**Inter-faith Dialogue and the Discourse of Guru Granth Sahib**

**(Civilizational Context)**

Jagbir Singh[[1]](#footnote-1)\*

The issues of inter-faith dialogue have assumed a vital significance in our contemporary world, threatened by global terrorism in the name of religion. Today, we are facing grave challenges of communal tensions and cultural conflicts. Such conflicts and clashes often occur due to lack of understanding and trust among different faiths. A contemporary thinker, Hans Küng, has rightly observed: "[There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.](http://www.azquotes.com/quote/917465)"[[2]](#endnote-1) In fact, the dialogue among religions is an attempt to build bridges of understanding between religious communities, sharing a common socio-cultural space. In a multi-religious society like ours, the need for such dialogue is all the more important. We are facing surge of religious fundamentalism and communal hatred let loose by clever machinations of global players and their sympathizers. These activities are threatening to the very survival of humanity.

In this context, we are reminded of a sensational thesis put forth by Samuel Huntington about two decades ago. In his book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), he asserted that there is a strong possibility of a ‘civilizational clash’ in near future. The cultural and religious identities of the people will be the primary source of conflict in this new era.. People will identify themselves more and more in terms of history, religion, culture and civilization[[3]](#endnote-2) Huntington confidently predicted that there will be a sharp conflict between 'the West and the Rest'. More prominently, this clash will be between Western Christianity and resurgent Islam as both Christianity and Islam are proselytizing religions. They assert their exclusive right to Truth and are intolerant of other faiths.[[4]](#endnote-3)

Initially, Huntington's theory of 'Civilizational Clash' got a mixed response in academic circles but the events of global terrorism (like events of 9/11) seemed to endorse the correctness of this theory[[5]](#endnote-4). However, a meaningful response to this theory was provided by Mohammad Khatami, former president of Iran, who proposed a parallel theory of 'Dialogue among Civilizations'. In recent years, this new theory has attracted considerable international attention. It has greatly enhanced the scope of inter-faith dialogue by incorporating a civilizational dimension to it.

This civilizational dimension of inter-faith dialogue needs to be clarified, especially in the Indian context. As we know, India is not a country or a nation in the ordinary sense of the term. It can be called a 'civilizational' state as it is the homeland of world's most ancient and living civilization – the Indic Civilization. This civilization has given birth to four major *dharma* traditions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The other prominent civilization of the world is the Abrahamic Civilization. In this civilization three major religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are included. Abrahamic Civilization entered into India during middle ages through the agency of invaders, professing Islamic faith. After decades of plunder, bloodshed and destruction, these invaders were able to establish their rule in India. With the establishment of [Delhi Sultanate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delhi_Sultanate) during 12th Century C.E., Islam spread across large parts of the subcontinent. Will Durant in his monumental work, *The Story of Civilization*: *Our Oriental Heritage* has observed:

"The Mohammedan conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history. The Islamic historians and scholars have recorded with great glee and pride the slaughters of Hindus, forced conversions, abduction of Hindu women and children to slave markets and the [destruction of temples](http://www.mysteryofindia.com/2015/11/islamic-destruction-hindu-temple.html) carried out by the warriors of Islam during 800 AD to 1700 AD. . . . It is a discouraging tale, for its evident moral is that civilization is a precious good, whose delicate complex of order and freedom, culture and peace, can at any moment be overthrown by barbarians invading from without or multiplying within."[[6]](#endnote-5)

Revisiting these two major world civilizations we find that Indic Civilization is inherently inclusive in nature. Its *dharma* traditions are committed to pluralistic vision of Truth and reality. It has a long tradition of intra-civilizational dialogue. Whereas, the Abrahamic Civilization (along with its religious traditions), is exclusive in nature. It excludes the possibility of a genuine dialogue. For a genuine inter-faith dialogue, an in-depth study and contextual re-reading of the scriptures of world religions is required. Only by rediscovering the true essence of religion and by emphasizing the moral values of these religious traditions, can we create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and harmony.

The conceptual terminology reflecting the world-view of these two civilizations can be easily differentiated. For instance, the term 'religion' is primarily associated with faith-based, mono-theistic, Abrahamic religions. The core tenet of these religions is a belief in personal, transcendent God (*Theos*). On the other hand, the term '*dharma*' refers to Indic religious traditions projecting the idea of an impersonal, immanent, Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*) and its realization. Thus, the Indic Civilization is primarily '*dharma*'centric and realization-based whereas the Abrahamic Civilization is 'religion' centric and faith-based. While sharing essential core elements of their respective civilizations, these religious/*dharma* traditions also display unique characteristics of beliefs and practices which establish their distinct identity. They have established themselves as independent world religions.

