INTRODUCTION

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) laid the foundation of Sikhism during the 15th century, the Period of Renaissance (between 14th century and 17th century) when the scientists were challenging some of the concepts of the church in Europe. During this period Guru Nanak was busy in challenging the ancient mythology and rituals in which the peoples of South Asia were shackled for centuries and were unable to express their free will in any aspect of their lives because their lives were controlled by their religious mentors. Guru Nanak promulgated a unique philosophy that is scientifically and logically very sound and has all the characteristics of universal acceptability [2, 7]. His philosophy is termed as Nanakian Philosophy [4]. It was strengthened, enriched and preached by the nine succeeding Gurus to the House of Nanak called Nanakian School. The words ‘Sikh’ and ‘Sikhi’ means ‘Teachings/philosophy’ of Guru Nanak according to Gurbani. The word ‘Sikhi’ gave rise to the modern anglicized word ‘Sikhism’. And the follower of this philosophy is called as ‘Sikh’.

Misinterpretation of Gurbani and Misrepresentation of Sikhism

Due to historical circumstances, after the death of Guru Gobind Singh there was systematic annihilation of the Sikh population by the Mogul rulers and their collaborators, the proponents of caste ideology. During the first quarter of the 18th century there were not many Sikhs left who could read or write Gurbani, not to speak of exegete it. It was during this period when Sikh places of worship fell under the control of Udasis and Nirmalas, who created their own version of Sikh. During this period most of the writings have misinterpretation of Gurbani and misrepresentations of Sikhism [3].

The Sikhs liberated Gurdwaras after a bloody struggle in the 1920s against the Mahants, Nirmalas and Udasis, but unfortunately misinterpretation of Gurbani and misrepresentation of Sikhism continued to be based on the inauthentic literature produced by Nirmalas and Udasis. Currently, the situation is the same and Gurbani is being translated into English and other languages without any efforts to interpret it in its real perspective.

I would like to add here views of some scholars about the old Sikh literature:

According to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha [9] the old Sikh literature (of the 18th and 19th centuries) has been written according to the level of intelligence and beliefs of the writers. From this old literature we are getting a lot of useful information as well as that is contrary to the Gurmat (Nanakian Philosophy). He has also emphasized
that the most important thing is that there is a dearth of research scholars but on the other hand there are many, who are deadly against the research scholars and would declare them as atheists or the enemies of Gurmat.

Prof Puran Singh [12] wrote about misinterpretation of Gurbani during 1920s as follows:

“It is to be regretted that Sikh and Hindu scholars are interpreting Guru Nanak in the futile terms of the colour he used, the brush he took; are analyzing the skin and flesh of his words and dissecting texts to find the Guru’s meaning to be the same as of the Vedas and Upanishad! This indicates enslavement to the power of Brahmanical tradition. Dead words are used to interpret the fire of the Master’s soul! The results are always grotesque and clumsy translations which have no meaning at all.”

The critical analysis of the following observation of Dr Gopal Singh [10] clearly indicates that due to improper understanding of Guru’s Word the Granth started to be worshipped more than read, uttered as a magical formula or a Mantram for secular benefits:

"The confusion of interpretation has occurred because the Sikhs themselves, for historical and other reasons, have never seriously attempted a scientific and cogent exposition of the doctrines of their faith, based on the Word of the GURU-GRANTH and related to the historical lives of the Gurus who uttered it. Without reference either to one or the other, casual attempts made at the interpretation of small portions of the Granth has resulted in such interpretations being incoherent, lop-sided, and therefore unreliable. During the present (now last) century, several attempts were made by the Sikhs to translate into Punjabi the Word of the Guru, but all such attempts ended in an all-too-literal translation, leaving the seeker as uninitiated to the Guru’s Word as he was before. And the word of the GURU-GRANTH became as involved and distant for an average reader as the Word of the Vedas, and it started to be worshipped more than read, uttered as magic formula or a Mantram for secular benefit than as a disciple of spiritual life for the achievement of ideals higher and beyond the world of sense and for the integrity of mind and soul in the world of the living.”

