

## Understanding Jap Jarnail Singh

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Jap is a masterpiece composition by Guru Nanak. It is popularly known as [Jap Ji Sahib](#). Every Sikh recites it in the morning every day. This is also recited at the time a person adopts Sikh religion. It contains all the fundamental principles of Sikhism. So it is important that we understand and follow its message if we want to pursue the path of Sikhism. Not surprisingly this is also the opening composition of Guru Granth Sahib, the eternal Guru of Sikhs. It is preceded by an opening preamble which is often referred to as Mool Mantra. In this lesson we will try to understand the meaning of this opening prelude. Given below are the original text in Punjabi and its English transliteration.

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

ik-o<sup>N</sup>kaar sat naam kartaa purakh nirbha-o nirvair akaal moorat ajoonee saibha<sup>N</sup> gur parsaad.

It can be safely said that this prelude is the quintessence of Sikhism. Its importance can be gauged from the fact that it occurs 568 times in Guru Granth Sahib. Bulk of the verses in Guru Granth Sahib has been compiled into anthologies of 31 different Ragas (Musical compositions). This verse occurs in its complete form at the start of each Raga. [1] And it further occurs in different abridged forms in Guru Granth Sahib for 534[2] times. Since it appears at the beginning of each anthology it can be easily said that this is the abstract of the philosophy being preached in the ensuing pages of the anthology of that Raga. All this underlines the fact that a correct understanding of this verse is pivotal to the understanding of the philosophy of Sikhism commonly called Gurmata. When we go into detailed explanation of this preamble we will find that it rejects the prevailing concepts of God. The earlier concepts of God as some one sitting somewhere above in the skies, sending his chosen few to the world for its salvation or meticulously taking account of all the deeds of the people and then awarding them with pleasures of heaven or throwing them into the inferno of Hell are all rejected. Similarly the view that God takes birth and comes to salvage humanity at regular intervals is also rejected. Guru has attached this preamble as an abstract at the start of each anthology to hammer home the point that the ensuing pages preach a new concept of God and the reader is required to be careful and not be misled by the use of existing mythological references. But before we discuss its meaning we need to know a couple of things that will help us understand its significance and meaning. Some times it is called Beej Manter or Mool Manter of Sikhism and it might lead to some misunderstanding about this verse and consequently about the basics of Sikhism. So it is extremely important that we understand why it is called Mool Manter or Beej Manter. First and foremost thing to be remembered is that our Gurus have

never given this epithet to this prelude to SGGS. Gurus did use the terms Beej Manter or Mool Manter in their verses but not for this verse. Wherever they have used these terms, they have been used to mean teachings of Sabd Guru or praises and appreciation for the blessings from God. [3]

So if some one calls this verse Beej Manter or Mool Manter, it should not lead us to believe that Sikhism believes in Mantras a la Hinduism or Buddhism. Hindu scriptures are full of Mantras and Mantra in their context means a sacred word, chant, or sound that is repeated during meditation to facilitate spiritual power and transformation of consciousness. Sikhism has rejected in toto the concept of these kinds of Matras. Manter in Guru Granth Sahib has been used in the meaning of teachings (UPDESH) of the Guru. Beej is a Punjabi word and means seed similarly Mool in Punjabi means the basic or fundamental. So if some one says that it is Beej Mantra or Mool Mantra it should mean that this verse contains a sermon which is seminal to the teaching of Guru or that what is said in this verse is Fundamental to the teachings of the Guru. Those who say that this verse or any of its words are meant to be chanted incessantly to gain spiritual power are mistaken as this contradicts the basics of Sikhism.

Coming back to the preamble, it can be easily said that each word used in here is a book in itself. Now let us take each word and dive into the ocean of knowledge that has been encapsulated in them. First and foremost thing to be noted is that instead of a word it starts with a digit. Guru Nanak has used digit one with the word Oankar to create a brand new word. The digit one has been used to emphasize the oneness of God and to avoid any confusion and misinterpretation in this regard. Digit one is pronounced as Ik in Punjabi If instead of using the digit the word "Ik" was used; it would have given any opportunity for distortion by way of multiple meanings of the word "Ik". The word Ik in Punjabi, in addition to its most popular meaning as numeral 1, also means first, sole, unique etc. In order to eliminate the possibility of any distortion and to make his message crystal clear Guru Nanak used numeral one to qualify the word Oankar. Further this digit one also locks the word Oankar to the meaning desired by Guru Nanak. The word Oankar has got a suffix Kar. Without this suffix the word Oan is used to mean three things. It means an opening prayer to God used in Hindu scriptures; it means yes sir; and lastly it means God. Since only God can be qualified as one and one only, so the word Oan has been used in this meaning. When we add suffix Kar to any word it means something that is pervading and happening all the time. So if we put all the pieces together Ikoankar means God that pervades everywhere. God that happens every moment. Guru Nanak sees God as a supreme being who is immanent and pervades every where and the whole universe is vibrating with its presence. When we will go further in our lessons we will see how Guru

Nanak visualizes the whole universe, the air, the water, the fire, in fact every thing singing a song of God.

