

CONTRASTING THE UNIQUENESS OF SIKHISM WITH CHRISTIANITY

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ABSTRACT

Sikhism has been distorted in literature largely because of the influence of Vedantic philosophy to represent it as part of Hinduism. Now some Christian theologians are using this flawed literature to compare Christianity with Sikhism. According to the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1], Guru Nanak has rejected all the essentials of Hinduism: incarnation of God, caste system, transmigration, karma, hell, heaven, gods, goddesses, and idol worship. Guru Nanak has also rejected the method or approach for attaining salvation preached by the Semitic and the Indian religions. Guru Nanak discusses the subject of evolution of life about five hundred years ago, which is different than that of Christianity but very similar to that of Charles Darwin discovered about 350 years after Guru Nanak.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2004 Colonel GB Singh [4], the author of *Gandhi: Behind the Mask of Divinity* came across a Web site, “Hope for Sikhs” operated by Reverend Tony Zekveld, Canada-based missionary. Expectedly his motives were to witness the Sikhs for the purposes of converting them to Christianity. GB Singh persuaded the Reverend to have an open debate on the Bible - God, soul, and heaven etc. on the pages of *Sikh Spectrum*, an online publication. At that time GB Singh asked me to add my comments on these topics from the perspective of Nanakian philosophy [2]. This particular article is a rejoinder to the claims of Reverend Tony Zekveld [5], which is based on Nanakian philosophy embodied in the Gurbani incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1].

DISCUSSION

Reverend’s misunderstanding, misinterpretation and ignorance has been discussed as follows:

The Reverend:

1. *“The Granth Sahib states the simple fact that God created the universe. How and why He created no one knows. Furthermore, by the immanence of God, the Sikh means that the universe is “an emanation of God, who willed its existence,” like a spider, which emits its own web from itself. Sikhs, therefore, do not have any difficulty with the scientific theories of evolution.”*

Response:

I find this statement amusing. What is Reverend trying to say? Is he trying to scare ignorant and simple-minded people just because the Sikhs believe in the scientific

validity of evolution? While the Biblical God is opposed to the idea of evolution of life, the Nanakian philosophy supports it. While the fundamentalist Christians oppose the teaching of evolution even in the twenty-first century, Guru Nanak discussed and imparted credence to the subject of evolution of life about five hundred years ago, roughly 350 years before Charles Darwin, and come to think of it, finally, science is catching up with the Nanakian philosophy. Moreover, the Creator according to Guru Nanak is Itself evolving as in the very act of creation of the cosmos when the Transcendent became Immanent—the Invisible became Visible—the Un-manifest became Manifest.

Guru Nanak has expressed his views on the vastness of the cosmos, the time of its creation and how it came into being. When was the cosmos created?

kvxusivj || vKqukvx kvx iQiq kvx viru]

kvix is nqI mhu kvxij qurhAw Aukar]u

vj n puelAw plFqI ij hwI I KUpirixij

vKiq n piieE kudAw ij il Kin I Kikrwxij

iQiq virunw j gI j wxYriq mhuw kiel]

j || krq || isrTI kausij yAwpyj wxYsel]—

What was the moment or time or date or day or season or month when the cosmos was created? Had the authors of Hindu scriptures or Quran known it, they would have mentioned it. Neither did the yogi know the date or day or month or season. It is only the Creator, Who knows when the cosmos was created.

AGGS, Jap 21, p 4.

How vast is the cosmos?

piqil || piqil | K Angis|| Angis]
EVk EVk Bwil Qkyvd khin iek v|q]
shs AT|rh kihn kq|w Asl UiekuD|q|]
I K|| hie q il KIAI| K|hie ivx|su]
n|nk| vf|| A||KIA|A||py| |x| A||pu]

After an immense and tiring search the authors of Vedas concluded that there are hundreds of thousands nether worlds under nether worlds and skies above skies. The Semitic texts say there are eighteen thousand worlds, but their Creator is One. However, the cosmos is so vast that it is beyond the scope of counting / measurement (i.e. beyond human comprehension)—one would run out of numbers if one were to undertake the counting. Nanak salutes the Great One, as It alone knows the vastness of Its creation.

AGGS, Jap 22, p 3.

How did the cosmos come into being?

