

FORMULATING METHODOLOGY FOR INTERPRETING GURBANI POSSIBLE CAUSES AND/OR EXCUSES

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ABSTRACT

Interpreting the holy Gurbani correctly has always been a great challenge for scholars of Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS). However, this subject has gained more attention recently for the right reasons because many scholars are interpreting Gurbani in their own ways. This paper has tried to determine the possible causes/excuses which may lead some scholars to misinterpret Gurbani. Eleven such possible causes/excuses have been identified in this regard and discussed in detail. I am hopeful that if careful attention is paid to these causes/excuses, chances are that there will be much less disagreement among scholars on this subject, and hopefully, we can interpret the holy Gurbani correctly.

INTRODUCTION

On the one hand, it is a matter of great comfort that a large number of scholars are showing a great interest in interpreting Gurbani; on the other hand it is a matter of great concern that there is not much agreement among the scholars on the meanings of the holy Gurbani. Everyone seems to have their own interpretation which many times prove to be highly damaging to the sanctity of the holy Gurbani besides being confusing to the masses because they do not get the clear message of the Golden Principles of Gurbani. Whatever the intent of the individual scholars in interpreting the Gurbani may be, they do not realize that because of the unclear messages, the common Sikh is seeking comfort from a large number of self-proclaimed “gurus” or *dera wallahs*, and practising rituals thereby getting trapped in superstitions and misbeliefs. The Sikhs have completely forgotten the supreme sacrifices and the hard work that our Gurus had done to pull the down-trodden masses from the darkness of ignorance which was the biggest cause of their slavery by a small sector of the

Indian Society which included the upper-class Brahmans and the ruling class. Today again, the uninformed or confused Sikhs are becoming slaves to the *dera wallahs*. There are more than 5500 registered *deras* in Punjab alone, and their number is growing fast. Also, cutting of hair and beards by the Sikh youth whereby they are losing their identity is due mainly to the confusing messages they are receiving from the different interpretations of Gurbani by scholars. I know some *dera wallahs* who encouraged their followers to cut their beards and their hair because they are no longer relevant. They preach that growing of hair and beards was meaningful only at the time of Guru Sahiban because it was a need of the hour due to some special circumstances. But now, that we have our own government and Sikhs are in majority in Punjab any way, there is no need of hair and beards now. Such misleading preaching should be alarming to all the Sikhs and we must unite and make an honest effort to have an agreement on the real meanings of the holy Gurbani.

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Before some solutions are presented to solve the problem, it is important to find the causes/excuses for such disagreements. Once we identify the causes, they themselves will lead to solutions.

SOME POSSIBLE CAUSES/EXCUSES FOR THE MISINTERPRETATION OF GURBANI

Even though, there is absolutely no internal inconsistencies in Aad Guru Granth Sahib and its Principles will never be stale or out of date, there are some aspects which, if not understood properly, may cause some disagreements among scholars in the interpretation of its meanings. As it will be clear from the next few pages, it is not because of some kind of deficiency in Aad Guru Granth Sahib - which is a Perfect Guru - if we make mistakes in its interpretation, but it is our inability not to understand the language or the style used in Guru Granth Sahib. Even though such issues will be discussed at length here, but many of the problems are caused by the vested interests of the individuals.

Causes/excuses

Writing Style of Aad Guru Granth Sahib
Absence Of Some Vowel-Symbols and Letters
Pronunciation
Use of Many Languages
Grammar used in Aad Guru Granth Sahib
Use of Metaphors
Use of Examples from Hindu Holy Books
Non-Thorough Study of Aad Guru Granth Sahib
Not Checking Internal Consistencies
Personal Biases and Vested Interests
Vicious Attacks on Aad Guru Granth Sahib.

Now let us discuss each possible cause/excuse in detail.

1. Writing Style

The entire Aad Guru Granth Sahib has been written in poetry, and at the time when Aad Guru Granth Sahib was compiled, it was customary to join all the words in a sentence to form a continuous line. So, when people would read Gurbani, they would split the continuous line forming smaller words and would misread some words drawing different meanings than the true intended meanings. This, of course, will be true of any language. Just as an example consider the

following possible splitting:

ਜੀਉ ਪਾਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਜੀ ਉਪਾਇਆ

AGGS, Kabir, 475. (1)

ਕੱਕਰੀਆਂ - ਬਰੇ (ਬੜੇ) ਅਤੇ ਕੱਕਰੀ - ਆਬਰੇ

AGGS, Kabir, 477)

Also, consider the splitting of the following holy sentences.