I appreciate the efforts of the Department of Guru Nanak Studies of the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar where the 20th Annual Seminar, Multidisciplinary Studies on Slokas, Varan tae Vadheek of Mahal I, is being held on March 6-7, 2006. On that very similar objective the Institute for Understanding Sikhism (IUS), Laval, Canada is busy to represent Nanakian Philosophy embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak into its real perspective since 1999. During the last 8 years the IUS has published two books, one booklet and 8 volumes of its biannual periodical, UNDERSTANDING SIKHISM –

The Research Journal.

Our research on the Bani of Guru Nanak has clearly indicated that philosophy embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak is based on science and logic; therefore, it has all the characteristics of universal acceptability [2, 7]. Since the objectives of both the institutes, the IUS and the Department of Guru Nanak Studies, are same, therefore, they have great responsibilities to disseminate Nanakian Philosophy in its real perspective to the humanity of the Modern Science Age.

DISCUSSION
I have picked up following Sloka # 10 of Guru Nanak to compare its traditional interpretations of some prominent scholars with that of my scientific and logical approach to interpret Gurbani:

Slok, Varan tae Vadheek, M 1. #10

Kalar kaeree chhapree

A. Traditional Interpretations

The traditional interpretations of the above Sloka of Guru Nanak are based on the information given in the old writings and bias of the interpretors. Since this type of traditional interpretations have been accepted in the past, therefore, no contemporary scholars of the Modern Science Age dares to deviate from this type of traditional interpretations to expore its originality and uniqueness lest they become unpopular among the Sikh masses.

Here I have picked up English interpretations of Manmohan Singh, which has been published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Amritsar; of Dr Sant Singh Khalsa, whose interpretation is easily available on the Internets and is consulted by almost all the Sikhs who have Internet access; and Punjabi interpretation of Dr Sahib Singh, which is accepted as the most modern interpretation and is widely accepted by the majority of the Sikh, for comprision to show that there is hardly any deviation to interpret the above Sloka in its real perspective:

1. Manmohan Singh [11]:
   The crow rubs and washes itself in the small pool of saline
Its mind and body are dirty with demerits and its beak too is filled with filth.
The swan of the lake, not knowing the crow is an evil bird, associated with it.
Such is the love with the mammon-worshipper.
Understand thou this, O divine, through the Lord’s love.
Shout thou the victory of the saints’ guild and do the deeds of a pious person.
Immaculate is the abulation, O Nanak at the sacred shrine of the Guru-river.

2. Dr Sant Singh Khalsa [8]:
The crow rubs and washes itself in the mud puddle. Its mind and body are polluted with its own mistakes and demerits, and its beak is filled with dirt.
The swan in the pool associated with the crow, not knowing that it was evil.
Such is the love of the faithless cynic; understand this, O spiritually wise ones, through love and devotion.
So proclaim the victory of the Society of the Saints, and act as Gurmukh.
Immaculate and pure is that cleansing bath, O Nanak, at the sacred shrine of the Guru’s river.

3. Dr Sahib Singh [13]

A person whose mind and body have become dirty with sins and bad deeds and whose mouth is also full with filthy language, tries to cleanse himself by bathing his body and mouth in the pool of alkaline water. (Although the alkaline water has the cleansing power, it cannot cleanse the sinful mind.)

The above interpretation is conveying the same philosophy of Guru Nanak, which has already been summarized in the JAP (The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy) [5]. In the following stanzas Guru Nanak explains the use of chemical (soap) to clean the dirty clothes and cleansing of mind by conducting good deeds as follows:

B. Scientific and Logical Interpretation
Scientifically it is a pool of alkaline water containing sodium hydroxide, which when combines with fatty or oily excretions of body becomes soap resulting in cleaning of the dirty body. I have noticed myself during 1950s in Amritsar, Punjab, India that some people used to collect the white fluffy stuff produced on the surface of the alkaline soils for washing their dirty clothes. During rainy season the rain water washes fluffy alkaline powder from the surface of the soil, which gets collected in the low areas to form a small pool of alkaline water. It was a common scene during rainy season that crows wash their dirty feathers in that pool of alkaline water since this water has a cleansing power. However, now no one can witness this phenomenon since all the alkaline soils have been reclaimed in the Punjab.

(Nota: *Cleanse: suggests more specifically the use of chemicals, purgatives, etc., and is often used metaphorically to imply purification [to cleanse one’s mind of evil thoughts]).

