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08

THE LIMINAL MATRIX OF VERSES CONTEMPLATION ON TIME IN ELIOT'S POETRY AND BANI OF GURU TEG BAHADUR

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Abstract:
Poetry may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world. But what poetry also often does is to raise questions about man's higher consciousness and explore concepts like temporality. Through his beautiful hymns, Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, proposed a profound truth: that time is relative at large. To appreciate the whole of our experience in its entirety, we must reach beyond causality and temporal linearity, to develop a life experience that allows for multidimensional and synchronistic experiences. Through the understanding of time inherent in many spiritually charged hymns of the Gurus, one witnesses an understanding that surpasses an otherwise dichotomous approach which restricts timelessness to the unconscious. Their poetry however allows us to reach beyond the everyday time-bound world into a greater, transcendent realm, rich with meaning and connection. Sadly, often the emphasis on temporality is lost in the excessive emphasis on its overt religiosity.

Keywords: *Space, Time, Existence, Transcendence, Consciousness, etc.*

'Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past. / if all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable.' The opening lines of TS Eliot's *Burnt Norton*, the first of his Four Quartets, were written in the 1930s, but while they may be familiar to many, one wonders if any of us have really stopped to consider their full import. Eliot sounds a speculative note with that 'perhaps' in the second line, yet his meaning still seems clear enough - if our perception of time as moving ever forward like a river is purely subjective, and the whole span of time - together with all actual events - has already transpired, then nothing we will ever do or say can alter the future, let alone the past. The inclination is, I think, to relate Eliot's insight directly to notions of free will, and hence to moral responsibility - the attribution of which is the thing that most preoccupies us in our social existence. This is not entirely different from the seeking of Guru Teg Bahadur's *Shabads* and *Shlokas*.

The evident lack of exploration and writing on 'time' is both odd and striking because temporality forms such an important theme of most mythological and religious poetry. The

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timeless unconscious, the evocation of the *Brahm, Simran and Jap* and every other endless repetition compulsion and the processes of consciousness, remembering and working through: all these involve temporality. It is largely the losses that time brings with it which take us into the prayer room: loss of our youth, our opportunities, our loved ones and our future anxieties.
The paradox is this: time and timelessness are fundamental principles of any spiritual deliberation yet little has been done to present a consolidated view of temporality. Sparkling with incredible references to time, the hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur Ji unravel the layers of human journey and vicariously also of its relationship with time. Seen from the angle of temporality, the *Shabads* are one hand an account of time past and time present, while on the other revealing an extraordinary gallery of mythological references that is also evocative of the passage of time.

> O man, why hast thou become crazy?
> Knowest thou not that life decreaseth day and night, and
> That thou art degraded by avarice?
> (Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Sorath, VIII)

In a way, revisiting his life is also an attempt at revisiting time. The journey through his martyrdom and travels provides the readers with incisive insights into history and therefore time itself, the Guru himself through his poetry laden with several ancient and mythological references explores the old 'times' as well as his time present, when the Sikh Martyrs were fighting the onslaught of Mughals. This is what renders to his life and Bani its distinctive tonality, i.e., his poetry rises like the fire-formed spirits that are said to assure a Phoenix-like regeneration no matter how many times it is destroyed. The symbol holds a unique signification not just for the life of Guru Teg Bahadur but the entire Sikh community and its resilient character, as it has also repeatedly fought the enormity of ideological and cultural invasions and yet salvaged and strengthened its traditions like never before.

It appears as if Eliot's meditative, poetic vision of existence and history in the Four Quartets and Guru Teg Bahadur's meditation-grounded philosophical analysis of existence and time - especially in his later writings--are mutually compatible and illuminating to an extraordinary degree, not only in comprehensive vision but in significant detail.

Not unlike Guru Teg Bahadur, the poets have viewed human existence as life in the in-between of time and timelessness. It also seems, as a consequence, both the Guru and the poet reject the common notion of historical meaning as fundamentally a matter of temporal development or progress, but rather both regard history as being constituted most significantly by the relation between human events unfolding in time and the timelessness.

The hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur ji and Eliot affirm a mystically apprehended, radically transcendent ground of being, which is differentiated to the highest degree in experience and symbol, but which is also universally the divine presence in experiences of human-divine encounter as these have been symbolized from ancient times to the present, both in the East and in the West.