ਲਾਖ ਕਰੋਰੀ ਬੰਧੁ ਨ ਪਰੈ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਤ ਨਿਸਤਰੈ॥

AGGS, M:5, 264 (1)

ਲਾਖ ਕਰੋਰੀ ਬੰਧੁਨ ਪਰੈ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਤ ਨਿਸਤਰੈ॥

NOTE (1): I have personally heard many people pronouncing the holy words both ways as shown above.

The top line means that the man is not content even after earning millions of rupees; he finds salvation (contentment) if he recites God's Naam with dedication.

This is the intended meaning as determined by the contents of the whole composition. The second line means that if a man has millions of restrictive bonds (obstacles) in his life, he finds freedom (salvation) by reciting God's Naam.

Consider the splitting of another holy line:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਜਿਨੀ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਸੇ ਕੜਿ ਨ ਸਵਾਹੀ॥

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਜਿਨੀ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਸੇ ਕੜਿਨ ਸਵਾਹੀ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 88.

Meaning: (top line). Those who worship the Perfect Guru in the early morning, do not suffer from boiling blood or discontentment (have peace of mind).

Bottom line: Those who worship God are roasted to ashes (suffer discontentment).

NOTE (2): Discussed in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan by Prof Sahib Singh (4).

Clearly, this is an absurd meaning and is a blasphemy. But the point is, if one does not pay attention to the proper splitting of the holy sentences, even a single misplaced letter can lead to highly misleading meaning. Some unscrupulous people have been able to mislead some ignorant people by abusing this aspect of the writing style of Guru Granth Sahib.

There are some more such examples in Guru Granth Sahib, but this is no longer a serious issue at present because most of the scholars have resolved

such differences.

When comparing beliefs of other faiths with their own, generally Guru Sahiban described the beliefs of the other faiths first, and then their own towards the end. Some scholars did not understand this distinction and thought Guru Sahiban were supporting the beliefs of other faiths. This was particularly true when some vested interests misconstrued the meanings to suit their own objectives. For example, consider the following holy composition of Guru Amar Dass Ji.

ਬ੍ਰਹਮਣ ਕਾਲੀ ਘਾਤੁ ਕੰਢਕਾ ਅਣਚਾਰੀ ਕਾ ਧਾਨੁ॥
ਫਿਟਕ ਫਿਟਕਾ ਕੇਤੁ ਬਦੀਆ ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ॥ ਪਾਹਿ
ਏਤੇ ਜਾਹਿ ਵੀਸਰਿ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਇਕੁ ਨਾਮੁ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 1414.

Meaning: The society considers the killing of a Brahman and a cow a great sin and so is the money earned by selling a daughter and accepting money from an immoral person. All these acts are cursed by the society. Likewise the evil of bad habits and the conceit of all time are considered reprehensible. But a man who forgets God's Naam is worse than all such sinners, and earns total disapproval in (God's Court).

See Note 1.

Again some people with vested interests have misinterpreted the real message in this holy Sabd and promoted the sacredness of the cow. But nowhere in Aad Guru Granth Sahib have Guru Sahiban professed the holiness of the cow or a Brahman. On the contrary, there are many holy Shabads in Aad Guru Granth Sahib which condemn the behaviour of the Brahmans when they rob the ignorant people by telling them fabricated stories which are full of lies. Similarly, there are Sabds which undermine the importance of the cow which is no better than any other animal. Listen to the following holy Sabds:

ਦੁਪ ਬਿਨੁ ਧੇਨੁ ਪੰਖ ਬਿਨੁ ਪੰਖੀ ਜਲ ਬਿਨੁ ਉਤਭੁਜ
ਕਾਮਿ ਨਾਹੀ॥

ਕਿਆ ਸੁਲਤਾਨੁ ਸਲਾਮ ਵਿਹੁਣਾ ਅੰਧੀ ਕੋਠੀ ਤੇਰਾ
ਨਾਮੁ ਨਾਹੀ

AGGS, M 1, p 354-5.

Meaning: Just as a cow which does not provide milk is useless, and a bird without wings is also

useless (cannot fly), vegetation without water is also useless (cannot flourish). Oh God! Just as a ruler without any power is useless, a man who does not have Your Naam in his memory is blind (is ignorant and his life becomes aimless).

ਧੇਨੁ ਦੁਧੈ ਤੇ ਬਾਹਰੀ ਕਿਤੈ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਕਾਮ॥

ਜਲ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਾਖ ਕੁਮਲਾਵਤੀ ਉਪਜਹਿ ਨਾਹੀ ਦਾਮ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 133.

Meaning: A cow is useless if it does not provide milk, and a crop wilts without water and thus does not produce any income.