Dialogue is a mode of knowledge and understanding used in interpersonal communication. On a higher level, it involves encounter between different perspectives and world views. In a genuine dialogue 'the self' and 'the other' are present to each other as authentic beings. Such a dialogue calls for openness and equality, a willingness to listen and a readiness to learn. The attitude most conducive to Inter-faith or Inter-Civilizational dialogue is pluralism which upholds the view that there are many and diverse paths to 'truth' which is universal. It is an attitude of accepting and respecting the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. It inspires harmony and peaceful co-existence among adherents of different religions.

The essential core of religion and *dharma* is the search for final meaning in life. It is a great motivating force for action. It acts like a vital spark of energy. Every religion contains some spark of 'knowledge' that is liberative and liberating. As, Lord Krishna says in *Bhagavad-Gita*: **न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।**[[7]](#endnote-6) (In this world, there is no purifier like knowledge.) We need such liberative knowledge to purify us and dispel darkness of ignorance and mistrust.

The present paper intends to study text and discourse of *Guru Granth Sahib* from the perspective of inter-faith dialogue and understanding. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, himself exemplifies a unique model for Inter-faith dialogue and understanding. During his five long spiritual journeys within and outside India, he entered into a creative dialogue with the contemporary religious traditions. The purpose was to understand and appreciate prevalent beliefs and practices in the light of his mystico-ethical vision and humanitarian ideology. It is our firm belief that the spirit of dialogue and understanding inherent in *Guru Granth Sahib* can be fruitfully utilized for spreading the message of communal harmony and peaceful co-existence for all the inhabitants of the world.

Sikhism is the youngest of prominent world religions. As already indicated, it occupies a distinctive place in the four major *dharma* traditionsof Indic Civilization. *Guru Granth Sahib* is the holy text (scripture) of Sikhism. The original version of this scripture, known as *Adi Granth*, was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, in 1604 C.E. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, gave it the present final form and installed it as *Guru Granth Sahib* in 1708 C. E. Sikhs all over the world regard *Guru Granth Sahib*, as eternal, living Guru and a supreme source of spiritual and moral guidance.

As a holy text, *Guru Granth Sahib* is unique in many respects. Firstly, it is not a collection of 'commandments' or 'theological’ statements but an anthology of poetic compositions, reflecting the mystico-ethical meditations of the inspired souls. Secondly, the poetic compositions included in this holy *Granth* are not only of the founders of Sikh faith but also of many other prominent medieval Indian Saints and mystics. These 'saint-poets' belong to diverse social, religious and cultural traditions of India. Most prominent among them are Bhakta Jaidev, Namdev, Sheikh Farid, Kabir and Ravidas. Chronologically, these medieval Saints and Gurus belong to a vast expanse of five centuries (12th century to the 17th century CE.). They also represent the vast regional and linguistic diversity of the Indian subcontinent.

Guru Arjan Dev, the compiler and editor of this *Granth*, was a man of prophetic vision and humanitarian concerns. He imbibed the spirit of renaissance heralded by Bhakti Movement during the middle ages in India. In fact, the emergence of Bhakti Movement symbolizes a great moment of spiritual awakening and resurgence of humanitarian spirit. Consequently, *Guru Granth Sahib* emerges as a significant 'knowledge text' of Indic Civilization during middle ages, incorporating philosophical meditations on the eternal verities of human existence. It also projects a radical vision of social reform, upholding human equality and dignity. The most important aspect of this *Granth* lies in its idea of true religion or *dharma* itself*.* It emphasizes the essential spiritual core of religion which transcends institutional boundaries. Significantly, the text and discourse of *Guru Granth Sahib* contains an insightful model for inter-faith dialogue which is most relevant in the present context.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith, has emphasized the significance of dialogue as a mode of knowledge in one of his compositions:

जब लगु दुनीआ रहीऐ नानक किछु सुणीऐ किछु कहीऐ ॥

भालि रहे हम रहणु न पाइआ जीवतिआ मरि रहीऐ ॥५॥२॥[[8]](#endnote-7)

(As long as we live in this world, O Nanak, we should engage ourselves in listening to someone and speaking to someone. Extensively I have searched, there is no eternal life; so, let us live here as if we are already dead.)

