

## SKEWED KNOWLEDGE OF GURBANI

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ਜਗਿ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਵਿਰਲਾ ਆਚਾਰੀ  
ਜਗਿ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਵਿਰਲਾ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ॥

*(Rare in the world is the gnostic who is a man of conduct  
Rarer in the world is a man of deliberation.)*

Earlier, the reviewers and scholars of Gurbani were literary and knowledgeable people who knew the proper and exact significance of vowels (ਲਗਾਂ / ਮਾਤਰਾਂ) fixed to a letter in each Gurbani line which conveyed the real meaning of a *sabad* in Gurbani composed by the Sikh Gurus. Unfortunately, modern scholars use the English language to criticise Gurbani composition by using second-hand information. As a result, they present a distorted view of concepts and events, be these historical or religious. So the interpretations done by earlier spiritual scholars are being distorted in a clever manner. We should try to see through these attempted changes in spelling of *sabad* being contemplated to be made on the pattern of Modern English. If this methodology gets acceptance, then next would be at paraphrasing the poetic verse of Gurbani of Guru Granth Sahib on the lines of modern English.

Much of the essential meaning and import of Gurbani verse will either get distorted or completely inverted or lost if the plea of modern scholars equipped with the knowledge of English and their methodology of teaching and writing, and suggesting changes in spelling of *sabad* and placing punctuation marks as used in English language, namely commas, semi-colons, colons, exclamation marks or full stops in place of the only punctuation mark in the form of a straight vertical line like ‘|’ and two ‘||’ at the end of every hymn and

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pause in Guru Granth Sahib simply to make Gurbani reading easier, is accepted. Literal translation of one language into another may be easy but simple translation in case of Gurbani does not work and it would never be able to translate the real meaning of the idea contained in Gurbani lines if the translator is either ignorant or chooses to ignore the relevance of Gurbani grammar such as use of vowels used in conjunction with various Gurbani letters and *sabads*.

Guru Granth Sahib contains complete seminal truths which have been scientifically proved to be correct with the present fractional research of universe. These truths expressed in Gurbani regarding creation of universe out of amorphous matter explain where this world came from and where we are all headed for and how nature exists as a single continuous expanse.

*For countless ages, there was utter darkness.*

*There was no earth and no sky but the infinite*

*Lord's will alone was pervasive.*

*There was neither day, nor night, nor moon, nor sun*

*But the Lord alone sat in profound trance.<sup>1</sup>*

Yet the instinct to thank and seek help from the Creator, omnipotent and omnipresent who is sensed everywhere in every thing is undeniable and immutable. Belief finds expression eventually in the twin concept of God as Nirgun (the formless, all pervading one) and Sargun (approachable through the human imagination as personal deities, all of whom are embodiment to the One).

It is a matter of great concern and it gets worse when today's scholars well-versed with more than four or five languages say that Guru Granth Sahib reinterprets the tradition of oneness of 'om' through 'ikonkaar'. This interpretation by writers is not the correct interpretation but is distorted and is absolutely incorrect and misleading. *Prima facie*, it looks like a well-designed philosophical approach to misguide the readers. ੴ (Ekoankar) has not emerged from the word (ॐ) (Om) of Sanskrit. Om is trinity of God: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva), whereas ੴ (Ekoankar) has a prefix of ੴ to ੴ which means that creator God is one and only one God which does not come in counting. In its genuine pronunciation *sabad* ੴ (Ekoankar) is expressively an expansion of 'karta' and 'dhunni' expansion of 'sound'

operational through *Karta*: a vibration in a voice of Orchestral trill (*Jhankaar*) like the touching of many strings of a musical instrument. These are nuances and sounds which can be felt but not heard. It can be difficult for an average person to distinguish between normal and abnormal vibration – ‘A state that is thoughtless and beyond intellect.’ Only saints and *brahmgiyanis* can distinguish this fine difference and submit to His power (One God Power reciting ਤੁਹੀਂ ਤੁਹੀਂ...) This for instance, is the nuance or meaning hinted at in the following hymns of saints Kabir Ji and Namdev Ji in Rag Sorath:

I have closed the doors (sense organs) the celestial music rings within me.<sup>2</sup>

Where the dazzling light is seen, there plays the celestial strain.<sup>3</sup>

The unskinned drum plays, without rainy season clouds thunder. Without the cloud rain falls, if anyone reflect over the real thing.<sup>4</sup>

Guru Nanak says further:

There is deep meditation and melody of celestial music there.

