

A Critical Review of Bhai Harbans Lal's Writings

Baldev Singh (baldev6@aol.com)
316, R Glad Way, Collegeville, PA 19426, USA

Misinterpretation of Gurbani and misrepresentation of Sikhism started right during the time of the Sikh Gurus and is still going on. Not only the non-Sikh scholars but many Sikh scholars are doing so either ignorantly or innocently or on purpose to realize their personal objectives. Such misinterpretations are also found in many Punjabi and English translations of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) found in prints, on compact discs and on many Internet sites these days. While glancing through The Sikh Review, I came across a report by Professor Devinder Singh Chahal on the second "Institute for Understanding Sikhism (IUS)" seminar held in Canada in 2002.¹ I was surprised when I read "Dr Harbans Lal proposed a resolution expressing the concern of the speakers and ISU on the increase of misinterpretation of Gurbani and misinterpretation of Sikhism in the Sikh literature by Sikh as well as non-Sikh scholars." I am not aware of any effort by Bhai Harbans Lal or ISU to check the misinterpretation of Sikhism. Some times things are not the same, as they seem to be or claimed to be. May be Lal does not realize that his own writings are full of misinterpretation of Gurbani and distortion of Sikhism.*

** Sacred hymns of Aad Guru Granth Sahib.*

This article analyses three such articles published by Lal in the "Understanding Sikhism Research Journal," which was launched in 1999 by Chahal on the premise of projecting Sikhism in its true perspectives on the basis of AGGS, the only authentic source of Nankian philosophy.

Sehjdhari Sikhs and Vaisakhi of 1699.²

The objective of this article is to explain the meaning of "Sehjdhari Sikh" and to determine the role and place of Sehjdhari Sikhs under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh and afterwards. However, Lal does not support his views on the basis of AGGS, instead, he relies on *Bipran* literature³, which not only subverts Sikhism, but also is responsible for destroying the cordial relations between Sikhs and Muslim populace by creating hatred between them. This article is full of erroneous statements, self-contradictions and distortion of Sikhism as demonstrated by the discussion hereunder.

Dr. Lal: The first sentence of the abstract says that the distinction between the Sehjdhari Sikhs and the Amritdhari Sikhs owes its historical origin to the day of historic Vaisakhi of 1699 CE. A statement in the introductory paragraph emphasizes this point by saying that a distinction between Sehjdhari and Amritdhari Sikhs began during the time of the tenth Guru when many Sikhs elected to become Amritdhari while the others remained to be Sehjdhari.

Then in the third paragraph (p 37), he claims that Sikhs who participated in the battle of Bhangani, Guru Gobind Singh's *Darbari Ratan* (court jewels) like Bhai Nanad Lal, and many other devout Sikhs like Bhai Kanayia were Sehjdhari Sikhs. He further states that among the 52 poets whose names are recorded by Bhai Kahan Singh only less than one third used 'Singh' as their surname suggesting that most of the poets in Guru's court were Sehjdhari Sikhs.

Response: There is no mention of the term "Sehjdhari Sikh" in the AGGS and there is no evidence that this term was used for Sikhs before the creation of the Khalsa Order. It is then reasonable to believe that this distinction between Sehjdhari and Amritdhari Sikhs started after the Vaisakhi of 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh initiated the Khalsa by administering "*Khandae Dee Pauhl* (baptism of the double edged sword)" to the Sikhs. Lal himself says in the abstract that the distinction between the Sehjdhari Sikhs and the Amritdhari Sikhs owes its historical origin to the day of historic Vaisakhi of 1699. Therefore, it is misleading and wrong to describe Sikhs, who participated in the battle of Bhangani as Sehjdhari Sikhs because this battle was fought in 1688, several years before the initiation of the Khalsa.⁴

Now let us examine his other claim that Bhai Nanad Lal, Bhai Kanyia and many other Sikhs who did not have "Singh" as their surname were not Amritdhari Sikhs. This is true that Guru Gobind Singh did not force any one to take "*Khandae dee Pahu*", it was voluntary. Sikhs who still believed in the caste system refused to take "*Khandae dee Pahu*" and turned hostile to the Guru and became his bitter foes. May be Bhai Nand Lal, Bhai, Bhai Kanyia and many other Sikhs who did not have "Singh", as surname did not

take *Khandae dee Pahul*". However, it is inconceivable that Bhai Nand Lal, Bhai Kanyia and many other devout Sikhs, who were in tune with Guru Gobind Singh spiritually and understood his mission, did not emulate him when he requested the "five beloved ones (*Panj Piare*)" to baptize him with "*Khandae Dee Pahul*." Moreover, it does not necessarily prove that that Bhai Nand Lal, Bhai Kanyia and others who did not have the "Singh" surname, were not *Amritdhari*. For example, in our village there were two old *Amritdhari* Sikhs, Sher Singh and Harnam Singh, who participated in the "Gurdwara liberation movement." People in the village addressed them by their nicknames, Sheru and Hami, respectively. Therefore it is understandable that Sikhs like Bhai Nand Lal, Bhai Kanyia and many others, who were very well-known in the community before the initiation of Khalsa were continuously addressed by their original names without the suffix "Singh."