Guru Nanak postulates that there was darkness for immeasurable length of time and the Creator with inherent *Hukam* (Cosmic Law or Universal Law) was in transcendent mode filling the void like fog fills space. And then at some moment according to the Cosmic Law, the cosmos was brought into being with infusion of Cosmic-consciousness (also referred to as Spirit, Light and God-consciousness).

Arbd nrbd D|D|k|w|] Drix n ggn|| h|kmu|A||w|]
n|| idn|ur|n n c|t|un s|f|j us|h sm|id |g|wied|] ...
j|| iqsu B|x|| q|| jg|q| a||w|ieA||] b|u| k| || A||f|x|u|
r|h|ieAe]

For immeasurable length of time there was darkness. Neither there was Earth or sky nor day or night nor moon or sun, except the Creator and Its Hukam. The Creator was in a transcendent mode filling the void like fog fills space. The cosmos was brought into being according to the Hukam without any visible support upholding the vast expanse.

AGGS, M 1, p 1035.

The cosmos sprang from a single command of the *Hukam*.

kl|| ps||au| ek|okv||au|] iqs q|h|e| |K d|riA||au|]
The cosmos sprang from a single act of Hukam generating innumerable currents of creation.
M 1, Jap 16, p 3.

In total content the Creator remains the same (constant), neither It increases nor decreases, which is consistent with what modern physics says about the relationship

between energy and matter expressed by Einstein’s formula, $E=MC^2$ —the sum total of energy and mass remains constant.

vf|| n hm|G|it n j|ie]

The Creator neither increases nor decreases in totality.
AGGS, M 1, p 9.

According to Guru Nanak, this event—the creation of the cosmos which is a mystery and a matter of wonder, is a support for the Creator as it is pleasing to It to express Itself in the creation.

A||p|n|A||p|us|ij E A||p|n|r|icE n||au|]
d|k| kd|riq s|j |A| |k|ir A||s|x||ifT|o|c|au|]

First, the Creator created Itself and gave Itself an Identity (nau, नौ)—cosmos. Second, It created nature and seated therein (transcendently), It takes delight watching it.
AGGS, M 1, p 463.

Evolution

s|ic|y|q|p|v|| B|ieA|| p|v||q|j | |u|h|ie]
j | |q| |q|B|x||s||j A|| G|it G|it j |q| sm|ie]

The True One created the air, air produced water and water created the world of life with God-consciousness (Cosmic-consciousness).
AGGS, M 1, p 19.

When it comes to the evolution of life, Guru Arjan couldn’t have spoken more clearly than these words about years before Charles Darwin. *Homo sapiens* evolved through countless forms of life like other species - ants, worms, moths, fish, elephants, dears, snakes and domestic animals like horses and bullocks-starting from inanimate matter, the basic elements. Moreover, he goes on to say that basic elements were recycled as inanimate matter like rock and mountains before the creation of “building blocks” for evolution of a living cell.

kel j nm Beyk|t p|q|w|] kel j nm gj |m|n k|r|t|w|]
kel j nm p|k| srp h|ieE] kel j nm h|v|r |b|k |j|ieE]
im| |j|gd|s im| n k|l br|A||]
ic|r|k|| |eh d|h s|j| r|A||] r|h|E]
kel j nm s|l |g|ir k|irA||] kel j nm grB |h|ir K|irA||]
kel j nm s|k| k|ir a||w|ieA||] |K c|ar|s|h |j|n B|r|w|ieA||]

Many births (different evolutionary stages of life) created worm and insect. Many births created elephant, fish and deer. Many births created bird and snake. Many births created ox and horse, which are yoked. O human being, now is your time to meet the Lord of the universe, since it took a very long time for the human body to evolve through many evolutionary stages of life. Pause.

the chief of the regency council when this Devanagari Dasam Granth was created. In recognition of his services, the title of Raja was conferred on him on August 7, 1847 [3].

Takhat Patna came under the control of East India Company near the end of eighteenth century. The revenue records of Patna treasury show that Nirmalas / Mahants of Takhat Patna were provided with pension and opium from 1814 onwards by the East India Company [3].

