

A Critical Evaluation of *Waheguru Gurmantar* in Sikh Religion

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In December (2017) issue of *The Sikh Review*, Bhai Harbans Lal (USA) published his article¹ "Naam - A Password for Universal Reality". According to the author, Naam literally means a name or an identity of a person, a thing or an entity. This definition of Naam set me to ponder over if there is any unique name of God (Ultimate Reality) coined by the Sikh Gurus for their followers in Sikh Religion? From my childhood days, I presumed that '*Waheguru*' is the sacred name of God to be uttered with devotion by all the Sikhs. It never came to my mind to investigate its origin and history in Sikh literature. I always took it for granted that Sikh Gurus must have promulgated and promoted its use in their sacred writings, known as Gurbani, recorded in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (SGGS) by Guru Arjun Dev. SGGS is the Sikh scripture which was installed in *Harmandir Sahib* (present day Golden Temple) in 1604.

During recent months, when I was involved in a critical study of SGGS to prepare my monograph² on simple interpretation/exegesis of Gurbani, I was surprised to find that Sikh Gurus have not created or coined any new name for God. They have employed the names of God already prevalent in India and being used by the Indian masses since ancient times. The most common name or epithet used for God is '*Ram*', which occurs 1758 times in SGGS. Its two other variations are '*Rama*' and '*Ram(u)*' which occur 254 and 27 times, respectively, in SGGS. Dr Khem Singh Gill³ has written in his recent book on Sant Teja Singh that there are 55 different names of God recorded in SGGS. There is a long list of names of God both from Hindu and Muslim religions given in the text of SGGS but an exhaustive compilation of Hindu names is available under Rag Maru⁴.

It is enigmatic why Sikh Gurus did not discover a new trade name of God as other prophets had done? The scholars of Sikh religion have different opinions in this regard. Some suggest that Sikhism is just an offshoot of Hinduism; others say that it is a syncretisation of Hindu and Muslim cultures in India; hence no new name for God was coined by the Sikh Gurus. My views are different on this issue. In my opinion, Sikh Gurus created SGGS as a universal scripture for the whole humanity; hence their outlook for adopting the current names of God was secular and not sectarian.

It may be of interest to probe this matter further on the basis of Gurbani recorded in SGGS. The Sikh Gurus have nowhere rejected the fundamental principles and basic formulations of other religions, except condemning the rituals and tactics of priestly class to exploit the Indian masses. However, Sikh Gurus were against idolatry of Hindu religion. The Sikh religion is monotheistic and rejects the multiplicity of demi-gods of Hindu religion. The opening stanza of SGGS, known as commencing verse or *Moolmantra*, sums up the qualities of God without naming Him. In my view, *IKONKAR* (⌘) is the most suitable choice to be used as an insignia or logo⁵ or trade name of God in Sikhism. Perhaps, the only other religion which forbids to utter the four letter Hebrew name of God, YHWH (Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh), is Judaism or Jewish religion. It is a sin for the Jews to pronounce the name of God.

Using Gurbani search engine provided by Dr Joginder Singh Ahluwalia of USA, I tried my best to search for different versions of '*Waheguru*' in SGGS. To my utter surprise, none of

Athe contributors of SGGS, including the Sikh Gurus, have used *Waheguru* to represent God. However, Bhat Gaiind is the only contributor who used *Waheguru* in two versions: *Wahguru* (3 times) and *Wah(e)guru* (13 times). In my opinion, Bhat Gaiind used both these versions as a eulogy in praise of Guru Ram Das Jee, and not for God.

vaihgurU vaihgurU vaihgurU vaih jlXu . kvl n{n mWur
b{n k]io s{n s;g s]B kht ma js]w ijsih whl Batu Kaih
jlXu . w[iK rUpu Ait AnUpu m]h mha mg Bel ik;knI sbw
Jntkar K[lu paih jlXu . kal klm hukmu haiT khhu kxunu
m[iO sk{ elsu b;m*u g*anu W*anu Wrt hIA{ caih jlXu .
sit sacu sRI invasu Aaiw purKu swa tuhl vaihgurU
vaihgurU vaihgurU vaih jlXu .