Dr. Lal: In the second paragraph (p 37) he says, " In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh initiated (baptized) the Sikhs by "*Khandae dee Pahul*" and brought to an end the custom of "*Charan Pahul*" (baptism by the holy water prepared by the touch of Guru's feet). He also terminated the authority of *Masands* to administer the initiation rites and asked the Sikhs to restrain from the congregation still led by the *Masands*."

Response: He does not give any reference from AGGS to support his claim that Sikh Gurus practiced the ceremony of "*Charan Pahul*" to initiate the Sikhs. It does not seem logical that Sikh Gurus practiced "*Charan Pahul*" to initiate Sikhs. Why Guru Nanak who refused to wear the sacred thread (*janeu*) would accept the Hindu custom of "*Charan Pahul*" for the initiation of his followers?

ਦਇਆ ਕਪਾਹ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੂਤੁ ਜਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੁ॥

ਏਹੁ ਜਨੇਉ ਜੀਅ ਕਾ ਹਈ ਤ ਪਾਡੇ ਘਤੁ॥

"Consider compassion as cotton, contentment as thread, chastity as knot and truthful living as the twist thereof. O Pundit, a sacred thread made from these ingredients elevates the inner-self -- conscience. If you have such a one, then put it on me!"

AGGS, M 1, p 471.

Besides, according to *Gurbani*, *Shabad* (Word) is the Guru. There are numerous references to "ਗੁਰਚਰਨ (Guru's feet)" in AGGS and it means Guru's teachings or attributes. Sometimes it is a metaphor for humility (to be at someone's feet). I think Lal's information is based on *Bipran* literature.

Dr. Lal: Later, on page 38 he contradicts himself when he says, "Dr. Maan Singh Nirankari cited *Ratanmala* claimed by some to contain narration of many conversations of Guru Gobind Singh as below:"

ਤ੍ਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਮਮ ਸਿਖ ਹੋਂ ਸਹਜੀ, ਚਰਣੀ, ਖੰਡ॥

"The Guru described his having three categories of Sikhs: *Sehajdhari*, *Charandhari* meaning those initiated by the touch of the holy water by the Guru's feet, and *Khandae de Amritdhari*."

Response: According to his earlier statement: In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh initiated (baptised) the Sikhs by "*Khandae dee Pahul*" and brought to an end the custom of *Charan Pahul*. He also terminated the authority of *Masands* to administer "*Charan Pahul*" to the Sikhs. Then who was administering "*Charan Pahul*" to the so-called *Charandhari* Sikhs? Where are the *Charandhari* Sikhs today, and who administers them *Charan Pahul*?

Dr. Lal: Again on page 38 he asserts, "Guru Gobind Singh's trust in *Sejdhari* Sikhs is further evident from the role given to *Sejdhari* Sikhs in propagating the Guru's religion and in the management of Gurdwaras during that period. Guru Gobind Singh sent some Sikhs to the holy city of Kashi to learn Sanskrit and to establish a Sikh University in Punjab for the purpose of training scholars on *Gurmat*. This group of Sikhs in turn trained many scholars of Sikh theology, who are well recognized in the Sikh history. Among those were included some great *Amritdhari* Sikhs such as Gyani Gian Singh and Bhai Santokh Singh."

Response: How did Guru Gobind Singh's predecessors manage to preach *Gurmat* without having "Sikhs educated in Sanskrit at Kashi?" I am amazed by Sikh scholars who from one side of their mouth proclaim loudly that our Gurus enlightened the people with their liberating philosophy in the language of the masses while from the other side of their mouth insist that Sanskrit education is needed to understand this philosophy. Lal's statement flies in the face of the evidence that the Sikh Gurus rejected the moral authority of Hindu scriptures and the essentials of Hinduism.^{5, 6, 7, 8, 9} Probably, this story was fabricated by the opponents of Sikhism after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, who have successfully transformed Sikhism into a religion of baseless Brahmnical rituals and ceremonies, far and far removed from the teachings of

AGGS. The writings of Giani Gian Singh and Bhai Santokh Singh contain many stories and interpretations that contradict the teachings of AGGS.