2. Absence of Some Vowel-Symbols and Letters

The Aad Guru Granth Sahib has not used the following vowel symbols and letters: dots under the letters s, k, g, j, and f to change their sounds; symbol to double the sound of letters; and the nasal 'n' sound. Because of the non-use of these sounds, some words are likely to be mispronounced which can result in a change in the intended meaning of some words. For example consider the following words which can be pronounced in more than one way depending upon the use (or non-use) of the missing sounds.

ਖਡ, ਖੱਡ (gorge); ਖੰਡ (sugar); ਸਕ, ਸੱਕ (Bark of a tree); ਸੌਕ (doubt).

ਕੱਕਰ (frost); ਕੰਕਰ (small stone); ਰੁਖ direction); ਰੁੱਖ (tree); ਪੈਦਾ (to produce); ਪੈਂਦਾ (happens); ਥਾ (was); ਥਾਂ (space); ਕਾਰਾ (Oh! Crow); ਕਾਰਾਂ (crows did); ਕਾਂਗਾਂ (big waves).

As you can see, a slight variation in pronunciation can change the meaning of some words dramatically. So is case in English words and in other languages. So, we need to pay attention to the correct pronunciation of such words where some vowel sounds are missing.

Again, almost all such possible situations have been correctly resolved from the context in which such words appear. But, those of us who have not read the clarifications are likely to make mistakes.

NOTE (3): Such problems are not unique to Gurmukhi Script and it is true of other languages as well. But we are concerned about the Gurmukhi Script here.

3. Pronunciation

There are a few words which, even though have identical spellings, yet are pronounced slightly differently depending upon the context in which they are used. In such cases, generally one has a hard tone while the other has a soft tone. Yet, the different pronunciations have very different meanings. Consider the words. The same situation is in the English language:

ਸੀਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਅਕਲ

The softer pronunciation of the first word is a name - like Sita, the wife of Lord Rama – while the harder sound means “stitched”. This word appears a few times in Guru Granth Sahib, and in most cases it represents the latter meaning. However, because of the personal bias, some people have used the softer sound to mean the wife of Lord Rama. Oosho (2) has done just that while translating JAP.

The harder sound of the second word means something which cannot be broken into simpler parts and represents God, while the softer sound means wisdom. Most people ignore to use the harder sound thus implying the incorrect meaning of the holy word where it means God and not wisdom. So, scholars must be careful about such words.

Please see NOTE (3) above.

4. Use of Many Languages

Aad Guru Granth Sahib contains holy compositions in many languages which include Punjabi with its many dialects, Pothohari, Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian and some words of Arabic, Marathi, and a few other languages. Because of the variety of languages used, some people find it difficult to understand the intended meanings of some Sabds. For example the word “ਖੁੰਦਕਾਰਾ” has been used only twice in AGGS – once by Nam Dev and once by Guru Nanak. This is a Persian word and means Master (or God), but some people thought it to be a Marathi word and related to the profession of Nam Dev. It was thought to mean the wooden plank of the washer man on which he washes clothes. There are some other words like “ਮੁੰਦਾਵਈ”, ਸੋਚ, and “ਤ੍ਰਿਕੁਟੀ” which have been thought to mean different than their

intended meanings.

5. Grammar Used in Aad Guru Granth Sahib

The grammar used in Aad Guru Granth Sahib is very different from the grammar of today. If, we do not follow the rules of the Grammar used in Aad Guru Granth Sahib, we will draw conclusions which could be totally against the Principles of Gurbani. A big credit is due to Prof Sahib Singh (3) who, after years of hard and dedicated labour, has successfully decoded the grammar used in Guru Granth Sahib. It is amazing to learn how beautiful and effective this grammar is. By simply changing the vowels in a given word, it can be changed from subject to object and from noun to verb, from male to female, from singular to plural and vice versa. By simply looking at the way a word has been spelt, we can tell what the grammatical form of the word is. Also, a slight change in vowels can result in a big change in the meaning of the word. For example, the word “Nanak” has appeared in four different forms, but each has a different meaning.

ਨਾਨਕ: This form of the name has been used by all Guru Sahiban who succeeded Guru Nanak Sahib and it implies that they are using the philosophy of Guru Nanak.

ਨਾਨਕੁ: Most of the time, this form has been used to represent Guru Nanak only, but in some cases it has also been used by individual Guru when they express their own views - particularly in a humble way.

ਨਾਨਕਿ: This form implies “Nanak” as subject and mostly it means something has been done by (Guru) Nanak.

ਨਾਨਕੈ: This form implies “to Nanak”.

The same principle applies to all other particular or class names.

Consider the following words with same pronunciation but with different meanings.

ਵਾਜੇ (Musical instruments); ਵਾਜਹਿ (They play (plural); ਗਾਵੈ (Sings (singular); ਗਾਵਹਿ (Sing (Plural).

