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Editorial

The task to revive classical modes of understanding religion and philosophy while avoiding any alienation of contemporary modes of knowledge production has led us to think differently. While maintaining a high hope of ‘recentering’ the epistemological position in unfolding of the Truth, we are also aware of the uphill contentions, particularly in post-Hegelian philosophical modes of theorization, that have made it nearly impossible to retrieve or reimagine religion and philosophy beyond historical loadings of identities of language, ethnicity, anthropology, and genealogy.

To understand the complexities of our landscape, let us take a closer look at the domain of Sikh studies. This domain has undergone many ebbs and tides of knowledge production in the past century, particularly after the Singh Sabha reform movement that was initiated with the historical encounter between the colonizer and colonized during last quarter of nineteenth and first quarter of twentieth century. Sikh subjectivity has since undergone a drastic shift towards a colonial understanding of religion and identity, leading to historicization of Sikh imagination and the rationalization of doctrinal understandings. While scholars of this age, particularly Bhai Vir Singh, focused on preserving the essence of Sikh spirit by employing what can be termed as ‘transparent metaphysics’, he also remained unbound by any form of ethnic, lingual, or historical identity constructions. However, his concentrated focus on the meta-historical relationship with Sikh Gurūs and Gurbāṇī has been recently interpreted as a covert call for metaphysical construction of religious identity. His works have been inappropriately criticized as an effort to canonize Sikh studies with a linguo-religious ideology — a theoretical claim that hardly finds any resonance in the native Sikh imagination. Many conspicuous and complex

entanglements that determine incoherence of understanding about an author and his motivation remain to be explored beyond the scope of this editorial. Yet, the idea of historically or theoretically formulated identity vis-à-vis an ontological expression of selfhood in spiritual coherence that transcends any historical or ideological loadings, is indeed a void that strives for further exploration.

Nevertheless, after the Singh Sabha movement and with growing influence of secularization, scholars in universities and other academic spaces, particularly in Punjab, created a plethora of Punjabi literature, including short stories, novels, and folk poetry, which shifted the focus away from Sikh studies. Authors like Amrita Pritam, Gurdit Singh, Balwant Gargi, Kartar Singh Duggal, Surjit Hans, Sant Singh Sekhon, Gurdial Singh etc., were prolific writers of their time. They offered clear depictions of individual and collective imagination, crafted creative folk poetry, addressed socio-cultural issues, romanticized the simplicity of village life, and both eulogized and criticized social practices and traditions, according to their influences and motivations. These writings invigorated a trend to capture mundane experiences of social life that reconciled literature with social reality, presenting a fresh account of everyday living experience. This shift was significantly triggered by the partition of Punjab, as the region witnessed a tragic bloodbath that could not be comprehended without delving into individual and social drives. Literary scholars were challenged by the awkwardness of the senseless situations that emerged in the struggle to uphold social morality. Studies on religion went out of focus with the increasing influence of Marxist scholars in the post-independence literary movement of 'progressive' authors, paving the way forward that facilitated a paradigmatic encounter between literature and social reality. Focusing on Punjab and the Punjabi language was crucial in shaping a secular ethnic identity.

The attention towards Sikh studies returned with the political turmoil in Punjab between the 1960's and 1990's, as both Sikhs and Sikh studies were brought under heavy scrutiny, critique, (mis)representation, and contradictions, spearheaded by W. H. McLeod's school of Sikh studies. Employing the methods of tracing a historical genealogy to frame Sikh identity as 'the other' of secular-liberal, McLeod managed to articulate arguments that had previously eluded scholars of Sikh studies. The eventful discourses employing historical modes of subjectification, or theological

interpretation of Sikh doctrines while producing texts for Western readership, problematized the domain of Sikh studies. Sikh scholars actively challenged the content of his thesis especially his criteria of selection and rejection of data. However, they failed to question the methodology and normativity employed to map Sikh studies into colonial frameworks of otherness that aimed to isolate 'the West' from any subjective influence of 'the rest'. Meanwhile, a large body of literature was produced by numerous scholars under McLeod's mentorship that brought Sikh studies to a global platform, fostering an evolution of the field beyond its specific contexts and situational boundaries. At the same time, as Sikhs migrated to the West, Sikh scholars started articulating a distinct Sikh voice, drawing on postcolonial studies and psychoanalysis to provide a strong and robust counter to critical reviews of Sikhism that were framing Sikhi as a spectral 'other' of modern secular nation-state.

