

# MEANINGS AND FUNCTIONS OF GURDWARA ACCORDING TO NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY

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## ABSTRACT

*A simple survey of Sikh history and literature will indicate that the term 'Gurdwara' has not been understood properly, although, the Sikh history revolves around it. In this article, meanings and functions of Gurdwara have been traced out from the Nanakian Philosophy enshrined in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Accordingly, Gurdwara means a 'Gateway to the Guru'; 'Guru' is 'Sabd' (philosophy); and Sabd is understood through vichar (discussion). Therefore, Gurdwara means 'Gateway to the Guru (Sabd)' or the institution for learning the philosophy of the Guru; and its functions are to disseminate it to the humanity.*

## INTRODUCTION

**G**uru Nanak was disseminating his philosophy (*Bani*) during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century by going from place to place. Thereafter, Guru Amardas, the third Guru in succession to the House of Nanak, established 22 *Manjis* (bedsteads, cots, platforms, daises, thrones) on which representatives of the Guru (called *Masand*) used to sit for dissemination of Guru Nanak's philosophy at various places in India [7]. When the *Bani* (word) of the Sikh Gurus were compiled into a Granth (Aad Guru Granth Sahib – AGGS) [1] then the *Manji* that was used by Guru Arjan himself was given to seat the Granth at night. During the day the Granth was displayed at the Harmandir Sahib, mid-sarovar, from which the Gurbani was preached [8]. Guru Arjan took this action to show reverence for the Gurbani and to impress upon the Sikhs that it is the Gurbani which is the Guru, not a person as a Guru. Similarly, at other places in India the copies of the Granth, from which the *Masands* preached the Gurbani, were also seated on the *Manjis*. Over a period of time, the building, in which the Granth was seated on *Manji*, started to be called first as *Manji Sahib* and then as 'Gurdwara'. A small *Manji* is still used to seat the Aad Guru Granth Sahib in every Gurdwara throughout the world. The evolution of Gurdwara clearly shows that its primary and fundamental function is to disseminate the Gurbani and to make the Sikhs to understand it properly.

According to Bhai Kahn Singh, the author of *Mahan Kosh* (The Great Encyclopedia in Punjabi) [4], Gurdwara is more than a place of worship. It is a school for the student, the Guru for the spiritual person, an hospital for the sick, sanctuary for woman's honor, and a rest house for the pilgrim. In the recent times, the

Sikhs all over the world as well as the people of other faiths have observed that most of the Gurdwaras are drifting away from its original meanings and functions and entering into ritualism. Moreover, it has also become a bone of contention among the Sikhs and its controllers for making the Gurdwaras as their fiefdoms.

Since this article is based specifically on the Nanakian Philosophy, it is important to define this new anglicized term so that readers could understand it properly:

### Nanakian Philosophy:

*A philosophy promulgated by (Guru) Nanak that was taught and strengthened by other nine Sikh Gurus, who succeeded to the House of Nanak.*

Guru Arjan in 1604 CE enshrined the Nanakian Philosophy in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib [8]. In around 1705 CE Guru Gobind Singh added the philosophy of Guru Teg Bahadur and reiterated the authenticity of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib.

The term, Nanakian Philosophy, has been conceived from the following information available from the AGGS and Sikh literature:

**1. Swayaiae of Guru Arjan** explains that Nanak is the Guru and his philosophy (Sabd) is a lamp of wisdom (enlightener) for the whole humanity. (AGGS, M 5, P 1385-1387) [1].

Moreover, Guru Ramdas says that Bani is Guru and Guru is Bani. And it is the Guru who says Bani as discussed later.

### 2. Bhai Kahn Singh

siqgru nwnk dy Aqj anll dy j nSln siqgrll dy mK qll

Akāl dī pīrā nī pīt hēl bīxī dī 'gurbīxī' sūxī hī [ 3]

The Bani, which has been revealed through the mouth of Satguru Nanak and the successor Satgurus under the guidance of the Akal (the Almighty), is called Gurbani.

But according to Bhai Gurdas, Bani revealed by any spiritually wise men is also called Gurbani. However, Bhai Kahn Singh insists that the word 'Gurbani' is especially used for the 'Bani' of our Satgurus [a note in Ref. # 3].

**3. Gurbilas Patshahi 6** indicates that Guru Hargobind taught the Sikhs that Nanak is the Guru and to follow his Sabd (Philosophy) [9].

My discussion on Gurdwara is confined specifically to the Nanakian Philosophy that has been incorporated in the AGGS and has been authenticated by Guru Arjan in 1604 CE and Guru Gobind Singh in around 1705 CE, when the *Bani* of Guru Teg Bahadur was added in it.

### MEANINGS OF GURDWARA

'Gurdwara' (Gurudwara) has been coined by the combination of two Punjabi words **Guru (gr)** and **Duara (dAra)**, which have been used many times in the AGGS.