Changing Meanings: Also, the meanings of some words have changed with time. For example “ਕੀ”

has been used to mean why, and “ਕਿਉ” has been used to mean how and not as the present meaning why. Similarly “ਬਕਣਾ” has been used to mean to utter or to say as opposed to the present meaning which is talking rubbish and is considered to be derogatory. “ਭਲੇਰਾ” which has been used to mean bad or evil now seems to mean better. Similarly “ਦਸਾਵਾ” used to mean to ask rather than to tell; and “ਟਾਂਡਾ” used to mean merchandize rather than the stalk of a plant, and so on. So, we have to be watchful when drawing meanings where such words have been used.

6. The Use of Metaphors in Aad Guru Granth Sahib

One of the beauties and the richness of the language used in Aad Guru Granth Sahib is the use of many metaphors. Some of the metaphors used are as follows: Husband, Master and Money lender have been used for God. Queen, Serpent, Poison, and the Second have been used for Maya; Swan for the Gurmukh or a saintly person; Crow for Manmukh or immoral people or for sensual pleasures (or id); Heron for an imposter; Sarovar and Cloud for the Guru, Pond for a self-proclaimed fake guru; and so on. We will focus on the metaphor, Crow today to discuss how some vested interests have misused this metaphor to concoct a baseless story of some Bibi Rajni and her leper husband to undermine the importance of Harmandir Sahib (The Golden Temple) Amritsar. Some other unscrupulous people have misinterpreted some Slokas of Farid Sahib and have made some misleading posters of Farid Sahib.

Bibi Rajni

As mentioned shortly before, the word “crow” has been used to describe a vile person or acts (thoughts) in contrast to “swan” which has been used for a Gurmukh or a holy man. Listen to the following holy couplets by Guru Nanak Sahib.

ਕਿਆ ਹੰਸੁ ਕਿਆ ਬਗੁਲਾ ਜਾ ਕਉ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੇਇ॥

ਜੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਵੈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਕਾਗਹੁ ਹੰਸੁ ਕਰੇਇ॥

AGGS, M:1, 91)

Meaning: *If God wishes, He can convert a vile person or an imposter into a holy man just by casting a sight of kindness, oh Nanak!*

Some people with vested interests took the literal and misleading meaning of the holy couplet to prove that the importance of Harmandir Sahib is not due to the fact that it was constructed by our revered Guru and that the life-sustaining Naam of God is recited from Aad Aad Guru Granth Sahib all the time, but because the small pond which was replaced by the present holy Sarovar had a few drops of some mythical amrit which is not even recognized by the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. To give credence to their idea, they concocted a completely baseless story according to which Bibi Rajni's ruler-father married her to a lame leper to punish her because she believed it was God and not her father who was her real provider. She put her husband in a basket and carried him on her head to some unknown destination. She reached a very secluded place near the present holy city of Amritsar and stopped for rest and for food.

She placed her husband near the pond and she went to a nearby village which was more than four km away to beg for food. When she was gone, her husband saw some crows taking a dip in the pond and turning into swans. He was very surprised at that and he crawled down to the pond to take a dip to see what happens to his leprosy if he took a dip in such water.

Will you be surprised if you learned that as soon as he took a dip, all his disease was cured and he was perfectly healthy!

This is how the villains twisted the meaning of the holy couplet. There are zillions of flaws in the story, but that is not the subject of our discussion at this point. However, the sad thing is that we have accepted this baseless story and we show more respect to the berry tree in the holy Sarovar than Guru Granth Sahib.

Baba Farid

Similarly, some other ignorant people have drawn the literal meaning of some of the holy Slokas of Baba Farid and painted some pictures of Baba Farid showing him lying on the ground where crows are gnawing on his frail body. Such misinterpretation is based on the Slokas of Baba Farid in which he uses crows as metaphors for evil desires. A couple of those are as follows:

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਤਨੁ ਸੁਕਾ ਪਿੰਜਰੁ ਥੀਆ ਤਲੀਆ ਖੁੰਡਹਿ ਕਾਗ॥

ਅਜੈ ਸੁ ਰਬੁ ਨ ਬਾਹੁੜਿਓ ਦੇਖੁ ਬੰਦੇ ਕੇ ਭਾਗ॥

AGGS, Farid, p 1382.

Meaning: *(I worshiped my God all my life and kept all my desires under control) and still I have not been able to see my God. Such is my luck. But the worse thing is that even though my body has been reduced to a skeleton with age, yet the crows (evil desires) are still inciting me.*

The ignorant people thought that Baba Farid was wearing a wooden roti around his neck and would lick it whenever he felt hungry. They have really kept a wooden roti in support of their claim in Pak Pattan (now in Pakistan) where Baba Farid had spent most of his life. This belief is the result of the misinterpretation of the following Sloka.