The next two words used are Sat and Nam. Combined together and pronounced as SATNAM, this is probably the most frequently used word alongside the word Waheguru, in any Sikh congregation. Many Raagies use these words to fill the gaps in their singing compositions. These two words are grammatically joined in this opening preamble we are discussing about. It is worth noting here that these two words appear as one word twelve times in this preamble in SGGS. [4] The word SAT means something that has an everlasting existence, isness or beingness and NAM means name, fame or glory. The glories or name of one God that pervades everywhere are true and everlasting. Let us think about it in a simple way. All of us have names. Our names do not represent what we are.

For example my name Jarnail does not represent who I am. All of you know I am not a general of any army. Our names are simply a word that is used to identify and distinguish us from other persons. It does not represent our qualities as a person. However all the names given to God are representative of its qualities or glories. You will find that almost all the prevalent names for God have been used in Guru Granth Sahib. Guru did not reject them. However, as always Guru has not missed to warn us not to treat any one of them as the real name of God. Guru has called them Kirtam or artificial names. [5] These are the names that people have been given to God due to some of Its qualities realized and witnessed by them in this world. However God's glories or name have preexisted and will outlive this world. [6] This is what the words Sat Nam emphasize here. It is worthwhile to note that Sikhism is very emphatic about the existence of God, the isness of God. Not only God does exist now, it has pre-existed this world and will outlive it. Guru says in later in Jap:

*aad sach jugaad sach. hai bhee sach naanak hosee bhee sach. ||1||*

Truth existed in the beginning. It existed before that. It exists. It shall exist for ever.

*hai bhee hosee jaa-ay na jaasee rachnaa jin rachaa-ee.*

God that created this cosmos does exist and Its existence can not be wished away by denials

We will see it in more detail when we go further in our discussion about Jap. So in nutshell, the God in Sikhism pervades and permeates everywhere. Its name or glories are true and exist for ever, have pre-existed and will outlive this world. God is not a mere imagination but something that exists. Something, that is to be felt and realized. Something that is real. Something that is true. Something, that is in this room right now. Something that existed before this room was built and something that will exist even when there will be no room here at this place.

The next two words are Karta and Purkh. These words take the meanings of Ikonakr to further depths. The one most common question that comes to the mind of each and every person is who created this universe. Bhagat Kabir flaunts this question to the Pandit.

*o-ay jo deeseh ambar taaray. kin o-ay cheetay cheetanhaaray. ||1||*

*kaho ray pandit ambar kaa si-o laagaa. boojhai boojhanhaar sabhaagaa.*

*||1|| rahaa-o. (Kabir Page 329)*

Oh Pandit! tell me who has painted the sky with stars? What is it that holds this sky? The one who understands this mystery is the luckiest person in this world. These questions are rhetorical and are aimed to expose the Brahmic views about God and Its creation preached by the Pandit. These two words Karta and Purakh have been added in this preamble to lay the foundation of the Sikh viewpoint on these questions. Karta means creator. God has been described as creator, in fact the one and only creator. Man can not be a creator. All that we call our marvelous creations or Seven Wonders of the World are simply the modifications or the original matter created by God. Science admits that matter cannot be created. Guru says later in Jap.

*aasan lo-ay lo-ay bhandaar. jo kichh paa-i-aa so aykaa vaar.*

*kar kar vaykhai sirjanhaar. naanak sachay kee saachee kaar.*

God created the entire matter in this universe. He enjoys this creations and his creations is true.

The most popular meaning of the word Purakh is male person. Though this has been used in this sense elsewhere in Guru Granth Sahib, but in this preamble it has been used to mean the Supreme Being (God) that pervades everywhere.

The word Karta signals us to read the word Purakh in this sense. The word Purakh has been used to describe this aspect of God in conjunction with many more words in Guru Granth Sahib. The examples are **purkh niranjan, eko purukh, aad purakh, sat purakh, abinaasi purakh, dyal purakh, puran purakh, jagjiwan purakh, gur purakh, purakh akaal.** {7} All this shows us that the word Purakh here has been used in the above meaning.