Keeping in view Nanakian Methodology [6] used by Guru Nanak in expressing his philosophy, scientific information on alkaline soil, and the use of allegoric, metaphoric, and symbolic expression, the interpretation of the following stanzas would be different than the traditional and literal English translation of above authors:

The above interpretation is conveying the same philosophy of Guru Nanak, which has already been summarized in the JAP (The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy) [5]. In the following stanzas Guru Nanak explains the use of chemical (soap) to clean the dirty clothes and cleansing of mind by conducting good deeds as follows:

i) Comments
All the above scholars have translated/interpreted “कल्र क्यरी कप्वी” as “pool of saline land”; “mud puddle” and “(बिल्कल दे) कबोल दी बाज्ही”. In all cases it means a “pool of dirty water”. In fact it is not dirty water.

Only Dr Sahib Singh has done good job at least to explain the ‘crow’ as the metaphor for sinful person but stuck to the traditional interpretation of “कल्र क्यरी कप्वी” to “pool of dirty water” like others. However, none of the above authors had mentioned the cleansing quality of the alkaline water and also failed to explain that even the chemical cleansing quality of this water cannot cleanse the sinful mind.
If hands are soiled with dust then cleansing method is ‘use of simple water’.
If clothes are soiled with urine then cleansing method is ‘use of soap’.
If mind is polluted with sin then cleansing method is ‘use of conscience’ (imbibing Naam).

One does not become virtuous person or vicious person just by saying these words (or pretending to be so). It is so because of one’s repeated good or bad deeds that make one as virtuous or vicious.

Nanak says:
What one sows, so one shall reap? (Because)
Every action and reaction is happening under the Laws of Universe.

Similarly, Guru Nanak even condemns the bathing at sacred places to cleanse the filthy mind:

I would bathe at holy places, if it pleases (the almighty).
If this practice is not accepted then bathing at holy places is of no avail. All the bounties, created (by God) that I see cannot be obtained without performing good deeds. AGGS, Jap 6, p 2.

Listening and accepting (Nanakian Philosophy); and developing love (for God and humanity) is equivalent to bathing at holy places, which removes the inner dirt of mind (the polluted mind).
AGGS, Jap 21, p 4.

Let us consider the next stanzas of the above Sloka:

Let’s consider the next stanzas of the above Sloka:

**Comments**

**Scientific and Logical Interpretation**

**Other Meanings of kalar (kalar)**
I would also like to explain that kalar (kalar - the alkaline soil) has been used as a metaphor for something of...
unproductive, weak or deteriorative nature. But one has to see in which context this word has been used. For example, in the following stanzas it has been used as bad and of destructive nature of alkaline soil (Kalar):

Why are you wasting your life watering the alkaline soil (to grow crops). (Because in alkaline soils many crops do not grow.) Why are you plastering the wall made of alkaline soil since the wall erected with alkaline soil will ultimately fall down. AGGS, M 1, p 1171.

(Continued from page 36)

In above Rahoo (Pause) Guru Nanak is explaining allegorically, metaphorically and symbolically to a Brahmin why are you wasting your life in useless rituals. It is just like watering the alkaline soil to grow crop and plastering the wall of alkaline soil which can fall down any time.

Here again Guru Nanak’s explanation is based on scientific information that alkaline soil cannot support growth of many crops since the high concentration of salt raises the osmotic pressure of the alkaline solution in the soil higher than that of the crop plant then reverse osmosis occurs and nutrients flow back to the soil and plants die. However, now the farmer can grow some crops like rice which can tolerate high concentration of salts.

CONCLUSIONS

The critical analysis of the above verse of Guru Nanak indicates that:
1. The traditional interpretations are mostly literal translations and are based on traditions widely accepted by people for centuries and the bias of the interpreters.
2. Such interpretations do not convey originality and uniqueness of Nanakian Philosophy.
3. To interpret Gurbani in its real perspective it is important to keep in view:
   i) Nanakian Methodology used by Guru Nanak to express his philosophy in his Bani.
   ii) Allegories, metaphors and similes used in Gurbani should be distinguished then should be interpreted according to the context used for.
4. There is a need to interpret Gurbani keeping in view the scientific knowledge and logic for the humanity of the Modern Science Age.

REFERENCES