

The Jagannath Temple and the Sikh Arti

Anil Dhir

The veteran actor Balraj Sahni, who taught in Santiniketan in the late 1930's, once asked Rabindra Nath Tagore, "You have written the national anthem for India. Why not write an international anthem for the whole world?"

"It has already been written, not only for the world but for the entire universe. It was written in the 16th century by Guru Nanak," replied Tagore. He was referring to the Sikh Arti (the ceremony of light). Gurudev Tagore was so enamoured of this Arti that he had personally translated it into Bengali.

Every evening, after the recitation of Rehraas Sahib, the melodious rendition of this Arti, sung by the Raagis in Raga Dhanashri, can be heard in Gurudwaras. Listening to the Arti is a tremendously soothing experience, capable of taking one directly into the spiritual realms of devotion through music. It has been aptly mentioned by Guru Arjan Devji in the Sri Guru Granth Sahibji: "Arti kirtan sada anand", which translates as "Singing God's praises is His Arti, and this brings boundless bliss".

As legend has it, it was during Guru Nanak Devji's visit to the Jagannath Temple at

Puri in 1506 CE that this Arti was composed. The temple priests conducted an elaborate Arti every evening. They brought a big platter on which were many lighted lamps, and the accompanying paraphernalia of flowers, incense,



ornaments, pearls etc. and began the Arti. This was accompanied with the beating of drums and cymbals, the ringing of the bells and chants from the scriptures.

Guru Nanak was a saint of the Bhakti Cult and its exponents had the goal of uniting the human race through true devotion to God and emphasised the oneness of God. He, along with the other exponents of the Bhakti Cult like Ramananda, Kabir, Chaitanya, Namdev, Tukaram and Ramdas had all originally believed

in the formless worship of the Lord. But the symbolic image of Lord Jagannath was neither of any “Akar” nor was it “Nirakar”. The perplexed Nanak seeing this “Kimkar” (of which form?) image, was simply astonished and was overwhelmed with deep reverence. He understood the universalism of Jagannath and started the ‘Namakirtan’ of the Lord in his own way. Basically, Nanak believed in the formless worship of ‘Nirakar’ - Brahma and his motto was ‘Ek Omkar Satnam’. It means that he believed in ‘Omkar’ or ‘Pranava Brahma’ which has no form and stressed on the ‘Satnam’ or the true Namakirtan of the Lord.

While at the Jagannath Temple, Guru Nanak observed that the priests were attaching more importance to the rituals rather than to the true faith of the Lord. He noticed that most of the devotees were joining the ritual not with their hearts; at best they were enjoying the spectacle of it. But, after seeing Jagannath for the first time, and the elaborate Arti, Nanak could not reject him on the ground that he was incompatible with his own Bhakti philosophy. All the gathered devotees stood up and gazed at the Lord with great devotion, like they do even today. But Nanak was so charged with ecstasy that he could not mark these reactions of the people. He was filled with great pleasure, was transfixed, and thus remained seated. So overwhelmed was he, that tears rolled down his eyes.

A section of the orthodox priests marked this indifference of Nanak and took it as disrespect to Lord Jagannath. After the Arti was over, they confronted him and asked him why he had not stood up during the Arti. They cast aspirations on his being a holy man and said that mere rosaries and a monastic garb don’t make a monk. Guru Nanak stood there as a silent spectator, as if

nothing had happened. However the priests persisted that he explains his conduct and then Nanak spoke:

“Dear brothers ! Does our Jagannath exist only here and in this wooden image? Is he not dazzling in the aura of his own greatness, inside all creation? Cannot his *Mahima* be felt and experienced without the accompanying rituals? “

Guru Nanak had by that time understood the real potentialities of Lord Jagannath. He had seen the touch of universalism and Vedic symbolism manifest in the wonderful image of Lord Jagannath. While uttering these words, Nanak became highly emotional and looking at the Lord, he started to sing a few stanzas from a Sikh composition. He spontaneously composed a Maha Arti wherein he said that when the Lord is Omnipresent and Omnipotent, how I can worship him with a small set of lamps and incense. He ought to be worshipped as grandly as his grandeur deserves. Guru Nanak sang an Arti in his melodious voice, describing how the entire sky is the platter on which the sun and moon are lamps for worship. The stars and the planets are the gems and pearls, the mythical Mount Meru, covered with sandalwood trees is the incense and the wind blowing from all directions is the grand fan for the beloved.

