

Paper Title: Concept of SÜNYA (SÜNN) in AAD GURU GRANTH SAHIB (AGGS)
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This paper was prepared for “Science and Religion: Global Perspectives”, June 4-8,
2005, in PA,USA, a program of the Metanexus Institute (www.metanexus.net)

Abstract:

The holy scripture of the Sikh faith, called Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS), consists of hymns of devotion to God, inspired reflections on the cosmic order, the vision of the higher life and exhortation to man towards lifting himself to the state of spiritual peace and the attainment of liberation. The sacred volume was completed in 1604 when it was installed in Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) for the first time on 1st of September.

Sünyam and Sünyata are two terms of major importance in Buddhism and have been used to denote 'emptiness', 'nothingness', 'non-substantiality' and 'the inexhaustible'. During the second century BC, Buddhist teachers in India emphasized the 'emptiness' as a basic description of the nature of existing things. They were known as 'teachers of emptiness' or *sunyavadins*. The emptiness of all things is a significant part of the Bodhisattva path to enlightenment in Mahayana Buddhism. Nagarjuna, the greatest Buddhist philosopher, interprets Sunyata in his treatise, *Madhymika sutras*. He established the theory of Sunyata and accepted it as the fundamental principle underlying creation. In Siddh-Nath-Yogi tradition, the term sunya has been used frequently. It is said that sunya is so transcendental that it is neither in the body nor is it out of the body. Sunya has been linked with the *sabda* or *nada*.

Various interpretations of Sünya doctrine exist in AGGS. We have an echo of Buddhist philosophy in the Sikh scripture. Sünya is not equated with void or emptiness in AGGS. Rather, it represents the state of equipoise where Absolute Lord exists in primordial trance called *sünya samaadhi*. The most original contribution of Sikh scripture is in the field of cosmology. Before the creation of the universe, Absolute Reality or God existed in the Sünya phase, called *adi sach* by Guru Nanak. When the creation starts, both time and space are also created and this phase corresponds to *jugadi sach*. In *Maru Solhe* composition in AGGS, the process of creation is explained in a scientific manner corresponding to Big Bang cosmology. The primordial state of existence of God or *adi sach* is synonymous with the Sünya phase as epitomised in AGGS(M.1, p.1035):

Billions of years ago,
There was nothing but utter darkness,
There was neither earth nor sky,
And the will of God prevailed.
There was neither day nor night, nor moon nor Sun;
God sat in primal, profound trance (in Sunya).

The concept of Sünya as introduced by Guru Nanak in AGGS has far reaching implications for understanding the Nanakian philosophy of Sikhism. Apparently, the

concept has theoretical linkage with Indian philosophy as it developed during the Buddhist era. Guru Nanak re-interpreted it and hence its import in Sikh metaphysics.

Biography:

Professor H.S. Virk retired as Head of Physics Department and Director Earthquake Research Center from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (India) in 2002. At present, he is working as Professor Emeritus in Indian Institute of Science and Religion in Pune.

He has got his Doctorate in High Energy Nuclear Physics from Marie Curie University, Paris in 1972, taught B.Sc. and M.Sc courses for 39 years, guided 18 Ph.D. scholars and published 310 research papers in the field of radiation physics, seismology and ion track technology. He has authored 15 books on scientific topics mostly in the Punjabi medium for the popularization of science.

Professor Virk has completed 16 Research Projects and his work is highly cited in earthquake prediction research and radiation physics. He has been a globe trotter and visited more than two dozen universities in Europe and America attending international conferences, as visiting/guest professor and guiding research. He was a Senior Associate of ICTP, Trieste, Italy from 1985-1990.

Professor Virk has been a member of various academic forums and professional societies in India and abroad. He is President of Indian Association of Physics Teachers.

He is working on a Project: "Science and Religion in Dialogue with special reference to Sikh Religion". His Project "Global Perspectives in Science and Spirituality" received an Honorable Mention Award by the John Templeton Foundation.

Paper Text:

Introduction

The holy scripture of the Sikh faith, called Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS), consists of hymns of devotion to God, inspired reflections on the cosmic order, the vision of the higher life and exhortation to man towards lifting himself to the state of spiritual peace and the attainment of liberation. The sacred volume was completed in 1604 when it was installed in Harimandir Sahib for the first time on 1st of September.

During twentyfirst century, a dialogue between Science and Religion is the order of the day for ushering in world peace. AGGS with its universal doctrines based on truth, compassion and justice is destined to play a sterling role at the global level. This is the only scripture, which corroborates modern scientific theories in the domain of cosmology.