Why did the Christian missionaries convert Maharaja Dalip Singh to Christianity? How much of the brainwashing tactic was applied? Were these missionaries trying to duplicate the lessons learnt from their past successes of first going after converting the King and then expecting the rest of the masses to follow suit? The case in point is the example of conversion of Emperor Constantine and thereafter imposing Christian faith on the subjects through threats and force. Little did the missionaries realize that in Nanakian philosophy the real sovereign is God, and not an earthly monarch! A Sikh owes his/her allegiance to God and Guru. And that is why the abominable act of converting Maharaja Dalip Singh failed to follow through the en-masse conversion of Sikhs, except for a few solitary examples.

The Reverend:

4. *"If God is without fear and enmity, then why is it that the Sikh fears doing bad? How do they account for their own deep spiritual unrest? Moreover, how does one account for what we read in their own writings that God cuts the head of the devil? Note these lines from the Padshahi in the Granth Sahib."*

The Reverend asks, "Why the Sikhs fear doing bad things if their God is without fear and enmity?" The answer to this question is on the opening page of the AGGS in the first stanza of Guru Nanak's composition Jap. The primary purpose of human life is to be one with God by becoming a *Gurmukh* (God-oriented, which requires living in harmony with God's *Hukm* (Universal Law). Moreover, civilized society demands of its members to be law-abiding and upright citizens. Sikhs, who have been misled about Sikhism, are the ones who suffer from spiritual unrest, not the ones who understand and practice Sikhism. Moreover, if the Reverend would look around, he will find that spiritual unrest is everywhere, especially among the Christians!

ikv sicA᳚᳚ hēIAI ikv k᳚᳚qtYp᳚]
h᳚km rj wēl cl x᳚ n᳚nk il iKA᳚ n᳚il]

How could one become a sachiara (Godlike), a God-oriented and how could one get rid of ignorance and falsehood? "By living in harmony with Hukm (Universal Law)," says Nanak.

AGGS, Jap 1, p 1.

The Reverend:

5. *"The concept of "grace" here must also be understood in the context of Hinduism. Because Sikhism is a particular kind of "guru cult," an adequate concept for their term of grace is "darshan" or "the guru's glance".*

Response:

Here the Reverend has given a literal interpretation of "grace". Grace in Nanakian philosophy means the benevolence of the Creator towards the creation. The very act of creation is grace. Being born as a human being is grace. The Creator has endowed mankind with superior intellect, critical thinking /discerning intelligence and conscience; this is what grace means:

kir krq᳚krx᳚l kir p᳚el] ij in klql iqin klmiq p᳚el]

The Creator created mankind and let it free to do as it wills. But how it was accomplished, only the Creator knows.
AGGS, M 1, p 932.

m᳚rt᳚l k᳚ ᳚y᳚d᳚h᳚᳚ kirA᳚] aik᳚iq j᳚iq ᳚᳚sr᳚iq pr᳚liKA᳚]

The Creator fashioned human body from the earthly elements and by some method endowed it with life, wisdom and discerning intellect.
AGGS, M 5, p 913.

The Reverend:

6. *"The Bible says that if we do not begin with Biblical God, neither will we end up with Him. There may be a way that seems right to you, but its end is the way of death. The Biblical God – He is true and living God. The Bible says that all things were created through Jesus Christ, Who is God, who is called Word. The only way we can know the Biblical God, the true living God is by believing in Jesus. God has revealed Himself in Jesus. He (Jesus) has made Him known."*

Response:

Guru Nanak rejected the type of God described in the Bible, as this God is nothing more than a tribal god, an exclusive God. For Guru Nanak the Creator is "One and Only" and Its creation, mankind is also one whereas belief in Biblical God leads to the balkanization or disintegration of mankind. The thoughts of many sages of diverse background that are compatible with the Nanakian philosophy are incorporated in the AGGS, however, there are no quotes from the texts of Semitic and Hindu religions, as these religions are based on the concept of an "exclusive God". In addition to the millions of gods, Hindus also believe in a God who communicates only through the Brahmans and then there is a God for the chosen people, the Jews. Christian God is approachable only through his only son Jesus Christ. For the Muslim, Mohammed is the last and final in a long line of Prophets of Allah (God) and they claim that theirs is the only true

prophetic religion.

