

AKHAND PAATH IN SIKHISM

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In these days importance of performance of various rituals around the ‘Guru Granth’ rather on deliberation of ‘Sabd Guru’ is evident from the recent observation made by Mr Sukhminder Singh Hansra, Anchorman of Ankhila Punjab TV Program (Vision TV) and Editor of *Sanj Swera* on the reading of 18 Akhand Paaths in a row in one room. He also took a great courage to pose the following question for discussion on the *Gurmatdiscussion* Group on the Internet on November 12, 2000:

However, it is important that during reading there should be discussion on the philosophy given in the *Paath* [See Ref # 1 also].

Bhai Kahn Singh [3] further says that during the time of Gurus no Akhand Paath was performed. The custom of Akhand Paath was started by the Buddha Dal, who used to live in forest and wanted to finish Paath in shortest possible time because of the possibility of sudden attack by the enemy. Then it was picked up by



**What is GURMAT in this direction?
If Guru Granth Sahib is our living Guru then is it
OK to have 18 Akhand Paaths in same room ?**

The above question posed by Mr Hansra is the most important and thought provoking if we want to bring back Sikhism in its originality during the 21st century. Therefore, it is the duty of the Sikh intelligentsia, the Sikh religious authorities, and the Sikhs at large to ponder upon this question seriously.

Bhai Kahn Singh, the most learned and respected personality among the Sikh scholars, says in *Gurmat Martand* [3] that *Paath* should be done by a person for himself/herself or could be recited by one's friends or relatives or intellectuals then it should be listened to carefully. It is not necessary to read it uninterrupted.

Taruna Dal. By and by it was picked up by the Granthis of many Gurdwaras and it became a custom or ritual to perform Akhand Paath. Now at some places 101 Akhand Paaths are read concurrently. Some devout Sikhs instead of reading the Paath themselves get it read by hired readers (*Granthis*) and consider that they have done a great *Punn* (charity). And those devout Sikhs, who cannot go to the Gurdwara or Dehra of their choice, buy through post the Akhand Paath that is either already read or to be read for them.

The Sikh Rehit Maryada published by the SGPC accepts the reading of Akhand Paath as a code for the Sikhs and describes how to perform the Akhand Paath. Nevertheless, it also recommends that Paath should be read by the family or by relatives or by the Sangat. In case the Paath is to be read by the hired Granthis then

the whole family should listen to it. In spite of the above code the SGPC sells Akhand Paaths performed in and around the sanctum sanctorum (Darbar Sahib Complex) at Amritsar on internet (Please see Web site of the SGPC).

Nanakian Philosophy and Akhand Paath

Just uninterrupted reading (Akhand Paath) of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) is not recommended anywhere in the Nanakian Philosophy. Instead it has been emphasized again and again for discussion/deliberation (*Vichaar*) of the *Sabd* (Nanakian Philosophy). For example, Proper understanding of Nanakian Philosophy (*Sabd*) can only be done through discussion:

ਸਬਦਾ ਪਿਰ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਬਲਿਕਾਰੁ] AGGS, M 1, P 904.

"Deliberation / discussion on the sabd (Nanakian Philosophy) of the Guru (in the AGGS) is highest of all types of religious worships."

ਿਖੁ ਸਿਗਿਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਨ ਜੁ ਪਨਿ ਿਜੁ ਚੁ ਸਬਿਦੁ ਨ ਕਰਿ ਬਲਿਕਾਰੁ]

AGGS, M 1, P 936.

"Without the True Guru the virtues cannot be realized. And the virtues cannot be realized until the Sabd (Nanakian Philosophy) is deliberated."

Guru Nanak also says that the seva (service) to the Guru is to comprehend his philosophy:

ਗੁਰੁ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਿਚਾਰੁ] ਹਮਨੁ ਮਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਸਿਰੁ]

ਜੁ ਪੁ ਚੁ ਸੁ ਮਿ ਪੀਟਿ ਪਿਰੁ ਿਖੁ] ਕੁਨਿ ਕੁ ਅਪਿ ਪਿਰੁ ਮਨੁ]

AGGS, M 1, P 223.

Guru Nanak says:

"The service to the Guru is to comprehend his philosophy.

And the one who eliminates ego and does good deeds is the greatest service to the Humanity.

Doing good deeds and knowing the Almighty is equal to all your meditation, austerities and reading of Puranas."*

(* Now reading of the AGGS also)

The theme in the above verses is that the service to the Almighty is to comprehend the *Sabd* (Nanakian Philosophy) and practice what is given there. The other principles of the Nanakian Philosophy given there are eliminating of ego and doing good deeds for the humanity. Such practices are equal to all types of meditations, austerities and reading of religious books.

It will not be difficult to pin point that **degradation in Sikh practices** is due to improper and incomplete understanding of Nanakian Philosophy by the Sikh religious authorities, Sikh political parties, and the members of the executive committees of Gurdwaras in India and in the foreign countries. This happened due

to the fact that the Sikh religious authorities, Sikh preachers, *Kirtanias*, *Sants*, *Kathakaars*, and *Granthis* ignored the real message, the Nanakian Philosophy, given in the prime (*aad*) and authenticated source, the AGGS. Instead they have been putting more emphasis on unauthentic information given in the extraneous writings that lead to misinterpretation of Gurbani and misrepresentation of Sikhism by the Sikh as well as non Sikh scholars. (Read about "*Causes of misinterpretation of Gurbani and misrepresentation of Sikhism and the solution*" by Prof DS Chahal in the current issue.)

Consequently, ritualism around the '**Granth Guru**' (AGGS) became more common than the emphasis on the understanding of Nanakian Philosophy given in the '**Sabd Guru**' [See ref # 2]. Our clergy began to take pride in quoting and singing hymns not from the AGGS but taken from outside sources, authenticity of which is always questionable. Our Ethereal Guru, the AGGS, though being worshiped/respected by the Sikhs from the core of their hearts, seems to be forgotten when needed to take guidance on spiritual, moral, and social problems; and bioethics. (Read the consequences of incomplete comprehension of Nanakian Philosophy by the Sikh clergy in '*The Year 2000 in Sikhism*' in this issue.)

Sale of Akhand Paath from the Harmandir Sahib, which is against the basic principles of Nanakian Philosophy was announced on Web site of the SGPC. The Akand Paath can be bought through Email and the Hukmnama is sent through Email when Akhand Paath is completed. Removal of advertisement for sale of Akhand Paath from the SGPC Web site was requested by Mr Harpreet Singh of Sikh Heresy Regulation Board, New York (zafarnamah@hotmail.com). It is encouraging to know that the removal of advertisement for sale of Akhand Paath on the SGPC Web site was accepted by Jathedar Talwandi as reported by Kirpal Singh of SGPC Web in charge.

Now it is the duty of the Sikh clergy and the executive Committees of every Gurdwara to explain about the Paath of the AGGS according to the Nanakian Philosophy to the Sikhs.

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