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਰੋਟੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਕਾਠ ਦੀ ਲਾਵਣੁ ਮੇਰੀ ਭੁਖਿ॥

ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾ ਖਾਧੀ ਚੋਪੜੀ ਘਣੇ ਸਹਿਣਗੇ ਦੁਖ॥

AGGS, Farid, p 1379.

Meaning: *Describing his control on his eating habits and the simplicity of his food, Baba Farid says that his roti was hard like wood (it was not coated with butter) and his appetite itself was the vegetable dish to go with the roti (it is the food of a poor man). Those who eat rich food will suffer very bad consequences.*

The second half of the Sloka clarifies the first half of the Sloka that Baba Farid's roti was not made of wood, it was simply a poor man's meal. Still the ignorant people thought that he used to eat (lick) a wooden roti.

The point of all these examples is that we must understand the Principles of Aad Guru Granth Sahib well before we draw any conclusions based on limited study.

7. The Use of Examples from Hindu Holy Books

Many stories from the Hindu holy books have been used in Aad Guru Granth Sahib as examples to emphasize the magnanimous of God. In Hindu books, different Hindu deities were glorified in such stories. Guru and the Bhagats have replaced the deities in these stories with glorifying God rather than the deities even though the stories have not been changed. For example, the stories of Bhagat Prehlad; of Dropadi, the wife of the five Pandvas who was gambled away to the Kauravas; of Ajamal, a Brahman who married a

prostitute; of the elephant who was caught in the tentacles of an octopus, a prostitute who trained a parrot to utter "Rama" and a few others have been cited many times to glorify God. Some people, either by ignorance or because of some vested interests, profess that Guru and the Bhagats have certified all these stories to be correct. Which is not true at all, because all Guru and the Bhagats have written clearly that all the gods and the goddesses, if they did exist, suffered from the bonds of Maya, and thus they did not have high spiritual levels. For example, pay attention to the following holy Shabads:

ਮਾਇਆ ਮੁਈ ਨ ਮਨੁ ਮੁਆ -----

ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਰਿਖੀ ਮੁਨੀ ਸੰਕਰੁ ਇੰਦੁ ਤਪੈ ਭੇਖਾਰੀ॥

ਮਾਨੈ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਸੋਹੈ ਦਰਿ ਸਾਚੈ ਆਕੀ ਮਰਹਿ ਅਫਾਰੀ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 992.

Meaning: ----- *Be it Brahma, Vishnu, sages, ascetics who do not talk for a long time, Shiva, Inder, ascetics who undertake physical suffering (to please God) or a beggar, only those who obey God's commandments are honoured in God's court while who disobey Him die unknown as rebels (and receive no respect).*

----- ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਮਹਾਦੇਉ ਤ੍ਰੈ ਗੁਣ ਰੋਗੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਈ॥

ਜਿਨਿ ਕੀਏ ਤਿਸਹਿ ਨ ਚੇਤਹਿ ਬਪੁੜੇ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੋਝੀ ਪਾਈ॥

AGGS, M 4, p 735.

Meaning: *The popular Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva suffer from the three effects of Maya and lead selfish lives, and do not remember the Creator. Only the individual who takes refuge of the Guru (and acts on His advice) realizes God.*

ਮੈਲਾ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਮੈਲਾ ਇੰਦੁ॥

ਰਵਿ ਮੈਲਾ ਮੈਲਾ ਹੈ ਚੰਦੁ॥-----

ਮੈਲਾ ਸਿਵ ਸੰਕਰਾ ਮਹੇਸ॥

ਮੈਲੇ ਸਿਧ ਸਾਧਿਕ ਅਰੁ ਭੇਖੁ॥

AGGS, Kabir, p 1374.

Meaning: *Unclean is Brahma and so is Indra (because they are engrossed in Maya). The Sun is unclean and so is the Moon. ----- All different forms of Shiva are also unclean. The Sidh yogis, their followers, and all the ascetics of different sects are unclean.*

ਭੈਰਉ ਭੂਤ ਸੀਤਲਾ ਧਾਵੈ॥
 ਖਰ ਬਾਹਨ ਉਹੁ ਛਾਰੁ ਉਡਾਵੈ॥ -----
 ਹਉ ਤਉ ਏਕ ਰਮਈਆ ਲੈ ਹਉ॥
 ਆਨ ਦੇਵ ਬਦਲਾਵਨਿ ਦੈ ਹਉ॥

AGGS, Nam Dev, p 873.

