

APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE FROM VARIOUS SCIENCES AND LOGIC TO INTERPRET GURBANI

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ABSTRACT

Gurbani is the absolute truth and the truth does not shake or waiver with time or contradicts itself. Truth from Science and truth from Gurbani must eventually converge to remove myths trickled down to us from Hindu mythology that has influenced interpretation of Gurbani. We have suggested both the scientific and spiritual perspectives to remove such doubts. It is concluded that use of science as a modern tool helps comprehend and understand, and gives a better picture of the total philosophy rather than leave things in myths and up to individual interpretations. The concept of God by Guru Nanak and modern science is similar which is important in understanding Gurbani.

INTRODUCTION

It is very disconcerting to read literal meanings of Gurbani. Gurbani created by any Guru, Bhagat or Bhatt should carry the same theme. But it differs in literal translation and conveys a wrong message, as for example, in Bhagat Trilochan and Bhatt Mathura sabds given here. There cannot be two interpretations of Gurbani. It is the absolute truth and the truth does not shake or waiver with time. However, many myths have trickled down to us from Hindu mythology and people over time have come to believe them. We need our scholars to do research using analytical minds so that they can help us remove such doubts that creep in our minds.

One of the strongest motivations of humankind is to seek answers to profound questions, and we need to bring all the power of both the scientific and spiritual perspectives to bear on understanding what is both seen and unseen. This is the approach we need in interpretation of Gurbani.

Guru Nanak and his successors were not scientists in the traditional sense. But none of their writings are at odd with modern scientific concepts. If science is used as a tool to explain some of their writings, it becomes easier to comprehend and understand, and perhaps get a better picture

of the total philosophy rather than leave things in myths and up to individual interpretations. The concept of total philosophy is important to understand the basic philosophy of Gurbani for proper interpretation or what we call interpretation in the real perspective.

The scientific concepts enhance our understanding about what were mysteries before. Scientific discoveries are not about damaging a religious faith or creating a new religion, sect or movement but to complement our understanding in a positive way (3).

The Message of Gurbani and Its Interpretation

In the absence of proper tools of understanding Gurbani even the learned scholars differ on the same theme. Here are some examples from recent missives on GLZ (Gurmat Learning Zone). My views, keeping in mind the basic philosophy and science, are also given. Even in daily practice of Gurbani, Dr Khokhar and Prof Kirpal Singh are in favor of use of *Mala* (rosary) for *Naam Japna*. On the other hand the missive of Mr Rawel Singh is against the use of *Mala* for *Naam Japna*. I endorse Rawel Singh's views.

Similarly, I noticed a duality in another discussion about existence of MIRACLES

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in Gurbani. Mr Rabinder Singh Bambra supports the existence of miracles in Gurbani, and possession of *ridhi* and *sidhi* (supernatural powers) by Yogis and Siddhas while Mr Mohinder Singh Sahni opposes the acceptance of miracles and *ridhi* and *sidhis* in Gurbani. Here I support the views of Mr Sahni.

Though our Gurus did not believe in reincarnation, yet Bhattas held Ram and Krishna as Divine incarnates, believed that Guru Nanak and his four successor Gurus were Ram and Krishna reborn. Here my views are that there is no reincarnation, and Rama and Krishna are not reborn as Sikh Gurus. Kabir Ji also says that we are not born again and again (reincarnated) as humans.

ਕਬੀਰ ਮਾਨਸ ਜਨਮ ਦੁਲੰਭੁ ਹੈ ਹੋਇ ਨ ਬਾਰੈ ਬਾਰ ॥

kabeer maanas janam dulambh hai ho-ay na baarai baar.

Kabir, Precious human existence does not come over and over again.

AGGS, Kabir, p 1366. (1)

Similarly Guru Arjan says that:

ਆਗਾਹਾ ਕੂ ਤ੍ਰਾਖਿ ਪਿਛਾ ਫੇਰਿ ਨ ਮੁਹਡੜਾ ॥

aagaahaa koo taraagh pichhaa fayr na muhadrraa.
Look forward; don't turn your shoulder backwards.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਿਝਿ ਇਵੇਹਾ ਵਾਰ ਬਹੁੜਿ ਨ ਹੋਵੀ ਜਨਮੜਾ ॥੧॥

naanak sijh ivayhaa vaar bahurh na hovee janamrhaa.
॥1॥

O Nanak, be successful in this life. You shall not be born again. ॥1॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1096.