Besides, it is a myth that Guru Gobind Singh sent some Sikhs in disguise to Kashi to learn Sanskrit from the Brahmans.¹⁰ *Nirmalas* (holy man) claim that Sikhs, who were sent in disguise by Guru Gobind Singh to Kashi to learn Sanskrit from Brahmans, founded their organization. Did Guru Gobind Singh indulge in deception to get his Sikhs educated in Sanskrit? It is logical that Brahmans, who had (have) no moral revulsion about ascribing immoral acts to their own gods and goddesses, made up this story. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to believe that Brahmans started this organization in Sikh disguise. The story of *Nirmalas* is full of holes. There is no evidence that Guru Gobind Singh's predecessors sent Sikhs anywhere to learn Sanskrit. What was the need for Sikhs to learn Sanskrit during the time of Guru Gobind Singh? For the sake of argument, suppose Guru Gobind Singh wanted Sikhs to learn Sanskrit to study ancient Indian literature. Then the question is where did Guru Gobind Singh or Guru Nanak or Guru Arjan learn Sanskrit? Did they go to Kashi? Of course not, they learnt Sanskrit where they grew up - in Punjab. This means that Sanskrit teachers were available in Punjab. So what was the particular need for Guru Gobind Singh to send some Sikhs to Kashi to study Sanskrit? Guru Gobind Singh had so many scholars and poets with him at Aandpur; couldn't he hire few Sanskrit teachers? Were the scholars, who translated Sanskrit texts into *Braj Bhasa*, not competent enough to teach Sanskrit to Sikhs? Let us suppose further that Guru did send some Sikhs to Kashi. What were their names and where did they come from? Is there any biographical information available about them? What did those Sikhs do with their knowledge of Sanskrit? Did they teach Sanskrit to Sikhs or translated Gurbani into Sanskrit?

Moreover, *Nirmala / Mahant* organization (*Akhara*) was started under the patronage of feudal lords, the Rajas of Patiala, Nabha and Jind in 1918.¹⁰ There is no surprise in it! Throughout history rulers have used clergy to keep their subjects ignorant like dumb driven cattle so that they could exploit them without any resistance and public outcry. Brahmans used to elevate their rulers to the status of god, for example, Sri Ram Chander Ji and Sri Krishn Ji were rulers. Brahmans even regarded Muslim rulers as God incarnate, *Eeshvoro va Dilishvoro va* (The emperor of Delhi is as great as God).¹¹ Christian clergy used to confer divine rights on their kings and the Muslim clergy used to do the same for their rulers. The Sikh feudal lords used the *Nirmalas* to keep their people ignorant for easy exploitation. No wonder the Sikhs under the British rule were more educated and more well-off than their counterparts under the rule of Sikh Rajas. *Nirmalas / Mahants* used to frighten people not only with their curses but also had the legal power to impose fine on Sikhs for refusing to comply with the request of the *Mahant* (clause 17 of the charter).¹²

Dr. Lal: On page 39 he says, "There exist many *Hukmnamae* (letter, an epistle, decree or edict) issued by Guru Gobind Singh to his individual followers or the Sikh congregations. They have been published and **authenticated**. These *Hukamnamae* contain Guru's instructions to follow his path of *Gurmat* and perform the specific chores to fulfill the needs of the Guru's house and congregations. These *Hukamnamae* can be cited to show that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed full recognition to *Sehajdhari* Sikhs even after the date of the initiation of *Amritdhari* Sikhs."

Response: It is true that Ganda Singh and others collected the so-called Gurus' *Hukamnamae*, but they did not vouch for their veracity. Who authenticated these *Hukamnamae* and by what method? As a trained scientist Lal should know that it is unethical to make a false assertions! Their authenticity is highly doubtful. Mehboob has argued very forcefully and logically that the corrupt *Masands* and unscrupulous Sikhs issued most of these *Hukamname* for their personal benefits.¹³

Dr. Lal: Further down on page 39, he says, "There exists a *Rehit Nama* written and signed by Guru Gobind Singh specifically addressed to *Sehajdhari* Sikhs." He has cited Pira Singh Padam's book published in 1989 to support this claim.¹⁴ Reference 10 on page 41 claims, "Bhai Nand Lal, the Poet Laureate wrote two *Rehit Namae*, one in 1695, i. e., four years before the *Vaisakhi* of 1699, known as *Reht Nama*, and the other in 1699, known as *Tankhah Nama*. Nand Lal was asked by the Guru to compile Guru's injunctions for the guidance of the Sikh community after the Guru left his human body for the heavenly abode. Guru Gobind Singh made himself available for his conversation with Bhai Nand Lal to guide him to compose his writings."

