

# DISCOVERY OF COMMENCING VERSE OF THE AAD GURU GRANTH SAHIB IN BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

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### ABSTRACT

The inscription of Commencing Verse (commonly called *Mool Mantra*) was found in a temple near Baku, Azerbaijan as reported in an article of Dr Modi. But no information was given about this inscription. The first part of inscription has been deciphered and interpreted. The last portion is difficult to decipher, however, there is some indication that some *Chela* (disciple) is trying to say something about this

### INTRODUCTION

I was browsing through the Internet for some information about the travels of Guru Nanak in Middle East that I came across an article originally written by Ervad Shams-Ul-Ulama Dr Sir Jivanji Jamsheedji Modi [5]. While reading through his travel in Azerbaijan I found an inscription in Gurmukhi script as shown in Fig 1. Nothing has been written by Dr Modi about this inscription except that with

a heading ‘*Yet another inscription*’. Besides this there is another inscription in Devnagri script with similar heading, ‘*Another inscription*’. The locations of both the inscriptions have not been disclosed. However, it is believed that these inscriptions are somewhere in that temple he calls it as Atash-Kadeh, which is situated in Baku, Azerbaijan.



Figure 1: The ‘*Commencing Verse*’ of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib [1]. The ‘*Commencing Verse*’ is often called as ‘*Mool Mantra*’ by many Sikhs.

### History of Atash Kadeh

According to Dr Modi [5] the Atash Kadeh was in a place called *Surkhani* on the road from Baku about 30 to 45 minutes by car. The origin of this word, *Surkhani*, may have come from “SHO-E-LE-KHANEH” meaning the house (“KHANEH”) of the fire balls (“SHO-E-LE”). Among the ocean of these petroleum wells is situated this alleged Atash Kadeh. Not just him but any Parsee who is a little familiar with Hindu religion, their temples and their customs, after examining this building with its inscriptions, architecture, etc., would conclude that this is not a Parsee Atash Kadeh but is a Hindu Temple, whose Brahmins (priests) used to worship fire (Sanskrit: *Agni*).

According to Dr Modi [5] this temple might have been built by the Hindu traders visiting Baku. But he has also mentioned that he has examined the small living rooms (cells), adjacent to the main square of this building, which resembled the Indian Buddhist monasteries cells for their monks. I think, however, it could also be possible that this building was originally built by Buddhists during the time when Buddhism was all over India, Iran and adjoining areas up to Baku, Azerbaijan. Later this place was taken over by Hindus from India during the fall of Buddhism. It is also possible that Guru Nanak during his long stay of 11 years in Middle East might have stayed at this place also to preach in the Central Asia [4].

According to Dr Modi [5] the inscription on the main entrance is in Nagrik (Devnagri) script, which in the beginning invokes the Hindu God, Shree Ganesha (Fig. 2). The building is referred to in the inscription as “JWAALAAJEE” (meaning volcanic), that means some burning substance building. And the installation date is mentioned as the Hindu Vikramaajeet calendar year 1866 (equivalent to 1810 CE). This inscription contains nine lines and the figures drawn in this inscription are as follows: the first row has a flower first, then a bell (“GHANT”), then the sun, then a fire ball, and again a fruit. The second row below this has a flower first, then the trident of Lord Shiva (“TRISHOOL”), then the Swastika symbol (Hindu style), then a second trident and then a flower.

If we compare another picture of the main entrance of Baku Temple as shown in Fig 3, we don't find the inscription shown in the Fig 2. We also do not find two parallel ridges between which this plaque of inscription is fixed. It shows that there are two main entrances. Moreover, the wall of the entrance in Fig. 3 is full of black smudges of weathering agencies and has another storey added at the top at the later date. But the wall of entrance in Fig 2 is less smudged and the plaque is free from any such smudges. It looks like that date, 1810 CE, on plaque on the entrance in Fig 2 does not indicate the date of construction of the Temple since the entrance in Fig. 3