In recent decades, a renewed interest in Punjab and Punjabi studies emerged amidst these politico-epistemic transactions. This development rekindles hope for a society capable of overcoming historical deadlocks by negotiating a neutral space beyond rigid religious ideologies. Avoiding the tensions of religious and epistemic polarization, scholars of renewed Punjab studies — led by western or diasporic researchers such as Farina Mir, Ann Murphy, and Anshu Malhotra, along with native scholars like Ishwar Dyal Gaur and Sumel Sidhu — became invested in critical and literary theory while focusing on celebrating shared traditions, ethnic diversity, and lingual hospitality prevalent in Punjabi folk literature and material culture. This approach, distinct from earlier efforts led by indigenous scholars of Punjab who were invested in producing fresh literature, is underpinned by the assumption that Punjab's rich tradition and common cultural practices have historically erased religious differences and fostered harmonious social relationships. However, this school continues to ignore that shared ethnicity and linguistic relationality provides insufficient means on its own to cultivate social ethics or unconscious moral drives, which could resonate with being's meaning on a higher plane, elevating human consciousness beyond a flat temporality. And although the motivation to discover and activate an agency that promotes interreligious harmony in a region signals an implied ethical subjectivity of these scholars, it falls short of connecting with deeper layers of ontological constitution, and behavioral patterns, or rendering any meta-temporal meaning to human consciousness. It appears

that the agency is breathlessly grappling to initiate a dialectical process in historical unfolding but remains devoid of triggering this process in a way that resonates with constitutive formation of being. It fails to recognize that the ethical normativity, which the agency is trying to stimulate, loses its potency in rendering an intuitive force to generate self-reflection or self-improvement by relying fundamentally on an identity drawn from geolinguistic landscape.

The key element evident from the discussion above is how the idea of identity has remained in a state of flux between Punjabi and Sikh identities in historical transactions of knowledge construction. Meanwhile, a compelling outcome following these encounters is the drifting, if not dislocation, of both Punjab and Sikh studies from its center into global spaces. Nevertheless, the historical tracing above also allows us to take a step back and identify the epistemic sources that invigorated knowledge production in what can be called as *Punjab studies and Sikh studies 2.0*, spearheaded in western academia. One key factor that attracts attention at this moment is the emergence of postcolonial theory in the West that has catapulted to its epitome in the contemporary age with the efforts of many scholars following Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Postcoloniality emerged as an underpinning agency for articulating alternate voices in western academia while employing critical theory. It rendered a breathing space to many marginalized and suppressed epistemes that were either deprived of their meaningfulness or straitjacketed into worldviews of underdeveloped humanity. Considering the discursive modes of theorizations in light of the example of Sikh studies and Punjab studies above, signals a retrieval of unencumbered understanding of religion and philosophy.

It does not require any exceptional intuitive vision to foreground that the gap between the experiential essence of religion and its implied, or many times distorted, forms of social practice continue to deeply impact the empirical investigations of academic research. Besides the domains of anthropology and religion, the challenges posed due to this gap haunt and confront structural barriers that have gradually erected within the domain of postcolonial theory. This confrontation is visible on at least two fronts. First, postcolonial studies continue to remain 'an underdog of colonialism' produced through the barriers of translation that pose the question of reliability on secular anthropocentric values. This has, by default, become counterproductive, as postcoloniality resists colonial impact using