Response: It seems that Lal did not read what Padam said about *Rehit Namae* in 1991.¹⁵ "Extensive research is needed to determine who wrote the *Rehit Namae*, and when? One thing is clear that no *Rehit Nama* was written by Guru Gobind Singh, otherwise it would have been included in Dasam Granth. It seems that *Rehit Namae* were written in the 18th century by Sikh writers, who assigned them to close associates of Guru Gobind Singh like Bhai Nanad Lal, Bhai Dya Singh, Bhai Chaupa Singh and others to enhance their value and acceptance by the Sikhs. It is possible that Bhai Nand Lal and others might have

written some parts of these compositions. However, a closer look at the contents, details and style of the language reveals that probably they were written after 1720. One can say with certainty that only Desa Singh's *Rehit Nama* is his own work. Some of the contents of some *Rehit Namae* are not consistent with *Gurmat*. For example, Brahman authors have excessively praised Brahmans, used abusive language against Muslims and advocated against the learning of Farsi and Arabic, and Desa Singh has advocated the use of opium, marijuana and alcohol."

Moreover, aren't the injunctions in AGGS sufficient to guide the Sikhs? AGGS is the Guru -- "the Eternal Guru" for a Sikh! Didn't Guru Gobind Singh confer spiritual Guruship on the teachings of AGGS?

Dr. Lal: On page 39, he asserts, "Guru Gobind Singh and his successors issued several *Hukammamae* exclusively to *Sehajdhari* Sikhs as indicated by them not using "Singh" surname."

Response: Who were Guru Gobind Singh's successors? Didn't Guru Gobind Singh confer Guruship jointly on AGGS and the corporate body of the Khalsa (entire Sikh community)?

Dr. Lal: In reference 1 on page 40, he says that Kesar Singh the author of "*Bansawli Nama*" was related to Bhai Dharm Chand, one of the "five beloved ones (*Panj Piarae*)".

Response: The original name of that "beloved one (*Piara*)" was Bhai Dharm Das, not Bhai Dharm Chand. Furthermore, he belonged to a Jat family from Hastnapur (UP) whereas as Kesar Singh Chibber, belonged to a Brahman family of Punjab. There is no possibility that they were related to each other because inter-caste marriages were unthinkable in those days.

Dr. Lal: On page 40, he has quoted Bhai Gurdas in support of his views about *Sehajdhari* Sikhs.

ਚਰਨ ਸਰਨਿ ਗੁਰ ਏਕ ਪੈਡਾ ਜਾਇ ਚਲ॥
ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਕੋਟਿ ਪੈਡਾ ਆਗੇ ਹੋਇ ਲੇਤ ਹੈ॥

"*Sehajdhari* Sikhs as any other Sikh take a step towards Guru by declaring their faith in Guru's path, *Gurmat*. The Guru promised to receive them with open arms."
Bhai, Gurdas. *Kabit* 111 (Punjabi), Singh, O., Ed., Patiala, 1994.

Response: There is no mention of *Sehajdhari* Sikhs in the couplet cited above. He has taken the liberty to distort the verse.

Scholars especially those who claim to be Sikhs should not lose sight of objective of Sikh philosophy, which is to bring all together under "One and Only God" -- irrespective of their caste, color, creed, gender, ethnicity and language.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਐਸਾ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਜੋ ਸਭਸੈ ਲਏ ਮਿਲਾਇ ਜੀਉ॥

"Nanak says that a true Guru brings all together to meet God."
AGGS, M, 1, p 72

The least a Sikh scholar can do is to bring all the Sikhs together instead of dividing them into different categories. Besides, it does not make any sense for people to claim to be *Sehajdhari* Sikhs three hundred years after the Vaisakhi of 1699. The term "*Sehajdhari* Sikh" was applied to those Sikhs who during the time of Guru Gobind Singh and the first half of the eighteenth century did not take *Khande Dee Pahul*. However, their children and grandchildren filled the ranks of the Khalsa Order when it was engaged in a life and death struggle against the tyranny of the combined forces of caste ideology and Muslim rulers. Use of the term *Sehajdhari* Sikh for today's Sikhs is not only a distortion of Sikh history but also disrespectful to memory of "real *Sehajdhari* Sikhs" who suffered extreme hardships and sacrificed their flesh and blood for the glory of Sikh *Panth* during the first half of the eighteenth century.

We all are Sikhs of the AGGS. In my opinion those who add adjectives like *Sehajdhari*, Jat, Ramgarhia and Namdhari etc. are either ignorant of the teachings of AGGS or they are insincere -- not genuine Sikhs! The word *Sehajdhari* Sikh is not found in AGGS. AGGS has very clearly defined a Sikh.

ਸਿਖੀ ਸਿਖਿਆ ਗੁਰ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ॥

ਨਦਰੀ ਕਰਮਿ ਲਘਾਏ ਪਾਰਿ॥

"One who imbibes Guru's teachings through deliberation, crosses the (ocean of worldly temptation) under the watchful eye of the Benevolent One."
AGGS, M I, P 465.

