

## SHRI GURU TEGH BAHADUR: PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

Aditi Singla

Assistant Professor  
Department of Music, Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana

### ABSTRACT

Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, occupies a unique place in Indian philosophical and religious thought. His Baani, though limited in volume, offers profound insights into the nature of Reality, the human condition, the transient world, and the path to liberation. Rooted in the Sikh conception of Ik Onkar, Guru Tegh Bahadur presents God as formless, eternal, self-existent, and immanent within creation. His philosophy emphasizes the impermanence of worldly attachments, the preciousness of human life, and the necessity of God-realization through meditation on the Divine Name. Central to his thought is the discipline of the mind, liberation from ego, and the attainment of jivan mukti—liberation while living. Rejecting ascetic renunciation, Guru Tegh Bahadur advocates transcendence within active social life, guided by fearlessness, compassion, and universal concern. His supreme sacrifice for religious freedom stands as a practical embodiment of his philosophical ideals, affirming ethical responsibility and spiritual courage.

**Keywords:** - Guru Tegh Bahadur, Sikh Philosophy, Ik Onkar, Jivan Mukti, Divine Name

### INTRODUCTION

In India, philosophy and religion are deeply interrelated. The only independent school was Charvaka or Lokayata, whose materialistic literature was largely destroyed. Philosophy and spiritualism are woven together, whether in the six Vedic systems (theistic or astak) or in Buddhism and Jainism (atheistic or nastak for rejecting the Vedas' authority). These non-Vedic schools emerged as reactions against Vedic orthodoxy. As scholars note: "The Carvakas, the Buddhists and the Jainas appeared initially as a sort of reaction."<sup>1</sup>

Sikhism is a non-Vedic religion rejecting the Vedas' ultimate authority. God is the ultimate Truth, symbolized by Ik Onkar. Founded by Guru Nanak Dev ji, it is revolutionary against caste-based stratification and exploitation. Sikhism believes in universal wellbeing and liberty. Its scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, contains the Baani of six Gurus (first five and ninth) with compositions of Vaishnav Bhagats and Sufi Saints. Dr. Avtar Singh observed this period as "characterized by loss of hope in the older tradition... announcing a new and more humanistic awakening."<sup>2</sup> The Baani is the primary source of Sikh philosophy. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Nanak joti, succeeded Guru Nanak ji's heritage. Founded in the fifteenth century, Sikhism is among the five main world religions.

Before analysing Guru Tegh Bahadur ji's Baani, we examine philosophy and religion's domains. Religion addresses Reality's nature, human nature, and humanity's relation to Reality. The first two are philosophical; the third falls under religion, bringing philosophy into religion's sphere. Sirdar Kapur Singh noted religion becomes "religion proper" when "it seeks and promises to help human soul to take the truths to heart and to put them into action... resolving the problems of suffering."<sup>3</sup> Religion is the whole person's response to ultimate value. From this perspective, we analyse Guru Tegh Bahadur ji's concepts.

### Life of Guru Tegh Bahadur

Born Tyag Mal on April 18, 1621 CE in Amritsar to Guru Hargobind and mother Nanaki, he received education in Gurmukhi, Sanskrit, and other languages under Bhai Gurdas and Baba Buddha ji. Guru Hargobind trained him in both bhagati and shakti (miri and piri). At thirteen, he participated in the Battle of Kartar Pur, displaying such swordsmanship that his name changed to Tegh Bahadur. He married Gujri ji in 1632 CE. When Guru Hargobind moved to Kirat Pur, Tegh Bahadur stayed at Bakala. In 1644 CE, Guru Hargobind bestowed Guruship on grandson Har Rai, who guided Sikhs until 1661, then passed it to his son Har Krishan. While at Delhi during an epidemic, Guru Har Krishan served sick people, caught infection, and announced "Baba Bakale," indicating his successor at Bakala. Guru Tegh Bahadur received Guruship and moved to Kirat pur, establishing Chak Nanaki, which became Khalsa's birthplace and was named Sri Anandpur Sahib.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's Baani, composed in different musical measures, though not large in scale, is profoundly meaningful, directly touching the heart. The concepts analysed include Reality's nature, human relationships with Reality, liberation or jivan mukt, the world's nature, and the world's relation to Reality.