But nowadays some Sikhs have replaced the word 'Gurdwara' with 'Guru Ghar' without paying any attention to the differences in the meanings of these two words. Although both words have 'Guru' in common, replacement of 'Dwara' or 'Duara' with 'Ghar' (house) makes lots of differences in their meanings because 'Guru' in Nanakian Philosophy means the Almighty, and a religious teacher.

But when one uses the term 'Guru Ghar' it means the 'House of the Guru or the Almighty'. According to the Nanakian Philosophy there is no particular place in the universe for the Almighty to live:

sōdrūkhī sōGrūkhī ij qubih srb smīl j ]

AGGS, Jap 27, P 6 & 347.

"What is that gate (door) of that house look like and what does that house look like wherefrom the Oh (the Almighty) resides and takes care of Its creation?"

Thus, to call 'Gurdwara' (Gurudwara) as 'Guru Ghar' (Ghar = House) is not justified. However, those Sikhs who have coined this word, 'Guru Ghar', might argue that 'Guru Ghar' means where the Guru, AGGS, resides. But 'Gurdwara' is an institution whereas 'Guru Ghar', is a place of residence. An **institution** is an

organization for promotion of a cause whereas a **residence** is a place where one actually lives, a building used as a house. Therefore, Gurdwara is an institution where *Gurbani* is preached; it is not a residence to live. Nevertheless, I must add here that Bhai Kahn Singh [4] has used 'Gurdwara' and 'Guru Ghar' as interchangeable terms. I do not agree to his interchangeable use because of the fact that Gurdwara is an institution and cannot be called 'Guru Ghar', which is a residence, as explained above.

To understand the meaning of Gurdwara (Gurudwara) we have to examine the meanings of gr(Guru) and dAra (Duara) in the Nanakian Philosophy.

### Guru

In the Nanakian Philosophy the Guru is the *Sabd (Bani)* and *Sabd (Bani)* is the Guru as explained in the following verses:

#### Sabd as the Guru:

sbdūgrūsrīq Dīn c] ] AGGS, M 1, P943.

"Sabd is Guru, consciousness and intention toward it make one its disciple (Sikh)."

bū grūgbūhībūsbid bū n pīe ]

AGGS, M 1, P 55.

"Without Guru it is all darkness, but without (deliberation on) Sabd (Guru's philosophy) one cannot attain any wisdom."

bīxī<sup>1</sup> grī grīhī bīxī ivic bīxī Alīmūsrī ]

grī<sup>2</sup> bīxī khī sūkī j nī mīl<sup>6</sup> prqīK<sup>7</sup> grī insqūry<sup>8</sup> ] 5 ]

AGGS, M 4, P 982.

{2 & 3 gr, grū grī and grī means grī according to Bhai Kahn Singh's *Mahan Kosh* [4]}

#### Who is the Guru here?

*Bani (Sabd)<sup>1</sup> is Guru<sup>2</sup> and Guru is the Bani (Sabd) and it contains all the elixirs of life."*

#### What is the Bani?

"Guru<sup>3</sup> says Bani and the servant (Sikh)<sup>4,5</sup> accepts<sup>6</sup> and practices<sup>6</sup> it. Obviously<sup>7</sup>, this is the Guru who helps to get salvation<sup>8</sup>."

#### Who is the Guru that says Bani?

j nūnūkūbī ygī bīxī grī bīxī hīr nūm smīeAū ]

AGGS, M 4, P 494.

"Nanak\* person (jann) speaks the wise words (Gunn Bani), that is Gur Bani (Guru's words) in which the Almighty is imbibed."

Bnīq nūnūkūryvlcū ]

ਸਿੱਖੀ ਬਿਖੀ ਭਾਈ ਡਰਿਪਾਇਰੁ ]  
 ਕੀ ਕੋਪਿਯੰਮਕ ਦਾਇਰੁ ]  
 ਜਪਿ ਕਪਿਸੁ ਭੀ ਏਹੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਹਿੰਸੁਰੁ ]

AGGS, M 1, P 661.

Nanak\* says:

*"When one contemplates with love on the true Bani (word).*

*Then one gets to the gateway to salvation.*

*(Understanding of )The philosophy in the Sabd (Bani/word) is equivalent to so-called jap (repetition) and tap (austerities)."*

(\* **Nanak**, in the above two stanzas, is with *kaka* having *onkar* means Nanak himself as a person not as a pen name for himself or for any other successor to the House of Nanak. Sometimes Nanak with *kaka* as *mukta* also means Nanak as a person but not as a pen name.)

