

EDITORIAL

QUADRICENTENNIAL OF COMPILATION OF AAD GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Worldwide preparations are vigorously being made all over the world to celebrate a very sacred event in the history of Sikhism, *Quadricentennial of Compilation of Aad Guru Granth Sahib and its installation (first Prakash)* in Darbar Sahib, Amritsar by Guru Arjan. This event falls on September 1, 2004. How is this event going to be celebrated and what would be the achievements?

Till the end of December 2003 almost nothing has been done to present the philosophy of Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) in its real perspective. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; Punjabi University, Patiala; and the Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh have already held a number of conferences to celebrate this event. When we look into the papers presented in these conferences it is difficult to figure out if there were any efforts to work out the precise and comprehensive philosophy of the AGGS, which can be presented to the humanity of Modern Science Age during 2004, the year of celebration. Many conferences were held indicating that the Aad Guru Granth Sahib is world first Interfaith Scriptures but nothing definite has come out in what respect it is Interfaith Scripture except mentioning that Bani of Bhagats, Sants, and Sufis belonging to different religions and of different castes is included in this Granth. Moreover, some papers were presented to show the universality of Gurbani and Sikhism but none has tried to find out if it was so then why are even the majority of the young Sikhs going away from Sikhism even in the Punjab, India?

On the other hand the Institute for Understanding Sikhism (IUS) started celebrating this historic occasion from September 2001. The contributions of the IUS in this respect are given as follows:

The First International Seminar in 2001 was on:
GURDWARA: History, Meaning and Functions of Gurdwara.

The Second International Seminar in 2002 was on:
Sabd Guru, Conscience and Consciousness.

The Third International Seminar in 2003 was on:
Doctrine of Guru Nanak in JAP.

In fact JAP is the essence or a summary of the Nanakian philosophy embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak, incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Therefore, on this occasion the first book published by the IUS is on

JAP, which is entitled as *JAP: The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy*. Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, the author of this book, has rendered its interpretation with science and logic. The book is available from the IUS and Singh Brothers, Amritsar.

The proceedings of all the three seminars are also available from the IUS.

Other contributions of IUS in representing philosophy in the AGGS for the last five years are also enlisted here. These may be considered as a stepping-stone or guide towards understanding and formulating "Integrated and Comprehensive Philosophy of Sikhism":

1. System of referencing Bani from the Granth: The Sikh Holy Scriptures.
2. How to Address the Holy Granth of the Sikhs.
3. Language and Script of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib.
4. The Commencing Verse of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, Mool Mantra, has been interpreted in the light of Gurbani, science and logic.
5. Concept of God in Nanakian philosophy.
6. Guru, Sabd, Sabd Guru, and Granth Guru.
7. Crusade against rituals of *Akhand Paath* and other such rituals.
8. Meanings and Functions of Gurdwara.
9. Who is a Sikh?

All the above subjects and many more are going to be the base for next book of the IUS.

A Chapter on '*Sikh Perspective on Bioethics*', written by Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, is being published in the *Annals of Bioethics* by the Center for Bioethics, Pain Management and Medicine, Des Moines, IA, USA. It is in press now. This is the first discussion on bioethics from the Sikh perspective in which the views presented are supported by quotations from the Aad Guru Granth Sahib.

The IUS is proud of its achievements and will continue to work towards the formulation of an "Integrated and Comprehensive Philosophy of Sikhism".

About four years ago in 1999 *Tercentenary of Khalsa* was celebrated in which the Sikh authorities and other Sikh institutes failed to portray the mission of Guru Gobind Singh in creating the Khalsa because of lots of infights among the Sikhs. One Akali Dal was fighting with the other; the President of SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) was fighting with the President of the main stream Akali Dal; Jathedar of Akal Takht was fighting with

another Jathedar, who also claimed to be the real Jathedar of Akal Takht, and other Jathedars of other Takhts; and so on. However, a number of favorites of the Punjab Government and of the Central Government were honored with various titles. The only visible effect of celebration of Tercentenary of Khalsa is that so-called 'Dasam Granth' has become in prominence and is being misinterpreted by many Sikh scholars and non-Sikh scholars to portray Sikhism, which goes mostly against the philosophy embodied in the AGGS.

