

SUKHMANI, SIKHI AND FRAUDULENT BABAS: Ritualizing or Spiritualizing?

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This article has two objectives: to bring about genuine appreciation of Sukhmani Sahib within the Sikh reader's mind; and secondly to help remove the plethora of *dera*-concocted myths and tales that have succeeded in turning Sukhmani recital into a ritual.

After Japji and Rehras, the Sukhmani is believed to be the most widely recited *banee*. Why then is there a need to bring about appreciation of *banee* that is already widely read? The reasons have to do with the *motivations underlying* our recitation. The basic argument is that if our motives are misplaced, our reading of a *banee*, even if done on a *nitnem* basis renders it ritualistic. *Gurbani*, is divine enlightenment. And enlightenment is, in essence, the anti-thesis of ritual. But if our *Gurbani* reading is reduced to ritualistic reciting and chanting, then there can be no greater folly in the realm of one's spiritual journey.

SUKHMANI AND DERA-WAAD. Few Sikhs would care to dispute the notion that no institution has played a greater role in popularizing the reciting of Sukhmani amongst modern day Sikhs than our *deras* and their *babas, sadhs* and *sants*. The Sikh Rehat Maryada (SRM) does not mention Sukhmani as a *nitnem banee*, but due to the *parchar* of the *deras*, a substantial number of Sikhs – especially Sikh women - have made Sukhmani a *nitnem banee*. The *dera* practice of “collective reciting” of Sukhmani has become part and parcel of the *maryada* of *diwans* even in mainstream gurdwaras. The SRM specifically states that the *maryada* of a *diwan* of a Gurdwara is *kirtan* and *Katha*. But one would readily find Gurdwara *diwans* that do no more than recite Sukhmani. The agenda of an *Isteri satsang diwan* in the *Gurdwara* is hardly beyond just reciting Sukhmani “collectively”. The practice of doing the same during home-based *diwans* is also commonly observed.

While on the surface, the popularizing of Sukhmani may appear to be in line with the *Gurmat* principle of propagating the reading of *banee*, a careful analysis of the methods used and the motivations of the propagators are both necessary and helpful. This article is a call for the discerning Sikh to think in terms of both our actions (wide scale ‘collective’ reciting of Sukhmani as a ritualistic phenomenon) and our motives (why are we really doing it?). **In spirituality, motives matter prominently.** This article is a call to re-orientate our personal and spiritual connection with Sukhmani, via a *re-examination* of our motivations. It is a call to not *merely* recite Sukhmani, but to connect spiritually – in the real sense - with the *true messages* of this marvelous *banee*. It is further a call to revert to the SRM sanctioned *maryada* of *diwans* – *Kirtan* and *Katha*. **Put in other words, this article is a call for the Sikh to stop ritualizing Sukhmani and begin to spiritualize with it.**

WHY SUKHMANI? Virtually every *Gutka* of Sukhmani, and every book extolling the virtues of reciting Sukhmani bears the stamp of one *dera* or other. *Deras* have invested heavily in producing beautifully bound Sukhmani *Gutkas* and flooded our homes and Gurdwaras with them. These *Gutkas* contain introductory essays whose core message is that tremendous worldly good would fall into the laps of Sikhs who recite Sukhmani daily. It is worth noting that these *deras* have yet to produce a single decent and genuine *translation* of Sukhmani. **Getting Sikhs to understand Sukhmani is not their concern, getting to Sikh masses to keep reciting and chanting it is. So much so that it appears as if getting Sikhs to mis-understand Sukhmani appears to be the underlying agenda.**

To this end, *deras* have ventured to produce relevant material. The latest book *Nine Wonders of Sukhmani* by Guriqbal Singh of the Mata Kaulan Dera¹ is illustrative. While appearing to be an explanation of Sukhmani, that is what it is precisely not. It provides nine “reasons” why Sikhs should recite Sukhmani as one’s daily prayer as well as “collectively” (in a *Sangat*). These nine “reasons” would be analyzed in a later section of this article.

It is clear that the underlying reason why our *deras* have placed great emphasis on the Sikh masses reciting Sukhmani has nothing do with spiritual altruism but everything to do with the fact that three of the 24 *Astpadees* (chapters) use the vocabulary of *Sadh*, *Sant* and *Bhram Gyani*. These 3 chapters - **through mis-interpretation** - allow for the continuous propagation of the agendas of *derawaad*. *Astpadee* number 7 expounds Godly virtues using the terminology of “*Sadh*.” *Astpadee* number 8 does the same using the term “*Bhram Gyani*” while number 13 deploys the term “*Sant*.” These are the three titles that *dera fellows* have bestowed upon themselves and their ancestors. The direct implication (through purposive mis-interpretations) is that these three *Asthpadees* are really about *derawallahs*. **The implied (and false) claim is that Sukhmani is primary evidence that *Sadhs*, *Sants*, and *Bhram Gyanis* are part and parcel of *Gurmat*, they have a special place in Sikhi, and Sikhs in general ought to provide reverence and unquestionable obeisance to these self acclaimed and self appointed people.** The basis of such a false assertion by these *dera fellows* is the false notion that Guru Arjun himself bestowed such a place in Sukhmani (and hence in the GGS) to mortal *Sadhs*, *Sants* and *Bhram Gyanis*.