Meaning: *An individual who worships god Bhairon (a scary and ghost-looking incarnation of Shiva) will at best become like a ghost, and a worshiper of goddess Seetla (small pox) will at best ride a donkey which spreads dust around because the goddess Seetla rides a donkey herself. ----- For such reasons, Nam Dev says he will trade all the gods and the goddesses with God any time.*

So, clearly, Aad Guru Granths Sahib is not certifying the stories of the Hindu Granths or glorifying the Hindu gods and goddesses.

8. Not Studying Aad Guru Granth Sahib in Depth

This is one of the major causes of misinterpretation of the holy Gurbani. Some people in the rush to earn fame by saying something different or something new from their opinions on certain subjects without studying Aad Guru Granth Sahib in depth. They form their views on some subject first and then select a few holy Sabds and use only those parts of the Sabds that suit their needs or views. This has happened many times recently. For example, some people are claiming that there is no life after death, and death is the end of every life. This is happening despite the fact that there is so much emphasis on one's deeds and reincarnation in Aad Guru Granth Sahib. For example consider the holy words:

ਫਿਰਿ ਫਿਰਿ ਆਵਨ ਜਾਨੁ ਨ ਹੋਈ॥

AGGS, M5, p 258.

If you focus only on this sentence in isolation, it can be interpreted in two completely different ways.

*You will not be born again. Or
 You can avoid being born again and again (by doing good deeds and being one with God).*

This is the real meaning of the holy words which has been repeated again and again in Aad Guru Granth Sahib.

Obviously, if you haven't studied Aad Guru Granth Sahib deep enough, you will draw the meaning that suits your views. There are hundreds of such situations where people can draw the meanings that suit their wishes. Another holy sentence:

ਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਬੋਲੈ ਦਰਗਹ ਪਰਵਾਣ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 821.

It can be interpreted in two ways:

(1) *Guru Nanak talks only about the facts which are approved in God's Court. Or*

(2) *Whatever Guru Nanak wishes is approved in God's Court*

It is because of not studying Aad Guru Granth Sahib deeply enough that a few ignorant people or people with vested interests are promoting that **Hemkunt is the place where Guru Gobind Singh Ji had meditated for thousands of years in His previous incarnation to realize God.** Had they studied Aad Guru Granth Sahib deeply enough they would have realized that it cannot be true because Aad Guru Granth Sahib strongly advises against leaving home and going to secluded places in search of God. As an example, pay attention to the following holy Sabds.

ਢਢਾ ਢੂਢਤ ਕਹ ਫਿਰਹੁ ਢੂਢਨੁ ਇਆ ਮਨ ਮਾਹਿ॥

ਸੰਗਿ ਤੁਹਾਰੈ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਬਸੈ ਬਨੁ ਬਨੁ ਕਹਾ ਫਿਰਾਹਿ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 256.

Meaning: *Where are you searching for God in different places, oh ignorant man! God resides in your heart, why are you looking for him in jungles?*

ਕਾਹੇ ਰੇ ਬਨ ਖੋਜਨ ਜਾਈ॥

ਸਰਬ ਨਿਵਾਸੀ ਸਦਾ ਅਲੇਖਾ ਤੋਹੀ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਮਾਈ॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥

AGGS, M 9, p 684.

Meaning: *Why do you go to the jungles searching for God, oh man! The omnipresent God which is above the effects of Maya resides inside you.*

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਜੰਗਲੁ ਜੰਗਲੁ ਕਿਆ ਭਵਹਿ ਵਣਿ ਕੰਡਾ ਮੋੜੇਹਿ॥

ਵਸੀ ਰਬੁ ਹਿਆਲੀਐ ਜੰਗਲੁ ਕਿਆ ਢੂਢਹਿ॥

AGGS, Farid, p 1378.

Meaning: *Why are you wandering in the jungles stepping on thorns oh Farid! God is present in your heart, what are you looking for in the jungles?*

Also, it took just about seven years for Bhai Lehna to be one with God and to succeed Guru Nanak as the Second Guru. Similarly, Guru Amar Dass served Guru Angad for about eight years to attain

the same spiritual level as Guru Angad. All the Bhagats, who's holy Bani, has been enshrined in Aad Guru Granth Sahib became one with God in a single life span; so why would it take thousands of years for Guru Gobind Singh to be one with God?

There are at least twenty more strong reasons to disprove the claim about Hemkunt being the place where Guru Gobind Singh had meditated but this is not the subject of our discussion today.

9. Not Checking for Internal Consistencies of Aad Guru Granth Sahib

Another major cause for misinterpreting Gurbani is the fact that most people fail to check for the internal consistencies of the principles of Aad Guru Granth Sahib in a rush to present their personal views on some aspects of Gurbani. For example some people falsely or purposely believe that Naam is something which must be whispered by a “guru” in the ear of each individual seeking Naam. Some others believe that God's *Hukm* is different for each individual. The managements of some famous historical Gurdwaras perform the Hindu *Aarti* as a mandatory ritual. Even though they call themselves Sikhs, followers of certain sects believe that eating meat is prohibited in Gurmat, and that the *cow is a sacred animal*. More recently, many scholars are professing that *reincarnation is a Brahmanical belief, and there is no room for it in Sikhism*. All these different views on important issues result from the simple fact that people do not check for the internal consistencies in Guru Granth Sahib.