It is interesting to note that Lal has relied on *Bipran* literature to build his thesis on *Sehajdhari* Sikhs. In all the 23 references cited by him there is none from AGGS.

For the sake of brevity, in the following two articles the discussion is mainly restricted to the interpretation of *Gurbani*.

Interfaith Dialogue And The Aad Guru Granth Sahib.¹⁶

This article is about the ecumenical nature of Sikh faith as demonstrated by AGGS, which includes the works of *Bhagats* (saint) and Sufis. This article contains controversial statements and misinterpretation of *Gurbani* and Bhai Gurdas' composition.

Dr. Lal: Page 7: Guru Nanak tells in the AGGS that one is born with innate tendency to seek four life objectives. But soon after birth, one finds oneself trapped in the house of *Maya*, the great illusion of a Pseudo-self. So blinded, one misses the objective and is lead away from Reality.

ਚਾਰਿ ਪਦਾਰਥ ਲੈ ਜਗਿ ਆਇਆ॥
ਸਿਵ ਸਕਤੀ ਘਰਿ ਵਾਸਾ ਪਾਇਆ॥
ਏਕੁ ਵਿਸਾਰੇ ਤਾ ਪਿੜ ਹਾਰੇ ਅੰਧੁਲੈ ਨਾਮੁ ਵਿਸਾਰਾ ਹੇ॥

“The humans are born with an inborn drive to secure four life objectives (*dharam, arth, kam and mokh*): thus they start living within the walls of *Maya* (illusion). In addition, as they are blinded by darkness of *Maya*, they forget about nomenon NAAM and lose contact with the cosmic Creative Self leading to defeat in the purpose of this life.”

AGGS, M1, P 1027.

Response: First of all only *kam* (sexual drive) and *arth* (drive for riches) are innate drives, the other two, *dharam* (religious duties), and *mokh* (salvation) are the products of the environmental influence under which a person grows up.

Second, *Maya* (material world) is not illusion according to Nankian philosophy.¹⁷ For the Gurus, the world is real, not illusion and their emphasis is on the authenticity of life – union with the Creator.

ਇਹੁ ਜਗੁ ਸਚੈ ਕੀ ਹੈ ਕੋਠੜੀ ਸਚੇ ਕਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਵਾਸੁ ॥

“This world is the abode of the “Everlasting One” Who resides in it.”

AGGS, M 2, p 463.

ਨਾਨਕ ਜੀਅ ਉਪਾਇ ਕੈ ਲਿਖਿ ਨਾਵੈ ਧਰਮੁ ਬਹਾਲਿਆ ॥

“After creating the world of life, God manifested Itself as Naam therein to make the world a seat for righteous actions.”

AGGS, M 1, p, 463.

According to AGGS, the purpose of human life is to realize God, and a life of separation from God is a life of *Maya* (illusion). It is *Haumen* (self-centeredness), which causes alienation from God.

ਹਉ ਵਿਚਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਹਉ ਵਿਚਿ ਛਾਇਆ ॥

In *Haumen*, one is engrossed in *Maya* and its influence.

AGGS, M 1, p 466.

ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਰੋਗੁ ਸੁ ਅਧਿਕ ਵਡੇਰਾ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਮੁਹਤਾਜੁ ਭਇਆ ॥

Whoever is afflicted by duality is the slave of *Maya*

AGGS, M 1, p 1153.

ਮਾਇਆ ਮਦਿ ਮਾਤਾ ਹੋਛੀ ਬਾਤਾ ਮਿਲਣੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਭਰਮ ਧੜਾ ॥

Intoxicated with *Maya* one is vain and mean and suffers from delusion, thereby getting away from God.

AGGS, M 5, p 924.

Third, the interpretation of verses by Lal is Brahmnical, not consistent with Nankian philosophy (*Gurmat*). Here Guru Nanak is commenting on the four objectives of human life according to Hinduism. The desire to achieve these four objectives leads to entanglement with *Maya*, which causes alienation from God. The primary objective of human life according to Nankian philosophy is union with God. Furthermore, the concept of *mokh* or *mukti* (salvation) is different in Sikhism than that in Hinduism.

ਰਾਜੁ ਨ ਚਾਹਉ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਚਾਹਉ ਮਨ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਚਰਨ ਕਮਲਾਰੇ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 534.

“I don’t crave for worldly kingdom or salvation -- *surg* or *baikunth* (heaven), I crave for the comfort of dwelling on God’s attributes (lotus feet).”

