

# Naam in Sikhism and 'Mahapurushiaism'

Dr. Ratul Chandra Borah\*

\* Professor & Head, Deptt. of Biochemistry & Agri Chemistry, A.A.U. Jorhat. 785 013. Assam.

E-Mail: [rcborah@aau.ac.in](mailto:rcborah@aau.ac.in)

Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568 AD) and Sat Guru Nanak Deva (1469-1539 AD) are two universal spiritual *Gurus* who reformed the society on the basis of new religious cultures according to their individual thesis. The religion established by Guru Srimanta Sankaradeva is known as *Eka Sarana Hari Nama Dharma* (in short, *Nama Dharma*) which is also known as *Mahapurusha Dharma* (Mahapurushiaism). The religion founded by Guru Nanaka is known as Sikhism. "In fact Sikhism has often been called the *Naam Marga* or the way of *Naam*". (Daljeet Singh, 1998).

**Ajoni:** Both the religions are monotheistic in nature and *Nirguna Brahma* is the ultimate object of realization. In Mahapurushiaism, *Nirguna Brahma* is realized through *Saguna Brahma*. However, in Sikhism incarnation of God is not accepted. According to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, (religious scripture of the Sikhs on which Sikhism is based), God does not incarnate, He does not come into the human form and is not born. In the *Mul Mantra* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, God has been mentioned as one who never takes birth or form. The Sikh *Gurus* have repeatedly emphasized, as also stated in the very opening verse of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, that God is one, *Ek Onkar* and no second entity. The same God is *Sarguna* and *Nirguna*, *Nirankar* and self absorbed. "But it would be highly inappropriate to confuse the *Gurus'* concept of *Saguna* and *Nirguna* (i.e. Translucent cum Immanent God) with the Advaitic connotation of these terms as also of *Ishvara*. The *Gurus* never accepted the Advaitic concepts of *Saguna* and *Nirguna*". (Daljeet Singh, 1998).

**Sangat:** However, in Mahapurushiaism, the basis of which are the *Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*, accepts the incarnation of God in different forms, the most important among them is Krishna who is both *Saguna Brahma* as well as *Nirguna Brahma* at the same time. In fact Krishna is the perfect incarnation of God, manifesting as *Saguna Brahma* whose name attributes are innumerable. Through the *Kirtana* (chanting) and *Shravana* (listening) of the *Naam* (name) as well as attributes of *Saguna Brahma* (Krishna), one (the devotee) attains the *Nirguna Brahma* (Krishna). In fact the *Naam Dharma* of Srimanta Sankaradeva is based on the four principles, i.e. *Guru* (Srimanta Sankaradeva), *Deva* (Krishna), *Naam* (attributes of Krishna) and *Bhakata* (Devotee of Krishna). The four principles lead to realization of the *Nirguna Brahma* (Krishna) in the *Satsanga* or the company of pious people or devotees of Krishna. However, hearing and chanting of *Naam* is the main principle of *Sadhana* for attainment of *Nirguna Brahma* through devotion to one and only one God i.e. Krishna. So, *Naam* and attributes of Krishna and Krishna (Hari) is synonymous.

In Mahapurushiaism, the modes of worship are *Shravana* (listening which is meditative) and *Kirtana* (chanting) of the name and attributes of Krishna in the *Satsanga* or in the company of the devotees of Krishna. Therefore *Naam* is central to the *Nama Dharma*.

**Shadba-Guru:** There are similarities in many aspects between Sikhism and Mahapurushiaism. In both the religions, it is the scripture which is placed on the altar (*Thapana* or *Guru Asana* in Mahapurushiaism) of worship. In Sikhism the *Gurdwara* is the place of community worship where *Guru Granth Sahib* is placed for worship as the living Guru. The 10<sup>th</sup> *Guru* of Sikhism, *Guru Gobind Singh* died in 1708 AD. But before his death, he passed on the Guruship to *Guru Granth Sahib*. (Surinder Singh Kohli, 1996). *Guru Granth Sahib* is regarded as the "Living jurisprudence" (accepted by the Supreme Court of India) and accepted as the living *Guru* of the Sikhs in the form of "*Gurus'* word" (*Shabad*