This living in the consciousness of death is a mystic expression of spiritual enlightenment which highlights the agency of dialogue. The Sikh Scripture employs this dialogical mode in dealing with the mystico-ethical issues in general and more particularly with the issues of Inter-faith in its textual space. As a matter of fact, Guru Nanak was the first proponent of religion/*dharma* who provided a unique model for the Inter-faith as well as Inter-Civilizational dialogue. Due to his unique historical situation, he entered into a creative dialogue with two major world Civilizations – the Indic and the Abrahamic.

It is interesting to note that the conceptual terminology of *Guru Granth Sahib* predominantly relates to the *dharma* traditions of Indic Civilization. But a significant portion of this terminology is also related to contemporary Islam (one of the prominent religions of Abrahamic Civilization). In fact, by using the conceptual terminology of diverse traditions, the discourse of *Guru Granth Sahib* enters into and creates the possibility of a Civilizational Dialogue. It is our firm belief that its pluralistic vision of truth and the spirit of dialogue can be fruitfully utilized for spreading the global message of communal harmony and peaceful co-existence.

As we have already noted, the philosophical basis of Inter-faith dialogue lies in the recognition and acceptance of multiple paths to truth. Indic Civilization and its *dharma* traditions firmly subscribe to this view. For instance, such a pluralistic vision is visibly reflected in *Rigveda*, the most ancient knowledge text of Indic Civilization:

एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति॥[[9]](#endnote-8)

(Truth is one, but the learned refer to it in different names.)

Here the idea of truth represents the all-pervading impersonal Reality which is essentially a philosophical rather than a theological concept. The Vedic deities like Agni, Yama and Matarishwan can be taken as personalized symbolic representations of the Ultimate Reality in its various manifestations. In other words, the theological diversities are sought to be dissolved in the unitive consciousness of the ground of all being named as '*sat*' (Truth).

In *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna states:

ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाम्यहम्।

मम वर्त्मानुवर्तन्ते मनुष्याः पार्थ सर्वशः।[[10]](#endnote-9)

(As people approach me, so I receive them. All paths lead to me)

This is reaffirmation of the Vedic injunction of multiple paths leading to one Ultimate Reality/ Supreme Being. Similarly, an attitude of friendliness for all beings (*jiva-s*)has been expressed in one of the seminal texts of Indic Civilization, *Yajur Veda*:

मित्रस्य मा चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षन्ताम्।

मित्रस्याहं चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षे।

मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे।[[11]](#endnote-10)

(Let all the *jiva-s* look towards me with a gaze of friendliness. Let me look with this friendly gaze towards all. Let all look towards each other in with this gaze of friendliness.)

The insight expressed in this text is representative of cosmic vision where all enmity is dissolved. It is a prayer invoking the emotion of mutual friendliness in all the *jiva*-sof the universe. In Buddhism also, the significance of friendliness has been emphasized in a forceful manner. In Buddhist *dharma* tradition *karuna* (compassion) and *maitri* (friendliness) are considered two cardinal virtues for realization and attainment of salvation (*nirvana*).

The text and discourse of *Guru Granth Sahib* shares these glorious traditions of pluralistic vision and friendliness toward all *jiva-s* as expressed in other *dharma* traditions of Indic Civilization. The same core tenet of the multiple paths to Reality/Truth is expressed here in various forms at many places. For instance, Guru Nanak in Sri Raga states:

एका सुरति जेते है जीअ ॥

सुरति विहूणा कोइ न कीअ ॥

जेही सुरति तेहा तिन राहु ॥

लेखा इको आवहु जाहु ॥१॥[[12]](#endnote-11)

(There is one awareness among all created beings. None have been created without this awareness. As is their awareness, so is their way. According to the account of our actions, we come and go in reincarnation.)

In other words, reality and its awareness are two different things. Awareness of reality is a perspective from which we experience and internalize it. Consequently, there are multiple paths available to us in life and living but every one chooses his own path in the light of his consciousness or awareness of reality.

As a matter of fact, the pluralism of the Sikh Scripture has its roots in the non-dualistic perception of Ultimate Reality which is all-pervading. It perceives one Lord (*prabhu*) in the whole of creation. For illustration some of the verses are quoted below:

आतम रामु सरब महि पेखु ॥

पूरन पूरि रहिआ प्रभ एकु ॥[[13]](#endnote-12)

(Perceive the presence of Atam and Rama in all beings. The perfect One is all-pervading.)