As we have seen before that each and every word in this preamble helps us to interpret the word preceding and succeeding it. When we read these words together they tell us that God is not only the sole creator but the one who resides both inside and outside of its creation. God is not something abstract but something very very real. How does God create? God does not have a factory somewhere up in the skies to manufacture souls and bodies. It is not sitting somewhere in this cosmos and busy in creating human beings, animals or other animate or inanimate things we can see around us? The word Purakh helps us here to understand this mystery. God is and owns the Cause of every single creation of this universe. Later in Jap Guru Nanak called it Hukam, the cosmic order that operates the entire universe. Every thing in this cosmos is under this

Hukam. Only God is beyond this Hukam. Guru makes it very clear that God is and owns the Cause of creation.

*aad purakh kaaran kartaar. bhagat janaa kay paraan aDhaar.* (P 290 P 5)

The God the Creator is the life line of his devotees.

*karan kaaran samrath hai kaho naanak beechaar.*

*kaaran kartay vas hai jin kal rakhee Dhaar.* ||2|| (P 1353 M 1)

God is the Cause of all creation, even the Cause is under Its command. God sustains and supports all Its creations.

*karan kaaran parabh ayk hai doosar naahee ko-ay.* (P 276 M 5)

God is the one and only creator and cause of creations.

It is important to note that in Guru Granth Sahib, God has been described as Kartar also to underline this aspect of its Being. [8]

It will be probably in place here to mention that in Rig Ved also there is a mention of a God called Pursh who is said to be creator of the universe. It is said to have ten thousand heads, eyes and feet. It is so large that its body is more than enough to girdle the whole earth. When he stands on his feet, one fourth of his body goes beyond the sky. Apparently the concept of Karta Purakh strongly rejects the existence of any such God mentioned in Rig Veda. The next two words are Nirbhau and Nirvair. It is customary to describe God as Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient. Some one who is present everywhere, is most powerful and knows everything. Guru Nanak did not pick any one these epithets for God; instead he described God as Nirbhau and Nirvair. Nirbhau means without fear and Nirvair means without enmity ill will or rancour. The words Nirbhau and Nirvair explain and define each other. [9] It is not possible to be without fear if you have enemies or you nurture some ill will against somebody. And it is not possible to get rid of ill will or enmity if we have fear in our minds. It has been very emphatically stated in Guru Granth Sahib that only God is fearless.

*sagli-aa bha-o likhi-aa sir laykh. naanak nirbha-o nirankaar sach ayk.* ||1||

Everything is under fear of God. Only god is fearless. ( P 464 m 1)

*naanak nirbha-o nirankaar hor kaytay raam ravaal. kaytee-aa kanH kahaanee-aa kaytay bayd beechaar.* (P 464)

God is the only one without fear, though there are so many so called incarnations.

Everything moves or stays stable in fear of God, because everything is under the cosmic order or Hukam by virtue of their very existence.

We see that by using the adjective Nirbhau, Guru Nanak has been able to convey much more than it was possible by use of the words Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipotent. Guru Nanak attached this word Nirbhau to Nirvair in order to define its meaning further. Even though God is all powerful, everything is under Its control and fear, but still God in Sikhism is full of love

and kindness. That is because despite being Nirbhau God is also Nirvair. God of Sikhism is not having any rod in Its hands to punish those who do not obey It. Instead God of Sikhism is ever ready to forgive and shower love on all of us. So much so that God of Sikhism has been described as some one who takes care of even those who are ungrateful.[10] All of us are ungrateful to God at some point of time in our lives. Sometimes we even say bad things about It. But God is still full of mercy. Gur Arjan Sahib describes it beautifully: *miharvaan saahib miharvaan. saahib mayraa miharvaan. jee-a sagal ka-o day-ay daan. rahaa-o.* ( P 724).

My Lord is always merciful and takes care of every one.

The next two words are Akal Murat. [11] Akal means something which is beyond death or time. Death is basically a limitation in time. Once this limitation is obliterated, death is conquered. Many people tried this. No one succeeded. Every one fears death. No one wants to die. Guru records this in his verses.

*bahutaa jeevan mangee-ai mu-aa na lorhai ko-ay.*( P 63 M 1)

Everyone longs to live long, No one wants to die.

*marnai tay jagat darai jeevi-aa lorhai sabh ko-ay.* ( P 555 M 3)

This world fears death and wants to live forever.

People have been trying to conquer death, but no one has succeeded and no one ever will. Because, this is the will of God. But God itself is beyond these limitations of time and death.