These examples suggest that we should not take Gurbani too literally. We should take a broader view of Gurbani to interpret in the modern age of science and technology.

Why is there duality in understanding the message of Gurbani?

What is the real message of Gurbani about these and other subjects?

The problem with the great theologians and researchers is that they are interpreting Gurbani according to their own single-minded knowledge and whims without considering the proper methodology for interpreting Gurbani. The answer to the above two questions lies in understanding the basic philosophy and use of science as a tools for proper understanding of Gurbani in its originality.

The essence of the Gurbani message starts with *Mool Mantra* (basic principle) which is the expression of *JAP* in as few words as possible. The philosophy of

our founding Guru Nanak is expressed in *Mool Mantra* and *JAP* which is extended into the entire Gurbani of our holy Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS).

The central theme of Gurbani is that there is only one God (*Ek Onkar*), who is known by different names in different religions. It is not outside the world. The God, a creator is in the creation and creation is in the creator.

ਖਾਲਿਕੁ ਖਲਕ ਖਲਕ ਮਹਿ ਖਾਲਿਕੁ ਪੂਰਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਸ੍ਰਬ ਠਾਈ ॥੧॥
ਰਹਾਉ ॥

khaalik khalak khalak meh khaalik poor rahi-o sarab thaa-ee.

The Creation is in the Creator, and the Creator is in the Creation, totally pervading and permeating all places.

AGGS, Kabir, p1350.

Science says the same. The very first word of *Ek Onkar* in *Mool- Mantra* expresses exactly the same concept which is the foundation of all modern relativistic science: $E=mc^2$. *Ek Onkar*: The Creator (energy) and the Creation (matter) are ONE! In other words, creator/creation or energy/matter is inter-convertible. But the total energy is one constant universal reality, the God. It is eternal (*akal moorat*) and does not take birth (*ajooni*).

If we realize that fact then we will not call Guru Sahiban as God or God-like because there is only one God who is eternal and doesn't take birth (*akal moorat* and *ajooni*). This will make *shabds* like the ones below easier to understand without controversy. Ignore the misleading shabad and its literal meaning that doesn't go with gurbani philosophy. Guru Arjun and Guru Nanak should not be interpreted as God or God-like.

ਭਨਿ ਮਥੁਰਾ ਕਛੁ ਭੇਦੁ ਨਹੀ ਗੁਰੁ ਅਰਜੁਨੁ ਪਰਤਖਯੜ ਹਰਿ
॥੭॥੧੯॥

bhan mathuraa kachh bhayd nahee gur arjun partakh-y har. ॥7॥19॥

So speaks Mathuraa: there is no difference between God and Guru; Guru Arjun is the Personification of the Lord Himself. ॥7॥19॥

AGGS, Mathura, p 1409.

ਸਭ ਤੇ ਵਡਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਜਿਨਿ ਕਲ ਰਾਖੀ ਮੇਰੀ
॥੪॥੧੦॥੫੭॥

sabh tay vadaa satgur naanak jin kal raakhee mayree. ॥4॥10॥57॥

Guru Nanak is the greatest of all; He saved my honor in this Dark Age of Kali Yuga. ॥4॥10॥57॥

AGGS, M5, p 750.

Here's what Guru Nanak and science say about our relationship with God: We can have scientific

explanation to the concept of Soul-God (*atma-parmatma*) from Gurbani. That is individual soul as part of universal soul.

God and Soul is explained by Guru Nanak as the 'Jyot', which is scientifically 'Energy'. Scientifically everything in this Universe came from this 'Energy' and will go back to this 'Energy'. 'Everything' means all matter including human beings and all other beings. Guru Nanak still goes further that this 'Energy' came from 'Sunn (or void) or Singularity or Nirgun'. The 'Sunn' means 'Nothingness' and 'Nothingness' means 'Everything'.

