

Relevance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the Present Era

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We are living in a world full of turmoil and tribulations. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, humanity is facing severe challenges to its very existence. The ever-increasing environmental pollution and the prevalence of large-scale corruption at all levels in society threaten its ecological and social fabric.

The monsters of drug menace and Covid-19 pandemic are trying to snuff out the very life-breath of human beings. Moreover, the rise of terrorism and the political rivalries among nations are threatening world peace. In such a dismal state of affairs, the clouds of destruction are looming large over humankind. But, there is a ray of hope in the form of Sri Guru Granth Sahib for the salvation of humanity from its present ills.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) [1-4], a unique religious and philosophical treatise, is a sublime blueprint for establishing a reign of peace and prosperity on Earth. It contains many divine messages unmistakably addressed to all humanity, which remain uniquely significant for all times and have a crucial relevance to the contemporary times.

Environmental Concerns

During the present time, modern industrial civilization is colliding violently with our mother Earth's ecological system with horrid consequences. Global warming, Green House Effect, Depletion of Ozone Layer, Deforestation, Soil Erosion, Pollution (Air, Water, Soil, Noise and Radioactive) make mother Earth sick day by day. If not checked and treated in time, she may become a lifeless desert incapable of supporting life [5-6].

In SGGS, Man and Nature are no more seen as external to each other, being involved in an inter-dependent relationship, reciprocally conditioning the life of each other. Guru Nanak stresses this kind of relationship in his composition 'Jap(u)';

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ॥ ਦਿਵਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ॥

Pavan gurū pāṇī piṭā māṭā dharat̄ mahat̄. Divas rāt̄ du^oe dā^oi dā^oiā khelai sagal jagat̄.

Air is the vital force, Water the progenitor, the vast Earth is the mother of all, Days and Nights are nurses, fondling all creation in their lap. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 8)

SGGS places a great deal of spiritual significance on the lessons we can learn directly from Nature. According to SGGS: Earth teaches us patience and renunciation; Sky teaches us equality and broadmindedness; Sun teaches us love for all; Air teaches us mobility and compassion; and Fire teaches us warmth and courage. This emphasis comes out clearly in the following hymns;

ਚੰਦਨ ਅਗਰ ਕਪੂਰ ਲੇਪਨ ਤਿਸੁ ਸੰਗੇ ਨਹੀ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ॥ ਬਿਸਟਾ ਮੂਤ੍ਰ ਖੇਦਿ ਤਿਲੁ ਤਿਲੁ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਮਨੀ
ਬਿਪਰੀਤਿ ॥

*Chandan agar kapūr lepan tis sange nahī parīt. Bistā mūtār khod tīl tīl man na
manī biprīt.*

Earth neither loves Sandalwood, aloe, or camphor paste nor does it mind if
someone digs it up bit by bit or applies manure and urine to it.

ਉਚ ਨੀਚ ਬਿਕਾਰ ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਸੰਲਗਨ ਸਭ ਸੁਖ ਛਤ੍ਰੁ ॥ ਮਿਤ੍ਰੁ ਸਤ੍ਰੁ ਨ ਕਛੁ ਜਾਨੈ ਸਰਬ ਜੀਅ ਸਮਤ ॥

*Ūch nīch bikār sukṛit saṅlgan sabh sukḥ chḥaṭar. Mīṭar saṭar na kachḥū jānai
sarab jīa samat.*

The comforting canopy of the sky stretches evenly overall, without considering
them high or low, good or bad. It does not distinguish between friends and enemies.
For it, all beings are alike.

ਕਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਪ੍ਰਚੰਡ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਓ ਅੰਧਕਾਰ ਬਿਨਾਸ ॥ ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰੁ ਅਪਵਿਤ੍ਰੁਹ ਕਿਰਣ ਲਾਗੇ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਭਇਓ
ਬਿਖਾਦੁ ॥

*Kar pargās parchand pargatiᵒ andḥkār binās. Paviṭar apvitrēh kiraṇ lāge man na
bhaᵒiᵒ bikhād.*

Blazing with its dazzling light, the sun rises and dispels the darkness. Touching
both the pure and the impure, it harbours no hatred to any.

ਸੀਤ ਮੰਦ ਸੁਗੰਧ ਚਲਿਓ ਸਰਬ ਥਾਨ ਸਮਾਨ ॥ ਜਹਾ ਸਾ ਕਿਛੁ ਤਹਾ ਲਾਗਿਓ ਤਿਲੁ ਨ ਸੰਕਾ ਮਾਨ ॥

*Sīt mand sugandḥ chaliᵒ sarab thān samān. Jahā sā kichḥ tahā lāgiᵒ tīl na sankā
mān.*

The calm and fragrant wind gently blows upon all places alike. It touches all the
things wherever these are, without even a bit of hesitation.