*too akaal purakh naahee sir kaalaa.* (P 1038 M 1)

O God, you are beyond the reach of death.

*kaal akaal khasam kaa keenHaa ih parpanch baDhaavan.* ( P 1104)

Death and deathlessness is the creation of God.

The word Murat means body, image or picture. The word Akal has been used as an adjective of Murat. The word Akal is very important here for couple of reasons. By using this word which is an antonym of Kal, Sikhism has parted its way from Hindu worship of Kal. There is still tradition to worship Kal, Kalika, Maha Kali, Maha Kal in Hinduism. Secondly this word along with word Murat is a feminine gender which shows that God is not of masculine gender in Sikhism. In fact it does not have a gender. That is why God has been described as both mother and father. ( p 103 m 5).

It is to be noted that Akal moorat as feminine description of God has been used at many other places in Guru Granth Sahib apart from this preamble.

[9]Another thing that is to be noted here is that word Akal which signifies something intangible has been used to qualify the word Murat which is something tangible. By doing so Guru Nanak has rejected the idol worship which was so rampant during his times and still goes on among Hindus. Later in Jap Guru makes it even clearer when he says that God can not be created and

installed. Reference here is to the tradition among Hindus who sculpt an image of God and install it in temples for worship. You can not create and install God in a temple. Reference here is towards the tradition among Hindus to sculpture an image of God and install it in the temple. Guru rejected this as a farce. While Guru Nanak rejects idol worship, at the same time by using the word Moorat, he has emphasized that God is not an abstract concept. Once again we see that both these words define meaning for each other.

The next two words are Ajooni and Saibhm. Ajooni means someone who does not take birth to exist and Saibhm means some one who exists by itself or is self existent. By use of these two words Guru Nanak demolishes the concept of incarnation of God Sikhism is so vehement and categorical in its rejection of the theory of incarnation of God that Guru Arjan Sahib has desired the tongue that says so be burnt.

*saglee theet paas daar raakhee. astam theet govind janmaa see. ||1||bharam bhoolay nar karat kachraa-in. janam maran tay rahat naaraa-in. ||1|| rahaa-o. kar panjeer khavaa-i-o chor. oh janam na marai ray saakat dhor. ||2||sagal paraaDh deh loronee. so mukh jala-o jit kaheh thaakur jonee. ||3|| ( P 1136)*

Leaving aside all days without any reason. They say God was born on eight lunar day. These people are mistaken, God is above death and birth. These people have cooked up strange stories about God. Human body is subject to all sorts of temptations. The tongue that says that God takes birth as human being deserved to be torched.

Interestingly today Hindus are celebrating the birthday of Krishan referred to in this verse. I am sure many Sikhs will go there to celebrate. Guru makes a very astute observation here. He says that whosoever has a body will have all sorts of temptations (sex, anger etc) for sure. Since God is the only one who is above temptations, so he can not be born as a human being. Another thing to be noted about these words is that the word Saibhm as always appeared in Guru Granth Sahib in conjunction with the word Ajooni which shows that they are complementary to each other. [12] If God is not born then who created God.

The answer to this question is that God created itself. It is self self existent. Guru further makes it clearer in the very first Pauri of Aasa Ki Var  
*aapeen<sup>H</sup>ai aap saaji-o aapeen<sup>H</sup>ai rachi-o naa-o. duyee kudrat saajee-ai kar aasan ditho chaa-o. ( P 463)*

First God created Itself and Its glories, then It created the entire nature where it resides in bliss.

The final two words in this preamble are Gur Prasad. Gur means the knowledge that takes us from darkness to light and Prasad means blessing. Guru Nanak has laid down the foundation of the Sabad Guru here in the preamble itself. We can understand and realize the reality of God only with the help of Guru- the knowledge that takes us from darkness to light. One point that is to be noted

here is that all we can do is to work on this knowledge; we can not force the outcome. It is like a being a student who can work hard on his studies but can not be an examiner for his own exam. That is fair enough. And just as the student who works hard on his studies does obtain the knowledge, so do we have the assurance from our Guru that our efforts will be rewarded for sure. *ghaal na bhaanai antar biDh jaanai taa kee kar man sayvaa.* ( P 614 M 5) Serve the one who never does any injustice to your labour and knows you from inside.

*so ki-o bisrai je ghaal na bhaanai. so ki-o bisrai je kee-aa jaanai.* (P 289 M 5) Do not forget the one who did full justice to your hard work, the one appreciates your work.