एक महि सरब सरब महि एका एह सतिगुरि देखि दिखाई ॥[[14]](#endnote-13)

(All (beings) are in One (Supreme Being), and One is in all. This is what the True Guru has shown me.)

लोगा भरमि न भूलहु भाई ॥

खालिकु खलक खलक महि खालिकु पूरि रहिओ स्रब ठांई ॥१॥ रहाउ ॥

माटी एक अनेक भांति करि साजी साजनहारै ॥

ना कछु पोच माटी के भांडे ना कछु पोच कुंभारै ॥२॥[[15]](#endnote-14)

(O brethren! Do not be deluded by any doubt. The Creator is in the Creation, the Creation is in the Creator, totally permeating all places. The clay is the same, but the Potter has fashioned it in various ways.)

In a similar manner, Guru Amar Das has asserted the equal validity of multiple paths of liberation (*moksha*). In Rag Bilaval, he states:

जगतु जलंदा रखि लै आपणी किरपा धारि ॥

जितु दुआरै उबरै तितै लैहु उबारि ॥[[16]](#endnote-15)

(The fire of suffering is consuming the inhabitants of the world. Have mercy, O Lord and save this world. Whichever be the door to liberation, lead it there to save itself*.*)

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, has also posited the similar view of man and his approach towards the Supreme Being. In one of his compositions included in *Dasam Granth* he states:

आप अपनी बुधि है जेती. बरणत भिन भिन तुहि तेती।[[17]](#endnote-16)

(As the intellect given to him, everyone one describes you in a different manner*.*)

Pluralism is an article of faith in a dialogic situation. It is not just toleration of diversity. It is an engagement with the diversity of co-existing religions in society. In real sense of the term, pluralism means active participation in a two-way process of interaction for gaining knowledge and understanding of each other's faith. However, pluralism does not mean abandoning the distinctiveness of our own faith.

In the scriptural tradition of the Indic Civilization the importance of dialogue as a mode of knowledge is well established. For instance, the whole discourse of *Bhagavad* *Gita* is in the form of a dialogue between Krishna and Arjun. Similarly, the Upanishads abundantly employ dialogical mode in presenting and clarifying the philosophical issues of life and living. The text of *Guru Granth Sahib* is no exception. It employs dialogue as a textual strategy to settle issues relating to beliefs and practices of various religions. The discourse of this scripture deals not only with inter-faith issues of Indic *dharma* traditions but also deal with contemporary Islam.

The inclusion of the hymns of Medieval Indian Saint-Poets belonging to diverse religions traditions (both Hindu and Muslim) alongside those of the Sikh Gurus is a clear proof of its inclusive and pluralistic approach toward religion. In fact, the universal message of *Guru Granth Sahib* not only accepts the diversity but also the distinct identity of these religions. Although it often criticizes the hypocrisy of the practitioners of religions, it makes a clear distinction between the inner spiritual essence of these religions and their outer formal practices.

Dialogue in the real sense is possible among the equals. To engage 'the other' in a genuine dialogue-process, we need to treat him as our equal. The discourse of *Guru Granth Sahib* places the idea of 'the other' in a philosophical perspective. In Rag Gauri Guru Nanak states in clear terms:

दूजा कउणु कहा नही कोई ॥

सभ महि एकु निरंजनु सोई ॥१॥ रहाउ ॥[[18]](#endnote-17)

(Who is the other? Where he is? There is no one. There is only one Supreme Being who is all-pervading.)

This metaphysical concept of the unity of all existence is the foundation on which the whole edifice of Sikh world view is raised. This unitive consciousness does not treat anyone as alien or other. Recognizing the Supreme Being as creator and sustainer of the created universe inspires us to treat all beings as equals.

In fact, Guru Arjan Dev goes one step ahead. He places the 'other' in the category of a friend which is recognized as an authentic relationship among equals. Our relationship with the other becomes problematic when there is enmity between us on any account. There is a beautiful statement to this effect in Dhanasri Rag by Guru Arjan Dev:

ना को मेरा दुसमनु रहिआ ना हम किस के बैराई ॥

ब्रहमु पसारु पसारिओ भीतरि सतिगुर ते सोझी पाई ॥२॥

सभु को मीतु हम आपन कीना हम सभना के साजन ॥[[19]](#endnote-18)

(No one has remained an enemy for me, and I am no one's enemy. It is Brahman (Supreme Being) who has expanded Himself within us all; The True Guru has given me this awareness. I have friendliness for all beings and I am a friend of everyone.)