**DUARA:**

The word ‘Duara’ has been mentioned in Nanakian Philosophy as ‘gateway’ many times. For example,

ਸਿਗਰੁ ਨ ਸ੍ਰਿਯਿ ਮਿੱਕ ਆਡ ਗੁਰੁ ] ਚਿਰਿ ਏ ਚਿਰੁ ਪ੍ਰਿਏ  
 ਮਿੱਕ ਦਾਇਰੁ ]

ਮਿਰਿ ਮਿਰਿ ਜਿਹਿ ਚਿਰਿ ਚਿਰਿ ਆਹਿ ਜਮਿ ਚਿਰਿ  
 ਕੀਰਿ ਆਹਿ ] 4 ]

ਸਬਦੁ ਸਿੱਖੁ ਜਿਹਿ ਕੀ ਆਪੁ ਪਚਿਖਿ ] ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਬਿਖੁ ਸਬਿ  
 ਵਕਿਖਿ ]

ਸਚਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸਚਿ ਸਕੁ ਪ੍ਰਿਏ ਨਾਨਿ ਨਿਮੁ ਮਿਲਿ ਵਸਿ ਆਹਿ ] 5 ]

AGGS, M 3, P 115.  
*This verse explains that the one, who does not understand the True Guru, is greatest fool, blind and illiterate. He is hurt again and again. If so then where can he achieve gateway (door) to the salvation.*

*When one understands the Sabd and the self, and way shown by the Sabd then he achieves all the pleasures and treasures of life and imbibes the Naam (the Almighty) in his mind.*

**Note:** Here it is important to know the meanings of salvation because it has been used again and again in the verses presented here.

**Salvation:**

1. A saving or being saved from danger, evil, difficulty, destruction, etc.; rescue.
2. *Theol.* deliverance from sin and from the penalties of sin; redemption

Meaning given in # 1 is more close to the one given in the Nanakian Philosophy and is more scientific and logical.

ਜਗੁ ਬਿਨਸੁ ਹਮਿ ਚਿਕਾਹਿ ਭਯਾਹਿ ਕੀਰੁ ]  
 ਗੁਰੁ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਿਏ ਆਹਿ ਸਚਿ ਮਿਕਿ ਦਾਇਰੁ ] 4 ]

AGGS, M 1, P 229.

*I have seen the whole humanity is perishing because of greed and egoism.*

*Gateway to salvation is reached through the service to the Guru.*

**What is the service to the Guru?** It is explained in the following verses:

ਗੁਰਿ ਮਿਕਿ ਨਿਮੁ ਨਿਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ]

ਅਹਿਰਿ ਸਬਦੁ ਨਿਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਸ੍ਰਿ ] 7 ]

AGGS, M 1, P 229

*When you do not forget the philosophy of the Guru then you receive the honor of tranquility.*

*When the treasure of Sabd (philosophy) has been imbibed in mind then ego is eliminated.*

ਸਗੁਰੁ ਸ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਸਿਨੁ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਸਿਨੁ ਕ੍ਰਿ ]

ਸਿਨੁ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ਕ੍ਰਿ ] 4 ]

AGGS, M 4, P 559.

*The above phrase again explains almost the same theme of the above verse that method to reach the gateway to salvation is by understanding the Sabd and applying its principles in such a way that we transform ourselves into a reflection of the Guru.*

ਲਿੰਗੁ ਚਿਰਿ ਚਿਰੁ ਆਹਿ ਚਿਰਿ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ] 1 ]

AGGS, M 1, P 1030.

*By getting rid of greed and by imbibing (understanding) the Infinite one reaches the gateway to salvation.*

ਕਿਰੁ ਕੀਰੁ ਮਿੱਖੁ ਚਿਰੁ ]

ਗੁਰੁ ਕੀਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਮਿੱਖੁ ਦਾਇਰੁ ]

ਪ੍ਰਿਠਿ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ਸੋ ਪ੍ਰਿਠਿ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ] 7 ]

AGGS, M 3, P 1052.

*Here the Sabd (word) is the gateway to salvation because nobody can erase good deeds (kirt). Such achievements are also inherited, one finds by eliminating the ego.*

ਗੁਰੁ ਪ੍ਰਿਠਿ ਜਿ ਚਿਰੁ ਮਿਰਿ ਜਿ ਚਿਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਕ੍ਰਿ ]

ਮਿਕਿ ਦਾਇਰੁ ਸੇ ਪ੍ਰਿਠਿ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ਚਿਰੁ ] 3 ]

AGGS, M 3, P 1276.

*With the blessing of the Guru ego is eliminated and understanding the Sabd attains new life. Therefore, gateway to salvation is achieved by eliminating ego.*

In all the above verses ਦਾਇਰੁ (Duara) means ‘gateway’ and ‘gateway to the salvation’ is through the Sabd.

(**Note:** In all the above verses and all other verses in the AGGS, ਦਾਇਰੁ is spelled with ‘A’ (*aera*), therefore, in English it should be written as GURUDUARA rather than GURDUWARA as is found in the literature.)