*Guru*). In the *Nama Dharma* of Srimanta Sankaradeva, it is the *Naamghar* where community worships, prayers are performed in addition to various cultural and social activities at the village level. In the *Naamghar* or *Gurugriha* the *Bhagavata* (the main scripture of Mahapurushiaism) is placed on the *Guru Asana* or *Thapana* (altar) inside the *Manikut* (sanctum sanctorum). An abridged version (a gist of the *Bhagavata*) called *Gunamala* is placed instead of the complete book of *Bhagavata* in the *Guru Asana* or *Thapana*. The Mahapurushias consider the *Guru Asana* as the symbol of living God and *Guru* (Srimanta Sankaradeva). God (Krishna) and *Guru* are synonymous, since the Mahapurushias accept Srimanta Sankaradeva as the partial incarnation of lord Krishna. Here Srimanta Sankaradeva is regarded as the sole *Guru* who is Supreme *Guru* (*Parma Guru*) and there is none other than Him any second *Guru* (*Naam Ghosa*, verse No. 375, Mahapurusha Madhavadeva). No other image or idol is worshipped by the Mahapurushias. No gods other than One Supreme Absolute God is worshipped in Mahapurushiaism.

**In Sikhism, *Naam Simran* is the main mode of worship which is synonymous with *Naam Kirtana*. Like Mahapurushiaism, there is no caste or ascetic austerity in Sikhism. It believes in one God, *Ek Onkar*. Singing His praise is the best way of devotion.**

The glory of *Naam* has been explained and exemplified throughout the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Similarly, in all the writings of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva as well as of Madhavadeva, *Naam* occupies the central position.

#### **Place of *Naam* in Sikhism:**

In Sikhism, the principle of *Naam* (*Shabad*) includes meditation, contemplation and reflection and the principles of *Shabda* (Hymns) includes praising and glorifying God earnestly with focused and attentive mind. *Naam* is God's name and *Simran* means remembering. There can be many names of God and He is to be remembered constantly through word, thought and deed. Although the word, '*Waheguru*' is the most appropriate word according to *Gurubani*, the purpose behind this is to select a word comfortable to mind for perpetual remembrance of God. "*Naam- Simran* is at the center of *Guru Nanak's* teachings. The whole message of *Guru Nanak* as contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib* revolves around *Naam*. The first chapter in the holy *Granth* is devoted to differentiation between the meaning of *Naam Simran* and *Bhakti*. *Simran* is beginning, *Bhakti* is the end. *Simran* is the seed, *Bhakti* is the fruit. (Kulwant Singh, 2002). This seed, when sown in the soil of mind, sprouts in the form of the live of God, to fructify. "In *Kaliyug*, vice predominates, and as a result the human mind has lost much of its luster. Since *Naam* is the only detergent that can cleanse the mind, it alone has the capability to change the *Yug*. It functions at all levels, from micro to macro. There are two ways to live a human life – by treading the path of *Bhakti* (devotion to God) and by following the path of *Maya* (worldly attachments). The path of *Bhakti* leads to rewarding life, peace, happiness, bliss and union with God. The path of *Maya* ends in pain and suffering. (Sri Gurbax Singh, 1999). "Thus *Naam – Simran* is an inseparable part of a Sikh's life. In fact, Sikhi is synonymous with *Naam Simran*." (Kulwant Singh, 2002). *Simran* is a meditative prayer within; God's name is respected lovingly in short phrases. "*Wahe Guru, Wahe Guru, Wahe Guru Ji/Sat Naam, Sat Naam, Sat Naam Ji*" is prelude to *Naam-Simran*, the recitation of God's name. In *Simran*, God is revered. God's name is God's praise. God's name is a portal, a vessel, its repetition an act of humility.