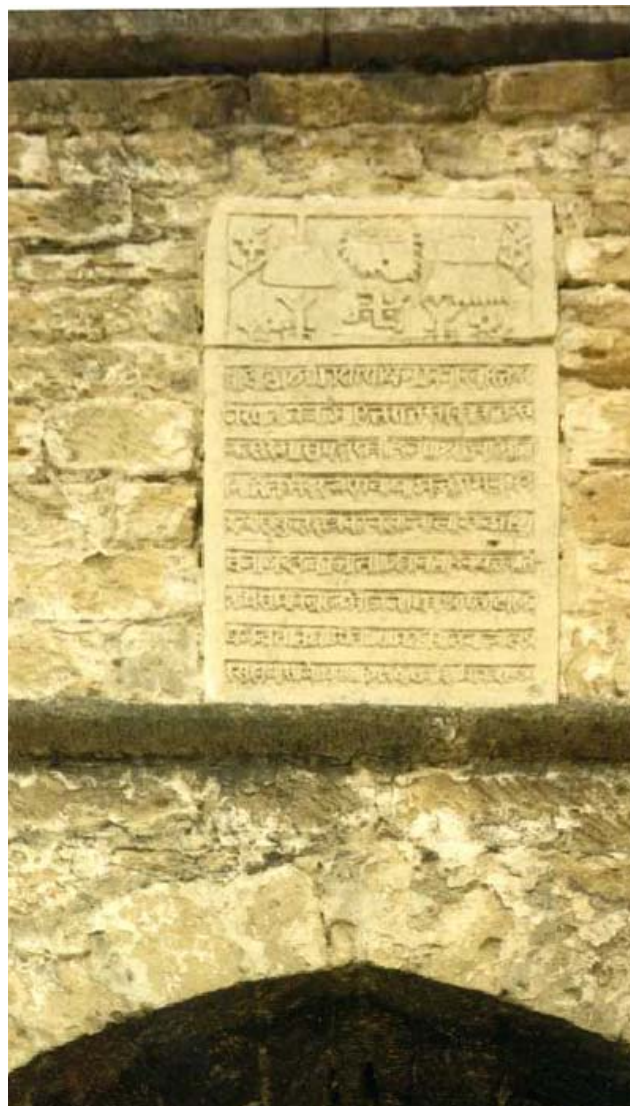


Fig. 2. Inscription above Main Entrance.

looks much older than 810 CE when the inscription in *Devnagri* was inscribed as shown on the entrance in Fig. 2. Moreover, it appears to be newer than the background wall of the entrance. It also appears that the inscription on the entrance is much newer than that of the Commencing Verse as shown in Fig. 1.

On the other hand Atul Aneja [2] writes that:

*“The temple of Ateshgah, 15 km from the Azeri capital, is among the several reminders of India's close ties with the region straddling the Caspian Sea. An inscription in Sanskrit above the narrow arched entrance to this monument is the first striking assertion of Azerbaijan's historical ties with India.”*

The Ateshgah monument, also called the fire worshippers' temple, traces its origins to Zoroastrianism, which took root in ancient Azerbaijan. *“It is Azerbaijan*



Fig 3. Another Picture of the main entrance to the Baku temple.

which is the mother of Zoroastrianism. This was the base from where this religion spread overseas", an Azeri diplomat said [2].

Atul Aneja [2] further said that the temple complex has evolved over several centuries. Its outer rectangular parameters house a row of rooms, added in several phases. Between the late 17th and mid-19th century, Indian traders funded the establishment of a guest room, stables and prayer rooms.

Apart from Sanskrit, inscriptions in Hindi and Gurmukhi can also be found along the monument's outer periphery. One of them refers to the site as Sri Jwalaji (temple of fire). **Another seeks divine blessings from Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith.**

It appears that what Dr Modi calls 'Atash Kadeh' is the same as 'Ateshgah' of Atul Aneja since both are talking about same Sanskrit writing on the entrance and also other inscriptions in Hindi (Devnagri) and Gurmukhi found along the monument's outer periphery.