ਸੁਭਾਇ ਅਭਾਇ ਜੁ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਆਵੈ ਸੀਤੁ ਤਾ ਕਾ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਆਪ ਪਰ ਕਾ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਸਦਾ ਸਹਜਿ ਸੁਭਾਇ ॥

*Subhāᵒe abhāᵒe jo nikat āvai sīt tā kā jāᵒe. Āp par kā kachḥ na jānai sadā sahj
subhāᵒe.*

Whoever someone comes close to the fire, his/her cold is taken away without
considering his/her being good or bad. It does not know to differentiate between
beings. It always has the same nature. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 1018)

SGGS teaches us the importance of living in harmony with Nature. The concept of
humans and Nature's interrelatedness places a tremendous responsibility on all of us to
protect Earth and its ecosystem. The eternal message of SGGS is that we should love

mother Earth and Nature [5]. Therefore, it is highly relevant to the contemporary environmental concerns. Also, it is unequivocal in inspiring the whole of humanity towards this cause.

Menace of Corruption

The prevalence of large-scale corruption in modern society is a great social evil. The fundamental message of SGGS is the concept of social responsibility. The socio-spiritual welfare of humanity is one of its central concerns. Gurbani describes this world as 'Dharamsal' (an abode of righteousness). Its objective is the creation of a new egalitarian social order, with an emphasis on work ethics.

The core of the teaching of SGGS is *Nam Japna* (Contemplation on God), *Kirt Karni* (the honest labour) and *Wand Chhakna* (sharing of the earnings). It proclaims:

ਆਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ ॥

Ghāl khā^e kichh^h hathahu de^e. Nānak rāhu pachhāṇēh se^e.

He, who earns his living by honest work and shares his earnings with others, has discovered the path of righteousness, says Nanak. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 1245)

Thus SGGS lays a great emphasis on human endeavour and honest labour. SGGS commands the Sikhs to keep the social environment clean by avoiding the company of power mongers, evildoers and slanderers. It lays great stress on good conduct in worldly affairs as it enunciates:

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

Sachahu orai sabh^h ko upar sach^h āchār.

Truth is the greatest virtue, but more remarkable is truthful living. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 62)

It condemns living by exploitation, bribery and corruption. It asserts:

ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੁਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ ॥

Hak parāⁱā nānkā us sū^aar us gā^e.

To deprive others of their rights ought to be avoided as carefully as the Muslims avoid pork and the Hindus consider beef as a taboo. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 141)

It exhorts Sikhs to avoid malpractices.

ਲਬੁ ਕੁਤਾ ਕੂੜੁ ਚੂਹੜਾ ਠਗਿ ਖਾਧਾ ਮੁਰਦਾਰੁ ॥

Lab kutā kūr chūhrā thag khādhā murdār.

A greedy person is like a dog; a liar is like a filthy street-sweeper. Cheating is eating a rotting carcass. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 15)

Gurbani emphasizes that for a Sikh, the exploitation of others is like eating a dead man's flesh. Therefore, the Sikhs are counselled to lead a life of contentment and respect the person, property and dignity. These social ideals of SGGS can help eradicate corruption and other malpractices from our society.

Drugs Abuse And Covid-19 Pandemic

Presently, human society is suffering from the various ill effects of the widespread abuse of intoxicants and narcotics. The demon of drugs abuse has taken a firm hold on young people, giving rise to various social and physical ills. Moreover, the overexposure to unethical soap operas, obscene pop music and materialistic culture has led to the growth of adulterous relationships. Thus, it has caused a severe setback to the physical, moral and spiritual health of society. Consequently, the curse of Covid-19 pandemic and drug abuse is taking its toll on humans.

But, even in this field, SGGS is capable of providing us with a beacon. It proclaims;

ਬਾਬਾ ਹੋਰੁ ਖਾਣਾ ਖੁਸੀ ਖੁਆਰੁ ॥ ਜਿਤੁ ਖਾਧੈ ਤਨੁ ਪੀੜੀਐ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਚਲਹਿ ਵਿਕਾਰੁ ॥

Bābā hor khāṇā khusī khar. Jit khāḍhai tan pīḍīai man meh chalh vikār.

Friend, all that food and pleasures are vain, which fill the mind with Evil and make the body writhe in pain. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 16)

Thus SGGS warns about the ill effects of the usage of intoxicants and narcotics. Therefore, the Sikhs are forbidden from taking these. Gurbani enunciates:

ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਮਦੁ ਜੇ ਪੀਵਤੇ ਬਿਖਲੀ ਪਤਿ ਕਮਲੀ ॥

Durmaṭ maḍ jo pīvṭe bikhlī paṭ kamlī.