A universal mind or one mind or one God of which we are part of is universal energy, because "the Universe is all energy and the energy is the Universe." Albert Einstein discovered: the energy can convert into matter and matter can convert into energy. The basic units: atoms and subatomic particles - that form molecules, and cells, and tissues, and organs, and individuals, are our common origin. The atoms and subatomic charged particles do not grow old and are ageless and timeless. We can call these basic units of matter as soul (*atma*) created from the energy of the Universe (*parmatma*) - the two are inter-convertible and represent *atma-parmatma*. The atoms in a child or a seedling are no younger than that of a wrinkled person or a yellowing leaf. That is why we can say that soul is eternal and never ages or dies, if we choose to say so (4).

Once we accept the God within and realize that it's not possible to be separate from God and that we are one with God; then we know that we are love and we are peace and we are joy and we are happiness and we are eternal. It's only when we look at life in a specific form, we fall victims to our separation from rest of things. That separation is called the ego. The ego is a false self that we made up to compete with God based on the thought that we are separate. That iron curtain of selfish ego separates us from Universal Spirit/ Universal Energy or God or *atma* from *parmatma*.

Here's what Guru Nanak Says:

ਆਤਮ ਮਹਿ ਰਾਮੁ ਰਾਮ ਮਹਿ ਆਤਮੁ

God is in the Soul and the Soul is in the God.
AGGS, M 1, p 1153.

ਆਤਮਾ ਪਰਾਤਮਾ ਏਕੋ ਕਰੈ ॥

ਅੰਤਰ ਕੀ ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਮਰੈ ॥੧॥

aatmaa paraatamaa ayko karai.
antar kee dubiDhaa antar marai.

Whose soul and the Supreme Soul (God) become one; the duality of the inner mind disappears.

AGGS, M 1, p 661.

We are all part of one indivisible divine mind or the universal mind or Universal Energy or God. Our individual mind or soul (*atma*) is divine image of supreme (or *Parmatma*), but we have to recognize it:

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥

O' my soul/mind you're the image of Divine light; so know your source.

AGGS, M 3, p 441.

Recognition of one's soul is recognition of God within us. What is that recognition! What is that state of mind with awakened spirit! That state of mind is without fear, without enmity, immortal without the fear of death or birth, complete within itself-- timeless, ageless, and formless (*Akaal Moorat*). We know that only physical body ages, spirit is not affected by time or age or birth or death. A few blessed ones realize that state of mind (*Nirbhau, Nirvair, Akaal Moorat, Ajooni Saebhang, Gur Parsad! Mul-Mantra* or Basic Principle, *JAP*, AGGS, p 1).

In addition to the above concept, there are some other main points to keep in mind when interpreting Gurbani. Violation of these points will take us away from interpretation in real perspective.

1. The concept of heaven, hell as specific places out of this world is not accepted.
2. *Haumai* (I-am-ness/false ego) is one of the most important impediments in realizing God.
3. The concept of *Sehaj* is probably unique to Sikhism. "*Sehaj*" may be called a state of mind that determines how one acts and deals with any situation. This state can only be achieved when one believes that in the ultimate analysis whatever happens is the will of God and one's responsibility is to take the right steps in a calm and peaceful manner in harmony with the environment.
4. We all are us, there is no other. If no other then there is no enmity. And if no enmity then there is no fear.

Understanding types of expressions, used in Gurbani using logic and science play very important role in understanding Gurbani as discussed in detail by Chahal (2). These include (i) Allegories, Metaphors, and Similes; (ii) Questioning-Answering System; (iii) Use of Practical Methods; (iv) Use of Established Concepts, Ancient Philosophy.

Here's an example of interpretation keeping in mind the principles we have discussed above. We are all familiar with Kabir ji's Sabd often cited in Gurdwaras and at funerals.

ਕਬੀਰ ਜਿਸੁ ਮਰਨੇ ਤੇ ਜਗੁ ਡਰੈ ਮੇਰੇ ਮਨਿ ਆਨੰਦੁ ॥

kabeer jis marnay tay jag darai mayray man aanand.
Kabeer, the world is afraid of death - that death fills my mind with bliss.

ਮਰਨੇ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਪਾਈਐ ਪੂਰਨੁ ਪਰਮਾਨੰਦੁ ॥੨੨॥

marnay hee tay paa-ee-ai pooran parmaanand. ॥22॥
It is only by death that perfect, supreme bliss is obtained. ॥22॥

AGGS, Saint Kabir, p 1365.