The unified nature of space/time, and the notion that this phenomenon is not some sort of limiting constraint, or measure, but a field capable of distortion and even imaginative eternity gained through poetry, leads us back to the queasy apprehension of our own utter

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relativity. Try as we might, we're condemned to live our life going towards a nullity, while our past is sucked into a void. No wonder the philosophically-minded end up examining their ancestors' tombs in graveyards and writing poetry about their intimations of eternity, because even those of us who're rather more prosaic cleave to archives of personal and familial experience - our creaky photo albums and desiccated sheaves of correspondence. Indeed, what gives our human cultures any sense of cohesion at all is an almost relentless effort to shore up our collective memory of the past against the remorseless depredations of time.

Upon further inquiry, one discovers the concept of Time even in the Vedas and Upanishads and sees several lines of philosophical convergence with it. *Kaala* or the Time has been often depicted as *Aswa*, a horse which flows continuously with seven rays and thousands of axes. Time, here does not get tired because it has tremendous force or energy. It also means the Time has no (*A*) tomorrow (*Swa*). Much like the poetic contemplation of the Guru, this means that Time has no future. The statement of the sages bears affinity with the messaging implicit in Guru's *Shabads* that suggest time white it is fleeting, is continuous and therefore it has neither a definite yesterday nor tomorrow. Time has no specific past and no certain future. The same idea has been explicated by several poets even in the Western tradition.

Amongst popular books, Paul Halpern's *The Cyclical Serpent* (1995) is an unusual book in that it places modern speculations regarding an oscillating universe within the context of the cyclic cosmology of the Puranas. There are several statements in the Vedic texts about the universe being infinite, while at the same time the finite distance to the sun is explicitly mentioned too. *Aditi*, the great mother of the gods, is a personification of the concept of infinity. A famous mantra speaks of how taking infinity out of infinity leaves it unchanged. This indicates that paradoxical properties of the notion of infinity were known to our Indian sages and Gurus. So much so, at least one of the founders of quantum theory was directly inspired by the Indian system of cosmos and time and knowledge. Schrodinger (1961) claims that the Vedic slogan "All in One and One in All" was an idea that led him to the creation of quantum mechanics (see also Moore, 1989). Even before Schrodinger, the idealist philosophical tradition in Europe had long been moulded by Vedic ideas.

Our readings of the cyclical yet infinite nature of time is also confirmed by other texts such as the *Mahabharat*a. Here is a reference to the size of the universe from the *Mahabharata* 12.182:

The sky you see above is infinite. Its limits cannot be ascertained. The sun and the moon cannot see, above or below, beyond the range of their own rays. There where the rays of the sun and the moon cannot reach are luminaries which are self-effulgent and which possess splendour like that of the sun or the fire. Even these last do not behold the limits of the firmament in consequence of the inaccessibility and infinity of those limits. This space which the very gods cannot measure is full of many blazing and self -luminous worlds each above the other (Ganguly Translation, Vol. 9, 23).

The Mahabharata has a very interesting passage (12. 233), virtually identical with the corresponding material in Guru Teg Bahadur's hymns, which describes the continuous dissolution of the world. Briefly, it is stated how a dozen suns burn up the earth, and how elements get transmuted until space itself collapses into Wind (one of the elements). Ultimately, everything enters into primeval consciousness. Not very different is the iteration of

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Guru Teg Bahadur who laments, Every moment life is passing away like water from a Cracked vessel (*Tilang,* I, SGGS).

The mystery of consciousness is a recurring theme in most Indian texts and visibly in the Bani of the Guru. The pervasive idea that the physical universe is an illusion is common to most Indian scriptures as also to the *Shabads* of Guru.

From a subtle and detailed analysis of Guru Teg Bahadur's Bani it is sufficiently evident that his understanding of time is as grandiose as time itself. While most cultures base their cosmologies on familiar units such as few hundreds or thousands of years, he lays bare several nuances that inform us of time that is seemingly limited yet tied to an endless procession of creation, preservation and dissolution.