**The Inscription in Gurmukhi in Fig. 1 given by Dr Modi seems to be the same which Atul Aneja is talking about as "Another seeks divine blessings from Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith."**

The inscription as it appears in Fig. 1 is rewritten line by line exactly the same way as follows:

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ  
ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਆਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ

ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ ਜਪੁ ਅਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸ-  
ਚੁ ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥ ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰ-  
ਸਾਦਿ ॥ ਬਾਝਾ ਜਾਟੂਸਾਰਕੁ ਥਾ ਜਿਸ ਕਾ ਚੇਲਾ  
... ਤਾਰੂ। ਸਹਬਿ ਕਾ ਚੇਲਾ ... ਵਾਬ ਕੇ ਸਾਹ ਜਿਸ ਕਾ ਚੇ-  
ਲਾ ਓਹੋਸਾਹ ਧਰਮ ਕੀ ਜਗਹ ਬਨਈ

There are seven (7) lines in total. The first three lines up to ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ (*Gur Parsad*) are representing exactly the same 'Commencing Verse' as is found in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1]. The Aad Guru Granth Sahib is commonly written as 'Adi Granth' in Sikh literature, and the 'Commencing Verse' is commonly called as 'Mool Mantra'.

The last part of third line starting with word ਜਪੁ (*JAP*) is the title of the next Bani (verse) of Guru Nanak. It is followed by a Sloka and ends at ਸਚੁ (*sach*) in the fourth line as follows:  
ਜਪੁ ਅਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸ-  
ਚੁ ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥

The fourth line ends with ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ (*Sat Gur*) and the ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ (*parsad*) is its part which flows over to the next (fifth) line.

The use of phrase, ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ, means that a new subject starts from here onward. But this phrase is not complete unless a logo, ੴ, is used in the beginning. Its complete form, which has been extensively used in the AGGS, is as follows:

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

If we compare the first four lines of the inscription with that found in the AGGS, there is hardly any difference except that:

ਅਜੂਨੀ is written as ਆਜੂਨੀ (*Kanna* has been added),

ਆਦਿ is written as ਅਦਿ (without *kanna*). and

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ is written as ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ (without ੴ).

The use of ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ (*Sat Gur Parsad*) means a new subject starts from here onward on the fifth, sixth, and seventh lines. Unfortunately all these lines are very badly damaged and cannot be deciphered easily. I hope these lines contain some information about this inscription. Until the last three lines are deciphered and interpreted, nothing definite can be said about the theme of the last section which starts with ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ.

**Last Section of Inscription (5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> line)**

A wild guess from the words deciphered so far indicates

that the words ਜਿਸ ਕਾ ਚੇਲਾ (*the disciple of whom*) have been used at least two times. Then at the end there is ਧਰਮ ਕੀ ਜਗਹ ਬਨਈ {*place of dharam (Religion) is built*}. Just possible there may be two disciples or only one disciple, who is indicating that this religious place was built for preaching *Sikhi* (Sikhism).

However, it is quite apparent that it is quite old inscription, may be of the time when Guru Nanak was in Middle East from 511 to 1521 CE, especially when he was around Baghdad and Tehran that he might have visited this place where from he preached his philosophy and later some of his ਚੇਲਾ (disciple/Sikh) got inscribed the 'Commencing Verse' or the Mool Mantra [4]. However, it is obvious that this ਚੇਲਾ (disciple) has left his message but it is damaged so much that no clear cut information is obtained.