How do we obtain bliss by death? The bliss can only be experienced while we are alive. The Gurbani declares that one who dies in the *Sabd* (*Naam-consciousness*) is truly dead. He is a *Jeevanmukta* (living-liberated). With constantly hearing, perceiving and contemplating the Truth, his individual light links to the Supreme Light. In this process disappears his false ego-sense (*Haume*), the notion of "I, me, mine, and you." Therefore, it is not the death of physical body but the death of ego in which we experience the supreme bliss.

ਹਉਮੈ ਵਿਚਿ ਜਗਤੁ ਮੁਆ ਮਰਦੇ ਮਰਦਾ ਜਾਇ ॥

Houmai vich jagat muua marado maradaa jaae.
In egotism, the world is dead; it dies and dies, again and again

(AGGS, M 3, p 555, Line: 19)

ਹਉ ਨ ਮੁਆ ਮੇਰੀ ਮੁਈ ਬਲਾਇ ॥

Hau mooaa maeree muee balaae.
I have not died - that evil nature (ego) within me has died.

(AGGS, M1, p 152, Line: 7).

Guru Nanak in *JAP* is saying the same as ultimate aim is to kill the ego if you want to realize the truth or experience the supreme bliss.

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥

kiv sachi-aaraa ho-ee-ai kiv koorhai tutai paal.
How to realize the truth, and remove the wall of falsehood?

Answer:

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥੧॥

hukam rajaa-ee chalnaa naanak likhi-aa naal. ॥1॥
O Nanak, accept and walk in the Way of His Will.

ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਜੇ ਬੁਝੈ ਤ ਹਉਮੈ ਕਰੈ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥੨॥

naanak hukmai jay bujhai ta ha-umai kahai na ko-ay. ॥2॥

O Nanak, one who understands His Command, does not speak in ego. ॥2॥

AGGS, Jap 1, p 1.

Here's another example of a very common hymn that

can totally mislead us without understanding the philosophy of Gurbani. Literal meaning without the use of logic and science will give us a conclusion that will be different from entire philosophy of Gurbani. This is one of the hymns in our holy book, the Guru Granth, which most theologians interpret more like Hindu concept of reincarnation and transmigration.

ਅੰਤਿ ਕਾਲਿ ਜੇ ਲਛਮੀ ਸਿਮਰੈ ਐਸੀ ਚਿੰਤਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਮਰੈ ॥

ant kaal jo lachhmee simrai aisee chintaa meh jay marai.
At the very last moment, one who thinks of wealth, and dies in such thoughts,

ਸਰਪ ਜੋਨਿ ਵਲਿ ਵਲਿ ਅਉਤਰੈ ॥੧॥

sarap jon val val a-utarai. ॥1॥
shall be reincarnated over and over again, in the form of serpents. ॥1॥

ਅਰੀ ਬਾਈ ਗੋਬਿਦ ਨਾਮੁ ਮਤਿ ਬੀਸਰੈ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

aree baa-ee gobid naam mat beesrai. rahaa-o.
O sister, do not forget the Name of the Lord of the Universe. ॥Pause॥

ਅੰਤਿ ਕਾਲਿ ਜੇ ਇਸਤ੍ਰੀ ਸਿਮਰੈ ਐਸੀ ਚਿੰਤਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਮਰੈ ॥

ant kaal jo istaree simrai aisee chintaa meh jay marai.
At the very last moment, he who thinks of women, and dies in such thoughts,

ਬੇਸਵਾ ਜੋਨਿ ਵਲਿ ਵਲਿ ਅਉਤਰੈ ॥੨॥

baysvaa jon val val a-utarai. ॥2॥
shall be reincarnated over and over again as a prostitute. ॥2॥

ਅੰਤਿ ਕਾਲਿ ਜੇ ਲੜਕੇ ਸਿਮਰੈ ਐਸੀ ਚਿੰਤਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਮਰੈ ॥

ant kaal jo larhikay simrai aisee chintaa meh jay marai.
At the very last moment, one who thinks of his children, and dies in such thoughts,

ਸੂਕਰ ਜੋਨਿ ਵਲਿ ਵਲਿ ਅਉਤਰੈ ॥੩॥

sookar jon val val a-utarai. ॥3॥
shall be reincarnated over and over again as a pig. ॥3॥