To the *derawallahs*, it hardly matters that Guru Arjun was *not* referring to any physical or human *sadhs*, *Sants* and *Bhram Gyanis* – let alone the fraudulent people who are now laying claim to these terms. These terms were **non-existent** for use for human beings during the times of the Gurus. Guru Nanak’s lifelong companion was called *Bhaee Mardana*. The writer of the first copy of GGS (*pothee sahib* then) was given the same title and called *Bhaee Gurdas* by the fifth Guru. During Guru Teg Bhadur’s time – the three Sikhs who were sawn into two, boiled alive and burnt to death were referred to as *Bhaee Mati Das*, *Bhaee Dyala* and *Bhaee Sati Das*. Decades after the Gurus, the Sikh community

¹ Bhai Guriqbal Singh, *Sikhmani Sahib Deean Nau Visheshtaeaan (Nine Wonders of Sukhmani)* (Punjabi), Amritsar: Bhai Chattar Singh Jeewan Singh, 2008.

referred to its countless martyrs as *Bhaee* – *Bhaee* Taru Singh, *Bhaee* Sukha Singh, *Bhaee* Mehtab Singh, *Bhaee* Manee Singh etc. The term “sant” was not used even during the reign of Sikh Raj.²

But for those who desired to mis-appropriate elevated terms of spirituality for themselves, it also did *not* matter that Guru Arjun has provided explicit definitions (within Sukhmani itself) regarding these three terms. For instance, *Bhram Gyani Aaap Parmesar* – *Astpadee* 8 (meaning: *Bhram Gyani* is God Himself). *Nanak Sadh Prabh Bhed Na Bhaee* – *Asthpadee* 7 (meaning *Sadh* and God are without distinction, one and the same). *Nanak Sant Bhavey Taan Laye Milaye* - (meaning if God is pleased, He allows for union with Him). Taken in totality, none of these terms refer to the physical being. It further does not matter that **the essence of Sukhmani is not to connect with the physical being but with God**. *Manus Kee Tek Birthee Sabh Jaan, Devan Ko Ekay Bhagwaan Astpadee* 14 (Meaning : the reliance on a human is sheer waste, because there is only one giver God).

What mattered was simply that these *dera-wallas* **hijacked these terms for themselves**. What further mattered was that the Sikh masses perpetually remained misinformed about the real meanings of the words *Sadh*, *Sant* and *Bhram Gyani*. The word “*Bhaee*” implied equality. How could these frauds be equal to the masses? What the *dera-wallas* wanted was a much higher status in title and name – even if they were utterly unworthy. Consequently, they bestowed the title of *Sant* to themselves, some called themselves *sadhs*, and some claimed they were *Bhram Gyanis*. They realized they needed a spiritual and *Gurbani*-based stamp of approval for their fraudulent titles. And they found an answer to their devious agenda in the mis-interpretation of Sukhmani. This *bane* has 83 verses that use the term *Sant*, 124 verses that use the term *Sadh*, and 74 verses that use the word *Bhram Gyani*. This was a gold mine for them. And **so long as the reader Sikh did not bother too much with the real meaning of the words as used by Guru Arjun, lots of people could be fooled**.³

Such an agenda however could *only* be achieved if the reciting of Sukhmani was popularized amongst Sikhs to the extent that it would become part of Sikh life; encroach into Sikh *Maryada* and become pivotal activity of our *Diwan Maryada*. The aim therefore

² My own research indicates that the first Sikh individual associated with the term “sant” was Attar Singh of Mastuanna (1866 – 1927). Though his student and biographer, Teja Singh (1877-1965) too went on to use the term for himself, its popularization had to wait till the Akali political leaders such as Fateh Singh (1911-1972) added it to their names. Its widespread and indiscriminate usage came about in the aftermath of the Indian government attack on Darbar Sahib and Akaal Takhat, leading to speculation that a large number of these ‘sants’ and their deras were propped up by the machinations of the authorities to weaken the authority of genuine Sikh institutions.

³ Sukhmani uses the word *Prabh* in 280 verses. Other references to God (*Guru*, *Satguru*, *Parmeshar*, *Ram etc*) similarly used in the verses. This gives the reader the sense of Guru Arjun’s style of picking one name of God and then writing an entire *Asthpadee* or more using that name. Within such appreciation, it becomes clear that Guru Arjun is using *Sant*, *Sadh* and *Brhram Gyani* to refer to God too.

was to let the **mere recital** of Sukhmani become the central pillar of Sikh *parampra* – especially relating to the practices of *Sangat* based spirituality. *Diwans* that begin and end with *collective reciting* of Sukhmani was the aim. Even if there was to be *Kirtan* after the Sukhmani recital it would be limited to one or two *shabads* since the recital had already taken an hour and half to two hours. *Katha* (*Gurbani* discourse) was obviously unnecessary altogether. The *sangat* was already too tired after a ninety minute collective recital of Sukhmani.

Such a goal was to be achieved by the publication and distribution of countless Sukhmani *Gutkas* and the creation of a whole plethora of fables, stories, *sakhis*, and mythological reasons of the greatness of reciting Sukhmani. Equally important was that the *understanding* of Sukhmani and its real and intended messages remained beyond the reach of Sikhs in general. This is probably why no *dera* has ventured to produce a translation of Sukhmani that is worth talking about.

RECITE, RECITE, RECITE, SUKHMANI. The most basic argument why Sikhs should recite Sukhmani at every available opportunity is stated in the vocabulary of a pseudo science that fits nowhere except within the precincts of a *dera*. There are five corollaries of this pseudo scientific theory,⁴ namely: (i) There are 24 hours in a day. (ii) The human being takes 24,000 breaths per day. (iii) The Sukhmani has 24,000 *Akhar* (words) – 1,000 words in each of its 24 *Ashtpades*. (iv) One Sukhmani (24,000 words) is daily *daswandh* for 24,000 breaths (v) If a Sikh partakes in such *daswandh*, his or her entire 24 hours and 24,000 breaths become blessed (*safal*) as a result.