Even scientists such as Carl Sagan have expressed amazement at the accuracy of space and time descriptions given by the ancient rishis and saints, who fathomed the secrets of the universe through their mystically awakened senses. As in modern physics, Indian cosmology envisaged the universe as having a cyclical nature. Much like that the end of each *kalpa* brought about by Shiva's dance is also the beginning of the next. Rebirth follows destruction.
But the aim of this book is neither to present a physical notion of time in Guru's Bani nor to engage with the compendious elaborations in the Vedic literature. The true purpose is purported towards a poetic understanding that enables the transcendence of 'time', or to spent that time in dedication and devotion to the divine, which is also the aim of every spiritual tradition. Time in Guru's Bani is presented often as an "ocean", sometimes a "terrible ocean" and sometimes "an ocean of suffering" that binds the soul to a mortal existence of perpetual ignorance and misery. "Release" from time's fateful wheel seems both difficult and impossible and the enormity of that suffering can perhaps be expiated only through good deeds. The Guru writes:

> What effort shall I now make?
> That my mental anxiety may be at an end, and I may
> Cross the terrible ocean?
> I have done nothing good since I was born, therefore I
> Fear the more (Dhanasari, IV, SGGS).

Even poets like Yeats and Eliot and several others affirmed and attested to the fact that they often drew inspiration from Indian systems of thought. One of them writes "Philosophers tell us that the Indians were the first ones to conceive of a true infinite from which nothing is excluded. The West shields away from this notion. The West likes form, boundaries that distinguish and demarcate. The trouble is that boundaries also imprison – they restrict and confine." The Hindu holy book, the Rig Veda (X:129), also takes a much more nuanced view of time and creation:

> Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?
> Whence was it born, whence came creation?
> The gods are later than this world's formation;
> Who then can know the origins of the world?
> No one knows whence creation arose;

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And whether he has or has not made it;
He who surveys it from the lofty skies,
Only he knows- or perhaps he knows not.
The tentativeness and the subsequent mystique of creation is equally immanent in the poetry of Guru Teg Bahadur who comments
Know, my friend, that the structure of the world is all
unstable;
Saith Nanak, like a wall of sand it is not permanent
(Sloks, XLIX, SGGS).

The references to time and creation are also abundant in the theory of animal life and particularly of man that was correctly understood by the ancient thinkers. The *Brihat Vishnu Purana* states that "the aquatic life precedes the monkey life" and that "the monkey life is the precursor of the human life." The same theory was explained in an interesting way by the *Dashavatara* (ten incarnations). The several inklings to animal form that Guru Teg Bahadur also refers to corroborates the same.

In keeping with the major tenets of Indian culture, Guru Teg Bahadur also had this unique vision of the infiniteness of time as well as the infinity of space. While modern astronomy deals with billions of years, Indian creation concepts deal with trillions of years. The Indian tradition upholds the idea that creation is timeless, having no beginning in time. Each creation and dissolution follows in sequence. The whole cosmos exists in two states -- the unmanifested or undifferentiated state and the manifested or differentiated state. But within that scheme the theme of mortality and death looms large in the Bani of Guru who remarks, "What is born dieth today, tomorrow or the next day;" (Sloks, LII). John Bowle, categorically declares that Plato was influenced by Indian ideas. Princeton University's Paul Steinhardt and Cambridge University's Neil Turok, have recently developed The Cyclical Model. They have just fired their latest volley at that belief, saying there could be a timeless cycle of expansion and contraction. The theorists acknowledge that their cyclic concept draws upon religious and scientific ideas going back for millennia - echoing the 'oscillating universe' model that was in vogue in the 1930s, as well as the Indian belief that the universe has no beginning or end, but follows a cosmic cycle of creation and dissolution.

Sir John Woodroffe, (1865-1936) a well-known scholar, Advocate-General of Bengal and sometime Legal Member of the Government of India has said: "Ages before Lamarck and Darwin it was held in India that man has passed through 84 lakhs (8,400,000) of birth as plants, animals, as an 'inferior species of man' and then as the ancestor of the developed type existing to-day. The theory was not, like modern doctrine of evolution, based wholly on observation and a scientific enquiry into fact but was a rather (as some other matters) an act of brilliant intuition in which observation may also have had some part. *(Is India Civilized: Essays on Indian Culture* - By Sir John Woodroffe Publisher: Ganesh & Co. Publishers Date of Publication: 1922 p. 22).