The recitation of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is an essential part of daily prayer in any *Gurdwara*. *Guru Granth Sahib* is a compilation of the messages of the Sikh *Gurus*. It accommodates even Hindu *Gurus* who are basically preachers of *Bhakti* culture. There are messages from

Sufi poets and the message of Kabir – the great preacher of *Bhakti* philosophy in medieval India. There are a total of 31 *Raagas* in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. (Surinder Singh Kohli, 1996). It needs training to recite of this holy scripture, for which persons are trained from a very young age.

The *Guru Granth Sahib* highlights the glory of *Naam* and its utility in human life. The dictum “*Sarab rog ka aukhad Naam*” heralds a great truth. It is a great truth, which when fully grasped has the power to overcome all physical and mental illness. It can be induced to harness the earthly resources for the benefit of mankind. *Guru Granth Sahib* rejects all ritualism, formalism and symbolism. All the Braministic intermediaries and cadres of priesthood exploiting the masses in the name of religion, have been castigated as self serving and hypocritical. *Guru Granth Sahib* advocates the equality of all human beings, irrespective of birth and gender. The woman is, in no way, inferior to man. The *Guru Granth Sahib* presents a balanced combination of action (*Karma*), devotion (*Bhakti*) and knowledge (*Jnan*). It is essentially a religion of devotion whereas the body has to work for the well-being 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*. The best service towards the *Guru* and the Lord is the remembrance of the *Naam*. (Harkirat Singh, 2003).

### **Spiritual meaning of Naam:**

“According to *Gurbani* “*Ek Onkar*” denotes both *Sagun* (manifested) (it is written as *Sargun* in *Guru Granth Sahib*) and *Nirgun* (un-manifested) stages of ‘*Akal Purakh*’ *Waheguru*. In its pure form it is a musical sound – word, arising out of ‘*Sunn*’ (soundless state). It is pure knowledge giving rise to the energy and worldly order. The ‘Word’ is pervasive every where and is creator, protector and destroyer of all physical forms of life and lifeless. ‘He’ has countless attributes but all are ‘His’ manifested qualities. The real one is beyond comprehension, languages and words. One can get tuned to the ‘Word’ in the heart through the mind with ‘His’ grace through the words of a true ‘*Guru*’ and can actually listen and see its manifestation. For that he has to surrender to the *Guru* with full faith, carry out his commands in toto and recite ‘*Guru mantra*’ repeatedly all the time. ‘

*Guru mantra*’ is one of the manifested names of ‘*Ek Onkar*’ which has the capacity to link the disciple (Sikh) with ‘Word’. (Dilbagh Singh, 2004).

“It is stated in the *Guru Granth Sahib* that as we start understanding the depths of the *Guru*’s word and chant ‘*Guru mantra*’ we start getting a kind of bliss after due course of time according to the purity/impurity/hardness/mellowness of our mind and heart, brought about by our deeds (*Karma*). This irrigates our mind and body (perhaps through the nervous system) cleaning them of our ego, five vices and illusionary ‘*Maya*’. Side by side, Godly virtues get cultivated in our heart. It is a life long process and while doing so one does not eye the fruit but awaits grace. It is ‘His’ grace, which finally tunes in the *Gursikh* to ‘*Ek Onkar*’ where he actually sees and listens to the ‘Word’ *i.e.* *Nirgun* stage through a different eye. Here the Sikh, *Guru* and *Waheguru* are and the same. This stage may be attained while living or after leaving the body. This is the stage where *Guru* Nanak Ji and all other *Gurus* and Saints described ‘*Ek Onkar*’ through *Gurbani*.” (Dilbagh Singh, 2004).

After the 10<sup>th</sup> *Guru* Gobind Singh there is no loving *Guru* in Sikhism and *Guru* Gobind Singh asked the Sikhs to follow *Guru Granth Sahib* as the sole *Guru* and to follow its preaching as guide (*Guru Granth Ji maneo, pargat gurah kee deh, jo prabh ko millvo chahai, khoj shabad mein leh,*” - meaning – *Guru Granth Sahib* is one *Guru* and it represents philosophy (body) of all the *Gurus*, only *Shabad* will connect us with *akal purkh* (Dasam Granth, p. 248). In Sikhism, the Khalsa panth was established by *Guru* Gobind Singh, the 10<sup>th</sup> and the last *Guru* before three hundred years ago. Khalsa – the family of pure ones, to which a Sikh

may belong through receiving baptism or initiation (*Amrit/Khande di pahul*). Therefore, every Khalsa is a Sikh, but every Sikh is not a Khalsa, unless he/she receives baptism.