ਮੇਰੇ ਮਨ ਜਪਿ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਨ ਅਕਥ ਸੁਨਬਈ॥

ਧਰਮੁ ਅਰਥੁ ਸਭੁ ਕਾਮੁ ਮੋਖੁ ਹੈ ਜਨ ਪੀਛੈ ਲਗਿ ਫਿਰਬਈ॥

AGGS, M4, p 1320.

“O my mind meditate on God, Whose virtues are indescribable. Whereas others long for *Dharam* (religious duties), *arth* (wealth), *kam* (sex) and *mokh* (heaven), a *Gurmukh* (God-centered being) is not distracted by them.”

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਵਸਿ ਚਾਰਿ ਪਦਾਰਥ॥

ਤੀਨਿ ਸਮਾਏ ਏਕ ਕ੍ਰਿਤਾਰਥ॥

AGGS, M 1, 1345.

“True Guru (God) is the controller of the four *padarth* (objectives). By God’s grace one obtains freedom (*mokh*) from the other three (*dharam*, *arth*, and *kam*).”

Dr. Lal: On page 7, he has interpreted following two verses incorrectly.

ਮਾਯਾ ਮੋਹੀ ਮੇਦਨੀ ਕਲਿ ਕਲ ਸਭ ਭਰਮਾਈ॥

“Like the intoxicated in sensuality the female elephant loses freedom in the hand of captors so has the entire civilisation in this age succumbed to intoxication of *Maya* and lost out to the delusions.

Bhai Gurdas, Var 1, Pauri 7.

ਕੋਈ ਨ ਕਿਸੇ ਪੂਜਦਾ ਉਚ ਨੀਚ ਸਭ ਗਤਿ ਬਿਸਰਾਈ॥

“No one respects any one else or their deities.”

Bhai Gurdas, Var 1, Pauri 7.

Response: The interpretation does not match the first verse. Bhai Gurdas has described the moral condition of the people of India of his time. The verse quoted here means:

“In this age the world is in the grip of *Maya* and everyone has been deceived by its glitter.”

The problem with the Indian society was not the lack of worship of deities but the recognition of the “Real Deity” – God. Here “*pujda*, ਪੂਜਦਾ” means respects and “*ooch neech*, ਉਚ ਨੀਚ” means good and bad, so the correct interpretation is “People do not respect each other and have lost the sense to discriminate between good and bad.”

Dr. Lal: On page 11 he says that Bhai Bala was a life long companion of Guru Nanak.

Response: Bhai Bala was not a life long companion of Guru Nanak. Generally, Lal quotes Bhai Gurdas’ works abundantly in his writings. For some reason he has ignored the eleventh *Var* (ballad) wherein Bhai Gurdas has listed the names of prominent Sikhs. While the name of Bhai Mardana occurs near the top, there is no mention of Bhai Bala.¹⁸ Furthermore, the name of Bhai Bala is not mentioned in other

Janamsakhis (biographies). Most historians agree that “Bhai Bala *Janamsakhi*” is the work of Hindalias (also known as Niranjaniyas), who were the bitter enemies of Sikhs.¹⁹ This sect played a very active role along with other Hindus in the extermination of Sikhs during the time of Zakria Khan and his minister Lakhpat Rai.²⁰ Therefore, Bhai Bala was either a member of the Hindalia sect, or a fictitious character, not a companion of Guru Nanak as claimed by Lal.

Surat: Higher Consciousness of Divine Engagement.²¹

This article is about *Surt*, which facilitates the comprehension of the *Shabad*. The interpretation of Gurbani is Brahmnic, not consistent with Nankian philosophy (*Gurmat*).

Dr.Lal: Page 29: According to Gurbani those not relating to *Surat* miss the boat in their life; they will continue to cycle in the circle of birth and death. For example, Guru says that without connecting one’s *Surat* to *Sabd* one continues to remain in the cycle of birth and death.

ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਵੈ ਪਤਿ ਖੋਈ ਆਵਤ ਜਾਤਾ ਹੇ ॥

“Without the *Sabd-Surt*, one comes and goes in the cycle of birth and death, and is humiliated through recycling in this coming and going.”

AGGS, M 1, p 1031.

Response: If the Gurus believed in the “cycle of birth and death” as claimed by Lal then there could be numerous chances to meet God – theoretically unlimited chances! There is categorical rejection of the concept of Hindu belief of “cycle of birth and death” (transmigration) in AGGS. The Gurus did not talk about the past life or the life after death, what they talked about and laid stress on is the present life. They made it abundantly clear that the present life is the only chance to realize God. For example:

ਇਹੀ ਤੇਰਾ ਅਉਸਰੁ ਇਹ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਰ॥

ਘਟ ਭੀਤਰਿ ਤੂ ਦੇਖੁ ਬਿਚਾਰਿ॥

“This alone is your chance to meet God, ponder and seek within.”