It was also claimed by the Jathedar of Akal Takht that by 1999 all the Sikhs would be initiated (baptized) as Khalsa. A few thousands were initiated on that day. If we try to evaluate the effect of celebration of the Tercentenary of Khalsa on this aspect we will find that about 80% of the young Sikhs in the Punjab are without *kesh* (hair) and turbans. It was also reported by Dr Kharak Singh in his keynote lecture, 'Guru Granth - Guru Panth' on November 15, 2003 conference held at Chandigarh that alarming large numbers of Sikhs have dropped the visible and essential requirement of Sikhism – the unshorn hair. This is the result of even after a vigorous 'Chetana Lahar' organized by the Institute of Sikh Studies (IOSS), Chandigarh and the Dharam Parchar Committee of the SGPC, Amritsar.

I pointed out at that time that we need to preach the basic philosophy of Sikhism in its real perspective before forcing any code of conduct. Till today there has not been any effort to work out the mission of Guru Gobind Singh in creation of the Khalsa.

Now the *Quadricentennial of Compilation of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib* and its installation in the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar is falling on September 1, 2004.

The Aad Guru Granth (AGGS) is highly respected by its followers, the Sikhs, however, it is also revered by the followers of different religious traditions as a truly Interfaith Scripture in the sense that it contains not only the hymns of six Sikh Gurus it also includes sacred compositions of 29 Hindu Saints and Muslim Sufis from all over sub-continental India from 15th to 17th century. That is why the Quadricentennial of Compilation is being celebrated by the Sikhs in association with followers of other religions as well as leading international inter-religious organizations.

During December 2003 the Dharam Parchar Committee of the SGPC has become very active and are holding a number of meetings to chalk out programs for celebration of various centennials including the Quadricentennial of Compilation of the AGGS during the year 2004. Similarly, in a move to make celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the Compilation of Aad Guru Granth Sahib in 2004 a grand success, the Centre has formed a Committee headed by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The 18-member committee would chalk out the programmes for the celebrations at the national level.

The members of the committee, apart from Mr Vajpayee, include Union Tourism Minister Jagmohan, Union Minister for Fertilisers and Chemicals Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, National Minorities Commission Chairman Tarlochan Singh, Andhra Pradesh Governor S S Barnala, former Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, SGPC Chief Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Lok Sabha MP R L Bhatia.

Time will tell if the Sikh authorities and various Sikh organizations will be able to present integrated and comprehensive philosophy of the AGGS to the humanity of Modern Science Age during these celebrations. It is envisaged that most of the Gurdwaras and *Dehras* of *Sants* throughout the world will be celebrating this event by holding one at least or multiple number of *Akhand Paaths* at the same time in the same room. During this time the *Kirtanias* will be in great demand in the Western world.

I have noticed that the Sikhs have not been able to decide if Sikhism is an offshoot of Hinduism or of Islam or syncretism of both or an original and unique religion founded by Guru Nanak. In this respect I am reproducing some observations about Sikhism for consideration during the celebration of Quadricentennial of Aad Guru Granth Sahib.

Bhai Sahib Bhai Kapur Singh, Formerly Professor of Sikhism, writes in "A Note on the *Jap (u)*" published by Dharam Parchar Committee of SGPC, Amritsar as follows:

"The facts given in the Veda were not perceived, deduced, or formulated through reason, but were revealed to men possessing high extra-sensitivity, the rishis, and Veda is, therefore, shruti, revelation in contradistinction to smriti, - that which is remembered, the knowledge derived through sense-perception and ratiocination. This is the foundation of the processes of the religious and metaphysical thought in India."

Then he wrote about Buddha as follows:

"Gautama, the Buddha, repudiated the claim and validity of the Veda in this particular sense, and he also denied by implication, the validity, of the shabd, non-human verbal sound, as a true source of knowledge. Buddhi, the enlightened, steadfast, dispassionate reason, was the source of the truth that Guatma, the Buddha, preached."

He further wrote about Buddhism as follows:

"Disappearance of Buddhism from the land of its birth, about fifteen hundred years ago, is coeval with the reassertion of the doctrine of shabd and identification of the shabd with the corpus of the texts of ancient Sanskrit literature, known as the Rig-veda, Sam-veda, Upanishads, etc."