But most importantly, fundamental to the Indian concept of time and space is the notion that the external world is a product of the creative play of *Maya* (illusion). Guru Teg Bahadur emphasises this illusory quality of the material world repeatedly.

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O good people, know that this body is temporary;
The God who dwelleth within it recognise as permanent.
The world is like wealth obtained in a dream; why be
elated on beholding it?
Why are you wrapped up in it? Nothing shall depart
with you.
Renounce both flattery and slander; take God's praises
to thy heart.
Nanak, the one God filleth all things (*Basant*, I, SGGS).

Cosmos itself undergoes an immense, indeed an infinite number of deaths and rebirths. The processes of creation and destruction are infinite despite the seeming brevity of mortal life. The dancing form of Shiva and his dance is representative of the co -existence of creative and destructive forces at the same time. In every act of creation is also immanent a promise of destruction. Eliot expresses the simultaneity of both in the following lines:

In my beginning is my end….
… to be restored, our sickness must grow worse (Eliot, Four Quartets, 9).

Because time-past and present are enveloped by time-future, Guru Teg Bahadur also suggests that all time is "unredeemable." This means that time cannot be treated in abstraction but as the vital ground of human reality. Lived time, and it's slipping away as this is embodied by individual human beings is the main focus of all his *Shabads*.

The great poets like Khayyam have informed us centuries ago about "what might have been" are an abstract notion that can only be entertained as speculation. Reading through the works of the great astronomer- physicist and especially the proclaimed author of The *Rubaiyat* which till date remains one of the most exquisite poetic deliberations about life and the brevity of time, there is much to learn. When he writes:

Ah, fill the Cup: - what boots it to repeat
How time is slipping underneath our feet:
Unborn TO-MORROW and dead YESTERDAY
Why fret about them if TODAY be sweet!
(Fitzgerald 37, First Edition 1859, Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam).

Though Omar's audacity of thought and speech and his epicurean delightfulness brought upon him much hatred and wrath, the underlying mysticism of his poetry can hardly be ignored. Instead, we recognise, much like Khayyam, that we only know what has actually come to pass, not what could or might have been. The poets engage with Parmenides' argument that only being exists. Being denotes permanence. Nothingness, the poet points out, cannot inform human reality because it never forms part of the present. For this reason, possibility—what might have been-is hemmed in by what has actually taken place: Like Eliot remarks:

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take

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Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden (Eliot, 36).

Imagination, of Guru Teg Bahadur, I contend, like the greatest poets of the world is what enables him to also understand the vacuity like Khayyam on one hand while also viewing the past as informing the present, on the other. In his entire Bani, imagination complements religious faith. The narrator/ seeker/ poet strolls through the garden of fancy , as if moving through a field mined with sights and sounds guarded by the garden's past. The narrator raises the question of how a rose that is witnessed by human eyes appears to us. Here we are reminded of Berkeley's notion that "to be is to be perceived," "For the roses / Had the look of flowers that are looked at." The embrace of time-past, through the exercise of the imagination, brings the past to life once again, if only as a memory.

A large breadth of his *Shabads* and *Sloks* is permeated with the idea that reality, the only reality that flesh-and-blood individuals can embrace, is time-lived yet insignificant. Like the bird leads the narrator through a drained pool that momentarily echoes the past, so the Guru also tells us,

The structure of the world is like a mirage; understand
this and ponder on it in thy heart
(Devgandhari, II, SGGS).

Eerily similar in thought and feeling is the line by Eliot where he details with superb poetic brilliance "The pool was filled with water out of sunlight." The narrator goes on to say:

Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present (Eliot, 16).

Guru's Bani also capture the essence of human life as we experience it in the flesh, not just as an abstraction. He laments the evanescence of time but also presents the reader with a vision of eternity and permanence as the ground of vital human reality that he must aspire for. The strength of his thought is the recognition of a hierarchical ordering of human existence. What we experience in space and time, as embodied souls, is but a semblance of the essence and form of reality. This is made explicit in the following lines:

Death wandereth about, O friend, like a serpent with
protruding fangs,
And it will seize thee sooner or later; understand this in
thy heart.
Saith Nanak, worship God; thine opportunity is passing
away (Sorath, I, SGGS).