*Gagan mein thaal rav chand dipak bane,
tarika mandal janak moti,
dhoop malyanlo pavan chavro
kare saal banray phulant joti,
kaisi arti hoye
bhav khandna teri arti.
Anhata Shabad Vajanta bheree*

The sky is the puja thaal (platter used for the artis),
in which the sun and the moon are the diyas (lamps)

The stars and planets in the
constellations are your jewels
The wind, laden with sandal-wood fragrance,
is the celestial fans
All the flowering fields, forests are radiance!
O! What a wonderful Arti, this is!

You, are a destroyer of Fear,
The sound of Your Name, which is so subtle,
that It goes unheard,
Resounds endlessly.

The priests and pilgrims had collected around Guru Nanak and they were thrilled to hear him sing such praises to the Lord. Nanak's Arti conveyed that Nature's tribute to the Creator was superior to any ritualistic oblation offered before images. His melody reverberated around the whole Temple and touched the hearts of one and all. The priests realised that they had an enlightened soul visiting them.

Guru Nanak then further described Jagannath in his exalted verse:

*Sahas Tav Nain na na
Nain hai Tohey kau
Sahas moorat Nana Ik Tohee
Sahas Pad Bimal Na na
Ik Pad Gandh bin
Sahas Tav Gandh Iv
Chalat Mohee
Sabh Mah Jot Jot Hai Sohee
Tis Dat Chanaan Sabh Mah Chanaan Hoi
Gur Sakhi Jot Pragat Hoi
Har Charan Kamal Makrand Lobhit Mano
Ana Din Mohey Aayey Pyaasa
Kirpaa Jal Dey Nanak Sarang Kau
Hoi Jaatey Terey nai Vaasa
Jo Tis Bhaavey So Aarti Hoi*

You have a thousand eyes, forms, feet, noses...
And you have none...

I am charmed !

Your Light enlightens all !

It is by the Grace of the Guru that the real Light
(Knowledge) Manifests.

What pleases the Almighty is this Aarti (Creation)

I yearn for Your Lotus feet, Night and day,

Nanak is like the thirsty bird that asks,

For a drop of water, From You O Lord !

That drop (Grace) will make Nanak find comfort,

In the uttering of Your Name.

This original Arti was composed by Guru Nanak himself though later four more stanzas were

added. However the depth of thought that is conveyed in these few words makes it one of the best compositions of Godhead and nature.

In describing Jagannath's form, Nanak described Him saying that you have no eyes, but I can feel your penetrating gaze, you have no hands, but I can feel the all encompassing embrace of your love, you have no nose but I can feel the warmth of your breath, you have no ears but I know that you can hear my yearnings, you have no feet but I dream of spending my days worshipping these lotus feet.

The Aarti was further appended by the verses of Bhagat Ravi Das who incidentally, was a cobbler by profession. He too was a mystic Bhakti Saint whose writings have been included in the Sikh Holy Book Guru Granth Sahib. The following lines were added to the Arti from his works:

*Naam Tero Aarti Majan Muraarey
Har Kay Naam Bina Joothey Sagal Pasaarey
Naam Tero Aasno Naam Tero Ursaa
Naam Tero Kesro Lay Chhitkaarey
Naam Tera Ambhula Naam Tero Chandno
Ghas Japey Naam Lay Tujhahee Kau Chaarey
Naam Tera Deeva Naam Tera Baatee
Naam Tero Tel Lai , Maahee Pasaarey
Naam Terey Kee Jyot Lagaayee
Bhaiyaa Ujiyaaro Bhavan Saglaarey
Naam Teraa Taagaa Naam Phul Maalaa
Bhaar Athaarah Sagala Joothaarey
Tero Keeyaa Tujhahee kyaa arpau
Naam Tera Tuhee Chavar Dhulaarey
Das Atha Atha Sathey Chaarey Khaanee
Ehay Vartan Hai Sagal Sansaare
Kahay Ravdaas Naam Tero Aartee
Sat Naam Har Bhog Tuhaarey*

O Lord, Your name is the Aarti,
Your name is the Flower, the saffron, and the sandalwood
That is offered to You.
Your Name is the (Deeya)
The Lamp, the oil and the cotton
That is lighted in it.

With the Light that Your Name gives out,
 The whole world is brightened.
 Your Name is the Thread and Your Name is also
 The Flowers that are strung into that thread.
 All that I offer to You is Yours.
 Your Name is the flywhisk, that you use,
 The (Chant of Your) True Name,
 We offer to You,
 All is false except Your Name !