God in Nanakian Philosophy

The God described in AGGS is easily understandable to all seekers of “Truth” irrespective of their creed, caste, gender, color, ethnicity and geographical considerations. Guru Nanak did not assign any specific name or gender to God. He used the prevalent names of God in usage by both the Hindus and the Muslims without any distinction along with addressing new names of his own. Most often in the AGGS, God is described by Its attributes like Creator, Formless, Transcendent, Omnipotent, Infinite and Ineffable or simply as True One, One or You or *Oh* meaning that or he / she.

A comprehensive definition of God is given by Guru Nanak at the beginning of the AGGS as follows:

< siq nimm krqw prKu inrBau inrvhu Akul mriq Aj hl sBligrpIsaid]

One and Only That is ineffable (in totality) – Truth is Its name, Creator, Omnipresent, Sovereign, Without enmity, Timeless Entity (unaffected by time), Beyond birth and death, Created by Itself, Enlightener and Bounteous.

AGGS, Commencing Verse, p 1.

Further down on the same page in the beginning of his composition of Jap, Guru Nanak has used the word *Sach*, meaning Truth for God and has emphasized its eternal nature.

Aiid scu j gaid scu] h'BI scu nink hsi BI scu]

Truth is primordial, It existed in the primal age, It exists now and It will exist forever,” proclaims Nanak.

AGGS, Jap, p 1.

God is ‘One’. This attribute has further been emphasized as follows:

siihbunr eko h'] eko h' Biel eko h']

My God is One, hey brother, It is One and Only.

AGGS, M 1, p 350.

ek mih srb srb mih ek eh siqqir djK idKiel]

The true Guru (God) has made me see that the One is in every thing and every thing is in One.

AGGS, M 1, p 907.

Ineffable God

In the AGGS, God has been described as infinite and ineffable again and again. In totality, God is beyond human reach and comprehension. A finite entity can't define an infinite entity. To emphasize this point Guru Nanak says:

kyq AwKih AwKix pwh] वेदे वरि वरि उठि उठि नरि ॥

epj klyh'ir krjh] q AwK n skih k'el kje]

How many people are attempting to describe the greatness of God and how many have passed away doing the same? If God were to create as many more as already created, even then they would not be able to describe the greatness of God.

AGGS, Jap 26, p. 6.

Nanakian philosophy categorically rejects the incarnation of God in human or any living form and the concept of virgin birth, resurrection, demons (Satan) and angels (Holy Ghost) and the Biblical concept of soul and sin. The Commencing Verse of AGGS describes God as *Aj hl* (*Ajuni*), meaning God does not come into anthropomorphic form. Guru Arjan echoed and amplified this view of Guru Nanak about God.

sqgru inrj nisie] mink ku kir r'pun j nu]

Satguru (God) is Niranjn — beyond Maya (without material content). Do not believe that It is in the form of man.

AGGS, M 5, p 895.

somKuj I auj qukh'ih Tikruj ni]

May that mouth burn, which says that God incarnates.

AGGS, M 5, p 1136.

Soul

Another major difference between Nanakian philosophy and other religions is the concept of soul. In Nanakian philosophy soul is God, the Transcendent One that permeates the entire cosmos and it is called as *jyoti* (light), *atma* or *jio* (spirit), *sabd-surt* (God-consciousness) and moral principles that guide life (conscience). Guru Nanak rejected the idea that soul is something separate from God and that it leaves the body after death to receive punishment or reward depending upon the person whose body it inhabits.

iek dJih iek dbIAih ieknu kyqK'ih]

ieik p'xl ivic asitIA'ieik BI iPir hsix p'ih]

nink ey n j'pel ikQ'j'ie sm'ie]

After death some bodies are burnt, some are buried and some are left to be devoured by animals/birds (dogs). Some are thrown in water while others are thrown in a dry well. There is no evidence / proof where the so-called soul ends after these different methods of disposal of the dead body,” opines Nanak.

AGGS, M 1, p 648.

mqukoj wxyj'ie Agl'p'iesl] j'hykrm km'ie qh' h'iesl]

Do not believe that the benefits of deeds performed in the current life will be rewarded in the next world.