It is almost like the Guru was telling us that only through time, time is conquered. We can only get a glimpse of eternity by experiencing the finality of time. His Bani reminds us that

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inspired philosophical reflection, dating back to its inception by ancient Puranic tradition, is akin to poetic expression because early forms of philosophical reflections were attentive to myth and the power of imagination in daily existence. Omar Khayyam, Firdausi and many other poets and ancient philosophers arrived at the conclusion that many of the puzzles of human life are best entertained through indirect confrontation. This is an exercise in patience and intellectual humility.

What is particularly striking is the economy of words in Guru's Bani. Through use of terse expression, he brings to life not just words but silences too. His constant iteration that "everything is like a dream" postpones its own existence pointing instead to a more transcendent space where silence can thrive and Man can find connection with the divine. Rather it becomes increasingly doubtful whether language can substantially capture the essence of human existence. The Guru gives credence to the notion that man's reservoir of timeless knowledge is actually accessible to all who are willing to be silent and engage the "name of God". Like Eliot also remarks "Words strain/Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish …"

Guru's reflection on the nature of time continues with words like mirage, fleeting, dream, maya, temporary etc gradually lending to his Bani a perpetual flavour about dissolution and renewal. The realization that "at the last moment nobody will accompany him (Devgandhari, III) has a sharp-edged, biting quality that only an awakened thinker can keep from turning into Nietzschean morbidity and nihilism. The abandonment/ disillusionment that the Guru expresses, his almost Shakespearean mockery of the seven stages of man and his Dostoevsky like critique of societal institutions in which echoes the music and dancing that makes the life a witness to the futility of marriage and the holy sacrament of death, were,

> When the soul parteth from thy body, cry out and call
> Thee a ghost;
> Nobody keepeth thee even half a ghari; they expel thee
> From the house (Devgandhari, II, SGGS).

His Bani abounds with images of fleeting time. Taking a cosmic look at man and lived-time, the poet offers the reader a vision of the futility of overt concern with earthly existence. In one of the most striking passages of the Bani, the Guru doubts whether mere poetry, or any of man's modes of expression, can fully grasp the cyclical nature of time: permanence.

> O good people, know that this body is temporary;
> The God who dwelleth within it recognise as permanent.
> This world is like wealth obtained in a dream; why be elated
> on beholding it?
> Why are you wrapped up in it? nothing shall depart
> with you.
> Renounce both flattery and slander; take God's praises
> to thy heart.
> Nanak, the one God filleth all things (Basant, I, SGGS).

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Part of the beauty of Guru Teg Bahadur's Bani is his reflection on time as it consumes individual existence, and not as an abstraction. This lends to his Bani the unique and distinct flavour of superlative existential work. He offers his vision of the "hill of smoke" that will cloud our senses and the world. He tells us that the beginning contains the seeds of the end. However, time racing away from us, the reader is assured, does not really matter. The reality of human existence goes deeper than any mortal can ever suspect. However unlike the scepticism of Khayyam or the relative bleakness that looms over existential thought, the Bani bristles and blooms with an almost Browning like optimism that revels in the idea that 'Adore God, Adore God; thy life passeth away' (Jaijawanti, II).

Continuing with a heartfelt and rather relentless bout of existential pondering, the Guru finds himself alone in the mortal world with only God as a companion. The Guru finds himself awed, perhaps even overwhelmed, that 'thou has no helper but God.' (Basant, I)

He discovers that experience alone is a bad teacher unless we dedicate ourself to the remembrance of God ('Nanak, in the same way worship God with single mind and single heart.' (Sloks, XLV) Experience, the Guru realizes, is customized to individual existence. Because experience is so personal in nature, it burdens us with the need to make sense of it. This is where the past tradition and rejection of doubt can aid us in our zest for life. Even though experience occurs in temporal parcels, truth remains objective and timeless in nature and is aligned with the seeking after God. 'Remember God, remember God, this is thy duty…Cling to God's sanctuary' (Jaijawanti, I).

Throughout the Bani, the Guru is confronted with the truths conveyed by his predecessors. There are frequent invocations to Nanak and even the ancient sages, an almost lifelong reflection on the essence of human reality. The Guru discovers that the wisdom of the elders is replete with concerns about the sting of passing time. 'Ram passed away, Rawan passed away with his large family; / Saith Nanak, nothing is permanent; the world is like a dream' (Sloks, L).