The glory of the Arti was further enriched with the addition of the verses of Sant Sain, who too was a mystic saint of humble origins. He was a barber in the court of Raja Ram, the King of Rewa.

What is the best Arti or form of adoration of the Lord is the theme of Sain's verses incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib. According to Sain singing of God's praise and meditating constitute the highest worship.

*Dhoop Deep Dhrit Saaj Aartee
 Vaarney Jaau Kamlapati
 Mangalaa Har Mangalaa
 Nit Mangal Raaja Raam Raaiko
 Uttam Deeyaraa Nirmal Baatee
 Toohee Niranjana Kamlaapati
 Raam Bhagat Raamaananda Jaaney
 Pooran Paramaananda Bakhaaney
 Madana Moorata Bhay Taarey Govindey
 Sain Bhanay Bhaj Paramaananda*

The Aarti is adorned by the lighted lamp
 And the fragrance of the incense.
 All is Auspicious.
 Thou art the Supreme and Pure Light.
 Thou art the Lord of the Goddess of Wealth.
 My obeisance to Thee.
 And to the Lord Rama, Beautiful Govinda,
 Who is described as Replete Pure Bliss !
 Sain prays to Thee, Who obliterates all Fear.

As if this was not enough, the Arti was further illuminated by incorporating the words of Sant Kabir, the greatest of the proponents of the Bhakti Cult. Needless to say, Sant Kabir was a humble Muslim weaver, who like Guru Nanak took the lonely road and travelled far and wide

spreading his simple and humble words of humaneness and compassion.

*Sun Sandhyaa Teree Dev Devaakar
 AdhPati Aadee Samaayee
 Sidh Samaadhee Anta Naheen Paayaa
 Laagee Rahey Sarnaayee
 Leho Aartee Ho Purakh Niranjan
 Satguru Poojo Bhaai
 Thaada Brahmaa Nigam Bichaarey
 Alakh Na Lakhiyaa Jaayee
 Tat Tel Naam Keeyaa Baatee
 Deepak Deh Ujiyaaraa
 Jyot Laayee Jagadeesha Jagaiyaa
 Boojhey Boojhana Haaraa
 Panchey Sabada Anaahada Baajey
 Sangey Saaringa Paanee
 Kabeer Daas Teree Aartee Keenee
 Nirankaar Nirbaanee*

Dear Lord!
 The Greatest of Yogis have not been able to
 comprehend You,
 Those who worship the unmanifest,
 Fail to realise You.
 Even though they have persevered in their quest.
 Your Name resounds unheard (By the worldly)
 And only He can hear (On who Your Grace
 descends) Pray to Your Satguru! Almighty Lord!
 Accept the Aarti, with the oil lit with the Chant of
 Your Name, By You, the Lord of the Universe!
 Kabirdas performs the Aarti of the 'Beyond
 Description' and the 'Without Form'

Bhagat Dhanna was a simple Jat farmer from Rajasthan from whose works the following lines were added to the Arti.

*Gopaal Teraa Aartaa
 Jo Jan Teree Bhagat Karantey
 Tin Key Kaaj Sanvaartaa
 Dal Seedhaa Maangau Ghee
 Hamraa Khusee Karey Nit Jee
 Pania Chaadan Neekaa
 Anaaj Maangau
 Gau Bhais Maangau Laaveree
 Ik Taajana Turee Changeree
 Ghar Kee Geehanee Changee
 Jan Dhanaa Levey Manglee
 Gopaal Tera Aartaa
 Hey Dayaal Teraa Aartaa*

Which means:

O Gopaala, (Accept) your Aarti!

You grant the wishes of those who worship You!
I ask for my basic sustenance (food, oil, lentils, good
quality grains)

Which makes me feel fulfilled.

I also pray for a good wife, good clothes, good grain,
a horse, a cow...