ਅੰਤਿ ਕਾਲਿ ਜੇ ਮੰਦਰ ਸਿਮਰੈ ਐਸੀ ਚਿੰਤਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਮਰੈ ॥

ant kaal jo mandar simrai aisee chintaa meh jay marai.
At the very last moment, one who thinks of mansions, and dies in such thoughts,

ਪ੍ਰੇਤ ਜੋਨਿ ਵਲਿ ਵਲਿ ਅਉਤਰੈ ॥੪॥

parayt jon val val a-utarai. ||4||
shall be reincarnated over and over again as a goblin.
 ||4||

ਅੰਤਿ ਕਾਲਿ ਨਾਰਾਇਣੁ ਸਿਮਰੈ ਐਸੀ ਚਿੰਤਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਮਰੈ ॥

ant kaal naaraa-in simrai aisee chintaa meh jay marai.
At the very last moment, one who thinks of the Lord,
and dies in such thoughts,

ਬਦਤਿ ਤਿਲੋਚਨੁ ਤੇ ਨਰ ਮੁਕਤਾ ਪੀਤੰਬਰੁ ਵਾ ਕੇ ਰਿਦੈ ਬਸੈ

॥੫॥੨॥

badat tilochan tay nar muktaa peetambar vaa kay ridai basai. ||5||2||

says Trilochan, that man shall be liberated; the Lord shall abide in his heart. ||5||2||

(AGGS, Trilochan, p 526.)

If one takes literal meaning of this hymn from Aad Guru Branth Sahib by Bhagat Trilochan, it will be more like Hindu idea of the cycle of birth and rebirth (where one would logically look for one's ancestors in lower life forms such as reptiles or in kings and queens depending upon how their earthly lives were measured by a heavenly judge) and not the Sikh philosophy.

In the last stanza of Bhagat Trilochan's hymn, its literal interpretation would tell us that one could sin the whole life to one's heart's content; all that is necessary to be forgiven is to die with the name of God on one's lips. Now, how sensible is that? How does that fit the model of perfect justice? This does not fly with educated Sikhs in age of Science and technology.

What Trilochan means is perhaps the same as in Hindu concept. Most of the orthodox Sikhs will also interpret similar to Hindu concept. But keeping in mind the entire Sikh philosophy using science and logic it will be interpreted as I.J. Singh of New York (Internet Discussion Groups) interprets that if you were obsessed with mansions all your life, then you may as well be a ghost or a goblin that supposedly haunts such buildings. If money and treasures have defined your life, you may as well be a snake. (In the Indian culture, snakes are reputed to make their home where treasures are buried.)

Why? Because your character traits have been defined by your preoccupations and values - that is the kind of a person you have become. We can, therefore, interpret all of the examples in his hymn, including prostitute, similarly - it is metaphorical language, not to be literally translated. That is why it is important to formulate methodology for interpreting Gurbani. With proper methodology, the interpretation goes along the entire philosophy of Aad Guru Granth Sahib, and does not put words in Trilochan's mouth who wrote the

hymn.

In conclusion, what Trilochan means here is to question what one has become over a lifetime of habits. "Reincarnation", then, is used as a metaphor, for our life here and now. So, until we get it "right", we are going to embody the human (or animal) experience over and over again in this life. Put another way, until we learn to live without a personal stake (ego/haumai), we are going to attach ourselves to desires which, unchecked, lead to addictive/neurotic personalities, and so the cycle continues.

I strongly feel that one must keep in mind most of the basic principles of Gurbani Philosophy before interpreting Gurbani. And one must make sure that it does not contradict any of these principles. Perhaps, this is the only way to interpret what we call in real perspective. Otherwise, interpretation tells more about the personality of the interpreter than the real message of Gurbani.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that the use of science as a modern tool helps comprehend and understand, and gives a better picture of the total philosophy of gurbani. The concept of God by Guru Nanak and modern science is similar which is important in understanding message of Gurbani. Otherwise literal translations will not only mislead but go against message of gurbani. As, for example, the sabds by Bhagat Trilochan and Bhatt Mathura often lead to the conclusions that last moments decide your future life and Guru sahiban were carnations of Rama and Krishna, and can be equated with God. Both conclusions are against the basic concept of gurbani and its scientific and logical interpretation. That's why we cannot take the literal meaning because it does not represent the real perspective.

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