NANAKIAN METHODOLOGY

For better understanding of Nanakian philosophy, it is important to study the Methodology used by Guru Nanak in representing his philosophy in his Bani. His Methodology has been named as *'Nanakian Methodology'* since this type of methodology has not been used in any other Holy Book. The same Methodology has also been followed by the other Sikh Gurus, who succeeded to the House of Nanak, in their Bani. Various methods, used by Guru Nanak in his Bani, are described as follows:

TYPES OF EXPRESSIONS IN GURBANI

i) Allegories, Metaphors, and Similes: Guru Nanak has used allegories, metaphors and similes extensively from the ancient epics and the mythical works in his *Bani* (word). Thus, understanding of these terms is important to interpret his Bani in its real perspective. These terms are as follows [23]:

Allegory: the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence; an instance (as in a story or painting) of such expression; a symbolic representation.

Metaphor: a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.

Simile: a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by *like* or *as* (as in cheeks *like* roses).

In most interpretations of Gurbani by some scholars, allegories, metaphors and similes have been considered as a factual part of the verse rather than in their respective expressions. By doing so such interpretations go far away from its real perspective. Thus, the allegoric and metaphoric expressions, and similes used by Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus was considered very carefully while interpreting Gurbani in this book.

Daljit Singh and Kharak Singh [9] also expressed almost same view on this aspect, when I asked about the *Bhagat* Bani and Gurbani through the Editor, S. Saran Singh, of the Sikh Review, Calcutta:

"The third question is about the myths and stories which find mention in the Guru Granth Sahib. Without meaning any disrespect to anyone, it is known that Ramayana and Mahabharata are among the great epics of the world in which most mythical stories have hardly any historicity. And, yet, these stories being current have their values for the purpose of clarifying religious propositions and making them linguistically understandable to the people who are conversant with them and the concerned idiom. Their reference is mostly symbolic, idiomatic or allegoric, and involves no acceptance of their historical reality."

Some Examples of Allegories and Metaphors,

ਗੁਰੁ ਦਰੀਆਉ ਸਦਾ ਜਲੁ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਮੈਲ ਹਰੈ ॥
ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਪਾਇਐ ਪੂਰਾ ਨਾਵਣੁ ਪਸੂ ਪਰੇਤਹੁ ਦੇਵ ਕਰੈ ॥
AGGS, M 1, P 1329.

If one does not keep in view the metaphoric and symbolic expressions in the above phrase, the interpretations would be different from that of the real theme. Interpretation of the above phrase is given here as an example where the use of allegories and metaphors by Guru Nanak were not considered properly by the following interpreters:

a) Dr Gopal Singh [10]:
The Guru is the clear blue river-water, Bathing in which one is rid of one's Vice.
Yea, when one bathes in the Guru's wisdom, one's animal-and-goblin-nature is turned into the God's.

---

b) Dr Gurbachan Singh Talib [20]:
The Master is a river, full perennially of holy water;
His contact impurity of foul understanding removes.
As is attained the holy Preceptor, is the holy bath accomplished.

Now let us see what would be the interpretation of the same phrase if the metaphors and similes used by Guru Nanak were considered properly.

ਗੁਰੁ ਦਰੀਆਉ ਸਦਾ ਜਲੁ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਮੈਲ ਹਰੈ ॥

This is an symbolic/allegoric expression.

ਦਰੀਆਉ (river) is a metaphor for wisdom/philosophy of the Guru.

ਨਾਵਣੁ (bathing) is a metaphor for using the above wisdom.

ਪਸੂ ਪਰੇਤਹੁ ਦੇਵ (*Pasu, praet, dev*) are the symbolic expressions for persons having instincts of animal, demons, and nobility, respectively.

Now its it is interpreted as follows:
The Guru's wisdom/philosophy when adopted/practised removes the evil thoughts.
The Guru's wisdom/philosophy when adopted/practised completely converts the person having animal and demon instincts into the noblest person of all.

ii) Questioning-Answering System
Guru Nanak often poses question in first phrase and then answer is given in the second phrase. Sometimes the question is in the first part of the verse and then answer is given in the second part of the same verse. However, most of the time it is difficult to distinguish a phrase whether it is a question or a normal phrase since such questioning phrase/verse is in poetical form. If this Questioning-Answering System were not understood properly then it would be difficult to interpret the Gurbani in its real perspective. For example,
Question:
ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥
Answer:
ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥ ੧ ॥ AGGS, Jap 1, p 1.
See detailed interpretation in the PART IV of this book in stanza # 1 at page 64.

Dr Thind [21] has shown this Questioning-Answering System in JAP, and Dr Prarminderjit Singh [16] has shown that it has been used throughout the AGGS.

iii) Use of Practical Methods
Many times very simple methods practiced almost every day are quoted to explain the philosophy. For example,
ਭਰੀਐ ਹਥੁ ਪੈਰੁ ਤਨੁ ਦੇਹ ॥ ਪਾਣੀ ਧੋਤੈ ਉਤਰਸੁ ਖੇਹ ॥
ਮੂਤ ਪਲੀਤੀ ਕਪੜੁ ਹੋਇ ॥ ਦੇ ਸਾਬੂਣੁ ਲਈਐ ਓਹੁ ਧੋਇ ॥
ਭਰੀਐ ਮਤਿ ਪਾਪਾ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ॥   ਓਹੁ ਧੋਪੈ ਨਾਵੈ ਕੈ ਰੰਗਿ ॥
AGGS, Jap 20, p 5.

