

Shri Guru Granth Sahib

Fifth Sikh Guru Arjan Dev compiled the Granth. His task was made easier by the fact that the third Sikh Guru Amar Das had collected the works of his two predecessors (Gurus Nanak and Angad) and got them put together into two volumes by his grandson (Shasar Ram), adding popular sayings of some Hindu Bhagats (Saints) as well as the Muslim Sufi mystics; he added his own comments whenever his view differed from theirs. These came to be known as 'Goindwal Pothees.' Guru Arjan borrowed them from Mohan Das son of Guru Amar Das and added writings of the Gurus from other authentic sources as well as his own compositions. The whole material was put together by Bhai Gurdas (himself a great poet) under the supervision of Guru Arjan and was called the Adi (first) Granth. Guru Arjan installed it in Harmandir in 1604; Baba Buddha was the first priest at Harmandir. The tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh added the verses of his father (Guru Tegh Bahadur) to it. He also decided to discontinue the institution of living Sikh Gurus. Furthermore, he enjoined on the Sikhs to consider Adi Granth as the 'living embodiment of all Sikh Gurus', at his passing in 1708 at Abchal Nagar (Hazoor Sahib) in South India. Adi Granth is now called Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS); the Sikhs accord it the veneration due to a living teacher and consult it regularly for wisdom every day. It means more to Sikhs than Vedas to Hindus, Koran to Muslims, Torah to Jews and Bible to Christians. A great effort has been made to preserve the thoughts expressed by the Sikh Gurus, unlike other holy books written decades after the deaths of the authors of the compositions. This makes SGGS a unique Holy Book in terms of the authenticity of the original message.

SGGS contains 5894 hymns, out of which the largest number (2216) belong to Guru Arjan, 976 to Guru Nanak, 61 to Guru Angad, 907 to Guru Amar Das, 679 to Guru Ram Das, 118 to Guru Tegh Bahadur, and 937 to the Bhagats and Bards. The hymns are sung by the congregation in a Sikh Gurudwara daily. They are set in 31 ragas. Nanak and other Gurus were great vocalists and musicians in classical style; Guru Arjan was a great instrumentalist. Both music and poetry form an integral part of the Sikh culture.

The Bhagats whose compositions are included in SGGS came from all over India. They covered a wide range in terms of religions, professions, and castes; most belonged to the lower castes. Kabir, Ramanand, Ravidas, Surdas, Sain and Bhikan came from UP; Jaidev from Bengal, Namdev, Trilochan, and Parmanand from Maharashtra, Pipa and Dhanna from Rajasthan, etc. Five of them: Farid, Bhikan, Satta, Balwand, and Mardana were Muslims. Kabir was a weaver; Namdev a tailor; Dhanna a farmer; Sadhana a butcher; Ravidas a shoemaker; Sain a barber; Ramanand, Trilochan and Surdas were brahmins; and Pipa a ruler. Farid who lived in the 13th century did much to spread Sufi Islam beliefs in Northern India. Kabir accepted the validity of incarnation of God as Rama; 292 of his hymns (the most by any Bhagat) are included in SGGS. Some of the Bhagats worshipped Rama and Krishna.

Considering the religious affiliations of the Bhagats whose compositions are included in SGGS, it is not surprising that the largest portions of SGGS is composed in a mixed language which may be called 'Hindwi' dialects, a mixture of Hindi, Prakrit, Braj, Punjabi, as well as Persian and Arabic vocabulary current then. The metaphor of SGGS is homely and direct like one would encounter in every day life. The word, sound, and idea pictures in the poetry of SGGS create a perfect harmony between the subject matter being discussed.

As one would expect, SGGS begins with Guru Nanak's composition 'Jap ji', the morning prayer of the Sikhs. Guru Nanak's teaching form the Gold standard for the Sikhs to follow. He stressed truthful living (honest living, compassionate heart, and a fearless passion

for truth) as the goal for the humans. I recommend all Sikhs to recite Jap ji with alert minds every morning and dwell on Guru Nanak's wisdom dispensed therein. The Gurus did not criticize the Muslim or the Hindu way of worship. However, all Sikh Gurus preached against incarnation of God and idol worship. Beginning with Guru Nanak, they all rejected the authority of the Vedas, Puranas, Shastras, as well as the Koran.

Basic Sikh belief is that life is not sinful in its origin; having emanated from the Pure One it remains pure in its essence. There is no place for a Satan in Sikh belief system. One's vision may be clouded by delusions and distractions leading to suffering. We are subject to five limitations: Lust, Anger, Greed, Infatuation, and Pride, but temptations may be overcome by following Guru's teaching. Asceticism or a notion of castes is forbidden for the Sikhs. No food is forbidden to a Sikh but that which creates in one evil or pain. Similarly, no dress is taboo but that which leads to sin and sorrow. Women rights are on par with men's rights; men as well as women may serve as priests. Thereby, the women are saved from the tyrannical rulings of the priesthood. One may contrast this situation with the status of women in Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, as well as Buddhism (Buddha gave a lesser place to women and asked monks to beware of them). Unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Sikhs do not claim any exclusive status with God by just being a Sikh. The spiritual merit is earned by submission of one's ego to God's Will (Hukam) and living in a state of equipoise (Sahaj). This view may be contrasted with the Christian and Islamic fervor for converting the so-called 'infidels', often at the point of a sword, in the name of the Benevolent, Merciful God, averring that salvation is not possible outside them.

The scholars are often confused by the Sikh view of life. Some see in it a strong strain of the Bhakti cult inspired by tenets of Kabir. Others see it as an attempt to reconcile monotheism of Islam with Hindu metaphysics. Again, Sikh emphasis on moderating of desires (Trishna) seems an echo of Buddhism, as do the terms like Nirban (Nirvana) and Sangat (Sangha). The Nirmalas, well versed in Hindu scriptures (their elders were educated at Benares), have interpreted Sikhism as a Vedantic creed, an exposition of the Bhagwat Gita. The Qadianis (a Muslim sect) quote chapter and verse to prove that Guru Nanak was a devout Muslim. Here one may note that the first four Gurus were Hindu men well grounded in Hindu Philosophy. However, in their enlightened phase, they only accepted some the basic doctrines of Hinduism, enlarging and deepening their meaning, and rejected those considered out of harmony with an integrated view of life. Again, the Muslims see Islamic views reflected in Sikh beliefs. Clearly, a need exists to expound on Sikh credo in considerable detail to remove superficial impressions of those professing other faiths.

The Sikh religion is monotheistic. Sikhs believe in One, All-pervading, Creator, Who is: Without Fear, Without Hate, Beyond Time, Not Incarnated, Self Existent, and Self-Enlightener God. One Personal Absolute God of Sikhism is all embracing. He is transcendent and yet immanent. He is the God of the whole Universe. He is the source of good as well as evil. But He expects us to choose good and avoid evil. In SGGS, God is remembered by all His names known to Hindu mythology as well as in Islamic scriptures: Ram, Bhagwan, Damodar, Murari, Gopal Gobind, Girdhari, Gopinath, Shyam, Vasdev, Narayan, Hari, Madho, Kesav, Brahm, Parbrahm, Mukand, Vishnu, Raghurai, Prabhu, Ishwar, Gosain, Kahn, Krishan, Govardhan, Bithal, Mohan, Murli, Manohar, Jagannath, etc; as well as Allah, Rabb, Khuda, Maula, etc. The common name of God for the Sikhs is 'Wahe Guru,' the Wonderful Lord.

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