

Introduction: Guru Granth Sahib

The first compilation of the Granth Sahib included the Gurbani of the first five Gurus, hymns composed by fifteen Bhagats and contributions by other holy writers. It was compiled by Guru Arjun Dev in 1604 and was transcribed by Bhai Gurdas. The Granth Sahib was enthroned in the Harimandar Sahib (the Golden Temple) in Amritsar. The final form of the Guru Granth Sahib was edited by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib in 1706 and transcribed by Bhai Mani Singh. The Gurbani composed by the ninth Nanak was also included in this final version. Copies of this sacred compilation were sent to all major Sikh centers in India.

The Guru Granth Sahib, in its first form was name Pothi Sahib, which means Sacred Scripture. When Guru Gobind Singh, before leaving the human body at Nanded, formally invested the Guruship in the Gurbani (Guru Granth Sahib). The Guru Granth Sahib contains some six thousand hymns. Major contributions are from the first and the fifth Nanaks.

Gurbani is grouped into thirty-one Ragas. Each Raga is classified into the Chowpadey, the Ashtpadi, and the Chhand. Within each of these sections, Gurbani is arranged in chronological order, so that the writings of the First Guru appear first, and so on.

In the Guru Granth Sahib, preceding the Gurbani classified according to the Ragas, the Guru has incorporated three compositions: Jap, Sodar and Sohila. A Sikh should read Jap (Japji) in the morning, Sodar in the evening and Sohila before going to bed.

Var, wherever present, forms the last part of the Gurbani in a Raga. After the Vars, appears the Bhagat Bani or the hymns of the Bhagats, the holy men. These Bhagats include Kabir, a 'low caste' weaver; Farid, a Muslim fakir; Nam Dev, a 'low caste' calico-printer; Ravi Das, a shoemaker, an 'untouchable'; Dhanna, an ordinary cultivator. Jaidev, Trilochan, Rama Nand, Pipa, Sain and Surdas are some other Bhagats whose hymns are included in the scripture. The hymns of these Bhagats were incorporated into the Granth Sahib because they all speak of ONE God and the brotherhood of man. It is noteworthy that among these Bhagats are Muslims and Hindus of different classes including the so-called low castes, and even outcastes.

There are two other unique parts of Gurbani. The Var in Ramkali Raga is an account of the services of the first five Gurus. It was written by Satta and Balwand, the two musicians of the Guru period. The Bhatt Bani is written by a group of Bhattas, who were well educated and recognized as professional exponents of the Hindu scriptures. Bhattas visited Goindwal during the ministry of Guru Arjun Dev. They found in the Guru and Gurbani the peace and solace they had sought all their lives. These impressions are mentioned by them in their hymns.

The Guru Granth Sahib is written in Gurmukhi script. The language, which is most often Sant Bhasha, is very close to Punjabi. It is well understood all over northern and northwest India and was popular among the wandering holy men. Persian and some local dialects have also been used. Many hymns contain words of different languages and dialects, depending upon the mother tongue of the writer or the language of the region where they were

composed. Guru Nanak taught that no one particular language is more suitable than any other for praising God. *A person can pray in any language and worship God by any name, as long as he is sincere.*

Sikhs who read, sing, or listen regularly to Gurbani find such an occupation blissful. Gurbani explains God and His virtues as the Generator, Operator and Destroyer of the universe. Gurbani contains no stories. It tells us how to realize God. Some popular characters and mythological stories of Puranas and other old literature are cited as examples to explain that God is great and merciful.

Message of the Guru Granth Sahib

Some of the important lessons one learns by reading Gurbani can be mentioned in brief as below.

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

(Guru Granth, p. 1)

God is the Lord of the whole universe. He alone is the Father-Mother for all of us. While the universe is moving and changing according to His Will, He alone is unchanged, beyond time, He is neither born nor is He to die. He is ever self-existing.

ਤੂੰ ਸਾਝਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥

(Guru Granth, p. 97)

ਆਪਨ ਬਾਪੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੋ ਭਾਵਨ ਕੋ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ ॥

(Guru Granth, p. 658)

All people are His children. No one community or people of any particular religion have a franchise on Him or His blessings to claim that God is theirs alone and other communities will be sent to hell.

ਕਰਮੀ ਆਪੋ ਆਪਣੀ ਕੇ ਨੇੜੈ ਕੇ ਦੂਰਿ ॥
ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਤੇ ਮੁਖ ਉਜਲੇ ਕੇਤੀ ਛੁਟੀ ਨਾਲਿ ॥

(Guru Granth, p. 8)

All people will be judged by their deeds alone. Anyone who loves God achieves the mission of his life.

We will be judged by our deeds and not by the name of the faith we adopt. There is only one religion and it is practiced not by performing rituals, but by having sincere love for the people irrespective of their caste, color, country, community, belief, etc. Anybody of an

community/faith who loves God, can realize Him and achieve the purpose of his life. Of course, we can address Him by innumerable names like Allah, Ram Gobind, God, Guru, etc., depending upon one's liking and the community in which one is raised.

No person is a born sinner. Rather, this life has been gifted to us by God to enjoy singing His virtues. To love Him, one is to love His children, that is, all human beings. Every person is His manifestation and every person has His reflection within him/her.

The man-assumed heaven and hell are not particular places beyond our earth. The place where we love God and sing His virtues is actually the heaven, the place where one receives the blessings of God. A person who fails to love God actually lives in Hell on this very earth.

Gurbani says every day is a good day and very valuable in our life. A person is supposed to love God all the time. Every morning one should sit quietly to recite and concentrate on the virtues of God and do the same again when the day is over. Before going to bed, one is expected to tune one's mind to the blessings of God for a peaceful sleep and prepare for the day when he will 'sleep' forever.

Generally, people believe a particular day to be sacred and more appropriate for prayers. They consider it a must to say their prayers on that day. Christians go to their church on Sunday while for Jews the sacred day is Saturday and for the Muslims it is Friday. Among the Hindus, in addition to certain days of the week being considered either auspicious or inauspicious, Sankrand (first day of the Indian solar month), Pooran Masi (full moon), and Amavas (no moon) days are also considered sacred.

Gurbani rejects all these beliefs. It says God made days, not good or bad days. Those who worship days or dates considering them to be auspicious or inauspicious are naïve and ill informed.