In this stanza various practical methods have been explained to cleanse the pollution according the nature of the objects:
If hands are soiled with dust then cleansing method is 'use of simple water'.
If clothes are heavily soiled (with urine) then cleansing method is 'use of soap'.
If mind is polluted with sin then cleansing method is 'use of conscience' (imbibing Naam).
See detailed interpretation in the Section on stanza # 20 of JAP at page 100.

iv) Use of Established Concepts, Ancient Philosophy

There is another method where Guru Nanak uses pre-established old concepts or notions or ancient philosophy in the beginning of the verse and then at he end of the verse explains his own philosophy. For example,

ਪਾਤਾਲਾ ਪਾਤਾਲ ਲਖ ਆਗਾਸਾ ਆਗਾਸ ॥

ਓੜਕ ਓੜਕ ਭਾਲਿ ਥਕੇ ਵੇਦ ਕਹਨਿ ਇਕ ਵਾਤ ॥

ਸਹਸ ਅਠਾਰਹ ਕਹਨਿ ਕਤੇਬਾ ਅਸੁਲੂ ਇਕੁ ਧਾਤੁ ॥

ਲੇਖਾ ਹੋਇ ਤ ਲਿਖੀਐ ਲੇਖੈ ਹੋਇ ਵਿਣਾਸੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਵਡਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਆਪੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਆਪੁ ॥

AGGS, Jap 22, p 5.

ਪਾਤਾਲਾ ਪਾਤਾਲ ਲਖ ਆਗਾਸਾ ਆਗਾਸ ॥

The above phrase has been literally translated by Manmohan Singh as follows by ignoring the above methodology used by Guru Nanak [15]:
"There are nether worlds below nether worlds and lacs of skies over skies."

'Patal' has been translated as 'nether worlds', i. e. the worlds of the dead persons. Scientifically there is no such world of the dead in our solar system or anywhere else. Logically there is also no need of hundreds of thousands (*lacs*) of nether worlds to hold the dead persons of the tiny planet, the earth. The *'Agas'* has been translated as 'sky'. Scientifically there is no sky. What is called sky is an upper atmosphere of the earth appearing as blue in sunlight. One can divide this atmosphere into different strata but definitely not into hundreds of thousands (*lacs*) of skies around our planet.

In fact what one sees out there is a space. Scientifically space is: *the three-dimensional expanse in which all matter is located and all events take place, extending in all directions and variously described as extending indefinitely or as finite but immeasurably large [6].* Therefore, literal translation of the above phrase does not lead us to the truth. Moreover, this is not the philosophy of Guru Nanak as is erroneously ascribed to him by some scholars. In fact, Guru Nanak is quoting the myth reported in the Vedas as is clear in the next phrase (ਓੜਕ ਓੜਕ ਭਾਲਿ ਥਕੇ ਵੇਦ ਕਹਨਿ ਇਕ ਵਾਤ ॥).

Similarly, Guru Nanak quotes the Semitic ideas about the worlds in the next phrase:
ਸਹਸ ਅਠਾਰਹ ਕਹਨਿ ਕਤੇਬਾ ਅਸੁਲੂ ਇਕੁ ਧਾਤੁ ॥

"Semitic books say that there are 18 000 worlds in the universe."

After quoting the ancient concepts, notions, or myths available in the literature on the subject, Guru Nanak explains his own philosophy as follows:
ਲੇਖਾ ਹੋਇ ਤ ਲਿਖੀਐ ਲੇਖੈ ਹੋਇ ਵਿਣਾਸੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਵਡਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਆਪੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਆਪੁ ॥

One can keep an account (of the worlds) only if it is countable.
The Almighty is the Great, Who knows how many are there.
See detailed interpretation in the Section on JAP in stanza # 22 at page 107.

DIFFICULTIES TO UNDERSTAND BANI BEING IN POETICAL FORM

Gurbani is in poetical form with minimum number of words without any punctuation, therefore, it becomes difficult to interpret Gurbani in its real perspective. Dr Sahib Singh (18) has tried to interpret Gurbani keeping in view this fact and he usually adds extra words in a parenthesis to make the interpretation understandable. Thus, in this book to make the interpretation easily understandable extra words have also been used and most of the time they have been put in parentheses.

All the systems of Nanakian Methodology explained above were considered while interpreting Gurbani. Besides scientific information known today, and logic were also applied to interpret Gurbani as close to its real perspective as possible. *As a result, my interpretation at many places is entirely different from those published so far.* Therefore, it is my humble request to the readers that the Methodology of Guru Nanak should be kept in mind all the time while reading my interpretation of Gurbani in this book.