Needless to say, a cursory examination will reveal that **all** five corollaries are patently false. Let us begin with the second; that *the human being takes 24,000 breaths per day*. Common sense will indicate that the number of breaths taken by an individual per day would depend on one's age, gender, state of health, emotional state, and level of physical activity, the weather and a myriad of other factors. If one follows the estimates of the medical professionals that provide a *range* of 14 –60 breaths per minute⁵, this translates as 20,160 to 86,400 breaths per day. But the *dera-wallas* insist it is 24,000 to the dot for every human being that walks the face of the earth.

⁴ Gyani Gurbachan Singh Khalsa Damdamee Taksaal, *Gurbanee Paath Darshan*, (Punjabi), Amritsar: Bhai Kirpal Singh Jawahar Singh Bazar Main Sewan, 1969, page 34.

⁵ Medical professionals provide the respiratory as follows: birth to 6 weeks: 30–60 breaths per minute; 6 months: 25–40 breaths per minute, 3 years: 20–30 breaths per minute; 6 years: 18–25 breaths per minute; 10 years: 15–20 breaths per minute; adults: 14–18 breaths per minute See Wilburta Q. Lindh; Marilyn Pooler; Carol Tamparo; Barbara M. Dahl in *Delmar's Comprehensive Medical Assisting: Administrative and Clinical Competencies*. Cengage Learning, 2009 p. 573

The Nanaksar *dera* has taken this figure to a higher level of absurdity. In the Sukhmani *Gutka* published by this group, they have included a couplet⁶:

Baithat Baran, Chalat Atharan, Soey Jaengey Tees.
Maithan Kartey Chausath Javey, Kion Na Bhajey Jugdees.

This fraudulent composition is given the form of a *salok*, perhaps to fool the reader into believing that this couplet is from *Gurbani* or even Sukhmani. It is not.⁷ The meaning: Sitting takes up twelve (breaths per minute), while walking and sleeping takes 18 and 30 respectively. While copulating 64 breaths per minute are gone, so why not contemplate on God? Anyone with basic understanding of the human body will know that one's breathing slows down considerably while asleep, but Nanaksari science says that sleeping requires more breaths per minute than walking. The fact that copulation and Godly contemplation can be put together within one couplet says quite a bit about such science and its adherents. Canadian writer Gurcharan Singh Jeonwala, in critiquing the Nanaksar group asks a revealing question: the *Sants* and *Babas* of Nanaksar are supposed to be celibate, how then do they know that 64 breaths per minute are expanded during the sex act?⁸ To this one may add another revealing question: what exactly do these fraudulent *Babas* do in their sleep to be expanding 30 breaths per minute when even Wikipedia says that the average breathing rate for adults (when awake) is 14 – 18 breaths per minute.⁹

The third corollary of *dera* science says that Sukhmani has 24,000 *Akhar* (words) or 1,000 words per *Asthpadee*. This is an equally fraudulent assertion. These *derawallahs* did not know then, (and probably still don't know) that due diligence will reveal this lie quite simply. The word count for the entire Sukhmani is 12,871. If one elects to remove the *dandees* that punctuate every line because they are not words, then the figure is 10,603. There are a total of 2,268 punctuation marks. If one then proceeds to remove even the numerals that are used by Guru Arjun to keep count of the *Saloks* and *Asthpadees*, (total 240 numerals) the resultant figure is 10,363. There is simply no way one could arrive at the magical 24,000 figure given by these *dera* fellows. If the argument is that by *Akhar* they mean not words but characters, then the count for characters for Sukhmani is 42,260.

So why are the *derawallahs* fixated on the 24,000 figure? The author's guess is that this is a case of building a series of lies on a single contemporary truth. The contemporary truth is the simple notion of a 24 hour day; and the fact that Sukhmani has 24 *Asthpadees*.

⁶ Page 14 of Sukhmani Gutka, Nanaksar Dera. This argument is credited to Baba Isher Singh Rarre Walley.

⁷ The source of this couplet is Gurbilas Patshahi 6. The (unknown) author of this Akaal Takhat banned publications attributes it to the *Bachittar Natak* Granth.

⁸ "Clarifying the lies relating to Sukhmani *Banee* by Babey, Sadhs and Sants and Frauds" in SIKH BULLETIN, December 2008.

⁹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Respiratory_rate.

The figure of 24 is thus falsely extrapolated into 24,000 breaths per day and 24,000 words. The “*daswandh*” (10 percent) of 24 hours works out just nice too – just over 2 and half hours – for the duration of a *diwan* or even personal reading of Sukhmani. So long as one has a believing lay audience and believes that no one would venture to manually do the math for the number of words in Sukhmani, such pseudo science will stand. The reality is that it can crumble even without having to do any math.

The truth of the matter is that during the time of the Gurus, the concept of a 24 hour day was non-existent in India. So the first corollary that there are 24 hours per day – is also false *when applied to the period of Guru Arjun*. The manner of determining time intervals then was *pehrs*. The day and night was divided into four *pehrs* each, with counting beginning from dawn. Each *pehr* was then divided into *gharees* (roughly 24 minutes in today’s measure). The smaller units were *Chasas*. The terms *pehr* and *gharee* are found repeatedly in the GGS when time is being talked about. For instance in this verse of Guru Nanak on page 357 of the GGS

ਵਿਸੁਏ ਚਸਿਆ ਘੜੀਆ ਪਹਰਾ ਥਿਤੀ ਵਾਰੀ ਮਾਹੁ ਭਇਆ ॥ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਏਕੇ ਰੁਤਿ ਅਨੇਕ ॥

Chasas, Gharees, Pehrs, Weeks, Thiths, Months and Seasons all originate from the one sun. Guru Arjun on page 106 of the GGS uses the term *peher* to denote one complete day

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਦਾਸੁ ਕਹੈ ਬੇਨੰਤੀ ਆਠ ਪਹਰ ਤੁਧੁ ਧਿਆਈ ਜੀਉ ॥ Nanak Prays that I may Contemplate on You for Eight *Peher*s (day and night).