Those who drink the wine of vice, their mind is turned. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 399)

The duties related to chastity and fidelity are enjoined to regulate marital relations and to ensure respect for fidelity in the family and avoidance of adultery. SGGS proclaims;

ਪਰ ਦਾਰਾ ਪਰ ਧਨੁ ਪਰ ਲੋਭਾ ਹਉਮੈ ਬਿਖੈ ਬਿਕਾਰੁ ॥ ਦੁਸਟ ਭਾਉ ਤਜਿ ਨਿੰਦ ਪਰਾਈ ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ

ਚੰਡਾਰੁ ॥

Par dārā par dhan par lobhā haumai bikhai bikār. Dusat bhāo taj nind parāī kām krodh chandār.

To covet others' wives, desire others' wealth, having greed and egotism is sinful; shun the evil passions, slandering, lust and anger. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 1255)

ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਕਾਇਆ ਕਉ ਗਾਲੈ ॥

Kām krodh kāiā kaō gālai.

Lust and anger waste the body away. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 932)

Thus by imbibing the ethical principles of SGGS, our society can get rid of the evils of intoxicants, narcotics and drugs abuse. Even the monster of a pandemic can be controlled and eventually destroyed by its healing touch.

War, Terrorism and World Peace

In modern times, man is very well equipped intellectually and materially. Yet, the class conflicts among people and struggle for supremacy among different nations, the world over, are still raging. Consequently, several nations are at war with each other, giving rise to terrorism and misery for humanity.

SGGS tells us that the *Haumain* (egoistic consciousness) is the cause of man's all problems and limitations. It is the root cause of the entire conflict between man and man, between one society and the other, and between one nation and the other. The altruistic tendencies developed in man as the result of cultural conditioning over the years are only superficial. The moment the struggle for existence becomes keen, the basic self-centeredness of man comes into play. Thus start all conflicts of man, social as well as national and international. SGGS emphasizes that man is capable of transcending this ego-consciousness. The remedy is to develop a higher consciousness by linking one's consciousness with God, *Naam*, or the Basic Consciousness. The Guru proclaims;

ਹਉਮੈ ਦੀਰਘ ਰੋਗੁ ਹੈ ਦਾਰੂ ਭੀ ਇਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ ॥ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰੇ ਜੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਤਾ ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਕਮਾਹਿ ॥

Haumai dīragh rog hai dārū bhī is māhi. Kirpā kare je āpṇī tā gur kā sabad kamāhi.

Ego is a chronic disease, but it contains its cure as well. If the Lord grants His Grace, one acts according to the Teachings of the Guru's Sabd. (Mehl 2, SGGS, p 466)

Treating all human beings as spiritually one and ethnically equal, notwithstanding their different religious backgrounds, is the prerequisite for maintaining a harmonious relationship between other communities and nations. If we want the world to be set free from the siege of distrust and disharmony, oppression and violence and the reign of terrorism, we have to see others as our brothers and sisters [6]. We need to discover how to affirm our own identity without threatening the identity of others. SGGS advocates:

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥

Bhai kāhū ka'o det neh neh bhai mānaṭ ān.

Neither threaten others, nor be afraid of anyone. (Mehl 9, SGGS, p 1427)

It vouches for the spirit of universality as;

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥

Singh, D. P. (2021). Relevance of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the Present Era, Asia Samachar, Malaysia, 10 July 2021.

Nā ko bairī nahī bigānā sagal sang ham kaᵛo ban āᵛī.

None is my enemy, and none is a stranger. I am in accord with everyone. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 1299)

The ideals of the Universal Fraternity of humankind and the Universal Parenthood of the one and only Creator as laid down in SGGS are of fundamental importance to settle all conflicts of humans.

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ॥

Ēk piṭā ekas ke ham bārik tū merā gur hāᵛī.

One True Lord is the father of all, and we are His children. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 611)

The idea of God's love for all beings teaches us to value others in their otherness. It makes love for God the *sine qua non* factor for humanity and seeks the expression of this love through *Seva* (philanthropic activities). Thus, by imbibing the ethical values enshrined in SGGS, society can be ameliorated.

Conclusion

The philosophy projected in SGGS focuses on creating a just, liberal, universal and altruistic social order. It is committed to promoting mutual love, striving for high moral conduct, social equality and peaceful co-existence worldwide. These basic principles are highly relevant to contemporary concerns.

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