The insight expressed in this text is representative of cosmic vision where all enmity is dissolved. It is a prayer invoking the emotion of mutual friendliness in all the *jiva-s* of the universe. In Buddhism also, the significance of friendliness has been emphasized in a forceful manner. In Buddhist *dharma* tradition *karuna* (compassion) and *maitri* (friendliness) are considered two cardinal virtues for realization and attainment of salvation (*nirvana*). The text and discourse of *Guru Granth Sahib* follows these glorious traditions of Indic *dharma* traditions. As a matter of fact, the pluralism of the Sikh Scripture has its roots in the non-dualistic perception of Ultimate Reality which is all-pervading. For illustration some of the verses are quoted below:

एक अनेक बिआपक पूरक जत देखउ तत सोई ॥

माइआ चित्र बचित्र बिमोहित बिरला बूझै कोई ॥१॥

सभु गोबिंदु है सभु गोबिंदु है गोबिंद बिनु नही कोई ॥[[20]](#endnote-19)

(In the one and in the many, He is permeating; wherever I look, there He is. The marvelous image of Maya is so fascinating; how few understand this. Gobind is everything, without Gobind there is nothing at all.)

The Sikh Scripture gives due space to the separate identity of different religious communities along with their distinctive beliefs and practices. This awareness is portrayed in Raga Ramkali where Guru Arjan Dev observes:

कोई बोलै राम राम कोई खुदाइ ॥ कोई सेवै गुसईआ कोई अलाहि ॥१॥

कारण करण करीम ॥ किरपा धारि रहीम ॥१॥ रहाउ ॥

कोई नावै तीरथि कोई हज जाइ ॥ कोई करै पूजा कोई सिरु निवाइ ॥२॥

कोई पड़ै बेद कोई कतेब ॥ कोई ओढै नील कोई सुपेद ॥३॥

कोई कहै तुरकु कोई कहै हिंदू ॥ कोई बाछै भिसतु कोई सुरगिंदू ॥४॥

कहु नानक जिनि हुकमु पछाता ॥ प्रभ साहिब का तिनि भेदु जाता ॥५॥९॥[[21]](#endnote-20)

(Some people call Him, Ram; others call Him, Khuda-i. Some serve Him as Gusain, others as Allah. He is the Cause of causes, the Generous Lord. He showers His Grace and Mercy upon us all. Some people bathe at *tiratha-*s and some make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Some perform *puja*, and some bow their heads in *namaz*. Some read the Vedas, and some the Koran. Some wear blue robes and some wear white. Some people call themselves as Turk, and others as Hindu. Some yearn for *bahisht* and others long for *swaraga*. Says Nanak, one who comprehends *Hukam* (the Divine Order), only he knows the secret of his Prabhu (Lord).

In this passage the belief-systems, religious practices and conceptual categories of Hinduism and Islam are placed in a composite frame of reference and the signifiers of both the traditions are used to construct a meaning that emphasizes unity in diversity. At the same time the discourse recognizes and accepts the religious diversity of two traditions. A similar semiotic strategy is at work in the following verses of Kabir:

अलहु एकु मसीति बसतु है अवरु मुलखु किसु केरा ॥ [[22]](#endnote-21)

(Allah is one, if He lives only in the mosque, and then to who does the rest of the world belongs?)

This philosophical vision of cosmic consciousness is the trade mark of the ideology of Sikh Scripture. In Rag Ramkali, Guru Arjan Dev says in a mood of prayer:

कहु नानक गुरि खोए भरम ॥

एको अलहु पारब्रहम ॥५॥३४॥४५॥[[23]](#endnote-22)

(Says Nanak, the Guru has rid me of all doubts. Allah and Parbrahm are the same.)

'Allah' and 'Brahman' are not only the prime signifiers of the two religious traditions (Islam and Hinduism) but are representative of the meta-narratives of the Abrahamic and the Indic Civilizations respectively. The discursive strategy of the text of *Guru Granth Sahib* here is inclusiveness. By indicating the spiritual unity/oneness of these signifiers, peaceful co-existence and communal harmony is emphasized. Such a unifying consciousness emerges only in an atmosphere of inter-faith dialogue and understanding. This is precisely the ideological position of the Gurus and Saints whose compositions have been included in this sacred text.