psychoanalytical tools that reproduce colonial frameworks through reverse identification of colonizer-colonized relationship, creating what can be understood as an 'ontological barrier' of relationality. This barrier posits a solid historical divide between the colonizer and the colonized, obstructing any fluid exchange of sensibilities. It hinders the development of an authentic, living relationship with 'the Other,' while remaining independent of the power dynamics that seek to assimilate one into the other. Drawing on a perpetual sense of alienation and anxiety, not only between an anthropological or genealogical colonizer and colonized but also within the self and the natural world, it delves into an antagonistic subject-object dualism lacking a potential or scope to accommodate paradoxical understandings. Therefore, at best, postcoloniality triggers a dialectical relationship with colonialism that continues to unfold itself through ideological realignments in history.

Second, and perhaps more crucially, is the need to sufficiently evaluate the implied 'euphoria' associated with theoretical understanding of nativity. This euphoria continues to celebrate nativity as an ideal life-form animating the accounts of colonialism through the lens of dominance and repression, while paradoxically denying humanity to a large majority of very nativity that it wants to liberate from acts of power. Although, this is not contestable point of deterrence in postcolonial studies, yet the excess emphasis on political subjectivity of the colonizer West takes the focus away from native forms of dominance that are intrinsically developed and remain innate within the very nativity which is thoroughly celebrated, enjoyed, and exalted in postcolonialism. Underneath this eulogy is a continuous denial of humanity within the native structures of subordination and dominance that postcolonialism has many times continued to ignore. This second contention originates from 'epistemological barriers' that remain (self) imposed within many research projects that focus deeply on archival studies but remain unrelatable within the practices of everyday life forms that nativity produces within itself.

Taken together, the two contentions demarcate the inherent boundaries of postcoloniality that hinder an epistemic process in reciprocal relationships. As pointed, the colonizer-colonized relationship does not lose its relevance in postcolonial studies. Rather in many ways it gets reaffirmed and recirculated in a fresh perspective through a reverse flow of identity formulations constituted as a response that offers a pushback to colonial

modes of knowledge constructions. This short-circuiting or rather completion of the loop of relationships to its origin of binary between colonizer and colonized produces echoes of colonialism while rendering only a marginal voice to everyday habits and paradigmatic intra-social subjectivities that predominate native life. So, postcolonial scholars often accept and adopt an ideological understanding of solidly constituted structured religion, both of the Self and the Other, leaving minimum space for classic modes of philosophizing through self-induction. In Sikh understanding, this philosophizing is cultivated through 'intersubjective transparencies' of *Naam Rasa* (Nectar of divine Name) tradition. In the vacuum of 'intersubjective transparencies', metaphysical concerns dominate the domain of postcolonial religious studies, laying down the ideological foundations of religion by advancing religious studies through the opposition of 'the other' in historical dialectics. As a result of this shift in the focus, the native forms of social objectifications and structures of dominance like inter-caste relations, feudal forms of economic and social structures predominant particularly in rural spaces, perpetuation of narrow or rather closed orthodoxic subjectivities amongst religious groups, politics of hero making in cultural and religious imaginations etc., are hardly considered to be explicable subjects of empirical investigation in studies developed from a postcolonial thrust. In contrast, the specter of colonialism continues to inform and direct the course of postcoloniality that overweighs the constitutive desire to focus on otherness, race, power, and embodiment of the colonizer West, while continuously overlooking the ingrained presence of colonizer subjectivity within the natives themselves.

This difficulty in turning the gaze inwards can also be attributed to the heavy dominance of diasporic scholars in the domain of postcolonial studies, who continue to adhere to a predetermined model of colonialism while treating nativity as a homogeneously formulated identity of suppressed humanity that holds the potential for authentic expression of life. Besides many contentions, postcolonial studies expose the deep impact of colonial influence on native subjectivity that continues to shape their world view in secular democratic forms of self-enunciation and political makeups. The idea that natives had fluid interreligious boundaries and negligible interreligious tensions in social constructs before the colonial advent, which subsequently transformed with colonial modes of identity construction, holds much ground in academic discourses of postcolonial theory. It firmly