Corollary four - that reciting Sukhmani’s 24,000 words is daily *daswandh* for 24,000 breaths - is the height of general illogic. The meaning of *daswandh* is ten percent. Ignoring the math of it still leaves one with the questions as to how *words* can be *daswandh* for *breaths*. It must take a very placid mind to not see such a fraudulent assertion. Imagine if one wins a lottery of 24,000 *Euros* and takes out a *daswandh* in Indonesian *Rupiahs*! Better still, offer 24000 paper clips as *daswandh* of winning 24,000 *Euros*!

Finally corollary (v) of the pseudo *dera* science states that if a Sikh partakes in such *daswandh*, his or her entire 24 hours and 24,000 breaths become blessed (*safal*) as a result. *Daswandh* is a concept that can apply to material things and it forms the guiding principle when it comes to giving money or material for benevolent activities. So if someone earns \$1,000 a month, the general rule would be that he or she would set aside \$100 per month for such a purpose. The rest is for the individual to use as he / she pleases. How this individual uses the remaining \$900 does *not* affect the \$100 that was donated. One may indeed lose it all remaining \$900 to a thief, give it back to the employer or throw it down the well. It is not a clever thing to do, but it would not affect the \$100 that has already been given out.

But *daswandh* cannot be applied to the notion of time when it comes to spirituality. In the spiritual realm, the measure is not *how long* we sit down to pray or *how much bane* we have read, but *how much of our mind* has been applied in the process. Going by such reasoning, we could have a person sitting down and reciting *bane*, or even listening to *paath* or *Kirtan* for 2 and half hours, but having one's mind on other things for the entire time except, say, 5 minutes. Cursory reading of *bane* tells us that it is the 5 minutes of *dhyaan* (contemplation) that count, not the 2.5 hours of sitting and reciting or hearing. As opposed to the money example in the preceding paragraph, what this individual does in the *remaining time* of the day WILL affect his 5 minutes of spiritual earning. What if he/she comes out of his/her 2.5 hour Sukhmani session and picks a 15 minute quarrel with another person? What if one indulges in 15 minutes of malicious gossip, slander or backbiting or decides to steal something (a 20 second act) after completing his/her 2.5 hour session? Is anyone going to say that the 15 minutes of quarrel, gossip, slander, backbiting or the 20 second act of stealing etc *don't* matter because *daswandh* has already been fulfilled when reciting Sukhmani? A more logical answer would be that they not only DO matter, they would actually *negate* the 5 minutes of spiritual earning that was gained during the 2.5 hour sitting. For such reasons alone (and there are others), *daswandh* cannot, does not and should not be applied to time or volume of *bane* being recited.

Recent literature on *dera*-science provides new twists to this fable of 24,000 words and breaths. The claim now is that the figure for 24,000 breaths is indeed correct, but that the *Sants* only take 21,624 breaths per day¹⁰. The balance of 2,376 is saved. Similarly Sukhmani actually has 21,624 *complete* characters. There are 2,373 *incomplete* (half) characters. That makes a total of 23,997, three short of 24,000. To make up for the shortcoming, Guru Arjun converted the word *Sant* to *Santan* in three verses in *Asthpaddee* 13, thus achieving the magical figure of 24,000. Our *dera* fellows have taken us Sikhs to be extremely dim-witted to accept such nonsense. Yet that is exactly what this whole obsession with words, characters and breaths is all about. Pure and plain nonsense. By a bunch of frauds and scammers.

MORE PSEUDO SCIENCE FROM THE DERA WALLAHS.

Derawallahs further claim that if one recites Sukhmani once, 21 succeeding generations of the reciting Sikh will be saved.¹¹ What they mean by being "saved" is anybody's guess. Seven of this saved generations would be on the maternal side, 7 from the paternal side and 7 from the matrimonial side. Now these figures are much less complicated than the 2,400 words, 24,000 breaths stuff. Yet they are equally illogical and fraudulent.

¹⁰ This argument is provided by Bhai Guriqbal Singh, *Sikhmani Sahib Deean Nau Visheshtaeaan* (*Nine Wonders of Sukhmani*).

¹¹ Bhai Guriqbal Singh, *Sikhmani Sahib Deean Nau Visheshtaeaan* (*Nine Wonders of Sukhmani*). The head granthi of Harmandar Sahib Gyani Gurbachan Singh has called this nonsensical book a "must read" for all Sikhs. He referred to it as "the illumination of the journey of Sikhi." See Rozana Spokesman of 4th May 2008.

One generation is 30 years. 21 multiplied by 30 gives us 630 years. It has been 413 years since Guru Arjun composed Sukhmani. This means that all of us Sikhs today are within the time frame of 630 years and within 21 generations. Surely each of us will have at least ONE ancestor who would have recited ONE Sukhmani sahib at least in the last 413 years. Going by the illogic of this argument, chances are we are all actually very much already saved. There is no real need to do anything anymore. Further, there are 217 years still remaining from the 630. This means that the next 7 generations of ours need do nothing too. They are also safe by virtue of the same ancestor who saved us.

The fact that such claims are rubbished by *Gurbani* is of little concern to these *derawallahs*. The basic principle of *Gurbani* and Gurmat is that *our* actions – and not those undertaken by our ancestors - decide our fate.

॥ ਜੈਸਾ ਬੀਜੈ ਤੈਸਾ ਖਾਵੈ ॥ GGS 366 You reap as you sow.

ਆਪਣ ਹਥੀ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਕਾਜੁ ਸਵਾਰੀਐ GGS 474. One's own actions resolves one's own affairs.

ਬੀਜੇ ਬਿਖੁ ਮੰਗੈ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਵੇਖਹੁ ਏਹੁ ਨਿਆਉ ॥GGS 476 He sows poison, and expects Ambrosial Nectar. Behold – what justice is this?