The discourse of Gurbani posits the idea of Ultimate Reality which is both transcendent and immanent at the same time. In its response to Islam it attempts to assimilate the monotheistic idea of personal transcendent God into its fold in an inclusive manner. This Inter-faith dialogical response is beautifully expressed in the discursive universe of *Guru Granth Sahib.* For instance, in Rag Ramkali Guru Nanak states:

आपे नेड़ै आपे दूरि ॥

आपे सरब रहिआ भरपूरि ॥*[[24]](#endnote-23)*

(He Himself is near and He is far away. He Himself is all-pervading, everywhere.)

The terms used for transcendence and immanence are taken from spoken idiom – *nerai (*near) *dur* (far away) for ease of communication. These efforts at synthesizing of opposing concepts relating to two different Civilizations reflects the spirit of renaissance ushered by medieval Bhakti movement. In this context the following verses from *Dasam Granth* are also relevant:

कहुं बेदि रीति कहुं ता सिउ बिपरीति,

कहुं त्रिगुन अतीत कहुं सरगुन समेत हो। [[25]](#endnote-24)

(Somewhere you work in accordance with Vedic rites and somewhere quite opposed to these; somewhere you are devoid of the three attributes and some elsewhere you are present with all these attributes.)

This spirit of synthesis is reflected in the underlying unity of all religions in following verses of Guru Gobind Singh:

देहरा मसीत सोई पूजा अउ निवाज उई मानस सभै एक पै अनेक को भरमाउ है। . . .

एकै नैन एकै कान एकै देह एकै बान खाक बाद आतिश अउ आब को रलाउ है।[[26]](#endnote-25)

(The *mandir* and the *masit* are the same, *puja* and *namaz* are the same, All the human beings are same; only they appear as different. ... Everyone has the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same build, a mixture of earth, air, fire and water)

In 'Siddha Gosti' composition of Guru Nanak we find an excellent example of Inter-faith dialogue. Composed in conversational style, it is a poetic rendering of a dialogue between Siddhas (the ascetics or Jogis) and Guru Nanak. It is comparatively a long composition containing 73 poetic stanzas, the main theme of which relates to two divergent world views - the Siddha and the Gurmat world views. "The text itself does not provide any clue as to the time and place of its composition, though it is generally placed in the last years of Guru Nanak`s life when he had finally settled down at Kartarpur."[[27]](#endnote-26)

The composition begins with an invocation to Supreme Being and a show of reverence for the assembly of the learned (the Siddha-s and the Sant-s):

सिध सभा करि आसणि बैठे संत सभा जैकारो ॥

तिसु आगै रहरासि हमारी साचा अपर अपारो ॥

मसतकु काटि धरी तिसु आगै तनु मनु आगै देउ ॥

नानक संतु मिलै सचु पाईऐ सहज भाइ जसु लेउ ॥१॥

किआ भवीऐ सचि सूचा होइ ॥

साच सबद बिनु मुकति न कोइ ॥१॥ रहाउ ॥[[28]](#endnote-27)

(The Siddha-s, sitting in their traditional posture, formed an assembly shouted, 'Salute this gathering of Sant-s.' I offer my salutation to the One who is true, infinite and incomparably beautiful. I offer my head it to Him; I dedicate my body and mind to Him. O Nanak, meeting with the Saints, Truth is obtained, and one is spontaneously blessed with distinction. What is the use of wandering around? Purity comes only through Truth. Without *sabda* (true knowledge) no one finds liberation.)

This invocatory piece also contains an indication of the central theme of the composition in the following statement: किआ भवीऐ सचि सूचा होइ ॥ साच सबद बिनु मुकति न कोइ The attitude of reverence for the contending party (the other) of the dialogue, as expressed here, is a traditional convention of our Indian culture. It creates an appropriate atmosphere congenial to Inter-faith dialogue where differences of opinion in matters of beliefs and practices are sought to be clarified and resolved if possible. Such an Inter-faith dialogue, if conducted with good will and honesty, can provide an excellent opportunity to understand each other's philosophical positions and theological assumptions better. It is a win-win situation for both parties.