From the above discussion it becomes clear that ‘Guru’ and ‘Duara’ in Gurbani means ‘Guru’ and ‘gateway’, respectively, according to the Nanakian Philosophy. Therefore, Gurdwara (Guruduara) means ‘Gateway to the Guru’. Since Guru is the *Sabd* and *Sabd* is the philosophy, therefore, Gurdwara means gateway to the philosophy of the Guru.

### GURU DUARAY

There is another word **grl dAwrY** (*Guru Duaray*) which has been used in the Nanakian Philosophy many times. Now let us find out what does the critical interpretation of the following verse of Guru Nanak teaches us when the word is **grl dAwrY** (*Guru Duaray*):

BWfW hCw sie j oiqsuBwvsl ]  
 BWfW Aiq ml lXuDqW hCw n hiesl ]  
**grldAwrYhie** sol priesl ]  
 ejq dAwrYDie hCw hiesl ]  
 mj yhCykW vlCwruAwip vrqWiesl ]  
 mqukoj wxYj Wie AgypWiesl ]  
 j hykrm kmwie qhW hiesl ]  
 AlmqW hir kW nWauAwip vrqWiesl ]  
 cil Aw piq isauj nmusvWir vjW vWiesl ]  
 mxsuikew vCwru iqhul k sWwiesl ]  
 nWnk Awip inhW usiB kl qWrs ]  
 AGGS, M1, P 730.

Meanings of special words: In the above verse ‘*bhaanda*’ means body (and the mind), ‘Guru’ means ‘Guru’, ‘*duaray*’ means ‘gateway’ or ‘through’, ‘*maanis*’ means ‘man’, ‘*amrit*’ means ‘elixir’, ‘*agay*’ and ‘*teh lok*’ means ‘next world’ and ‘three worlds’ used as metaphors.

### Interpretation

“Only that body (mind) is pure that is liked by You (the Almighty).

The body (mind) that is extremely polluted with vices cannot be cleansed just by washing.

It is only when one enters the **gateway (path) of the Guru\***, one can get wisdom.

It is this gateway where after entering one can cleanse one's polluted mind.

Then the Almighty Itself will make one to distinguish between the polluted and cleansed mind.

One must not understand that the verdict/judgment of deeds is declared after going to the next world.

(It is here in this world) What one sows so shall one reap.

The elixir of the life is the realization of the Almighty and

The Guru himself will distribute this elixir (to you).

Once one enters (chalia) this gateway one will be honored.

Then human being will be honored everywhere (in the three worlds).

Nanak says: You yourself will be contented and will make your filial generations contented.”

(\*Gateway or a means to access or a road or path to the Guru’ is more appropriate interpretation than ‘Through the Guru’, since it is **grl dAwrY hie**. Moreover, in the next sentence (stanza) it says **ejq dAwrY** means ‘through this gateway or path’ of the Guru. Then again **cil Aw** has been used that means walking through.)

The main theme conveyed in this verse by Guru Nanak is as follows: The polluted mind cannot be cleansed by washing the body. It can be cleansed only by entering the gateway to the Guru, i.e. by following the philosophy of the Guru. Because here ‘*Guru Duaray hoay*’ means by entering the ‘gateway’ that leads to the ‘Guru’, the *Sabd* or the Nanakian Philosophy, and when one deliberates, understands and brings the philosophy into practice then the mind is cleansed and one gets the salvation. There is another point to be noted carefully in this verse that salvation is not attained after the death as is mostly understood by many scholars; it is attained here while living on this earth.

Let us examine more verses from Nanakian Philosophy to find out the meanings of ‘Guru Duarae’ (**grldAwrY**):

kir ikrpW Apn'Gir AwieAw qW imil sKIAW kwj urcWieAw ]  
 KJ udjK min AnduBieAw shuVlAwhx AwieAw ]1]  
 gwvhugwvhukimxl **ibbjk blCwru** ]  
 hmr'Gir AwieAw j gj lvnuBqWru ]1] rhWau ]  
**grldAwrY**hmrW vlAwhuj hAW j Wshuimil Aw qWj winAW ]  
 iqhul kW mih **sbdurivAW** h'AwipugieAw mnuminAW ]2]  
 AGGS, M 1, P 351.

This verse of Guru Nanak revolves around the marriage of a devotee (as a bride) with the *Sabd* (as the husband).

It means union with the *Sabd* of the Guru. Hey my friends! sing songs, which can discriminate between good and bad, and right and wrong (**ibbjk blCwru**). The next sentence

#2 explains symbolically solemnization of a marriage of a devotee with the *Sabd*, i.e. accepting the path of the Guru. Then it was understood that the *Sabd* (the Almighty) is everywhere and my ego had vanished.

ekWAcwruWiekurW ]  
 pak paxl Agnl AsrW ]  
 ekWbvruBv'iqhul ie ]  
 ekWbWysWYpiq hie ]

igAwnu iDAwnu l ysm sir rhl ]  
 grmi K ekuvrl w kol hl ]  
 ij s nōd je ikrpw qysKupwey ]  
**grldArYAwK sKwey ] 7 ]**

AGGS, M 1, P 930.

