmly established, the intrinsic holiness of human body is attested. The human body becomes the locus and focus of all righteousness because it bears the divine light. 'This body is all seat of righteousness, Bearing the holy Eternal's light' (SGGS.642). However short-lived and ephemeral may be the human life, the bodily existence on earth is a sojourn of anticipation and expectation for the overflowing of God's presence as though life is but a movement from the parental home to the husband's home. It is movement from blessing to blessing and therefore from gratitude to gratitude. 'For a few days only in the parent's home is our life, To the husband's home must we depart' (SGGS.699).

The tantric understanding of the human body is yet another important aspect of the Sikh philosophical anthropology. It comes from Kabir who was himself a weaver and therefore aptly describes the human body in the context of cotton culture. 'The body is a sheet, forty yards in length. Of which nine are the apertures of the body, Ten the faculties of the senses and mind, Twenty one are the reeds; Its warp consisting of sixty threads and nine joints, In its woof are another seventy two threads'. (SGGS.699). Body is no longer an abode of sin and filth but a visible form of the Divine. It is also the gateway to peace and joy because the word of the Lord finds its home in the human body. 'All visible forms Thy body'.

(SGGS.746). 'By the preceptor's word to the self (original, sarir, lit. body) comes joy and peace' (SGGS.770). The body is in the social space and it is the source of all ethical action. Good qualities and virtues have to flower forth from the body. 'This body is the shoot bringing forth flower of good qualities, On a string wear these' (SGGS. 1645).

**Need for Re-storing Value to Facts:** The phenomenon of science has turned a full circle by discovering the travesty of cumulative facts as explanations about the world. In search for truth, science has been riding the crest of success as human intelligence is ever expanding. The very expansion of scientific realm has tried to quell the quest for transcendence and the meaning it accords to human longings. This is exactly the context in which the knowledge maker of the present century will have to look at the vibrancy of the religious metaphors as value additives to the sheer brutality of facts. 'Holy the creation by Him raised, holy all that He sustains' ( SGGS.589).

As the Divine throbs within the mundane and the sensual it is important to realize that religions are perhaps the most beautiful creations of the human mind. In their most pristine and natural state religions can be perceived as works of great art and works of great value meant to provide joy in the midst of gloom and darkness. 'And in spontaneous poise (*sehaj*) in life's night passed joyfully' (SGGS.800). The unalloyed joy of the child at perceiving a bubble in the rainwater as something beautiful and exciting lasts for a few seconds. But those few seconds are important moments in life because it dawns on the child that the fact of being human is to know that life is a gift given free of cost and without one's asking and that it must be made beautiful as a work of art. 'The gift of human incarnation' (SGGS.804).

**Need for Resonating Faiths for Harmony:** The future of Hope and the Hope for the future lie in the hands of the youth whose religion will be the Religion of Harmony. Faith in one's heart will be expressed in contentment, compassion and perfection. Filling one's life with the contents of love results in contentment, filling one's mind with thoughts of altruism results in compassion and filling one's heart with feelings for the Lord results in perfection. 'In your mind bear contentment, Towards all creation bear compassion, The lord is sole repository of perfection' (SGGS.619).

Harmony can be achieved only with a compassionate heart coupled with compassionate actions. Respect for all life so eminently advocated by the sage Mahavira and compassion for the whole world so eloquently preached by the enlightened Buddha are rolled into one by the Guru Granth. 'Mighty all to accomplish, compassionate to all beings; Over all His protective hand placed' (SGGS.622). In the drama of Globalization the youth move about the world as though it is their native place and make their home anywhere as the protective hand of the Lord is everywhere. Their presence and activities become the blossoming acts of worship and prayer. Harmonious living breaking all barriers of nation, race, caste and creed and removing all prejudices and discriminations will be the face of religion in the coming years. 'True and holy are Thy continents and universe, True and holy are Thy worlds and forms created by Thee' (SGGS.981). The world becomes one's home and the practice of charity therein becomes the true benchmark of humanity and the hallmark of religion. 'Better than the ascetic pose is the householder's life; Wherein is practiced charity' (SGGS.1238). 'The Lord is lake, ocean, this world a play by Him created; As the wave in ocean is absorbed, So is He in all being solely pervasive' (SGGS.1726).