The Siddhas initiate the dialogue with some preliminary quarries addressed to Guru Nanak regarding his personal life, his source of knowledge and his Guru, to which the Guru responds in a polite manner. And then the Siddhas ask a pertinent philosophical question:

दुनीआ सागरु दुतरु कहीऐ किउ करि पाईऐ पारो ॥

चरपटु बोलै अउधू नानक देहु सचा बीचारो ॥

आपे आखै आपे समझै तिसु किआ उतरु दीजै ॥

साचु कहहु तुम पारगरामी तुझु किआ बैसणु दीजै ॥४॥

जैसे जल महि कमलु निरालमु मुरगाई नै साणे ॥

सुरति सबदि भव सागरु तरीऐ नानक नामु वखाणे ॥

रहहि इकांति एको मनि वसिआ आसा माहि निरासो ॥

अगमु अगोचरु देखि दिखाए नानकु ता का दासो ॥५॥[[29]](#endnote-28)

(The world is an ocean, treacherous and impassable; how can one cross over? Charpat (Yogi) says, O Nanak, think it over, and give us your true reply." Guru Nanak says in reply “What answer can I give to someone, who knows and understands everything? I speak the Truth; you have already crossed over, how can I argue with you?” The lotus flower floats untouched upon the surface of the water, and the duck swims through the stream; with one's consciousness focused on the Word (*sabda*) one crosses over this terrifying ocean of *samsara.* O Nanak, chant the *nam* (the Name of the Lord). One who lives in solitude, (alone as a hermit), enshrining the Lord in his mind, remaining unaffected by hope in the midst of hope, sees and inspires others to see the inaccessible, unfathomable Lord. Nanak is his slave.)

With one's consciousness focused on the *sabda* (liberative knowledge), one crosses over this terrifying world-ocean.Here the classical symbol of a lotus flower growing in water drawing its sustenance from the mud below and yet remaining untouched by it has also been used to illustrate the point that man can live a detached life in this world and realize the Supreme Lord by enshrining His Name in his heart.

In this composition the true spirit of Inter-faith dialogue is maintained in accepting the validity of Truth possessed by the contending party but its empty ritualism is not tolerated either. In a polite manner Guru Nanak is able to show the hollowness of certain ritual practices using the conceptual terminology of Siddha world view and way of life. According to Guru Nanak meditating on the unchanging Truth (the Name or essence of Supreme Being) and living a life of detached attachment is the only way to liberation.

In fact, the entire text of *Guru Granth Sahib* is full of such insights which are relevant for an effective inter-faith dialogue and more importantly, for inter-civilizational dialogue in our contemporary context.

**Notes and References:**

1. *\* Former Professor and Head, Department of Punjabi, University of Delhi.*

   *Life Fellow, Punjabi University, Patiala.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hans Küng (2007), *Islam, Past Present & Future* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications.). p - xxiii. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. [Huntington, Samuel P.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_P._Huntington) (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York. Simon & Schuster. P- 28-29. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. *Ibid.,* p-210-11 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. “September 11 attacks, also called 9/11 attacks, series of [airline](https://www.britannica.com/technology/aircraft) [hijackings](https://www.britannica.com/topic/hijacking) and suicide attacks committed by 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group [al-Qaeda](https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Qaeda) against targets in the [United States](https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-United-States), the deadliest terrorist attacks on American soil in U.S. history. The attacks against [New York City](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-York-City) and [Washington, D.C.](https://www.britannica.com/place/Washington-DC), caused extensive death and destruction and triggered an enormous U.S. effort to combat [terrorism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/terrorism).”

   *https://www.britannica.com/event/September-11-attacks* [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. [Will Durant](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Will_Durant). (1935).*The Story of Civilization*: *Our Oriental Heritage.* New York: Simon & Schuster.page 459. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. *Bhagvad Gita* – 4/38. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. *Guru Granth Sahib*,661. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. *Rigveda Samhita* 1.164.46. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
10. *Bhagavad Gita* 4:11. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
11. *Yajur Veda.* 36.10.18. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
12. *Guru Granth Sahib*,25. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
13. *Ibid,* 892. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
14. *Ibid,* 907. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
15. *Ibid*, 1350. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
16. *Ibid,* 853. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
17. *Dasam Granth.* [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
18. *Guru Granth Sahib*, 223. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
19. *Ibid*, 671. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
20. *Ibid,* 892. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
21. *Guru Granth Sahib,* 885. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
22. *Ibid*, 1349. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
23. *Ibid*, 897. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
24. *Ibid*, 876. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
25. *Dasam Granth.* Page 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
26. *Ibid,* p – 51. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
27. *http://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com* [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
28. *Guru Granth Sahib*, 938. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
29. *Ibid,* 938. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)