*In this verse Guru Nanak explains that the Transcendent Entity is One and Only. It was learnt through the Guru (Guru Duaray).*

fl q fl q hysKI Prtyclr slgwr ]  
 fwhpix qin sKunhl ibnufr ibxTI fwr ]  
 frip mēl Gir Ampxl fITl kllq sj wix ]  
 frurw iKAw gir Ampxl inrBaurmuvKwix ]  
 fljir vsu iKw Gxl j b dKw nhl dlir ]  
 iqKw invwrl sbdumln AllmtpuPlAw Brplir ]  
 djh djh AwKysBukel j YBwVqldje ]  
**grldArYdysl iqKw invwrlsie ] 3 ]**

AGGS, M 1, P 933.

*This verse of Guru Nanak explains that by wondering around all my clothes and ornaments have been torn. But when I showed my love (desire) to know the Transcendent Entity, my quest for It (the Almighty) was satisfied by the Sabd as an elixir (Amrit) delivered through the Guru to make aware that It pervades everywhere. All my desires to meet the Almighty have been shattered and I failed to get peace of mind. Everybody wants peace of mind. But only that person will get peace to whom the Almighty wishes to give. One can become worth attaining peace through the Guru, that means understanding the Sabd and practicing the advice given in it. Then all the desires will be fulfilled. If someone finds out that fact, is honored. This wisdom is spoken through the Guru.*

ij nl cw iKAw iqnl sldupw iAw ibnu cw KyBrim Bl w iē ]  
**Allmtpusicw nmuhYkhw kClN j w iē ]**  
 plvq hllprvwxu BieAw pYysbid smw iē ] 2 ]  
 Awpydje q pwe lA Yhrw krxw ikClN j w iē ]  
 d j x v w l y k l h i Q d w i q h l **grldArYpwe ]**

AGGS, M 3, P 33.

*In the above verse it is explained that the 'Naam' is the elixir (Amrit) and this elixir was attained by understanding the Sabd. Such wisdom is received through the Guru (Guru Duaray).*

scu s j m u siqgrldArY ]  
 hamYkDwsbid invwrl ]  
 siqgrusjv sdw sKupw iAw sll uslkusBwqwhw hy ] 5 ]

AGGS, M 3, P 1057.

*The real efforts to do good deeds were found through the Ever-existing Guru (Guru Duaray), i.e. the ego and anger were eliminated through the Sabd. By understanding Sabd one attains all the pleasure and humility.*

scw scudwqw krm ibDwqw ij suBwViqsunw iē l w iē ]  
**grldArYsel bWYij s nōAwip bWw iē ] 4 ]**

AGGS, M 3, P 1234.

*The Ever-Existing and Bounteous (Almighty) blesses the one through the Guru (Guru Duaray) to whom It wishes. Only that one will discover, to whom the Almighty blesses.*

In the above verses the word 'grldArY' (Guru Duaray) means 'through the Guru' ('Through' means: by way of; by means of; as result of; because of). Therefore, the meanings of 'Guru Duaray' are: through Guru; by way of Guru; by means of Guru; as a result of Guru; because of Guru.

**Gurdwara and Dharamsal**

In literature sometimes Gurdwara is interchanged with *dharamsal* or vice versa [4-6]. Bhai Kahn Singh [4] has mentioned that from Guru Nanak to Guru Arjan the Sikh Religious temple was used to be called as '*dharamsal*'. Guru Arjan was the first who built '*dharamsal*' (Harmandir) amidst the Amritsrowar. At the time of Guru Hargobind the *dharamsal* started to be called as Gurdwara. Fauja Singh [5] also quoted that at the time of Guru Hargobind the *Dharamsal* started to be referred to as Gurdwara.

There is a great confusion in the Sikh history and literature about the use of terms, *Manji or Manji Sahib, dharamsal* and Gurdwara as synonymous with one another [4-7]. Major Gurmukh Singh [6] described '*dharamsal*' from Sanskrit as court of justice, tribunal, charitable asylum, religious asylum, and in Punjabi it stands for a place of worship or the village hospice (inn). It is surprising that when Major Gurmukh Singh [7] writes about *Manji*, he does not mention about *dharamsal* and vice versa when he writes about *dharamsal* [6] in the same source of information, Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, he does not mention about *Manji*. According to him *dharamsal* is a Sikh institution as precursor of Gurdwara. (Please see also the article of Dr Dhillon in this issue on pp 13-17) Major Gurmukh Singh [7] drew this meaning from the *Janam Sakhi* (biographies) that usually contains unauthentic information. He said that wherever Guru Nanak went he established *dharamsals* to sing praises of the Lord and to discuss matters of common concern.