In this unstoppable movement of the wheel of time, Guru Teg Bahadur tells us that humility and surrender is the ultimate form of wisdom that we can hope for. The key to this embrace of humility is the understanding that genuine humility is arrived at after much reflection. It is reflection on the nature of the self, God, and transcendence-that is, existential concerns-which equip the Guru to grasp the great wisdom of the elders. What the elders know, we, too, can possess, but only at the end of the struggle for truth. Nothing comes easy. He rejects superficial pursuits towards enlightenment that are bereft of humility.

> He writes,
> Going on pilgrimages, fasting, and giving alms,
> while pride is in the heart,
> Nanak, these things are as fruitless as an elephant's
> Bathing (Sloks, XLVI, SGGS).

Reading deeper into the *Shabads* and *Sloks* of Guru Teg Bahadur, one sees how they present a reflection on human existence that is amplified with a cosmic view of time. The greatest rishis and sages, merchants, bankers, eminent men of letters, patrons of the arts, statesmen, and everyone else who has ever walked on earthy soil, eventually embark into the darkness that

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frames our mortality. Yet what Eliot refers to as the "darkness of God" is the anticipation of hope. Human existence, the Guru warns us, must master the art of patience. Similar to Eliot's thought who says, "Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:/So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing", is the expression of Guru Teg Bahadur who remarks:

> Know that the Lord for whom the Jogis grew weary of
> Searching without finding His limit
> Ais near thee, but without form or outline (Jaistsari, III, SGGS).

A more detailed look into the underlying essence of his Bani also offers the reader a view of life as resistance. The difficulties that we encounter in living pave the way for the attainment of truth. The beginning of life journey also points to its distant end, since we cannot become who we are without first realizing the existential singularity of human life. The narrator / Guru makes it clear that our fear of the future, and passing time, are but the beginning of strife and self-realisation. Self-sustaining intuition of the nature of personhood propels us through the world, enabling us to become who we must be. This, Eliot cautions, before time runs out for us, "In order to arrive at what you do not know / You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance."

> Similar to that is the utterance of Guru Teg Bahadur,
> Awake, O man, awake; why dost thou heedlessly sleep?
> The body which was born with thee shall not depart with thee;
> The mother, father, sons, and relatives whom thou
> lovest,
> Will throw thy body into the fire when the soul departeth
> From it.
> Know that the affairs of the world last only during life.
> Nanak, sing God's praises; everything is like a dream
> (Tilang, II, SGGS).

The hope and optimism that the poets of the world have offered us is not the blanket form that populism uses to gloss over the sting of reality with social-political platitudes. The poets plunge you into the vortex of pain and ask the reader to embrace a stoic view of human reality. This means that we must accept the loss of much that is dear to us in order to attain divine transcendence. Life, the poets remind us, cannot evade the truth of Adam's curse- 'And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.'

The Bani of Guru Teg Bahadur reflects on time as a lived, existential reality that man embodies. The Bani makes frequent references to water especially the ocean. The ocean, a metaphor for subjectively lived-time-we are told-informs human existence. This rendition of time is quickly contrasted with chronological time, which is nature's time.

The Bani of Guru Teg Bahadur attempts to reconcile the tension between these two forms of time constantly. Realizing that there can be no end to the passage of time, the Guru recognizes

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that man's embrace of time is essential to our development as incarnate souls in this body. He says:

> Know that the affairs of the world last only during life.
> Nanak, sing God's praises; everything is like a dream (Tilang, II, SGGS).

Guru Teg Bahadur confronts time not as an abstraction but as the reservoir of our follies and personal experience. With increasing age, we come to regard the past as a closed-ended reality that contains an account of our actions. For him, the passage of time ought to teach us much about permanence of soul: many people merely pass through experiences without shunning sin or pride and miss life's meaning. He writes:

> When Death's noose falleth on thy neck, all shall become
> The property of others.
> O madman, thou hast intentionally ruined thine affairs;
> Thou did not shrink from the commission of sin or
> dismiss pride (Tilang, III, SGGS).