The 'Commencing Verse' (Mool Mantra), which is followed by next Bani ਜਪੁ (JAP) and a Sloka, in the present Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) printed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Amritsar are as follows [1]:

ੴ ੴ  
ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ੨  
ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ੩ ॥  
॥ਜਪੁ॥  
ਆਦਿੰ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿੰ ਸਚੁ ॥ ਹੈੰ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀੰ ਸਚੁ ॥ ੧ ॥

It has been interpreted by Chahal [3] as follows:  
*The One and Only, Oh, the Infinite<sup>1</sup>;*  
*Exists;*  
*Creator;*  
*Without fear*  
*(Not governed by any other – Not under any Law of Universe);*  
*Without enmity;*  
*Timeless (Without effect of time and space);*  
*Neither takes birth nor dies;*  
*(Never comes into any anthropomorphic form)*  
*Created by Itself<sup>2</sup>;*  
*Enlightener; and Bounteous<sup>3</sup>.*

The above scientific and logical analysis of the 'Commencing Verse' of the AGGS clearly indicates that it is not a mantra or Mool Mantra in any respect but a precise and concise definition of the Transcendent (Abstruse / Abstract) Entity. Although the God of Guru Nanak is Transcendent still It exists (*sat/sach*) hence the word 'Entity' has been used. Again It is a unique Entity and there is no other like It, therefore, It is designated as 'I' (One and Only). Since there is no descriptive name for the God of Guru Nanak, therefore, It is addressed

as 'It'.

According to Dr Sahib Singh [8] and Bhai Kahn Singh [7] a phrase (*Isht*) in which the poets often have full confidence or faith is called *Manglacharan* in Punjabi. In other words it means a definition in English. Therefore, if the 'Commencing Verse' is to be identified for any purpose, it could be called *Manglacharan*, or it may be called simply the 'Commencing Verse' of the AGGS. But it is definitely not a 'Mool Mantra' because there is no place of any type of Mantra in the Gurbani.

Then a new Bani starts with the following heading:

॥ ਜਪੁ ॥ (JAP)

Thereafter, a Sloka is given before the start of the next Bani as follows:

ਆਦਿੰ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿੰ ਸਚੁ ॥  
ਹੈੰ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀੰ ਸਚੁ ॥ ੧ ॥

In this stanza the God has not been addressed with any specific name, like Ram Allah, Gosain, Gobind, Bhagwant, etc. This is based on the same philosophy of Guru Nanak that there is no descriptive or specific name for the God.

It is important to understand the meanings of ਸਚੁ (*sach*). ਸਚੁ (*sach*) and ਸਤਿ (*sat*) are commonly used in the Gurbani and both means 'true' or 'truth' and/or 'exist' or 'existence' depending on the context these words have been used. Here the word '*sach*' means 'exists'. Dr Sahib Singh [8] and Giani Harbans Singh [6] also interpreted '*sach*' as 'exists'. This '*sach*' represents that Entity, which has no descriptive/specific name, but exists. Therefore, it is interpreted as follows [3]:  
*Was in existence<sup>2</sup> before the beginning of the time and space<sup>1</sup>;*  
*Was in existence in the past<sup>3</sup>; Is in existence in the present<sup>4</sup>;*  
*Will remain in existence forever<sup>5</sup> (in the future)."*

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The 'Commencing Verse' (Mool Mantra) and heading of the next Bani, ਜਪੁ (JAP) followed by a Sloka can easily be deciphered.
2. This portion of the inscription is very similar to that found in the AGGS with very minor differences in the spelling and missing of ੴ in the fourth line.
3. This portion has been fully interpreted in English in the text.
4. The second part of inscription starting from fifth line

(Continued on page 26)

(Continued from page 40)

- to the end of seventh line is damaged very much and is not easy to decipher.
5. It is a mere guess work from a few words which are easily deciphered that some disciple or disciples have built this religious place. In this portion of inscription neither the name(s) of the disciple(s) nor the inscribing date are available.
  6. The dates of this inscription may be quite earlier around 16<sup>th</sup> century rather than that of 19<sup>th</sup> century as indicated by Modi [5] found in the inscription on the main entrance (Fig.2). The 16<sup>th</sup> century is the time when Guru Nanak was in the Middle East around 1511-1521 CE [4].
  7. Only complete deciphering of the last three lines can reveal the real message of that **ਚੇਲਾ** (disciple/Sikh) who got the 'Commencing Verse' inscribed.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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