**What is a Dharamsal in Nanakian Philosophy?**

Let us examine a few verses to find out in which context the word '*dharamsal*' has been used in Nanakian Philosophy:

r w q l r q l i Q q l v w r ] p v x p i x l A g n l p i q w l ]

iqsuivic Drql Qwip rKI Dnm sul ]  
 iqsuivic j IA jgiq kyrly ]  
 iqn kynim Anj Anj ] krml krml hie vlcirru ]  
 scu Awip scu drbruru ] iqQ'ishin plc prvixu ]  
 ndrI krim pv'lnsuxu ] kc pkwel EQ'pnie ]  
 nink gieAw j w'j'wie ] 34 ]

AGGS, Jap 34, P 6.

Here in this verse, Guru Nanak says that the whole earth is a dharamsal meaning a place to live in righteousness.

mhn qryatbmltr mhl Apwru ]  
 mhn qryshin dAwir j laustk Dnm sul w ]  
 Dnm sul Apwru dAwir Tkir sdw klrqnu'gwhy ]  
 j h sD stk iekqrhwh qhw qwh idAwvhy ]  
 kir dieAw mieAw dieAw sAwml hhu dln ikpwrw ]  
 ibnvllq nink drs ipAwysimil drsn sKuswru ]1]

AGGS, M5, P 248.

Here Guru Arjan describes that the temple of the Almighty has no boundary. Hey the Almighty! Your beauteous abode is a sanctuary (*dharamsal*) for the noble people (*sants*). The infinite glory is of Your sanctuary (*dharamsal*) where all sing your praise. Here again the *dharamsal* is a place of no boundary and a sanctuary for the noble people.

m'sKI hllsKupwieAw ] gir Aljir sduvswieAw ]  
 siqgir priK ivKwil Aw msqik Dir k'YhQuj lau ] 9 ]  
 m'bdI scu Dnm sul hY ] grisKw l hdw Bwil kY ]  
 p' Dvw pKw Prdw iqsuiviv iniv l gw pwie j lau ] 10 ]

AGGS, M 5, P 73-74.

Here in this verse Guru Arjan says that I have found happiness by following the philosophy given in the Sabd of the True Guru. That means I have founded a true place of righteousness (*dharamsal*) where I bring together the Guru-oriented Sikhs and serve them (the philosophy of humility and righteousness). It means the *dharamsal* is a place of no boundary (means the whole earth) to learn and practice humility and righteousness through the Guru (Sabd).

From the above verses it is evident that '*dharamsal*' in Gurbani means a place of unlimited boundary to live in righteousness and a sanctuary for the noble people (*sants*) to sing the praise of the Almighty. And **Gurdwara** means the 'gateway to the Guru (Sabd)', the institution to deliberate on Sabd to understand its philosophy.

## IMPORTANCE OF VICHAR (DELIBERATION) IN NANKIAN PHILOSOPHY

### Vichar

A great importance has been given to *vichar* in Gurbani

at many places in the AGGS. Different writers have interpreted *vichar* differently. But according to the general meanings of *vichar* in Punjabi and the meaning given by Bhai Kahn Singh [4], *vichar* may be defined as: *The method to determine the truth by discussing and deliberating the subject matters thoroughly in a group.*

The meanings of the word 'discuss' in English dictionaries are: *To investigate by reasoning or argument; to discourse about something to arrive at the truth or to convince others of the validity of one's position.*

### i) Vichar Means Deliberation/Discussion

Since proper understanding of any subject matter can only be achieved through discussion, highest importance has been given on *vichar* (deliberation) of the *Sabd* in the Nanakian Philosophy:

sBs'lapir gir sduvblcru ] AGGS, M 1, P 904.

"Highest of all deeds is the deliberation / discussion on the Sabd of the Guru (Nanakian Philosophy)."

sicunim gir sbid vlcir ] AGGS, M 1, P 355

"The Ever-Existing (Almighty) is realized through the deliberation of Guru's philosophy."

ivxu siqigr gx n jwpl ij cru sbid n kry blcru ]  
 AGGS, M 1, P 936.

"Without the True Guru the virtues cannot be realized until deliberation of the Guru's philosophy is carried on."

### ii) Vichar Means Philosophy

*Vichar* also means philosophy as is indicated in the following phrase:

isKI isiKAw gir vlcir ]

AGGS, M 1, P 465.

"Sikhi (Sikhism) is the advice of Guru's philosophy."