DEFINITIONS AND TERMS
All the definitions and terms used in this book have been explained in the text as well as in the GLOSSARY at the end of the book. All the definitions and terms and also some particular words have been marked with asterisks (*) to indicate that these words have been defined/explained in the **Glossary.**

SOURCES OF MEANINGS
Before interpreting any phrase it is necessary to know the most appropriate meanings that convey the theme or philosophy of the whole stanza or verse of that phrase. To find out the most appropriate meanings of the words used in Gurbani, the following sources were consulted: (i) *Mahan Kosh* by Kahn Singh [14], (ii) Sri Guru Granth Kosh by Dr Gurcharan Singh [11], (iii) *sabd arth* (meanings of words) from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan* of Dr Sahib Singh [18], and (iv) *Aad Sri Guru Granth Sahib* of Giani Harbans Singh [12] without being influenced by their interpretations, since sometimes their interpretations are dominated with some ancient concepts or myths, although they have tried to refrain from such concepts or myths in most of their interpretations; and through consultation and discussion with many learned persons through phones, Internet and personal communications.

FEED BACK
Feedback on my scientific and logical interpretation of Gurbani was obtained through personal discussions on certain points or topics with *Gianis*, scholars, college and university professors, and students. A lot of feedback was collected as responses from the readers of my articles published in various journals in the world and responses from the readers of my articles posted on the Web site, Understanding Sikhism: http://www.chahal.info, maintained by Dr Parminder Singh Chahal, my son. Discussions on various Sikh Internets were quite helpful to clarify certain points. Some feedback was received from the audience when I presented my papers in conferences and Gurdwaras. The suggestions and comments received from the reviewers of the draft manuscript have been a great asset to improve its representation. The feedback, thus obtained, was evaluated scientifically and logically for interpreting of JAP.

INTERPRETATION OF GURBANI
The Gurbani was interpreted after critical analysis of words to find out the most appropriate meanings in the context with the theme of the verse keeping in view the scientific information on that theme and the application of logic. Special precautions were taken not to cite mythical or inauthentic works to support a concept or to formulate a principle. Nevertheless, the mythical works; and allegories, metaphors and similes, quoted in the Gurbani to make it understandable, were considered very carefully in the context of the main theme of the verse as discussed earlier.

Once the use of of mythology and ancient concepts as allegories, metaphors, and similes in Gurbani are understood properly then it was easy to achieve consistent and accurate interpretation of JAP in its real perspective. Thus, the use of above Methodology helped to avoid the dichotomous interpretations (amorphous nature of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib) as pointed out by Dr Oberoi [7].

ADDRESSING GOD
For Guru Nanak God is Transcendent Entity That is ineffable (ਅਲਖ), incomprehensible (ਅਲਖ), un-fathomable (ਅਗੋਚਰੁ), formless (ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰ), infinite (ਬੇਅੰਤ) inaccessible (ਅਗਮ), without any fault (ਨਿਰੰਜਨ), etc. Due to these characteristics of God Guru Nanak has not assigned any descriptive/specific name to God

[2]. He has omitted to use any such name to address God in majority of his verses wherein it is difficult to know to whom it is addressed. This method of referencing to God is very prominent in JAP. Throughout JAP no ਕਿਰਤਮ ਨਾਮ (descriptive/specific name) like, Gopal, Gobind, Swami, Allah, Rahim, etc. has been used by Guru Nanak except in stanza # 37 wherein Guru Nanak has used the name 'Ram' for God. This Ram is not that Ram who was son of Dasharatha in the ancient history. This is the 'Ram', which means that 'Entity', which pervads everywhere. However, in the rest of Bani Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus, who succeeded to the House of Nanak, have used extensively descriptive/specific names, e.g. Ram, Gopal, Gobind, Swami, Allah, Rahim etc. But it does not mean that they accept these names as the real names for God. These names have been used as metaphoric names of that Transcendent Entity (God) to make their Bani easily understandable by their followers, the Sikhs.

Therefore, in this book God has been represented as Almighty, God, It, That, and pronoun of God has been used as 'It' and 'Its' instead of 'He' and 'His', respectively. (That means Impersonal God – not involving in any human personality.)

PRESENTATION OF PUNJABI OR OTHER WORDS
The *Punjabi* and other foreign words when used in the text for the first time are italicized and then used as normal print of the text. These words are spelled as they are pronounced in Punjabi except other such words, which have already been accepted in English Dictionaries, e.g. Ram as Rama, Mantar as Mantra, Raag as Raga, etc.

SYSTEM OF REFERENCING BANI FROM AAD GURU GRANTH SAHIB
A new and refined method of referencing the Bani from the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) has been developed. That has been discussed in detail by Chahal [3]. This system of referencing Bani from the AGGS was used throughout the text for maintaining consistency and to set a standard system of referencing Bani from the AGGS. The system of referencing the works other than that of the AGGS was the same as used in most of the scientific works. All the references used in each section are given at the end of the respective section.

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