After mentioning Buddha's views about the Veda, and giving the reason for disappearance of Buddhism from India, he wrote about Guru Nanak as follows:

"After twenty hundred years, after the Buddha, who was Siddhartha Gautama, Guru Nanak is a milestone in the spiritual life of India, comparable in principle, to the phenomena of the revelations of Vedic texts and the system of psychological discipline and intellectual ratiocination of Gautama, the Buddha, Guru Nanak proclaims the validity of the doctrine of the shabd in a special sense and claims that the shabd-testimony which he prefers is independent, in its genesis and validity, of the ancient scriptural texts called Veda, but beyond that he does not explicitly go. He does not repudiate the truth enshrined in these scriptural texts. This point must always be borne in mind when understanding Guru Nanak, for non-appreciation of this point has already resulted in endless confusion and misunderstanding."

Here is another example.

Ishwinder Singh Chadha has picked up the views of Khushwant Singh (KS) about Sikhism as reported in Web site (<http://home.istar.ca/~cye/k%20singh%20-interview.html>) of Jagpal S Tiwana (JST) and then compared it with that which appeared in the Sikh Review, Kolkata (pp52-56, of July 2003 issue).

Mr Chadha says in his letter (copy to Editor, *Understanding Sikhism Res. J.*) to the Editor, The Sikh Review, that he was surprised to note that some very controversial views of Khushwant Singh had been edited out in what was published in Sikh Review. For example in the original interview on the website the following remarks are there:

In Web site of JST:

JST: What about the statements that suggest that Sikhs are *keshadhari* [sporting unshorn hair] Hindus? You yourself wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 12, 2001) that Sikhism is a branch of Hinduism. We had a very heated discussion on this in our Sikh Diaspora forum on Internet.

KS: That is correct. Sikhs are *keshadhari* Hindus. Their religious source is Hinduism. Sikhism is a tradition developed within Hinduism. Guru Granth Sahib reflects Vedantic philosophy and Japji Sahib is based on the Upanishads. [Emphasis added]

What appeared in The Sikh Review is as follows:

JST: Sikhs assert that theirs is an independent sovereign religion, while you often club Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism with Hinduism?

KS: That is correct. The Sikhs' religious source is Hinduism. Sikhism is, by and large, a tradition developed within Hinduism. Guru Granth Sahib comments on Vedantic philosophy and certain concepts of Japji Sahib

are traceable to the Upanishads. [Emphasis added]

Mr Chadha further writes: Words can be put in the mouth of any body, or edited differently to suit different audiences. I do not know whether the editing to make the interview more palatable for the Sikh audience was at Editor, SR's end or at the end of the interview, JST.

Still there is another very good example of undermining Nanakian philosophy as follows:

Undermining of Nanakian philosophy by Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, President, Sahitya Akademi, is found in the "Foreword" to the book, *Guru Nanak: Founder of Sikhism*, written by Dr Trilochan Singh and published by Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Delhi. It was written on the eve of celebration of the Fifth Centenary of Birthday of Guru Nanak. His denigratory statement is as follows:

*"The people of the Punjab (and along with them those of the rest of India) became immediately conscious of the value of Guru Nanak's advent and his teachings after he began to preach to them; and Guru Nanak built up and organised during his life time a very important religious persuasion which was broad-based on the foundations of Vedantic Monotheistic Jnana and Puranic Bhakti. The faith preached by Guru Nanak was nothing new for India, it was basically the old monotheistic creed of the ancient Hindus as propounded in the Vedas and the Upanishads - the Vedanta with its insistence upon Jnana or Knowledge of the One Supreme Reality. And this monotheistic basis was fortified, so to say, to put the matter in a simple form by Bhakti or faith as inculcated in later Puranic Hinduism. **The Sikh Panth was nothing but a reformed and simplified Sanatana Dharma of medieval times.**"*

Will the forthcoming conferences on Celebrations of the Quadricentennial of Compilation of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib being held in 2004 by the custodians of Sikhism, Sikh authorities, and Sikh institutions be able to resolve the above confusion and to portray the uniqueness and originality of Nanakian philosophy?

OR

Will Sikhism be able to stand as an independent religion or will lose its uniqueness and originality as happened with Buddhism about fifteen hundred years ago in India?

The other issues to be resolved are about the status and role of Bhagat Bani and Bhatt Bani in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib in constructing an '*Integrated and Comprehensive Philosophy of Sikhism*'.

Devinder Singh Chahal, Editor.