Big Bang cosmology explains many features of our universe and it holds its sway due to experimental support it got during recent years. However, it has many enigmas yet to be resolved. For example, Who created the universe? What was the pre-creation state of the universe? What will be the end or fate of the universe? Mathematical models fail to answer these questions. In fact, all mathematical equations fail at the moment of creation

of the Universe and its annihilation leading us to "Singularities", a term which has become a cosmological buzzword these days.

AGGS comes to the rescue of our modern day cosmologists. A wonderful doctrine of Sünya is introduced in the Sikh scripture to explain the pre-creation state of the universe. God is the creator of the universe and He is the annihilator. So there is no enigma or concept of 'singularity' in AGGS.

Surprisingly, Quantum Physics allows the universe to appear out of nothing at all, as a so-called vacuum fluctuation using the famous 'Uncertainty Principle'. Chaotic inflation led to the sudden expansion of the Universe out of a quantum fluctuation. Indian religious literature is full of references regarding creation of the Universe. However, the doctrine of Sünya, first introduced in Buddhism has been elaborated in AGGS. It is a testimony of intuitive knowledge gained by the Sikh Gurus using *dib drishti* or spiritual vision which is of transcendental nature.

Concept of Sünya in Indian Tradition

Sünyam and Sünyata are two terms of major importance in Buddhism and have been used to denote 'emptiness', 'nothingness', 'non-substantiality' and 'the inexhaustible'. During the second century BC, Buddhist teachers in India emphasized the 'emptiness' as a basic description of the nature of existing things. They were known as 'teachers of emptiness' or *sunyavadins*. The emptiness of all things is a significant part of the Buddhisatva path to enlightenment in Mahayana Buddhism.

Nagarjuna, the greatest Buddhist philosopher, interprets Sunyata in his treatise, *Madhyamika sutras*.¹ He established the theory of Sunyata and accepted it as the fundamental principle underlying creation. The doctrine of the void is a method of rejecting all attachments because things have no 'self', that is, they are empty. 'Void' is not nothingness conceived in negative terms. This positive concept of 'void' is often compared with emptiness inside a vase. The state of Sunyata, or void is one in which all polarity, all subject – object differentiation has ceased to exist. But for a *sunyavadin* this is a positive concept. Sunyata is the negation of all views and is itself not a view !

In Siddh-Nath-Yogi tradition², the term sunya has been used frequently. It is said that sunya is so transcendental that it is neither in the body nor is it out of the body. Sunya has been linked with the *sabda* or *nada*. In the *Hathyogic* and *Tantrik* cults, *Nada* or *Sabda* Brahman had been accepted as the original cause of the cosmos. In the Siddh-Natha cult, sunya was considered as a synonym of *Sabda* or the absolute *Nada*, which is nothing but a trait of Absolute Reality. In Gorakh Bani, there is a mention of one *Sunyadvava* in the *gaganmandal* where in complete darkness lightning flashes and the nectar trickles. The Siddha attains this stage by yoga practices. In the Siddh-Natha literature, the word sunya has been used in the following contexts :

- a) Supreme Reality (*Nada*), Supreme knowledge or Supreme nature.
- b) *Brahmanrandhra*, *Dasam dwara*, the *Sahsrara chakra* and *Gaganmandal*.
- c) *Siva-loka*.

Concept of Sunya in Sikh Tradition

We find an echo of Sunyata philosophy of Buddhism in Sikh scripture³, Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS). Siddh-Nath-Yogis held their sway in Punjab before the advent of Sikhism. They all belong to the Sahajayani sect of Buddhism or its perverted forms after assimilation into Hindu fold. According to *Mahankosh*, there were twelve *panths* of Nath cult in Punjab and eightyfour Siddhas, with Guru Gorakh Nath as a leading figure among the Siddhas of Punjab. Guru Nanak's dialogue with Siddhas is recorded in AGGS as Siddh-Goshit which is in the form of a religious debate concerning origin of cosmos, sünya, liberation and various other issues. Guru Nanak rejected the Hatha-Yoga cult of Siddhas and condemned the path of renunciation of the world followed by them. He advocated adoption of house-holder's life in this world and preached Sahaj-Yoga or Nam-Yoga, the Sikh way of life.

The term Sunya occurs in Siddh-Goshit⁴ when Siddhas pose a question to Guru Nanak :

Q:- What about the pre-cosmos state ? Prior to it where the Lord of void abide ?