### The Concept of Reality

Guru Nanak Dev ji's philosophy was carried forward by successor Gurus with the same divine light. Sri Guru Granth Sahib supports this. Guru Nanak Dev ji defined ultimate Reality: "the One Universal Supreme Being, the Real, the Spirit, the

Creator, Without fear or anger. Timeless, Incarnated, Self-Existent, the Enlightener." God is pure consciousness and existence—unchangeable, beginningless, endless, unborn, self-illuminated, beyond description and attributes. God is immanent everywhere, within every form, filling all creation.

Some may ask how, if God is formless, He can be everywhere and in everything. Guru explains through vivid metaphors: just as fire resides in wood but manifests only when churned with a drill, or butter exists in milk but becomes visible only when milk is churned or heated, similarly God permeates all creation but manifests through His grace. Guru says: "You are not far from us, oh Lord, you are very near to us; some see you manifest in all forms; some see you far away from them. You are embedded in the heart yet the ignorant search you elsewhere, in remote places. Detached from the world, you remain, oh Lord, in the world of action; revealed by the Guru, my mind has become enlightened." When one lives in God's fear and love, the fear of the world vanishes, and the person becomes truly fearless in life.<sup>4</sup> This realization of God's immanence transforms the way one perceives and interacts with the world.

### **The Nature of the World**

Guru Tegh Bahadur's Baani emphasizes the world's transitory and perishable nature. Everything in the world is transitory and will eventually perish except God, who is eternal. People spend their entire lives accumulating wealth and material possessions, remain deeply attached to family and friends, but when death comes, nothing and no one accompanies them—not friends, not relatives, not sons or daughters, not wealth or possessions. Man wastes his precious life accumulating worldly things, considering the body permanent and eternal, thus deceiving himself. But when death arrives, nothing remains of all that was accumulated. The body that was previously so loved and cared for suddenly becomes repulsive and is quickly disposed of. When the messengers of Yama, the god of death, arrive, the person realizes that all those considered near and dear were actually strangers. Life's play ends abruptly, and the person passes to Yama's court to account for all actions. Man becomes intoxicated by family attachments, wealth and material possessions, and youth and physical beauty. He is deluded by the sense of mine and ownership in worldly things. The world is like a dream or magic show, fleeting and impermanent as a moment's flash. Everything is transient and perishable—youth fades, wealth disappears, and life itself comes to an end. All these worldly attachments and possessions will vanish like travellers who part ways after meeting briefly, like houses built on someone else's land that will eventually collapse and return to dust. Therefore, one should devote the mind to God, repeat and meditate on His Name constantly, and save oneself from the endless cycle of reincarnation and suffering.

### **The Nature of Human Being**

According to Sikhism, human birth is considered the highest and most evolved form of birth in all of creation, and it is extremely hard and rare to attain. Human birth is the greatest and most precious opportunity given by God to meet Him and merge back into Him. The ultimate aim and goal of all species is God-realization—this is the true end and purpose of human life. Human life is precious and valuable but also short and fleeting, and God has given this rare opportunity to human beings to meet Him and realize their true divine nature. Those who do not meditate on God's Name and engage in spiritual practice waste the precious gift of human birth. By God's grace alone, one obtains the rare treasure of human birth to engage in good deeds, contemplate and meditate on God's Name, and achieve ultimate liberation from the cycle of birth and death. But deceived and deluded by illusion and maya, man pursues temporary wealth and fleeting pleasure, remains attached to worldly things and relationships without meeting the Lord, and forgets the one who gave this life—the only one who can truly help and save him. Lost in the darkness of illusion, intoxicated by youth, physical strength, and material achievements, man completely forgets the ultimate Reality that pervades all. Man wastes his precious and rare human life searching for and criticizing others' faults instead of correcting his own, wandering through 8.4 million various life forms in different species before finally gaining the precious human birth with its unique opportunity to meditate on God's Name and achieve liberation. But even after obtaining this rare gift, he still dances to illusion's tunes and remains entangled in temporary attachments, forgetting that his attachment to impermanent and transitory things will inevitably lead him to Yama's court of judgment.

### **The Love of God**

According to Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, God's love should completely permeate one's mind, body, and soul without parting from Him even for a moment. Pure mind is essential for true love of God; one should not claim God's love while attached to worldly objects. Just as the tongue cannot taste sweet things mixed with bitter elements, claiming God's love while attached to maya is impossible. Guru presents a metaphor: "Mother, mind has not understood, though repeatedly I say. Like not tasting sugar-candy mixed with neem, like not smelling fragrance with nose closed with wax. Like not entering water keeping clothes on, similarly God's name is not imbibed by one absorbed with worldly love." The meditator contaminated by five evils—lust, anger, greed, attachment, and ego—cannot taste God's Name. Just as one cannot enter water fully clothed without getting wet, one cannot imbibe God's Name while absorbed in worldly love.