When Guru Arjan compiled the Gurbani into a Granth, he mentioned *vichar* as the whole philosophy of Sikhism under the heading of *Mundavani* (seal, conclusions) at the end of the AGGS, and he described the importance of *vichar* as discussion/deliberation of the subject matters (*wastu*) in it (AGGS) as the final instructions to the Sikhs:

m'lvxl mhl w 5

QwI ivic iq'ln vsq'lpelE squst'kuvlcirru ]  
 Al'lk'j nwmu Tkir kw pieE ij s kw sBs'ADwro ]  
 j y koKw'j y koB'lyiqs kw hie aDwro ]  
 eh vsquqj l nh j wel inq inq rKuair Dwro ]

qm s[uricrn l ig qrlA'sBunink bh[m pswro] 1 ]  
AGGS, M 5, p 1429.

### Mundavani (Seal, Conclusion)

*"In the platter (The Granth) are found three subject matters - truth, contentment and the vichar (philosophy of the Guru).*

*The elixir from the Almighty is also there, for which everybody has the desire to have it.*

*Whosoever adopts (khavé) it and practices (bhunché) it, is saved. (i. e., Whosoever discusses/deliberates and practices it, is successful.)*

*These subject matters (truth, contentment, vichar) in no way can be ignored or discarded, keep them in mind all the time.*

*The sea of darkness (ignorance) can be crossed by following the instructions (charan lag) (recorded in the Granth).*

Nanak says: *The Almighty pervades everywhere."*

Although great importance is given to the deliberation of Gurbani, the irony is that very little deliberation of the Gurbani is done in Gurdwaras. Whatever a little deliberation or *viakhia* is done by the *kirtanias*, *kathakaars*, *sants* or others is always one-way, i.e. from the speaker to the *sangat* (congregation). It is not a deliberation until it is two ways, i.e. from speaker to *sangat* and from *sangat* to speaker. There is a general impression that discussion in Gurdwara is against Gurbani, however, Gurbani emphasizes again and again the importance of *vichar*. It has been observed that almost in all the Gurdwaras the *kirtanias*, *kathakaars* and *sants* usually leave the Gurdwara immediately after their performance to go to another Gurdwara and the *sangat* of the previous Gurdwara do not get any chance to talk to them even after the *divaan* (assembly) to resolve their doubts.

### FUNCTIONS OF GURDWARA

According to the evolution of institution of Gurdwara, the main function of Gurdwara should be of reading, listening (understanding), and practicing of the Gurbani (Nanakian Philosophy) as explained in the following stanza of JAP:

q[rQuqp[ieA[ dquclru]

jykopivliql kw mru]

sixA[ m[in]A[ min klq[ B[au]

At[r]giq q[r]Q mil n[au]

AGGS, Jap 21, P 4.

*"Pilgrimage, austerity, compassion, and charity, if earns any merit, is very little, i.e. equal to a sesame seed. However, by listening (understanding) and accepting (practicing) and imbibing the wisdom (of the Guru) in mind, is equivalent to cleansing one's inner-self at a pilgrimage."*

It is a pity that very few academicians present their views on the Gurbani and Sikhism in their real perspective in Gurdwaras. It may be due to the fact that in general the *sangat* is fond of listening to professional *kirtanias*, *sants* and *kathakars* only. It has also been noticed that most of the devout Sikhs when enter into the Gurdwara they would offer a little money before the Aad Guru Granth Sahib but double or manifold of that to the *kirtanias*, *kathakaars*, and *sants* even without listening and understanding their preaching because they have been taught to do so.

In these days preaching of ancient philosophy and mythology by professional *kirtanias*, *kathakaars*, *sants* and by some Sikh scholars is on the increase and very little is discussed about the Gurbani and Sikhism in their real perspective. Consequently, the young Sikhs of the Science Age are drifting away from Gurdwara, as they are not satisfied the way Gurbani and Sikhism is being taught or preached there.

Since the Gurbani and Sikhism is most scientific and logical, it is necessary that it should be taught scientifically and logically to make the young Sikhs to understand it properly. We have to stop wrong preaching if we want to represent Sikhism as a universal religion of the world and to bring back the young Sikhs into the fold of Sikhism.

Instead the Gurdwara is busy in arranging uninterrupted recitation of the AGGS (*Akhand Paaths*), uninterrupted *kirtan* for whole night (*rehnsabai*), celebration of *barsis* (anniversaries) of *sants* and *Babas* of various *dehras*, *massiyas*, *puranmashis*, *sangrands*, etc. in spite of the fact that such practices are condemned and rejected in the Gurbani. On the contrary there is no deliberation of *Sabd* by the *sangat*.

It is earnestly suggested to the executive of every Gurdwara to invite academicians on the same bases as the *kirtanias*, *kathakaars*, *sants*, etc. to present well-researched and documented information on the Gurbani and Sikhism. A definite time should be fixed for every speaker to answer the inquiries or questions from the *sangat* to resolve their doubts. I do not have to mention here that our young Sikhs are living in the Science Age (Space Age, Computer Age, Information Age) and they will not be convinced until the Gurbani and Sikhism are represented scientifically and logically and they are encouraged to pose questions to the speakers (*kirtanias*, *kathakaars*, preachers, *sant*, etc.) to resolve their doubts.