A:- The very thought of the pre-cosmos state lands one in a state of wonder. In the profound stillness of the Sunya , the formless one pervaded in continuum then.

Siddh-Goshit in AGGS is a remarkable debate on the beliefs, practices and doctrines of the two systems; one propounded by the Siddhas and the other by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith. Philosophical questions concerning the origin of cosmos, life and mind, potency of *Sabda*, need for the Guru, nature of Supreme Reality and the liberation for human soul are answered by Guru Nanak from the Sikh view-point. The concept of Ideal Man (*Gurmukh*) is propounded by Guru Nanak demolishing the concept of world renunciation practiced by Siddhas.

Interpretations of Sünya Doctrine in AGGS

Various interpretations of Sünya doctrine exist in AGGS. We have an echo of Buddhist philosophy in the Sikh scripture. Sünya is not equated with void or emptiness in AGGS. Rather, it represents the state of equipoise where Absolute Lord exists in primordial trance called *sünya samaadhi*⁵ :

The Yogi, the Primal Lord, sat within the celestial sphere of deepest trance (*samaadhi*)

(AGGS, M. 1, p. 685)

In AGGS, Absolute Reality or God is both immanent and transcendental.⁶ It is formless, attributeless and hence beyond description :

He possesses all qualities, He transcends all qualities;

He is the formless Lord, He Himself is in Primal trance (*samaadhi*).

(AGGS, M 5, p. 290).

In consonance with the Buddhist philosophy of sunyata, subject – object differentiation or concept of duality does not exist in the sunya state as enunciated by saint Kabir⁷ in AGGS :

No life or death, no pain or pleasure is felt there.

There is only the primal trance of *samaadhi*, and hence no duality.

(AGGS, Kabir, p. 333)

Absolute Reality or God is omnipresent and exists in the present, past and future. The truth of primordial existence of God before the creation of time and space is also explained by Guru Nanak in AGGS⁸ :

Existed before the beginning of time and space;

Existed throughout the various ages in the past;

Exists in the present; and

Will exist in the future.

(AGGS, M 1, p. 1)

There is also an echo of Siddha doctrine⁹⁻¹⁰ of sunya in the form of *Nada* in AGGS :

The deepest *samaadhi*, and the unstruck sound current of the *Naad* is there.

(AGGS, M.5, p. 293)

There, the unstruck sound current of the Absolute Lord vibrates and resounds.

(AGGS, M. 1, p. 943)

Sūnya Phase and Creation of Universe in AGGS

The most original contribution of Sikh scripture is in the field of cosmology. Before the creation of the universe, Absolute Reality or God existed in the Sūnya phase, called *adi sach* by Guru Nanak. When the creation starts, both time and space are also created and this phase corresponds to *jugad sach*. In *Maru Solhe* composition in AGGS, the process of creation is explained in a scientific manner corresponding to Big Bang cosmology. The primordial state of existence of God or *adi sach* is synonymous with the Sūnya phase as epitomised in AGGS¹¹ :

Billions of years ago,

There was nothing but utter darkness,

There was neither earth nor sky,

And the will of God prevailed.

There was neither day nor night, nor moon nor Sun;

God sat in primal, profound trance (in Sunya).

(AGGS, M. 1, p. 1035)

Guru Arjun, the fifth Nanak, describes the primordial trance of God before the creation process starts as a manifestation of God¹² :

For countless days, He remained invisibles.

For countless days, He remained absorbed in Sūnya

For countless days, there was utter darkness, and

Then the Creator revealed Himself.

(AGGS, M. 5, p. 1081)

According to Guru Arjun¹³, there was no duality in the Sūnya phase of existence of God as already discussed under the Indian tradition of Buddhist philosophy :

When there was no creation,
Whence was the need for virtue and vice ?
When the God was in Primordial trance (*Sunya samaadhi*),
Whence was the need for enmity or jealousy ?
When God was not in Its manifested form,
Thence who could suffer pain or feel happy ?
When God was in Its transcendental Entity,
Thence who was lured by attachment or by doubt ?

(AGGS, M.5,p.290)

However, the most beautiful elaboration of Sunya doctrine is given by Guru Nanak in his composition *Maru Solhe* in AGGS.¹⁴ Sünya is compared to a primal void where God exists in Its full effulgence. The creation appears when God wills out of this sünya phase. All the seventeen stanzas of seventeenth *Solhe* give us a vivid description of sünya and there is no parallel in Indian religious literature to the spiritual vision of Guru Nanak. We may quote only a few reflections from this vision :

In the Sünya (Primal void),the infinite Lord assumed his Power.
He Himself is unattached, infinite and incomparable.