The wonder and marvel of it can not be narrated.

He to whom God Himself shows, beholds.

Nanak such a man obtains understanding.<sup>5</sup>

### PRONUNCIATION OF SYMBOLੴ

(*Ekoankar*) ੴ is one word, Not two. Though it has three segments. ੴ, ਓ and ੴ but recitation is “*Ekoankar*”. These three segments are ੴ – *Ek* (ਏਕ) ਓ – *oan* (ਓਅੰ) ੴ (ਕਾਰ). ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ are five letters (*Panch Akbar*) as elucidated in *vaar* 3:15 of Bhai Gurdas.

With relation to its articulation, the amanuensis of Guru Granth Sahib, Bhai Gurdas has unfolded the mystery of first word or symbol ੴ in *vaar* 3:15 (ਮੁਲ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਦਾ ਗੁੱਝਾ ਭੇਦ)

ਏਕਾ ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ ਲਿਖ ਦੇਖਾਲਿਆ ॥

ਉੜਾ ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ ਪਾਸਿ ਬਹਾਲਿਆ ॥

Bhai Gurdas writes further:

ਏਕੰਕਾਰ ਏਕਾਂਗ ਲਿਖਿ ਉੜਾ ਓਅੰਕਾਰ ਲਿਖਾਇਆ ॥ *Vaar* 39:1

Bhai Gurdas had full knowledge of the nuances of Gurbani grammar and intricate techniques of modulating the voice to a perfect

form of verses recited by Guru Arjun Dev Ji and used different vowels expressing different meanings of the verses and rhymes. The issue of Gurbani translation and interpretation is not as simple as interpretation of a climate change, but one of enlightened state of spirituality in which Gurbani has been composed.

Thus ੴ is One Word. Hence it is not a topic but its genuine pronunciation is *ekoankar* and is non-controversial as Guru Nanak himself authenticates:

He Himself is True and True is all that He has made.  
From that Lord has originated the entire creation  
When it pleases Him, then does He make the expanse,  
If it pleases Him He becomes one alone then.<sup>6</sup>

As an actor stages a play and appears in many characters and guises, similarly the Lord when He abandons His guise and ends His play, then the One alone remains, the One alone.<sup>7</sup>

Guru Arjun Dev says further:

Many a time was the extension extended,  
Ever and ever the unique Lord remains the same One.<sup>8</sup>

Gurbani grammar is completely different and is very much expressive and its ਦੁੱਤ ਅੱਖਰ (*dutt akkhar*) and vowels are appropriately placed and convey correct meaning(s) of the word(s) keeping in view its nuances and intricate technique of modulating the voice by using *bindi*, vowel signs, two vowels to a letter of *sabad* which need not be mixed with today's general grammar or English punctuation.

### **BINDI (ਬਿੰਦੀ)**

It has been used about two thousand times in Guru Granth Sahib not only on vowels but on letters too such as : ਉ, ਊ, ਓ, ਅ, ਏ, ਸ, ਹ, ਕ, ਖ, ਗ, ਚ, ਜ, ਢ, ਣ, ਤ, ਥ, ਦ, ਧ, ਨ, ਪ, ਬ, ਭ, ਮ, ਰ, ਲ, ਝ ।

### **ਦੁੱਤ ਅੱਖਰ (DUTT AKKHAR)**

In general grammar there are only three Dutt Akhars as:

ਹ: ਪੜ੍ਹ, ਕਲ੍ਹ, ਜੜ੍ਹ ....

ਰ: ਮੰਤ੍ਰ, ਪ੍ਰੇਮ, ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਨ ...

ਵ: ਸ੍ਰੀ, ਸ੍ਰਫ, ਸ੍ਰਗ ...