Waahay Guru, Waahay Guru, Waahay Guru, Waahay Jee-o. You are lotus-eyed, with sweet speech, exalted and embellished with millions of companions. Mother Yashoda invited You as Krishna to eat the sweet rice. Gazing upon Your supremely beautiful form, and hearing the musical sounds of Your silver bells tinkling, she was intoxicated with delight. Death's pen and command are in Your hands. Tell me, who can erase it? Shiva and Brahma yearn to enshrine Your spiritual wisdom in their hearts. You are forever True, the Home of Excellence, the Primal Supreme Being. Waahay Guru, Waahay Guru, Waahay Guru, Waahay Jee-o.

(svele[mhl[cxuT[k[p;na 1402)

s[vk k{ BrpUr jugu jugu vahgurU t[ra sBu swka .
inr;karu pRBu swa slamit kih n sk{ k]xU tU kw ka .
bRhma ibsnu isr[t{ Agnt itn kxu m]hu Bya mn mw ka .
cvraslh IK j]in xupael irjku wIAa sB hU kxu tw ka . s[vk
k{ BrpUr jugu jugu vahgurU t[ra sBu swka .

Your servants are totally fulfilled, throughout the ages; O Waahay Guru, it is all You, forever. O Formless Lord God, You are eternally intact; no one can say how You came into being. You created countless Brahmas and Vishnus; their minds were intoxicated with emotional attachment. You created the 8.4 million species of beings, and provide for their sustenance. Your servants are totally fulfilled, throughout the ages; O Waahay Guru, it is all You,

forever.

(svele[mhl[cxuT[k[p;na 1403)

The Sikh Gurus have recommended recitation of 'Ram' in SGGS more than 2000 times as a eulogy of God, ignoring *Waheguru*, the term used by Bhat Gaiind:

Bael r[ramu khhu ictu laie . hir jsu vKru l{ clhu shu
w[K{ ptIAaie .

O Siblings of Destiny, chant the Lord's Name, and focus your consciousness on Him.

(isrlragu mhla 1 p;na 22)

mn r[ram jphu suKu h]ie . ibnu gur pR[mu n
paelA{ sbiw iml{ r;gu h]ie .

*O mind, meditate on the Lord, and find peace. Without the Guru, love is not found.
United with the Shabad, happiness is found.*

(isrlragu mhla 1 p;na

58)

nank ramu jphu tru tarl hir A;it sKael paieAa .

*O Nanak, meditate on the Lord, and swim across the river; they find the Lord, their best
friend, in the end.*

(marU mhla 1 p;na

1039)

However, two other names 'Satnam' and 'Nirankar' have also been used by Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Nanak, respectively, in SGGS to represent God:

ikrtm nam kT[t[r[ijhba . sit namu t[ra pra pUrbla .

With my tongue I chant the Names given to You. 'Sat Naam' is Your perfect, primal Name.

(marU mhla 5 p;na

1083)

naxu t[ra inr;karu h{ naie lieA{ nrik n jaelA{ .

Your Name is the Fearless Lord; chanting Your Name, one does not have to go to hell.

(Aasa m> 1 pxuzl p;na

465)

Who promoted *Waheguru Gurmantar* as a recitation or meditation as a substitute for the name of God for the Sikhs? It is not the Sikh Gurus but the renowned Bhai Gurdas, the scribe and interpreter of SGGS. Bhai Gurdas has justified his coinage of *Waheguru* on the basis of Indian mythology, which looks like a formulation of his genius:

ਸਤਿਜੁਗ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਵਾਸਦੇਵ ਵਵਾ ਵਿਸਨਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਾਵੈ।

Satijugi Satigur Vaasadayv Vavaa Visanaa Naamu Japaavai |

In Satyug, Visnu in the form of Vasudev is said to have incarnated and 'V' Of Vahiguru reminds of Visnu.

ਦੁਆਪਰਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਹਰੀ ਕ੍ਰਿਸਨ ਹਾਹਾ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਾਵੈ।

Duaapari Satigur Haree Krisan Haahaa Hari Hari Naamu Japaavai |

The true Guru of dvapar is said to be Harikrsna and 'H' of Vahiguru reminds of Hari.

ਤ੍ਰੇਤੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਰਾਮ ਜੀ ਰਾਰਾ ਰਾਮ ਜਪੇ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਵੈ।

Taytay Satigur Raam Jee Raaraa Raam Japay Sukhu Paavai |

In the the treta was Ram and 'R' of Vahiguru tells that rembering Ram will produce joy and happiness.

ਕਲਿਜੁਗਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰ ਗੋਵਿੰਦ ਗਗਾ ਗੋਵਿੰਦ ਨਾਮੁ ਅਲਾਵੈ।

Kalijugi Naanak Gur Gobind Gagaa Gobind Naamu Alaavai |

In kalijug, Gobind is in the form of Nanak and 'G' of Vahiguru gets Govind recited.

ਚਾਰੇ ਜਾਗੇ ਚਹੁ ਜੁਗੀ ਪੰਚਾਇਣ ਵਿਚਿ ਜਾਇ ਸਮਾਵੈ।

Chaaray Jaagay Chahu Jugee Panchaain Vichi Jaai Samaavai |

The recitations of all the four ages subsume in Panchayan i.e. in the soul of the common man.

ਚਾਰੋ ਅਛਰ ਇਕੁ ਕਰਿ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜਪੁ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਜਪਾਵੈ।

Chaaro Achhar Iku Kari Vaahaguroo Japu Mantr Japaavai |

When joining four letters Vahiguru is remembered,

ਜਹਾਂ ਤੇ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਫਿਰਿ ਤਹਾਂ ਸਮਾਵੈ ॥

Jahaa Tay Upajiaa Firi Tahaa Samaavai ||

The jiv merges again in its origin.

(ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੧ ਪਉੜੀ ੪੯)

According to Bhai Gurdas, Waheguru is the most sacrosanct term for God as it is composed of first four initials of representative holy figures (True Gurus) of four epochs (Yugas) of Hindu Calendar. I think the logic behind Bhai Gurdas's argument is not scientific but mythical. Anyhow, recitation of Waheguru has become very popular in Sikh religion after its adoption by Guru Gobind Singh Jee as a salutation for the Khalsa (*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*). It has become part of the Sikh prayer and a common form of salutation among the Sikhs now.

Coming back to the topic of Naam, which is a central theme in SGGS, Bhai Harbans Lal has promised to explore it further in his forthcoming articles. In my view, Sikh Gurus have not suggested recitation of any other name or *mantra* explicitly in SGGS except 'Ram', as discussed in para 2 supra. It means we are not following the diktat of Sikh Gurus in SGGS but of Bhai Gurdas, the scribe of SGGS. This point needs to be further investigated on the basis of Sikh beliefs and codes of conduct, better known as *Rahitnamas*. Bhai Gurdas has given a clarion call to Sikhs to recite *Waheguru* as a *Gurmantra* (a formulation assigned by the Guru) in his famous composition "*Varan Bhai Gurdas*":

ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਹੈ ਜਪਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਖੋਈ।

Vaahiguroo Guramantr Hai Japi Haumai Khoee |

His Guru-manta is Vahiguru, whose recitation erases egotism.

(ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੧੩ ਪਉੜੀ ੨)

ਪਉਣ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ।

Paunu Guroo Gur Sabadu Hai Vaahaguroo Gur Sabadu Sunaaiiaa |

The Guru's word is the air, the Guru and wondrous Lord has recited Word the Guru.

(ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ : ਵਾਰ ੬ ਪਉੜੀ ੫)

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