The basic definition of *Naam* is contained in the *Sukhmani* and some quotations from the *Guru Granth Sahib* are cited hereunder. (Daljeet Singh, 1998).

i) *Naam* sustains all religions and universes, all thought, knowledge and consciousness, all skies and stars, all forces and substances, all continents and spheres. *Naam* emancipates those who accept it in their heart.

ii) *Naam* is the creator of everything. To be divorced from *Naam* is death. All is created by *Naam*. *Naam* gives form to everything and through *Naam* comes all wisdom or light.

iii) *Naam* extends to all creation.

iv) *Naam*, is the 'Nine Treasures' and nectar (*Amrita*). It permeates the body.

v) *Naam*, the immaculate, is unfathomable. How can it be known? *Naam*, is within us, how to get it? The perfect *Guru* awakens your heart to the vision of *Naam*. It is by the grace of God that one meets such an enlightener.

There are numerous verses in the *Guru Granth* where *Naam* and God have been described synonymously. Therefore, *Naam* is dynamic immanence of God, which is making and readily sustaining the manifest world of force and form.

#### **Guru Nanak on Naam:**

"According to *Guru Nanak* everything in the universe is created by the power of Divine Name (*Naam*) and without the Divine Name there is no way (*The Japji*). He explains that all the visible forms are held by the Divine Name, everything takes its rise from the Divine Name and is again absorbed in it .... The Divine Name is synonymous with the Divine Word or *Shabad*." (R. M. Chopra, 2000).

*Guru Nanak* said,

Hearkening to the Name bestows Truth, divine wisdom, contentment, To bathe in the joy of the Name is to bathe in the holy places.

(*The Japji, Pauri, 10*)

It is held by *Guru Nanak* that God is *anaam* (nameless), yet He is possessed of infinite names. "Numberless, Thy Names and numberless Thy places" (*The Japji, Pauri, 19*). "In fact, *Guru Nanaka* took many prevailing attributive names of God for One Absolute Reality such as Vishnu, Brahma, Govinda, Gopal, Hari, Keshava, Krishna, Narayana, Parameswara, Ram, etc. from Hindu pantheons and Muhammadan names like Allah, Haq, Rahim, Khaliq, Khuda, Rahim, Rabb, etc. from Muslim Holy books. All these Names stand for the same God. To these names more names have been added by the Sikh Gurus such as, *Piara, Pritam, Mittar, Sajjan, Satguru, Waheguru*, etc." (R.M. Chopra, 2000).

#### **"Japu ta Eko Naam":**

Contemplate thou only the *Naam*. This expression is found in *Guru Granth Sahib*, Rag, Suhi Mahala I. The meaning of the technical terms '*Japu*' and *Naam*, expressed in the *Guru Granth Sahib* is as follows:

"*Japu* means prayer, meditation, *Naam* means the Spirit within, figuratively the *Naam* also means *Amrita* or nectar of immortality."

Sikhism, like Mahapurushiaism, prescribes *Naam Simran* in the company of *Satsang* or devotees (*Bhakta*). Literally *Satsang* means the *Sang* (Company) of *Sat* (*Naam, Guru* and God). Thus, Sikhism and Mahapurushiaism have the basic similarity of *Guru, Deva* (God), *Naam*, and *Satsang* (*Bhaktas*). The entire conception of the Ultimate Being is regarded as *Naam* or the 'Holy Name'. God is considered as *Nama-Rupa* in Mahapurushiaism.

In all the writings of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, *Naam*

occupies the Supreme place along with *Deva*. The *Naam* of Hari (Krishna) is synonymous with *Deva*.

Thus, both Mahapurushiaism and Sikhism glorify the *Naam* in their respective religions and *Naam* finds the supreme place of attaining devotion that is *Nirguna* Brahma. □

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