But in Gurbani grammar, there are five additional Dutt Akhars:

ਤ: ਉਸੁਤਿ, ਹਸੁ

ਚ: ਅਸੁਰਜ, ਪਸੁਮਿ, ਨਿਸੁਲ

ਟ: ਸਰਿਸ੍ਰ, ਦ੍ਰਿਸ੍ਰ, ਸ੍ਰਿਸ੍ਰ  
 ਯ: ਉਧਰੁਓ, ਨਿਵਾਰੁਓ, ਲਿਖੁਓ  
 ਨ: ਸ਼ੋਹ, ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਾ, ਇਸਨਾਨ

which are used and on the foot of some letters ਦੁੱਤ ਅੱਖਰ (Dutt Akkhar) vowel sign of ਔਕੜ, ਦੁਲੈਕੜ is placed : ਮੰਤ੍ਰ, ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰ, ਪ੍ਰ, ਅਕ੍ਰੁਰ ....

### **TWO VOWEL SIGNS**

There are about ninety words having two vowels to a letter: ਲਗੁ/ਗੁਰੁ to shorten or lengthen the verses in recitation. Such letters or words having two vowels to a letter are : ਉਮਾਹਾ, ਏਕੋ, ਸੋਹਲ, ਸੋਈ, ਹੋਤ, ਗੋਸਾਈ ਗੋਪਾਲਾ, ਕੋਟਵਾਰੀ, ਚੋਰਾਇ, ਜੋ, ਤੋਹਹਿ, ਦੋਆਲੇ, ਧਨੋ, ਨਮੋ, ਪਛੋਤਾਵੈ, ਬੋਲਾਨ, ਭਯੋ, ਭੋਲਾਏ, ਮੋਹਿ, ਲੋਕਾਨੀ ....

### **ADDITIONAL VOWEL SIGN ਹਲੰਤ (HALANT)**

In Gurbani grammar, an additional vowel sign ਹਲੰਤ ( ) is expressively used hundreds of times on the foot of letter of words : ਓਲ੍ , ਜਿਨ੍, ਜਾਣਨਿ . ਭਲਨੀ, ਰੁਝਾਈ, ਪੀੜ, ਖੋਲੇ, ਵਰਿਆ, ਨਾਨ੍, ਤਿੰਨਖੇ, ਸੰਨੀ, ਆਪੀਠੈ, ਕਨ੍, ਸਮਾਰਿ, ਕਰੀਨ੍ ...

Let our modern English translators and scholars of Gurbani give an honest answer. Do they really understand the subtle nuances and implied meanings contained in Gurbani verses as pointed out in the above discussion. In my humble opinion, majority of them do not, as they are not thoroughly conversant with the Gurbani grammar. The superficial knowledge of Gurbani of some of these scholars leads to skewed interpretation of Gurbani. No wonder, no two translations of Guru Granth Sahib are identical. It is because of this subjective approach, lack of knowledge of Gurbani grammar and the implicit meaning conveyed by the use of each vowel or supra segmental signs, stresses or nasalisation symbols with various letters and words of Gurbani. One can only regret such an inadequacy of linguistic skill in these otherwise good scholars of English. One can only quote Ehsan Danish:

*Jhukein kis kis key aage ab-madad-e-khaliq-e-aalam,*

*Ke teray banday bhee ham sey peish aatey hein kbuda ho kar.*

(Before how many persons of the world should we bow for help, O God,

Even your created men behave like gods with us?)

So when the problem of striking a delicate balance between

scholarship and spontaneous response of a faithful devotee arises, the original Gurbani text must provide the correct answers. We must keep the sanctity of Gurbani intact which communicates and connects us with the Almighty through the medium of Sikh Gurus, saints and Bhaktas who had composed it on the basis of their revelations received directly from the Divine in their moments of intense spiritual enlightenment and ecstasy. The correct interpretation of this unique and rare experience is only possible if the interpreter or translator is fully conversant with the Gurbani grammar. Hence the need for modern scholars to combine their scholarship with the skill to decipher the nuances of vowels and their connotations. Once we take liberties with Gurbani spellings and the grammatical attachments, the whole communication and context will go haywire:

*Ek nukte ne kbuda se Juda kar deya.*

{One single dot (here and there) snapped communication between God and man.}

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#### REFERENCES

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