AGGS, M 1, pp 729-730.

six mn imqrIpaWiraW iml vj w h'ieh]
j b l guj bin s'isuh'qb l g ieh qn idh]

O my mind, my dear friend, this is the time for you to meet the Creator. Moreover, this opportunity will last only as long as the body is healthy and full of vitality.
AGGS, M 1, p 20.

siB mih j iq j iq h'sie]
iqs k'c'ix SB mih c'ixuh'ie]

Within all there is light (God-consciousness) and it is Your light which is in all.
AGGS, M 1, p 663.

ek ik'snll srb d'j' d'j' d'j' q Awqm]
Awqm bisd'visij y k'j ix B'aj]
n'nk q'k' d'isuh'sel in'rj' n d'au]

The One Creator, Who takes care of all, is also Atma in all, The Atma is transcendent One. Nanak is at the service of one who understands this mystery; as such a person is God-like.
AGGS, M 1, p 1353.

Awqm mih rimurim mih Awqm]
God is in soul and soul is in God.
AGGS, M 1, p 1153.

ieaukh'n'nkum'n qll' iq s'rbuh'Awpx' mll up'c'ixu]
O my mind, the Universal light is within you, recognize your roots—the source of your origin—the Primordial Light—Energy.
AGGS, M 3, p 441.

siB mih j iq j iq h'sie]
iqs k'c'ix SB mih c'ixuh'ie]
Within all there is light and it is Your light which is in all.
AGGS, M 1, p 663.

sbd s'riq sk'abj y'pB r'iqausk s'ru]
One obtains comfort through sabd-surt (God-consciousness) by imbibing God's excellences, which are the source of bliss.
AGGS, M 1, p 62.

Besides, the Sikh Gurus do not talk about the past life or the life after death, what they talk about and lay stress on is the present life. For example,

iml uj gdl's iml n kl brIAW] ic'rk'ul ieh d'j' s'j' rIAW]
This is your chance to meet the Lord of the universe, meet Him. It took a very long time for the human body to evolve through many evolutionary stages.

AGGS, M 5, p 176.

Bel pr'p'iq m'nk d'j' rIAW]
g'ib'itl iml x kl ieh q'rl brIAW]

Take advantage of your human birth, as this is your only opportunity to meet God.
AGGS, M, 5, p 378.

m'ns d'j' bh'ir nh p'ivih k'Clap'au'mik'iq k'w krury]
n'nk kh'qu'gie k'rim'lv'sv'igr k'lp'wir aq'ru'ry]

“You won’t be born again, take some measures to obtain salvation right now. Praising the Merciful One, will take you across the ocean of worldly temptations,” says Nanak.
AGGS, M 9, p 220.

Aug'hw k'll'q'ig ip'c'w P'jr n'w mh'f'v'w]
n'nk isi'j iev'j'w v'ir bh'i'v n'w h'wl j nm'v'w]

“Don’t look to the past, make efforts to move ahead. This is the only chance to meet God because you won’t be born again,” this is how Nanak understands.
AGGS, M, 5, p 1096.

Salvation

Attaining of salvation in Sikhism is different than other religions:

ivic d'nIAW s'j' k'm'el'AY] q'w dr'gh b'ls'ix'ip'el'AY]
It is service to others that earns seat in God’s court.
AGGS, M 1, p 26.

Anid'nuj w'ig rhy'il v l w'el] j lvn m'kiq giq A'q'ir p'el]
He, who remembers God all the time, becomes a jivan mukta by seeking within.
AGGS, M 1, p 904.

In a hymn addressed to Muslims Guru Nanak says, “The mere fact of subscribing to the faith of Prophet Muhammad ensures nothing, neither paradise nor salvation because Allah is inscrutable.”

hkup'rieAW n'nk'w a'isus'IA'ru'as'ug'ie]
g'ir pl'ru'h'm'w q'w Br'j'w m'rd'ru'n k'wie]
gl l i'bs'qun j w'el'AY'c'at'y's'cu'k'm'wie]
m'rx p'wih h'rw'm mih h'ie hl'wl un j'wie]
n'nk'ug'l l k'w'el k'w'ol'p'ip'ie]

To violate or usurp someone’s right is like eating pork for a Muslim and cow for a Hindu. The Guru/Prophet would support only if the follower does not make unlawful living. Mere talk does not lead to paradise; salvation lies in right conduct. If you add spice to unlawfully earned food, it does not become lawful (Halal). Nanak, falsehood begets only falsehood.
AGGS, M 1, p 141.

schuErYsBuk0apir scuAuciru]

Truth is higher than every thing but higher still is truthful living.