It is the "meaning-of" which restores the meaning of experience: 'We had the experience but missed the meaning, /And approach to the meaning restores the experience/In a different form, beyond any meaning/We can assign to happiness', writes Eliot.

Guru Teg Bahadur creatively avoids the trap of treating time as merely an abstraction; he depicts actual instances of motion. His Bani explores before-and-after, especially in seemingly day to day and trivial matters. In The Bani, directionless and covetous men are compared to wandering dogs; there are allusions to Jogis and travellers. A simple thing like wandering through life signals the passage of time that cannot be recovered. The people who are misguided through most of their lives are not the same individuals who get off at another destination. This is an allusion to Heraclietian flux. Every inch of time narrowing behind life's train ought to be measured not in feet, but in moments that will never return. For Guru Teg Bahadur, time is best measured in vital moments that metastasize into years, culminating in eternity.

Make no mistake about it: time can be paradoxical, sinister even. Time is Maya like, unrelenting in its mystery, seemingly short though there is a permanence that it reveals. For Guru Teg Bahadur, the commonplace is often overlooked because it tells us much about the nature of things that never change. This is Eliot's genius at its most endearing. To convey the impact of this thought, he turns to the Jogi and invariably ties the idea of time to God's mysterious ways,

> Nobody knoweth God's ways
> Jogis, jatis, penitents, and several wise men have grown
> weary *thinking* of Him;
> He can in a moment make a beggar a king, or a king
> a beggar;
> What is empty He filleth, and what is full he emptieth;
> this is a practice of God;

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He hath spread His own illusion, and he himself behold-
eth it (Bihagra, I, SGGS).

The essence of the saint is not encountered as an occupation. Rather, the saint intuits the nature of timelessness. Like several seers and poets, he points out that many people marvel at earthly existence, especially when this distracts them from seeking God and higher truths. The architectonic of reality that the saint uncovers directs us to the intersection of the mundane and the sublime. The saint confronts his own existence with the necessary love to unhinge reality from the boredom of existential morbidity.

Think not that that Jogi
In whose heart thou recognizest covetousness, worldly
love, and selfishness is united with God.
He who neither calumniateth nor flattereth others, to
whom gold and iron are the same,
And who is free from joy and sorrow, is properly called
a Jogi (Dhanasari, III, SGGS).

Through all of this the focus of the Shabads and Slokas written by the Guru is the goal of personal salvation. The musings of the Guru serve as a point for further reflection on the earthly incarnation of the soul. The Bani contains several allusions to different stages of life. Seeing himself reflected in the ocean he calls "everything is like a dream." The constant blending of our ignorance of the "Death's noose" the Guru feels that this is enough to "stir the dumb spirit."

Faced with the ineffable, the Guru repeatedly emphasises 'God's name.' In his Bani, it is not just prayer, but it is a place where one must do away with sense and notion. It serves as a stage of life, a moment in time when life is guided by an epiphany. This is the moment of understanding and feeling that makes the narrator reflect on salvation. Prayer and 'taking shelter in God's name', we acquire the ability to communicate with the divine. Eliot says something strikingly similar in his poem,

And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying (Eliot, 22).

The main lesson that cyclical time leaves us with is not that time is ultimately cyclical, but that our actions and memory fail us. This is why the end is a beginning and the beginning an end. This is also why 'Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning. / Every poem an epitaph. And any action/Is a step to the block, to the fire, down to the sea's throat …' Time is like a moving platform that man rides on. The problem, as the Guru sees it, is that we forget the sights, colours, people, and places that we encounter along the way. We focus on 'wealth, equipages, women and empire.' We cannot know what we do not seek: A people without perspective or 'in whom there is no devotion to God," are not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/of timeless moments.'

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With the Guru's Bani one comes to a cautiously hopeful ending, though. The Guru doesn't assure us that all will be well. However, we must cultivate patience and surrender. The coming-to-fruition-of-time cannot take place until the end of time. This is the only hope and redemption. There can be no earthly solution to man's homelessness and discontent in the material realm. This is why we must revisit the places that we have taken for granted and learn to rediscover them. There, in the droning nuisance of cyclical folly, we are rewarded with the discovery that soul can only come to know itself in time, against time by remembering God.

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