Guru teaches that if one truly loves God, worldly attachments should drop from the mind because one cannot serve two masters—either God or illusion. One should love God with undivided attention. The mind should be so absorbed in God that nothing else remains. But it is human nature to remember God only in distress, forgetting Him when happy. Like patients who remember doctors only when sick, humans remember God only in times of danger. Only rare persons remain devoted to God always, remembering Him in happiness and sorrow alike. A dying thirsty person desperately thirsts for water; similarly, man should thirst intensely for God's love. Those truly loving God do so like fish in water—fish cannot survive outside water because water is its life. Similarly, humans should realize God's love is their life, without which they cannot truly live. Before death overcomes, one should devote oneself to God's love.

### **The Concept of Mind and Liberation**

The human mind holds an important place in Sikhism, especially in Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's compositions. The mind determines one's path. According to Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, human mind is never stable; mostly restless and hard to grasp, always immersed in desires, unfixed. Insurmountable wrath abides in it, an irresistible force snatching enlightenment, termed as the mind's jewels. Guru terms mind as forgetful because it goes astray, never listening to scriptures that could guide it toward God. Due to this forgetfulness, the hard-to-attain human birth is wasted. Humans get attached to maya, the source of all suffering, disinclined toward God's love, who is immanent everywhere and ever within. The mind is termed mad, ever engrossed in avarice, becoming worthless, forgetting life's end is near.<sup>5</sup> The mind is so self-willed it doesn't listen to good counsel, isn't restrained from evil thinking, deceives the world by fraud, serving only its interests. Guru compared the mind's condition to a dog's tail that always remains crooked. The only way to control mind and put it on the right track is controlling evil propensities that distract the mind and meditating on the Divine Name in holy congregation.

The Guru says since Reality or God is immanent in His creation, residing within every human being, there is no need to go to forests or wild places to search for Him or do hard Yoga exercises to control mind. He should be searched within. Fear of death is the most dreaded thing in human life. To achieve liberation, death's fear must be removed from mind. To the question Guru Tegh Bahadur ji himself posed—what is the Divine Name and how to achieve devotion to God and remove death's fear—Guru answers that God's Name, the ocean of grace, may only bring liberation. No other piety act equals that.<sup>6</sup> God resides within humans as fragrance in rose, reflection in mirror. Realize the self; without realization, illusion's impurity is not removed. Real yogic praxis is eradicating ego, avarice, attachment from mind. A true yogi doesn't bother about praise or flattery; gold and iron are equal to a true yogi, joy and sorrow are alike, and has made the mind poised and restrained.

The concept of liberation propounded in Sikhism is that of jivan mukat, achievable while living in this world. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji termed the status of liberation while living as mukat, jivan mukat, or nirbhai pad. The only way to achieve this status is to meditate on the Divine Name as discussed above, that to realize one's self one must meditate on God's Name. The liberated person or jivan mukat is one who is not touched by joy and suffering, avarice, attachment, and egoism. Such a person is not touched by praise or dispraise, and to them gold and iron are alike, joy and sorrow are the same, foe and friend are alike. The truly liberated person is one who does not strike fear in others and does not stand in the fear of anyone, and such a person is in the image of God. The jivan mukat is one who has realized the self and helps others on the path of realization, on the path of liberation.<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes people may confuse the concept of vairag propounded by Guru Tegh Bahadur with the traditional concept of renunciation as given in Hinduism or other Indian religious traditions. This is not correct as we can see that it is not renunciation; it is the status of transcendence in which the person is not carried away by emotions and evil propensities, the person is not entangled by worldly attractions while doing his or her duties in the world, fulfils social responsibilities and feels concerned for the whole human race. It was this transcendence with concerns for the whole humanity that Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib ji chose to be martyred himself for the religion which was not practiced by him, the religion of others, to defend the basic right of freedom to practice one's own faith.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Radha Krishnan (Ed.), *History of Philosophy Eastern and Western*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952, vol.1, p 275.
2. Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*, Patiala: Punjabi University, 2009, p 7.
3. Gopal Singh Dardi, *English Translation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Introduction by Sirdar Kapur Singh, vol. 2.
4. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 1426.
5. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 219.
6. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 632.
7. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 684.