The basic approach to understand the principles of Aad Guru Granth Sahib or any other religious book is to apply the principle of hermeneutics which means that you must study the whole book thoroughly to dig out the true principles and removing any doubts about seemingly contradictions. Even if one finds a single contradiction to his conclusions that he is professing, his conclusions are incorrect. There is absolutely no contradiction of principles in Aad Guru Granth Sahib. There may be some writings where there is some room for misinterpretation, but in most such cases, Gurus have clarified the writings of other Bhagats by elaborating on them. There are many Slokas of Baba Farid and a few of

Bhagat Kabir where Gurus have done that. **So, every scholar with some new ideas MUST ensure that there are no contradictions of principles to his/her ideas in Aad Guru Granth Sahib.**

10. Personal Bias

There is a great praise and reverence expressed for the Sant (Saint) in Aad Guru Granth Sahib because according to Aad Guru Granth Sahib, a saint is an individual who has broken all the bonds with Maya and has become one with God. A Sant is a completely selfless person and connects people with God. In fact, a Sant (or Sadh) is synonymous with the Guru. A couple of holy Sabds are quoted here in support.

ਸੰਤ ਮੰਡਲ ਮਹਿ ਹਰਿ ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ॥

ਸੰਤ ਮੰਡਲ ਮਹਿ ਦੁਰਤੁ ਸਭੁ ਨਸੈ॥ ----

ਸੰਤ ਮੰਡਲੁ ਤਹਾ ਕਾ ਨਾਉ॥

ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕੇਵਲ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਉ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1146.

Meaning: *That place is called the world of the Sant where only praise of God is sung. In the world of the Sant one's heart becomes a residence for God's Naam and all the sins are dispelled.*

ਸੰਤਹ ਚਰਨ ਮੋਰਲੋ ਮਾਥਾ॥

ਹਮਰੇ ਮਸਤਕਿ ਸੰਤ ਧਰੇ ਹਾਥਾ॥

ਸਾਧਹ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਮੋਰਲੋ ਮਨੁਆ॥

ਤਾ ਤੇ ਗਤੁ ਹੋਏ ਤ੍ਰੈ ਗੁਨੀਆ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1206.

Meaning: *I put my head on the feet of the Sants who place their kind hand on my forehead to bless me. My mind harbours the Sabd (Teachings) of the Sants all the time. In fact, all those people who are engrossed in Maya find salvation by following the Teachings of the Sants.*

These are only a few examples that show the magnanimity or the high spiritual level of the Sants. But some cunning people abuse the meaning of this holy word and become self-proclaimed Sants or Gurus by wearing a special dress to give the false impression of saintliness to the ignorant people and thus fleecing them. They have a huge following because they claim to bless people and fulfill their wants which of course could not be farther from

truth. Such selfish fake Sants have been a big cause of detaching the people from the universal Teachings of Aad Guru Granth Sahib. They have their own code of ethics for their followers, which in many cases, is completely different from that of Sikhism. And the irony is that they always quote Aad Guru Granth Sahib in their messages to the masses because they do not know what else to preach.

A few of such thugs have gone even much farther and quote just 3 or 4 words from holy Aad Guru Granth Sahib to justify their saintliness. A big fake self-proclaimed guru has used just the following highlighted words to misguide people that Guru Amar Dass had forecast his guru-ship in the town named Sirsa:

ਆਨਦੁ ਸੁਣਹੁ ਵਡਭਾਗੀਹੁ ਸਗਲ ਮਨੋਰਥ ਪੂਰੇ॥

ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਉਤਰੈ ਸਗਲ ਵਿਸੁਰੇ॥

ਦੂਖ ਰੋਗ ਸੰਤਾਪ ਉਤਰੈ ਸੁਣੀ ਸਚੀ ਬਾਣੀ॥

ਸੰਤ ਸਾਜਨ ਭਏ ਸਰਸੇ ਪੂਰੈ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਜਾਣੀ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 922.

Meaning: Listen to God's Naam for your mental bliss and for the fulfillment of all your objectives, oh lucky folks! Once you realize God, all your worries and concerns are dispelled. All your illnesses and discomforts are eliminated by listening to the evergreen Word of the Guru. By listening to the Guru with full devotion the holy people feel blissful.