Another pseudo claim perpetuated by our fake *Sadhs*, *Sants*, and *derawallahs* rests on the basic need for *Sukh* amongst the masses. They tell us that the word Sukhmani means this *banee* is the source of *Sukh* or joy. This distortion is fed by a myriad of concocted stories. In his book, *derawallah* Guriqbal Singh narrates the story of a woman with breast cancer who was given ten days to live¹². She instead chose to recite Sukhmani over a *jot* (oil lamp) fueled by purified ghee and then applied the butter on her affected breast. She was cured in ten days. The fact that Guru Arjun - the writer of Sukhmani himself set up a leper home in Taran Taran, Amritsar and hired medical men of the times (*hakeems* and *vaids*) to treat them escapes the *dera* fellows. The *dera* crowd needs to tell us why Guru Arjun did not read Sukhmani over oil lamps and rub that oil over the lepers.

An equally pseudo story talks about a “muslim” trader who asked a Nanaksari Baba for a way to stem his business losses. The Baba “gave” the trader half a couplet from Sukhmani - *Nirdhan Ko Dhan Tero Nao* and told the trader to recite it one hundred times daily. One year later the trader came back and told the Baba he had followed the Baba's instructions and amassed immense wealth to last many lifetimes. His problem now was that he needed a long life to enjoy his wealth. The Baba then “gave” him the second part of the couplet *Nithavey Ko Nao Tera Thao*. The moral of the story is that repeated recitations of mere half couplets can do wonders even to a non-Sikh, imagine what good can be attained by reciting the whole *banee*. The choice is the couplet is deliberate. The first half

¹² See The Third Wonder, in *Nine Wonders of Sukhmani.*, op.cit.

contains the word “*dhan*” (wealth) twice, and the second “*thao*” (place) twice. The lay folk can be fooled into believing the Baba’s humpty dumpty tale and that the Baba had a realistic formula indeed. It matters little that Guru Arjun is saying that for a Sikh, real wealth comes from acquiring Godly virtues (*Nirdhan Ko Dhan Tero Nao*).

As the fifth “wonder” of reciting Sukhmani, Guriqbal Singh says farmers can double the harvest of their farms if they recited Sukhmani over the water that is used to irrigate the crops. Going by such logic one could recite Sukhmani over documents (resume, loan applications, medical records!); clothes, furniture, food, and just about anything and expect positive results. One wonders if the English language even has a term for the proponents of such absurdity.

The underlying claim of such distortions is the suggestion that one’s disease, sorrow, pain, loses and negative situations *go away* if one recites Sukhmani. The thinking Sikh would want to know if reciting Japji or Rehras or any *banee* other than Sukhmani *brings* disease, sorrow and pain? Isn’t all of *Gurbani* for the benefit of us Sikhs? The discerning Sikh would also want to know why *Gurbani* then tells us to accept the Hukam, the Raza of God, to rise above Joy and Sorrow? Guru Nanak says in Japji:

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥ GGS 1.
Meaning: how can one become truth imbued? And how can the wall of separation (between Man and God) be torn down? O Nanak the path to becoming truth –imbued is to obey the Hukam of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will. || 1 ||

Guru Teg Bahadur ji illustrates the meaning of living in accordance with His Will as follows:

ਜੋ ਨਰੁ ਦੁਖ ਮੈ ਦੁਖੁ ਨਹੀ ਮਾਨੈ ॥ ਸੁਖ ਸਨੇਹੁ ਅਰੁ ਭੈ ਨਹੀ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਕੰਚਨ ਮਾਟੀ ਮਾਨੈ ॥ ੧ ॥ GGS 633. He who is not affected by pain or pleasure, affection or fear, and who takes gold to be dust; || 1 || Rahao || Who is not swayed by slander or praise, nor affected by greed, attachment or pride; who remains beyond joy and sorrow, honor and dishonor; || 1 || Who is not touched by desire or anger; within his heart, God dwells. || 2 || That man, blessed by Guru’s Grace, understands this way. O Nanak, he merges with the Lord of the Universe, like water with water. || 3 ||

So why are the *derawallahs* pushing Sukhmani as the magic potion for Sukh? For one thing, they have understood the psychology of the masses – namely a need for *Sukh*. Secondly, the dera fellows have found a way to latch on the *dera* agenda of self-propagation on Sukhmani. This *banee* has three full sections devoted to *Sadhs*, *Sants* and *Bhram Gyanis*. Sukhmani has a whopping 281 verses that reinforce these terms into the Sikh mind and psyche. So long as these terms remain mis-understood, the pseudo *Sants* and *Babas* are able to fool the Sikh masses into achieving their agendas and goals. Such a

goal cannot be achieved through popularizing Bawan Akhree, or Ramkli Sadd or Sidh Ghosat, or Oangkar, or any other *banee*. It has to be Sukhmani.

The popularization of Sukhmani is thus done at the most basic level by equating Sukhmani to *Sukh*. The *dera* argument is that the meaning of Sukhmani is ਸੁਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਮਣੀ *Sukha(n) dee Manee*. In the world of snake charmers, ਮਣੀ (*manee*) refers to the topmost vertebra of a particular species of a snake that is used as the cure-all for snake bites.¹³ Being the snake-oil salesmen that our present day fraudulent *Sants* and *Babas* have become, it comes as no surprise that they would chose to distort the meaning of the title of this wonderful *banee*. Such distortion aids them in their agendas. It works because the Sikh masses desire *Sukh* and have accepted that *banee* is simply a *mantar* or magical spell to achieve this *Sukh*.