**Need for Realizing the Good and the Beautiful:** Search for Timeless Beauty starts with one self. It all begins with seeing, observing, listening and laughing. Morning meditative walks become musings on the ordinary and nothing prevents one from worshipping the world which is the beautiful temple of the Lord. 'The world, beautiful temple of the Lord, by the creator is made' (SGGS.120). Even if one does not believe in God, a motif which has

inspired the creation of temples, cathedrals, mosques and all kinds of architecture, paintings, sculpture and music nothing gets in the way of a direct apprehension of beauty. Even though it is the soul which really registers and houses beauty it may not be necessary to believe in the soul in order to apprehend beauty. But the ordinariness of life and the immersion into it may lead to humility and a sense of reverence which may ultimately lead one to the feet of God. Beauty may be seen as the evidence and signature of God. 'Love as water; Myself! To the lord bear such love , as the lotus's for water, as the fish for water, as the chatrik's for the rain, as milk for water'(SGGS.125).

It is due to the bane of duality, be it Platonic, Cartesian or Dvaitic that the sense of the Timeless Good and timeless Beauty remains the distant shadow of humanity. But a re-turn to love, compassion, laughter and beauty can banish this curse and make duality vanish. Practice of dualism, puritanism, rationalism and utilitarianism is the cause for the present malady. Realizing the Beautiful implies a contemplative, reflective and unitive mode of being and seeing. It is like the unified moment of the player, the act of playing and the display of the play itself. 'All existence the theatre of Thy play' (SGGS.213).

Beauty production is camouflaged by much ugliness and piles of dirt heaped by the mega cities and metros, whether European, American or Asian. The delicate rhythm of the local cultures and their vernaculars are on a continuous decline. By reclaiming the mythical and the folk traditions which contain so much of wisdom and serve as an anti-dote to the mad rush of civilization, a corrective and constructive hermeneutic can be made in favour of the beautiful from myths like the age- old Garden of Eden or the Shangri-la. Creative abundance and bounteous beauty can be built as a meta narrative. 'The world is a garden plot, The Lord is the gardener, Cherishing all none neglected' (SGGS.240). 'In Thy beauty dost thou fascinate all creation' (SGGS.154). 'In all creation is the Lord's beauty, his light; The lord is close by our side' (SGGS.348). In all spots is our Lord immanent' (SGGS.843).

The present century, while foreboding gloom and doom, at the same time presents hope and bloom. Creative, affirmative and transformative action for living a life in consonance with the intimations and invitations of the good and the beautiful will be the one on-going prayer pleasing to the Lord. 'Whatever action pleases Him is the highest prayer' (SGGS.1389). As the plastic art makes the world uglier and more aggressive, the need to fall back upon restoration of the natural world as the appropriate domain of the Beautiful becomes all the more imperative. 'Before coming of spring, the Lord ever is in bloom, He who makes everything blossom, From none does He seek the bloom' (SGGS.1646).

A clarion call is sounded by the Guru Granth to cherish the only world as the Lord cherishes the same, love the world as the Lord loves the same, partake in its blessings and wear the aspects of earthly beauty as the most fitting garment of the Lord. The longest journey of fulfillment after all, starts but with a single step. 'There where the Lord is ever devotedly cherished, The earth wears aspects of beauty, the spot full of blessing; And all objectives fulfilled' (SGGS.1697). Ultimately both *satyam* and *sivam* will become convertible categories of *sundaram*, as Beauty being the ontological manifestation of the other two.

**Conclusion:** This perspectival approach has examined the relevance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib for the present century as an ongoing engagement with its constructive contribution to the welfare of humankind. The text contains an in-built flexibility and elasticity for multiple ways of reading. It further shows that one can profitably read the scripture and benefit from the direction it indicates. The Guru Granth Sahib remains a constant companion to the seeker not only to address one's psychogenic and sociogenic needs but also to go beyond these and address transpersonal and transcendental needs. To the extent a scriptural text ennobles the human spirit towards universalism and altruism it becomes a spiritual text. The

Guru Granth in this sense is truly a relevant scriptural text.

*References: All references are from the 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib' in four volumes translated by Garbachan Singh Talib, Patiala, Punjab University. 1990*