AGGS, Kabir, P 1159.

ਭਈ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਮਾਨੁਖ ਦੇਹੁਰੀਆ॥

ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਮਿਲਣ ਕੀ ਇਹ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਰੀਐ॥

“Being born as a human is a blessing indeed, this is the opportunity to meet God”

AGGS, M, 5, P 378.

ਆਗਾਹਾ ਕੂ ਤ੍ਰਾਪਿ ਪਿਛਾ ਫੇਰਿ ਨਾ ਮੁਹਡੜਾ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਿਝਿ ਇਵੇਹਾ ਵਾਰ ਬਹੁੜਿ ਨਾ ਹੋਵੀ ਜਨਮੜਾ॥

Nanak says, “Don’t look to the past, make efforts to move ahead (to realize God).

This is the chance (to meet God) because there won’t be a birth again for you.”

AGGS, M, 5, P 1096.

ਦਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਕਾ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੈ ਕਰੈ ਕਿਆ॥

“Why should one who wants to have a glimpse of the Beloved, should bother about the salvation and paradise?”

AGGS, M, 1, P 360.

ਮਾਨਸ ਦੇਹ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨਹ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਕਛੁ ਉਪਾਉ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਕਾ ਕਰੁ ਰੇ॥

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਕਹਤੁ ਗਾਇ ਕਰੁਨਾਮੈ ਭਵਸਾਗਰ ਕੈ ਪਾਰਿ ਉਤਰੁ ਰੇ॥

“(O careless one), you won’t be born again, make efforts to realize of God (salvation).

Praising the Merciful One, will take you across the ocean of worldly temptations,” says Nanak.

AGGS, M 9, p220.

ਮਿਲੁ ਜਗਦੀਸ ਮਿਲਨ ਕੀ ਬਰੀਆ॥

ਚਿਰੰਕਾਲ ਇਹ ਦੇਹ ਸੰਜਰੀਆ॥

“This is your chance to meet the Lord of the Universe, meet Him. It took a very long time for this human body to evolve.”

AGGS, M 5, p 176.

ਕਬੀਰ ਮਾਨਸ ਜਨਮ ਦੁਲੰਭੁ ਹੈ ਹੋਇ ਨ ਬਾਰੈ ਬਾਰ॥

ਜਿਉ ਬਨ ਫਲ ਪਾਕੇ ਭੁਇ ਗਿਰਹਿ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਲਾਗਹਿ ਡਾਰ॥

“Kabir, human birth is difficult to obtain because the same person is not born again and again, like a ripened fruit once fallen on the ground, does not get attached to the branch again.”

AGGS, Kabir, p 1366.

ਜੇ ਜਾਣਾ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਈਐ ਘੁਮਿ ਨ ਆਈਐ ॥

ਝੂਠੀ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਲਗਿ ਨ ਆਪਿ ਵਵਾਈਐ ॥

“When we know that after death we are not going to come back then why waste our life in the pursuit of perishable worldly things?”

AGGS, Farid, p 488.

The verse “ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਵੈ ਪਤਿ ਖੋਈ ਆਵਤ ਜਾਤਾ ਹੇ ॥” quoted by Lal is from a long *Shabad* covering almost the entire page. In this *Shabad* Guru Nanak has emphasised that the panacea for all human problems is *Naam Simran* (constant meditation on the attributes of God). *Naam Simran* transforms a person to a “God-centered being” (*Gurmukh*), who becomes one with God (*Jiwan Mukta*). Becoming one with God is the purpose of life according to Guru Nanak. This verse consists of two parts, Guru Nanak’s philosophy of *Naam Simran* and the Hindu belief of transmigration (cycle of death and birth). So in this verse Guru Nanak advises someone who believes in “the cycle of birth and death” that without *Naam Simran*, one comes and goes and suffers humiliation in the “cycle of birth and death”. “Cycle of birth and death” is not Guru Nanak’s belief, nor he endorses it.

Lal: On page 31, Lal has quoted Gurbani emphasising the fact that for a human being the present life is the only chance to meet God.

ਮਿਲੁ ਜਗਦੀਸ ਮਿਲਨ ਕੀ ਬਰੀਆ॥

ਚਿਰੰਕਾਲ ਇਹ ਦੇਹ ਸੰਜਰੀਆ॥

“Meet the Lord of the Universe - now is the time to meet Him. Taking so very long, this human body was fashioned for this purpose.”

AGGS, M 5, p 176.

ਭਈ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਮਾਨੁਖ ਦੇਹੁਰੀਆ॥

ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਮਿਲਣ ਕੀ ਇਹ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਰੀਐ॥

“You have been blessed with this human body and mind (in contrast to other forms of animal kingdom).