The truth is that within the 24 *Saloks* and *Ashtpadees* of Sukhmani, there is only a single *Rahao* line. Since the *Rahao* acts as the summarized title of the *shabad* or *banee*, and contains the jist of the composition, the meaning of *Sukhmani* is therefore to be derived from this *Rahao* verse, as follows:

ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਸੁਖ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨਾਮੁ ॥ ਭਗਤ ਜਨਾ ਕੈ ਮਨਿ ਬਿਸੁਮ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ GGS 262. *Sukhmani* is about the joy derived from knowing the ambrosial virtues (*amrit prabh naam*) of God. *Sukhmani* is about His beloved people (*bhagats*) wanting these virtues to reside within their minds.

This then is the jist of the *banee* and the meaning of the word *Sukhmani*. The rest of the *banee* is a long, serialized, step by step exploration and explanation of the ambrosial virtues of God. Every *Asthpadee* describes a different facet of God and encourages the *Bhagat* Sikh to accept those virtues. The concluding verse of *Sukhmani* sums it all up:

ਸਭ ਤੇ ਉਚ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਸੋਭਾ ਬਨੀ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਗੁਣਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ॥ Highest of all spiritual actions is to **praise** (*sobha*) Him. Nanak, *Sukhmani* is therefore about these descriptive virtues (*Gun Naam*) of God.

Sukhmani is certainly NOT about any particular class of human beings. It is NOT about some people labeling themselves as *Sadhs*, *Sants*, or *Bhram Gyans*. It is also not about people wanting to ward off physical *dukh* and replace it with *sukh*. If one must view *Sukhmani* in the context of *Sukh* and *Dukh*, then this *banee* is intended to give the Sikh the courage and strength to bear and accept all *dukh* that come with the *hukam* and will of God. Because this is exactly what Guru Arjun the author of *Sukhmani* did when he endured the epitome of physical *dukh* in the form of unspeakable tortures leading to his martyrdom. This single fact alone ought to make any Sikh ponder as to whether *Sukhmani* is intended to be a *sukh* inducing *mantar*.

¹³ See *Punjabi English Dictionary*, Punjabi University Patiala, 2002 Edition, pp662.

DISTORTING THE MARYADA OF OUR *DIWANS*.

The Maryada of the Sikh *Diwan* as prescribed by the Sikh Rehat Maryada is as follows:

(ਹ) ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰੇ ਵਿਚ ਸੰਗਤ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰੋਗਰਾਮ ਆਮ ਤੌਰ ਤੇ ਇਉਂ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ:-

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼, ਕੀਰਤਨ, ਕਥਾ, ਵਖਿਆਨ, ਅਨੰਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਅਰਦਾਸ, ਫਤਿਹ, ਸਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਦਾ ਜੈਕਾਰਾ ਤੇ ਹੁਕਮ। Translation: The program of the *Sangat* within a Gurdwara normally is as follows: The *Prakash* of the SGGS, *Kirtan*, *Katha*, Lecture, Anand Sahib, *Ardas*, *Fateh*, *Jaikara* of *Sat Sri Akaal* and *Hukumnama*.

It is clear that collective recitations of *Gurbani* are NOT part of SRM *Diwan Maryada*. There are good reasons for it. The first relates to the nature of *Gurbani*. In the *Sangat* atmosphere *Gurbani* is sung as *Kirtan* to allow for comprehension and appreciation of its inner messages. The singing (in raag and taal) slows down considerably the rate of *banee* read-out. This slowed rate and musical rendition allows for some understanding of the messages to take place. The *Katha* (by definition it is the lay explanation of *Gurbani*) is an integral part of the *Diwan* because *Gurbani* is meant to be understood, appreciated, internalized and then walked upon. *Kirtan* and *Katha* help accomplish these follow up actions that Sikhi demands.

Reciting *Gurbani* in the *Sangat* can produce no understanding and internalization of its messages except for one or two individuals who have studied *Gurbani*. This is because *Gurbani* is NOT prose. *Gurbani* is composed in poetry which is condensed, idiomatic; complex at times, and deploys a number of different languages. Hence reciting *banees* is not the *Maryada* of our *Diwans*. Reciting *Gurbani* falls within the domain of individual contemplation.

Collective recitation of *Gurbani* has its own problems. People walk in at any time, pick up a *gutka* and join in just about from anywhere. Usually when the Sukhmani recital begins, the *granthi* is all alone or joined by a handful of dedicated people. By the time the recital ends, a large number would have joined it – some from midway some from the closing sections. There are issues of speed – the one leading it recites fast and many are simply lost trying to catch up. More than numerous mistakes are made; words, entire lines and even whole couplets being glossed over. This is gross disrespect of *Gurbani*. At the end of it, in the *Ardas*, a lie is propagated by the *Ardasia* who tells the Guru that the *Sangat* has done ਬੇਅੰਤ multitude / countless of Sukhmani recitals. A multitude of people sitting down with a multitude of open *gutkas* does NOT constitute a multitude of Sukhmani recitals. Obviously no understanding of any kind takes place, because the entire objective is to get it over with. **The end result is that we have made collective Sukhmani recital into a ritual.**

Sukhmani is an ਇਕਾਂਤੀ ਬਾਣੀ (*ekantee bane*). It is to be read alone, in deep contemplation, with a desire to praise God using innovative names (*Prabh, Sadh, Sant, Bhram Gyani* etc) and to understand God using novel virtues. The ultimate aim is to understand and apply these concepts in our daily lives.

Even though the SRM has specified a Sikh's *Nitnem banees*, Sikhs can add on to one's personal *nitnem*, it is indeed laudable that Sikhs make Sukhmani or Oangkar or Sidh Ghosat or Ramkali Sad of any other *bane* from the 1430 pages as their Nitnem. The SRM actually calls for the Sikh to individually and personally keep doing a *Sehej Paath* (slow and contemplative) reading of the GGS from start to end – 5 – 10 pages a day as part of one's *nitnem*. Yet the underlying objective must be spiritual, not ritualistic, and certainly not a means to material gains such as *Sukh*.

WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF THE PSEUDO SCIENCE OF THE DERA WALLAHS ?

The source of it all is a discredited and *panth*-banned book called the *Gur Bilas Pathsay 6*.¹⁴ Even though eminent Sikh researchers have rubbished large portions of *Gurbilas*, it remains the core source for *deras* and *granthis*, *parcharaks* and *ragis* who are *dera* trained or identify with *dera* thought. The entire story of the *dera* science as narrated above appears on pages 92 – 94 of *Gurbilas 6* as follows:

Simrat Shastar Bed Bkhaney. Chavee Hazaar Swas Nar Thaney.

¹⁴ Published in 1718 by an unknown author who harboured anti-Sikh and anti-Gurmat agendas, it purports to recount the life of Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Guru. Its anti-*gurmat* messages and anti-*Gurbani* messages and in particular its overt bhramanical tones are clearly evident. The Sikh panth, in 1920 decided that *Gurbilas* should not be preached in Sikh Gurdwaras. In 1998, the Dhram Parchaar Committee of SGPC (of all institutions !) re-published the book under the authorship of Akaal Takhat Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti and Dr Amarjeet Singh. In what appeared to be a concerted effort to have the book accepted by the Sikh masses, this republished version carried acknowledgments from the Who's Who of Sikhs such as the SGPC chief Tohra, the Jathedars and Granthis of the Takhats, Preachers such as Sant Singh Maskeen, Jaswant Singh Parwana, and writers such as Joginder Singh Talwara. Shortly after its re-publication, Gyani Gurbakhsh Singh Kala Afghana in a book titled *Gurbani di Kasvati Tay Gurbilas Patshai 6* diligently and systematically exposed the folly of not just *Gurbilas 6*, but the agenda behind its republication. Kala Afghana's book took on each story of *Gurbilas* and analyzed it on the touch stone (*Kasvati*) of *Gurbani*. He managed to establish that virtually every story in *Gurbilas 6* was a fabrication. The result was that in October 2000, the SGPC banned the book (its own book, really) a second time. Kala Afghana's suggestion that the republication of *Gurbilas* was a conspiracy involving the highest echelons of the Sikh establishment including the Akaal Takhat which had been infiltrated by *dera* thought seemed to have proven in the fact that while no action was taken against any of the 15 Who's Who, Kala Afghana earned the wrath of Jathedar Vedanti who had him excommunicated subsequently (in 2003) even though Afghana (a British resident) did not appear at the Akaal Takhat (on the basis of ill health) to answer the charges against him. In what has become a sad state of affairs for Sikhi parchaar, even though banned, *Gurbilas 6* seems to have become the primary source of *Katha* and *parchar* by Sikh *Kathakaars*, *parcharaks*, *ragis* and *granthis* – especially those who are *dera*-alined or *dera* trained.

As Upav Kareay Ko Ta Tay. Swas Safal Hovey Sabh Yaa Tey.

Verse 378. Translation: The Simratis, Shastars and the Vedas reveal that the human being takes 24,000 breaths per day. (They further reveal) the need to undertake specific efforts to purify the entire number of breaths through those efforts.

*Sukhmani Gur Muknon Ucharee. Munn Maal Mano Gur Dharee
Chavee Hazaar Akshar Eh Dharey. Upma Aap Sree Mukh Rarey.*

Verse 396. Translation: The Guru recited Sukhmani. In His heart he resolved that it was the panacea vertebrae (हृत्) for material (gains). Twenty four thousand words therein. Such praise the Guru recited Himself.

CONCLUSIONS. The results of the *dera*-initiated and *dera*-inspired effort with regards to Sukhmani have been as follows:

One, there is now wide spread and wide scale mindless reciting / chanting of Sukhmani in our Gurdwara and Home based *Diwans*. Such reciting involves disrespect to the *banee*, given the severe limitations of collective reciting of any *banee*. Untold errors, people joining in half way, people leaving halfway, glaring omissions, etc make a mockery of the recital. For all intents and purposes – this collective reading has become a ritual and a very distorted one.

Two, such collective reciting takes away the time that a *Sangat* can devote to *Kirtan* and *Katha* – two very crucial spiritual activities of our *Sangat*-bases spiritual life. 2.5 hours of Sukhmani recital leaves no time for *Kirtan* and *Katha*.

Three, no real understanding comes from such collective recitation. The ritual of collective recitation has been going on for decades, yet its readers in particular and Sikhs in general have not gotten any wiser as to the messages of Sukhmani. If at all, collective reading has created misconceptions about the *Banee*.

Four, wide-scale and wide-spread recitals of Sukhmane has resulted in the instillation of fear amongst lay Sikhs from the class of individuals who call themselves *sadhs*, *sants* and *bhram gyanis*. It appears that large numbers of Sukhmani reciting Sikhs have swallowed hook line and sinker, the *dera wallahs* agenda that the terms *Sadh*, *Sant* and *Bhram Gyani* as used in Sukhmani refer to them and that Guru Arjun has provided the spiritual approval for these class of people. Any attempt to educate the lay *Sangats* with regards to the destructive ways of these group of frauds called *Sants* and *Babas* is often met with dire warnings with quotations from Sukhmani. *Sant Ka Dokhee*, *Sant Ka Nindak*, – is (mis) translated as ‘Someone who expresses disapproval of these present day self acclaimed ‘Sants’, ” and literal translations follow. ਸੰਤ ਕੈ ਦੁਖਨਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਸਭੁ ਜਾਇ Criticizing the ‘Sant’ takes away all your Sukh. ਸੰਤ ਕੈ ਦੁਖਨਿ ਨੀਚੁ ਨੀਚਾਇ ॥ The critique of the “Sant” is

lowliest of all. ਸੰਤ ਕੇ ਨਿੰਦਕ ਕਉ ਸਰਬ ਰੋਗ ॥ The critique of the 'Sant' will be inflicted with all the diseases. ਸੰਤ ਕਾ ਦੋਖੀ ਅਧ ਬੀਚ ਤੇ ਟੁਟੈ ॥ The critique of the 'Sant' will break into two in the middle.