*satgur aakhai so kaar kamaavan so jap kamaaveh gursikhaa<sup>N</sup> kee ghaal sachaa thaa-ay paavai.* (P 317 M 4) The Sikh works hard as per the teachings of his Guru and God rewards him for his labour.

To conclude we can say that in this opening preamble from SATNAM to GUR PRSAD Guru Nanak has given a very logical and detailed description of his concept of one God IKONKAR. As we move from one word to another our understanding becomes more and more deep and comprehensive. Sikhism is probably the first religion in the world to give a scientific and logical definition of the attributes of God. Each one of these words used in the preamble is operating in a certain rhythm pattern. They define and complement each other. They are like blocks of meaning that lock perfectly well to the word preceding and succeeding them. Each one of them is like a lamp on the door sill that lights up the room from both inside and outside. And for the first time in this world God has not been described as a male. Some of the words used are of feminine gender.

For example Akal Murat is feminine gender. God does not have a gender. Last but not the least we must treat this preamble not as a mantra to be recited incessantly, but as an abstract of the philosophy preached in Guru Granth Sahib. What the modern journals are doing now in their research papers, Our Guru did it more than 400 years ago when he edited Guru Granth Sahib.

## Notes

1. There are a few exceptions to this rule. For example Rag Sri Rag, Tukhari, Kedaraa, Jaitsari and Bairari start with an abrdoged not complete format of this preamble. And following verses start with the complete format.

Aasa Ki Var

Rag Aasa Bani Bhagtan Ki

Salok Sahaskriti M 1

Salok Sahaskriti M 5

Salok Varan Te Vadeek

Swayai M 5

Jap

The arithmetic works like this  $31-6+7=34$

2. The detail of abridged forms is as under.

Ikonkar satnam karta purakh gur prsad. 8 times

Ikonkar sat nam gur prsad. 2 times

Ikonkar sat gur prsad. 523 times

Ikonkar 1 times

3. Given below are the examples where these terms appear in Guru Granth Sahib. *sach bin sat santokh na pavei. Bin gur mukat na aavei javei.*

**MOOL MANER** *har nam rasayan kho nanak poorā paya.*

The above verse is at page 1040 of Guru Granth Sahib and its meaning in English will read like this. Contentment in life can not happen without realization of truth. Guru (Knowledge of truth) is the only way of salvation. Nanak says that the praises of God is the only source of nectar. This is fundamental teaching or mantra.

**BEEJ MANTER** *har keertan gao. Aage millie nithave thao. Gur pure ki charni lag. Janam janam ka soya jag*

The verse is on page 891 and meaning in English will read like this. The seminal sermon is to praise and appreciate God. It helps us in future. When we serve the True Guru by following his teachings it awakens us from our deep slumber

4. See page-line 94-2, 220-18, 235-9, 242-7, 243-14, 323-12, 340-02, 345-9, 462-17, 475-12, 1319-2 and 1327-1

5. Guru Arjan Sahib has made it very clear in this verse that people have been worshipping or remembering God with different names. But all these names are not the real names of God, they only represent a part of his glories that have existed from time immemorial and will outlive this world.

6. Guru Nanak while addressing a yogi says in the following verse that instead of going after the rituals he should concentrate on the name of God that has preexisted and will out live this world.

*Aasit Naasit eko nao---*Page 983-54

7. For further clarification see verses on page number

10,11,12,134,138,175,235,240,286, 1291and1351 of SGGS where word Purakh has been used.

8. For further clarification read following pages of SGGS where word Kartar has been used. Page number 15,24,59,290,503,551and 721

9. Some examples of the adjectives of Nirbhau and Nirvair. Read page 11,12,18,27,108,302,354,596,931,960,962,1400,1404,1415 and 1421.

10. The following verses shows that God is kind even to those who are ungrateful.

*Akirghana no palda prabh nanak sad baksind.* (Page 47 M 5)

The ever kind god takes care of those who are ungrateful.

*Akirtghana ka kare udhar. Prabh mera hai sada dyar.* (Page 909 M 5)

My lore is always kind. It salvages even those who are ungrateful.

*Paleh akirtghana puran drishti teri ram.* (Page 547 M )

God is kindness in whole who feeds even those who are ungrateful.

**11.** For further reading and understanding of word Akal Murat see page 78,99,212,609,614,916,1038,1082,1101,1121,1201,1208

**12.** For further reading and understanding of word Ajooni and sabhm see page 99,597,916,1042,1082,1201,1212,1397,1405 and 1407

**13.** The transliteration used in this article has been copied from Sikhnet website.