This is your opportunity to meet the Manager of the Universe.”

AGGS, M, 5, P 378.

Response: Here Lal has contradicted his earlier statement “Without the *Sabd-Surt*, one comes and goes in the cycle of birth and death, and is humiliated through recycling in this coming and going.”

Lal: Later, on page 32, while interpreting another verse he contradicts what he said on page 31 described above.

ਜਨਮ ਜਨਮ ਕੀ ਇਸੁ ਮਨ ਕਉ ਮਲੁ ਲਾਗੀ ਕਾਲਾ ਹੋਆ ਸਿਆਹੁ ॥

“This mind is blackened with many cycles of birth and death.”

AGGS, M 3, 651.

Response: Lal has interpreted “ਜਨਮ ਜਨਮ (*janam janam*)” as “many cycles of birth and death” either literally or he believes in the “cycle of birth and death”. Let me first deal with the pitfalls of literal translation of Punjabi expressions. When a mother says “ਜੁਗ ਜੁਗ ਜੀਵੇ ਮੇਰਾ ਲਾਲ (*jug jug jivae mera lal*)”, she

is not talking about the mythical Hindu ages, she is wishing a long life for her son. Similarly other expressions like “ਦੁਨੀਆ ਚਾਰ ਦਿਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਖੇਡ ਜਾਂ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਚਾਰ ਦਿਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਮੇਲਾ (*duniya char dina dee khaid ja duniya char dina dw mela*) mean that our sojourn in this world is limited. As I mentioned earlier, AGGS rejects the concept of “cycle of birth and death”. Therefore, “ਜਨਮ ਜਨਮ (*janam janam*)” means different experiences in life and the verse should be interpreted accordingly as: “This mind is blemished with the ill effects of various life experiences.”

Conclusions.

The analyses of these articles show that Bhai Harbans Lal’s writings typify Brahminical version of Sikhism, not the authentic version of Sikhism consistent with Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Moreover, he relies on Bipran literature to support his point of view in stead of the *Bani*** enshrined in AGGS.

** *Bani* means sacred hymns of AGGS.

References.

- 1 Chahal, D. S. Second ISU Seminar 2002 in Canada: *Shabad* Guru, Conscience and Consciousness. *The Sikh Review*, 2002, 50 (11), p 66-68.
- 2 Lal, H. Sehajdhari Sikhs and Vaisakhi of 1699. *Understanding Sikhism Res. J.* 1999, 1 (1), p 37-41.
- 3 Bipran literature: Literature that that subverts Sikhism.
- 4 Singh, S. *The Sikhs in History*, 4th ed., 2001, p 68.
- 5 Singh, S. *The Sikhs in History*, 4th ed., New Delhi, 2001, p 19.
- 6 Grewal, J. S. *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, New Delhi, 1994, p31.
- 7 Singh, J. *The Sikh Revolution*, New Delhi, 1998, p 105.
- 8 Singh, B. Misinterpretation of Gurbani by W. H. McLeod, Part I, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, 2003, 5 (2), p 72-80.
- 9 Singh, B. Misinterpretation of Gurbani by W. H. McLeod, Part II, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, 2003, 5 (3), p 66-78.
- 10 Kala Afghana, G. S. *Bipran Ki Reet Ton Sach Da Marg*, part 5, (Punjabi), 1999, p 32-60.
- 11 Narang, G. C. *Transformation of Sikhism*, 5th ed. 1960, p 98.
- 12 Kala Afghana, G.S. *Bipran Ki Reet Ton Sach Da Marg*, part 5, (Punjabi), 1999, p 37- 38.
- 13 Mehboob, H. S. *Sehjae Rachio* Khalsa (Punjabi), 1988, p 723-746.
- 14 Padam, P. S. *Rehat Nama Sehjdharian Ka (Vajubularaz)*. In *Rehat Namae* (Punjabi), 1989.
- 15 Padam, P. S. *Rehat Namae* (Punjabi), 1991, p 43-44.
- 16 Lal, H. Interfaith Dialogue and the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. *Understanding Sikhism Res. J.* 2001. 3 (2), p 6-13.
- 17 Singh, Daljit. *Sikhism a Comparative Study of its theology and Mysticism* 2nd ed., 1994, p 186, 206-208.
- 18 Gurdas, B. *Varan Bhai Gurdas* (Punjabi), Amritsar, 1976, 95.
- 19 McLeod, W. H. *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 1996, p 23.
- 20 Singh, Sangat. *The Sikhs in History*, 4th ed., 2001, 97, 100-101.
- 21 Lal, H. *Surat: Higher Consciousness of Divine Engagement*. *Understanding Sikhism Res. J.* 2003, 5 (1), p 29-35.