### SUGGESTIONS TO PONDER UPON

Now it is easy for me to sum up the whole discussion that Gurdwara is a gateway and on entering it one finds the Guru, the *Sabd* that has been enshrined in the Aad

Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh. Then after entering the gateway it becomes the most important duty of the Sikh to *vichar* (discuss/deliberate) the Gurbani with the *sangat* to find out the truth and to achieve the contentment and salvation.

When so much importance is given to the *vichar* (discussion/deliberation) in the Gurbani then why it has not been adopted in Gurdwara? It means the term, Gurdwara, was never understood properly before. It is never too late to amend and adopt the right path. The executive of every Gurdwara should immediately adopt the following procedure to achieve the above objectives:

- a. *Raagi* should recite Gurbani in the form of a *kirtan* with right explanation of the Sabd. After the *kirtan* about 10 minutes should be devoted for discussion on the topic of the *kirtan*. The discussion should be lead by the stage secretary himself to encourage the *sangat* to ask questions for further explanations. The first question should be asked by the secretary to initiate the *vichar* (deliberation / discussion). Every member of the *sangat* has the right to ask questions and to give his/her opinion on that particular topic of the *kirtan*. A word of caution: Maintenance of scrupulosity is most important aspect of discussion.
- b. Similar method should be followed for the academicians, *sants*, preachers, *kathakars* and politicians when they are lecturing on some topics. After their talks, again it is the duty of the stage secretary to reserve about 10 minutes for discussion and also to initiate the discussion as explained above.

By this method, a poorly prepared and unqualified *raagi* or *sant* or preacher or academician or politician will not be able to face the *sangat* next time and will be automatically eliminated from this easy-money collecting business. By adopting this method better *raagis*, *sants*, preachers and politicians will be produced, who could represent Gurbani and Sikhism in their real perspective. Consequently, the *sangat* and the executive would become more aware of Gurbani and Sikhism in their real perspective. In fact *kirtan*, *katha*, and discussion should be done by the *sangat* in Gurdwara and expert academicians, *raagis*, and *kirtanias* should also be invited occasionally.

*Sangat* is also advised to be in Gurdwara before the commencing of *Divaan* (congregation) and should stay there until the *ardas* (prayer) of *smapati* (closing ceremony) is performed. Coming in and going out, while the *Divaan* is in session, should be restricted. *Langar* (eating together without any discrimination) should be served only after the performance of the *Ardas*.

There would be some executive members of Gurdwara,

who would object to this system of discussion/deliberation of Gurbani under the disguise of disrespect to the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, because of the fact that they are not interested that the Sikhs should know Gurbani and Sikhism in their real perspective. Instead they are more interested to find the means and method by which they could collect more funds for the Gurdwara. But we (the *sangat*) have to decide ourselves whether we have to obey the instructions given in the *Mundavani* (conclusions) to *vichar* (deliberate / discuss) to find out the truth and to achieve contentment and salvation or we have to follow those executive members, who object to hold discussion to keep the Sikhs in the darkness as before forever, as they have done until this time.

Finally, formation of a new organization, International Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (ISGPC) each for Canada, USA, UK, and others countries, constituting members of high caliber, reputation, and prestige; a legally valid constitution; and a scientifically and logically sound *Rehit Maryada* (code of conduct) based on Gurbani, are needed immediately. Such an organization could take care of the proper functioning of Gurdwaras and the representation of Gurbani and Sikhism in their real perspective during the 21st century. In vast countries like Canada and USA there should be regional ISGPCs for each region. Recently a North American Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (NASGPC), constituting 41 Gurdwaras, i.e., 36 Gurdwaras of British Columbia, and 5 from across the border, has been established. Mr Balwant Singh Gill of Surrey, BC is the spokesperson for the NASGPC.

Such an organization should be constituted by eminent Sikh theologians, having some knowledge of science; eminent Sikh scientists of various fields, having some knowledge of Gurbani; and eminent historians and linguists having some knowledge of both Gurbani and science. I had put an emphasis on the knowledge of science for every group of experts because we are living in the Science Age (Space Age, Computer Age, Communication Age) where scientific and logical interpretation of Gurbani and representation of Sikhism is needed. I hope the NASGPC would form Board of Directors of the qualifications explained above.

## CONCLUSIONS

Gurdwara is an institution for the dissemination of Gurbani and Sikhism where one can deliberate on Gurbani with the *sangat* (congregation) and the scholars to improve one's temporal and spiritual thoughts to live in righteousness on this earth. It is also a place for resolving community problems, for holding educational

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seminars and conferences, and religious functions - *Gurpurbs*, and social functions - naming of newly born baby, birthdays, marriages, *antam sanskaars*, etc.

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