From the Sünya, He created air and water.
He created universe and the man in the fortress of body.
From this Sünya, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva issued forth.
From this Sünya, the moon, the sun and the earth were created.
They were created from Sünya, and they will merge into the sünya.
From the Sünya, the five elements became manifest.

From the True Guru, contemplative meditation is obtained.
And then, one dwells with the True Lord
In His celestial home, in deepest *samaadhi* of *sunya*.
O Nanak, the immaculate sound current of the *Naad*
And the music of the *Sabad*, resound;
One merges into the True Name of the Lord.

(AGGS, M.1, p. 1037)

Conclusion

The concept of Sünya as introduced by Guru Nanak in AGGS has far reaching implications for understanding the Nanakian philosophy of Sikhism.¹⁵ Apparently, the concept has theoretical linkage with Indian philosophy as it developed during the Buddhist era. Guru Nanak re-interpreted it and hence its import in Sikh metaphysics.

When Siddhas ask Guru Nanak: "Who are they, who are attuned to this Absolute Sünya"? Guru Nanak answers: "They are the Gurmukhs (Guru oriented), like the God, from whom they originated." While Sünya doctrine was used to promote renunciation and monasticism by its Buddhist advocates known as *sunyavadins*, Guru Nanak condemned it and advocated the life style of a Gurmukh, the house-holder who faces the challenges of worldly life. Thus theoretical implications of Sünya doctrine may be identical in both

Buddhism and Sikhism but empirical meanings are different in the two systems. In the Sikh metaphysics, Sünya represents the pre-creation stage of our cosmos when God or Absolute Reality was absorbed in itself and realm of duality was non-existent.

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ਨਾ ਦਿਨੁ ਰੈਨਿ ਨ ਚੰਦੁ ਨ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਸੁੰਨ ਸਮਾਧਿ ਲਗਾਇਦਾ] (AGGS, M. 1, p. 1035)
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ਜਬ ਧਾਰੀ ਆਪਨ ਸੁੰਨ ਸਮਾਧਿ ॥ ਤਬ ਬੈਰ ਬਿਰੋਧ ਕਿਸੁ ਸੰਗਿ ਕਮਾਤਿ ॥
ਜਬ ਇਸ ਕਾ ਬਰਨੁ ਚਿਹਨੁ ਨ ਜਾਪਤ ॥ ਤਬ ਹਰਖ ਸੋਗ ਕਹੁ ਕਿਸਹਿ ਬਿਆਪਤ ॥
ਜਬ ਆਪਨ ਆਪ ਆਪਿ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ॥ ਤਬ ਮੋਹ ਕਹਾ ਕਿਸੁ ਹੋਵਤ ਭਰਮ ॥
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ਆਪੇ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖੈ ਸੁੰਨਹੁ ਸੁੰਨੁ ਉਪਾਇਦਾ ॥ ੧ ॥
ਪਉਣੁ ਪਾਣੀ ਸੁੰਨੈ ਤੇ ਸਾਜੇ ॥ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਉਪਾਇ ਕਾਇਆ ਗੜ ਰਾਜੇ ॥
ਅਗਨਿ ਪਾਣੀ ਜੀਉ ਜੋਤਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੀ ਸੁੰਨੇ ਕਲਾ ਰਹਾਇਦਾ ॥ ੨ ॥
ਸੁੰਨਹੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਮਹੇਸੁ ਉਪਾਏ ॥ ਸੁੰਨੇ ਵਰਤੇ ਜੁਗ ਸਬਾਏ ॥
ਇਸੁ ਪਦ ਵੀਚਾਰੇ ਸੇ ਜਨੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਮਿਲੀਐ ਭਰਮੁ ਚੁਕਾਇਦਾ ॥ ੩ ॥
ਸੁੰਨਹੁ ਸਪਤ ਸਰੋਵਰ ਥਾਪੇ ॥ ਜਿਨਿ ਸਾਜੇ ਵੀਚਾਰੇ ਆਪੇ ॥
ਤਿਤੁ ਸਤ ਸਰਿ ਮਨੂਆ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਨਾਵੈ ਫਿਰਿ ਬਾਹੁੜਿ ਜੋਨਿ ਨ ਪਾਇਦਾ ॥ ੪ ॥
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