The real meanings are of course different and related to the human mind denying God, challenging God's authority and Wisdom. The *Sukh Sabh Jaye* in ਸੰਤ ਕੈ ਦੂਖਨਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਸਭੁ ਜਾਇ therefore refers to the spiritual joy explained in the Rahao line of the *banee*: ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਸੁਖ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨਾਮੁ ॥ ਭਗਤ ਜਨਾ ਕੈ ਮਨਿ ਬਿਸੁਆਮ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ Similarly *Aadh Beech Tay Tutey* in the verse ਸੰਤ ਕਾ ਦੋਖੀ ਅਧ ਬੀਚ ਤੇ ਟੁਟੈ refers to the midway breaking of the journey of spirituality that Sukhmani is all about. The derawallahs would want us to believe that *Aadh Beech Tay Tutey* means that anyone who critiques their Sants and Babas will have end up with his body broken into two right in the middle.

It appears therefore that the pseudo *dera-wallah sadhs, sants* and *bhram gyanis* have succeeded in their agenda of not only fooling the Sikh masses into accepting them, but overwhelmingly succeeded in creating fear in the minds of those who would want to question their fraudulent ways.

It is ironical that the author of Sukhmani was able to bear untold tortures and unfathomable pain with immense courage and bravery. Yet the Sikh masses who recite this same *banee* in unprecedented numbers are sinking into the depths of unfathomable fear and immense fright of a bunch of frauds whose only aim is to deceive us. This is simply because we have not attempted to UNDERSTAND the messages of Sukhmani.

Such then, is the result of our having made Sukhmani recital into a ritual. Any and every ritual, in essence, dulls the mind, paralyzes the intellect and euthanizes spirituality.

WHAT TO DO? Educating ourselves and sharing it with others is perhaps the way to come out of the situation we have landed into. Some suggestions at the individual level are as follows:

One, if you are planning to sponsor a Gurdwara *Diwan* or have a *Diwan* in your home for any purpose at all, stick to the SRM mandated *maryada* of *Kirtan* and *Katha*. You will obtain the blessings of the Guru and the *Panth* for doing what is right.

Two, educate your family, friends and relatives about the issue. If you can find the courage within your convictions, tell them you will not attend a *diwan* which breaks the *maryada* of the *diwan* and which especially makes a mockery of *banee* in the so called "collective reading." As explained above, this collective reading is no more than a group of well meaning Sikhs getting together to collectively disrespect a wonderful *banee* – joining in as and where they please, opting out wherever convenient and skipping entire verses when the going gets too fast for them.

Three, if Sukhmani is your personal *nitnem*, continue to do so but make it a point to start UNDERSTANDING it – one couplet a day, one paragraph a week, one *Ashtpadee* a month. Get a decent translation and a dictionary. Prof Sahib Singh's translation is a good start. Keep in mind that a vast number of Sukhmani "translations" are little more than manifestos of *dera-wallahs* aimed at converting ordinary Sikhs into becoming hordes of Sukhmani chanting ritualistic people.

Four, if your Gurdwara is blessed with an educated *granthi*, *parcharak*, *ragi* or *Kathakar*, persuade them to explain Sukhmani to the *Sangat* using a series of lectures – perhaps one *Ashtpadee* at a time. Do keep in mind that a vast number of our *granthis*, *parcharaks*, *ragis* and *Kathakaars* are *dera-trained* or *dera* affiliated. Instead of helping the *Sangat* understand the true messages, they may re-enforce *dera* agendas instead. If such is the case, look for independent and enlightened members of the *sangat* who may be willing to do such a *sewa*.

Five, if you are a *parbhandhak*, recognize that it is your duty to have the Sikh Rehat Maryada instituted in your *Sangat*. Educate the management and *Sangat* that *Kirtan* and *Katha* are the sanctioned *maryada*. *Asa di Vaar diwans* for instance, cannot and should not be replaced by collective Sukhmani recitals. Nor should any other *diwan* be. If families insist on collective Sukhmani recitals, then ensure that such recitals are done outside of the prime *diwan* time (two hours before a *diwan* begins or some time after it has been concluded).

Six, as members of the *Sangat*, we have a collective right to expect and demand that our Gurdwaras serve the objective of providing *Gurbani* enlightenment. Each and every time we attend a Gurdwara *diwan* as part of the *Sangat*, the reward ought to be in the form of food for the soul (*Kirtan*) and *Gurbani gyan* (*Katha* and *Vikhyaan*). The Gurdwara is no place for *maryadas* of *derawallahs* or individualized practices (12 hour chanting of Japji, Chaupai, lights-off chanting of this or that *mantar* etc).

It is natural that when we have such issues and challenges we look for guidance from our Sikh institutions. The stark reality however is that our institutions themselves have succumbed to such follies. In some cases, they have become part of the problem. The issue at hand, as is the case with a vast majority of Sikh spiritual challenges is among those that require solutions at the individual level. As *Guru kay* Sikh, it is incumbent that we educate ourselves and those around us, and at the very least refuse to be part of any wrong or deviant practice.

Sikh readers and Parbhandhaks who wish to circulate or republish this article in their publications may request soft copies from the author at dhillon99@gmail.com.