The four highlighted words in the holy Sabd mean that holy people feel blissful. But some selfish fake guru has twisted the meaning to promote that the holy Sabd means that the next guru will be in the town of Sirsa (in Haryana).

This is how some unscrupulous people misinterpret the holy Gurbani to suit their purposes.

Misinterpretation of Qadian

Another example comes from the Ahmediya sect of Islam which was founded in the 19th century in the town of Qadian near Batala (Gurdaspur). Qadi is the real pronunciation of the word Qazi which is used by the Arabs for priests who also act as judges. Qadian means Qazies. While discussing the date of creation of the universe, Guru Nanak writes that no religious leader –

Hindu priests or Muslim qadi- knows the exact time (*Wakhat* in Punjabi) of creation of the universe. In addition to time, the Punjabi word “*Wakhat*” also means “trouble”. Let us focus on the following holy lines by Guru Nanak Sahib:

ਵੇਲੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ ਪੰਡਤੀ ਜੇ ਹੋਵੇ ਲੇਖੁ ਪੁਰਾਣ॥

ਵਖਤੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਓ ਕਾਦੀਆ ਜੇ ਲਿਖਣ ਲੇਖੁ ਕੁਰਾਣ॥

ਥਿਤਿ ਵਾਰੁ ਨ ਜੋਗੀ ਜਾਣੈ ਰੁਤਿ ਮਾਹੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ॥

ਜਾ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਿਰਠੀ ਕਉ ਸਾਜੈ ਆਪੈ ਜਾਣੈ ਸੋਈ॥

AGGS, Jap # 21, p 4.

Meaning: The learned Brahmins do not know the exact time of creation of the universe. Had they known it, they would have recorded it in the Puranas. Even the Qadies have no idea of that time because it has not been recorded in the Koran. Even the yogis have no knowledge of the date of creation and nobody else knows anything about the season or the month of creation. Only the Creator of the universe knows exactly when it was created.

However, the Ahmediyas purposely twisted the meaning of the words “*Wakhat*” and “*Qadian*” to imply that Guru Nanak Sahib had blessed the Ahmediyas saying that no trouble or calamity will ever befall the town of Qadian. (The most interesting thing is that the Ahmediya Sect had not even been founded at the time of Guru Nanak Sahib). Because of this message spread around by the Ahmediyas, the Sikhs never attacked the Ahmediya Muslims in Qadian during the indo-Pak partition of 1947 despite the fact that millions of Sikhs had been murdered in Pakistan by the Muslims. I am very happy that the Ahmediyas were protected by the Sikhs, but not happy for the reason for which they did that.

VICIOUS ATTACKS ON AAD GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Some unscrupulous people have launched unjust vicious attacks on Guru Granth Sahib. They are claiming that a few compositions (sabds) in Aad Guru Granth Sahib are vulgar which of course is complete non-sense. There are two possible causes/excuses behind such willful attacks and both the causes have already been covered earlier in this Paper, but here, there is a difference of intent.

Vested Interests: Most of the people in this group are the ones who are promoting the so called Dasam Granth as a genuine book authored by Guru

Gobind Singh. Such people could only be serving as a tool to a bigger group who wants to mislead the Sikhs and weaken their faith in Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Such people should study Aad Guru Granth Sahib to find the infinite weaknesses in the Dasam Granth. They may not realize that by promoting the Dasam Granth, they are actually being blasphemous.

The second possible cause is again their **unwillingness to study Aad Guru Granth Sahib** in depth. If they study Aad Guru Granth Sahib in depth, they will realize that there is absolutely no vulgarity in our revered Granth Sahib. Guru Sahiban and the Bhagats have used examples from daily life to convey the Divine Message in a way that most people can relate to. There is no room for any criticism.

SUGGESTIONS

If we pay careful attention to the above possible causes/excuses – particularly to checking the internal consistencies of Aad Guru Granth Sahib - for misinterpreting Gurbani and try to avoid such lapses, almost no room is left for making mistakes in the correct interpretation of the holy Gurbani.

Prof. Sahib Singh has done a remarkable job of interpreting Gurbani based on the Gurbani Viyakaran also deciphered by him. He had a deep knowledge of the many languages used in Aad Guru Granth Sahib and he did a good job to ensure the internal consistencies of the holy Compositions. One may not agree 100% with his interpretations, but the fundamental principles of Gurbani have not been violated in his translations. So, we should use his translation of Aad Guru Granth Sahib as the basis for the correct interpretation of Gurbani, and wherever we have any concerns about the meanings of some particular sabds, we should discuss those in a meeting.

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With these words, I thank Prof Chahal to organize such an important platform where we can pool our suggestions to eliminate the possible causes for misinterpretation of Gurbani. I am also thankful to the other organizers who have helped directly or indirectly in arranging this conference.

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