The final touches to this great composition were
given by none other than the tenth Guru Gobind
Singh Ji,

Yaa Tey Prasann

Bhayey Hain Mahaa Muni

Devan Key Tap Mein Sukh Paavey

Jag Karey Ik Ved Rarey

Bhav Taap Harey

Mili Dhyaan Hi Laavey

Jhaalar Taal Mrudanga Upanga

Rabaab Leeyey

Sur Saaj milaavey

Kinnar Gandharva Gaana Karey

Gani Jachha Upachhara Nirata Dikhaavey

Sankhana kee Dhuneey Ghantan kee Kari

Phoolan Kee Barkhaa Barsaavey

Aartee Kot Karey Sur Sunder

Pekh Purandar Key Bali Jaavey

Daanatee Dachhan Dey Key Pradachhan

Bhaal Mein Kum Kum Achhan Laavey

*Hot Kulaahal DevPuree mil Devan KeyKuli Mangal
Gaavey*

Aisey Chand Partaap Tey Devan Badhyo Prataap

Teen Lok Jai Jai Karey Rarei Naam Sat Jaap

Sagal Dwaar Ko Chaad Key Gahyo Tumhaaro Dwaar

Baanh Gahey Kee Laaj Rakh Govind Daas Tuhaar

Aagya Bhayee Akaal Kee Tabhee Chalaayo Panth

Sabh Sikhian Ko Hukum Hai Guru Maaniyo Granth

Guru Granth Jee Maaniyo Pragat Guraa Kee Deh

Jaa Kaa Hirdaa Shudh hai Khoj Shabad Mei Leih

*Vaanee Guru Guru Hai Baanee Vich Baanee Amrit
saarey*

*Gurbaanee Kahey Sevak Jan Maaney Partakh Guru
Nistaarey*

The Lord is pleased by the penance, prayers, rituals
recitation of the Scriptures, Meditation, music, dance
of the Celestial Beings, adorned with vermilion,
various musical instruments, Ringing of bells and the
showering of flowers, and the tune of the Aarti . The
cosmic worlds rejoice and chant the Divine Name.

I have come to Your door-step O Lord, having left the
world behind, Protect me, I am in Your service.

Because of the Lord's command, this order (Sikhism)
Came into being.

The Sikhs are urged to believe that the Granth is the
Guru manifest, Whoever is pure in heart, will find the
answers within the words of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Its words are the Guru, and the Guru is in the Guru
Granth's Utterings,

And within the words is the nectar (Of knowledge)

And the words urge disciples to believe in the Guru!

Thus the complete Arti that is sung today
has in reality been composed by two Gurus, a
cobbler, a barber, a weaver and a farmer, all from
humble stock. This is proof enough that Sikhism
believes in the equality of all humankind. The Guru
Granth is an ecstatic pouring of a Spiritual Heart.

In this Arti, Guru Nanak described what
he saw and experienced, yet even to him it was
a very difficult task, because when it came to
describing the Lord, words failed him.

Awal Allah noor upaya

Kudrat ke sab bandey

Ek noor te sab jag upjaya

Kaun bhale ko mande.

'First of all, God created light;

Mother Nature created all human beings equal;
from that one Light the entire world came into being;
so how do we differentiate that one is better than the
other ?'

I find it rather sad and intriguing that the
connection of Guru Nanakji and the Guru Granth
Sahib in particular and Sikhism in general with
the Jagannath Temple is little known. Nanak did
visit many of the holy spots during his first Udasi,
but the impact that Jagannath had on him and his
belief is reflected in the Guru Granth Sahib and
his later writings and preaching.

Another little known and important fact
that has remained unsung is the influence of
Jayadeva's work the "Geet Govinda" in the Guru
Granth Sahibji. Two hymns composed by

Jayadeva have been incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahibji. It is evident that these hymns found their way to the Sikh religion due to the profound influence that Jayadeva had on Guru Nanak during the latter's visit to Puri.

The Bauli Mutt and the Mangu Mutt at Puri both have the Holy Guru Granth Sahib and the relevance to the Guru's visit is recorded. While on his deathbed in 1839 Maharaja Ranjit Singh willed the Kohinoor to the Jagannath Temple. Bhai Himmat Singh from Puri was one of the five disciples popularly known as 'Panch Pyare'. Odisha has seen the thriving of different religions in all their forms from ancient to modern times. Hinduism, with its various aspects like Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam have all thrived and gained relevance in the State. Good research will definitely bring into notice the relevance of Puri and Lord Jagannath in the Sikh history and religion.

(The author undertook the Jagannath Sadak Sagad Yatra on the Old Jagannath Sadak and researched many aspects on the history old road. He can be contacted at anildhir2k5@hotmail.com)

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Anil Dhir lives at 112, Vaishno Villa, Satyanagar, Bhubaneswar-751007. E-mail : anildhir2k5@hotmail.com