AGGS, M 1, p 62.

Aml ukir Drql blj usbd0kir sic kl Awb inq djh pwxl]
hie ikrsuxuelmnuj thwie lYiBsqudj kumVyejv j wxl]

Let your daily actions be the field, sow the seed of Sabd (Word, Truth, and Divine knowledge) and water it daily with truth. Work hard like a farmer and grow a crop of firm belief. O ignorant one, then you would understand the meaning of hell and heaven.

AGGS, M 1, p 24.

The above philosophy is further strengthened by other Sikh Gurus as follows:

j lvn mkiq s0AwKIAlmir j lVlmlrIAV]
j n nink siqgrumjl hir j gudqruqriAV]

Nanak says, "One crosses the ocean of worldly temptations when the true Guru unites one with God. Such a one who obtains freedom from the influence of haumain (self-centeredness) is called jivan mukta."

AGGS, M 4, p 449.

pB kl AwigAw Awqm ihqivV] j lvn mkiq salkhivV]

He, who abides by God's Will, is a liberated person—one who obtains salvation (jivan mukta).

AGGS, M 5, p 275.

As you sow so shall you reap?

Contrary to the Christian belief that human beings are born sinners, Nanakian philosophy makes it abundantly clear that the Creator blesses human beings with God-consciousness. It is only when one loses touch with God-consciousness and becomes alienated--then that one commits a sin.

ieaukhYninkumn qllj iq sribuhYAwpxw ml upCuxu]

O my mind, the Universal light (God-consciousness) is within you, recognize your roots—the source of your origin .

AGGS, M 3, p 441.

People do not become virtuous or sinners by calling them so. It is their deeds that determine whether they are virtuous or sinners. It is their deeds that determine their union or separation from God. One reaps what one sows:

j Yw krysuqSiv puvV]
Awip blj Awpyhl KivV]

One gets what one does, and what one sows, so shall one reap.

AGGS, M 1, p 662.

idnurIn Apnw kIAw puel]
iksuds n dljYikrqvBvuel]

We earn what we do day and night. Why blame others, it is our own doings that lead us astray.

AGGS, M 5, p 745.

cllgAwelAw birAwelAw vucVDrmuhdllir]

krml AwpoAwpxl kyrvYkydlir]

Good and bad deeds determine the relationship with God. According to their deeds some are drawn closer to God, whereas others move away.

AGGS, Jap Sloka, p 8.

How to become Truthful?

The above question is very common, which usually asked. Guru Nanak replies to live harmony with the Laws of Universe:

ikv sicAwrw h0elAVikv kVYqtYpwl]

hkm rj wel cl xw nink il iKAw nnil]

How could one become a sachara (Godlike), a God-centered being (gurmukh) and how could one get rid of ignorance and falsehood? "By living in harmony with Hukam (Universal Law)," says Nanak.

AGGS, Jap 1, p 1.

The Sidhas questioned Guru Nanak. How could one get rid of ignorance and falsehood? Guru Nanak replied as follows:

qrw kvxugrVij s kw qlcj w]

sbdugrVsrjq Din cj w]

"Who is your Guru or whose disciple are you?" "Sabd (Truth, Divine knowledge) is the Guru and my mind, which is focussed on the Sabd and comprehends it, is the disciple." Replied Guru Nanak.

AGGS, M 1, pp 942-43.

CONCLUSIONS

The God as presented in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib is rational, benevolent, loving, merciful, forgiving and the Creator of all. It embraces all seekers of "Truth" with a bear hug, irrespective of their creed, caste, gender, color, ethnicity and geographical consideration.

SBysuJlvw sdwiein qllksYn idsih bwhrw j lau]

All are partners in Your commonwealth and You do not look at anyone as a stranger.

AGGS, M 5, p. 97.

nw kobhl nhl ibgunw sgl sllg hm kaubin Awel]

Enmity to none, nor we consider anyone stranger, getting along with all is our creed.

AGGS, M 5, p. 1299).

(Continued on page 14)