establishes the epistemic value of the domain highlighting the root cause of religious polarization while trying to overthrow the continued inertia of its influence. In other words, postcoloniality does play a role in liberating subjectivity from structures of political dominance often propagated under the garb of racial profiling of religion, yet it disregards that natives are not free of their indigenously developed systems of political and social dominance and oppression within themselves. Ignoring the power struggles of natives amongst themselves has led to distancing postcolonialism from native social praxis. In a way, the echoing of euphoria of nativity, particularly within the diasporic academic contentions, offers a form of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, that sublates nativity as an idea, but simultaneously suppresses the reality of its existential forms of social dominance, influence, and colonial subjectivity amongst the natives themselves. This is indeed a reason that the knowledge produced from these discourses has remained 'theoretical', holding negligible resonance in practice in postcolonial environments.

Taking into consideration such predominant modes of enunciation that have both negated and preserved nativity in dialectical epistemic evolution of ethnic/lingual/colonial/postcolonial modes of structuration of a world view, the idea of *Shabadārth* has come to its crystallization. Going beyond established modes of socio-cultural power dynamics, *Shabadārth* is a step ahead of many preset binaries paving ways to open up a space that allows a local to enunciate its philosophical conceptions. There are three vital underlying influences that will continue to guide our way forward. First, we will strive to maintain a minimum level of intersubjective relations among diverse modes of knowledge production, enabling us to avoid any theoretical stagnation. We shall achieve this by maintaining what we understand as 'intersubjective transparencies.' Through intersubjective transparencies, we will be positioned to maintain a respectful and recognitive relation with diverse epistemes without confronting or alienating alternate voices. Additionally, we will zealously engage in dialogues that pave the way to cohesively realize the gaps in our own understandings of many aspects of human knowledge, which can productively contribute to this process of self-enrichment. Further, intersubjective transparencies allow us to overcome the barriers of siloed readings of diverse domains of art, literature, culture, philosophy, aesthetics, science, language, and religion. In doing so, we are also looking at undertaking a bilingual experiment that by its very

constitution remains *sui generis* at the point of enunciation. Not only does this make it plausible to decompose the barriers of language in intellectual movement, but it also renders an opportunity to deepen our understandings of local-particulars and reflect upon the inherent meanings that produce their philosophical conceptions. Besides, we look forward to exploring fresh idioms of language, particularly in Gurmukhi, to enhance creative potentials that have remained constrained by established standards of presentation and representation. The payoff from this experimentation is a reclaim of a subjectivity that stands in waiting to articulate its productive potential allowing an access to the worldhood that the language holds. Therefore, articles in Gurmukhi, as evident in many scholarly papers of this first edition, serve as sites of new modes of theorization and enunciation not attempted in many established modes of Punjabi literary criticism and academic publications. In many ways, the freshness of idiom and contextualization of arguments in these papers provide a much-needed breakthrough for mainstream intellectual discourse. This experiment enables us to strongly support initiatives that explore language usage beyond traditionally established bindings. In other words, intersubjective transparencies grant access to go beyond any predeterminate structures of established epistemic or power relations between a particular and the universal.

The second major influence that guides the vision of *Shabadārth* is drawn from the recognition of potential practical possibilities that arise from the opening of a vivid worldview. This possibility, although entails intellectual exploration of diverse subjects and discourses, we also believe that any epistemological formulations cannot have determinate ground in vacuum of its meaningful practices. Reflective reasoning and empiricism recuperate potential possibilities of being, which creatively account for individual development and social realization. In a way, conventional wisdom operative in cultural normativity that drives ethical and moral judgements of being is not only made accessible but is also revisited, and if required critiqued, to respond to being's belongingness to a higher order. This experimentation can be achieved through what we understand as 'ontological rediscovery' of being's meaning through self-exploration. For such ontological rediscovery, we believe that flat temporality or materialist modes of historicization remain insufficient source of realized meaningfulness for both individual and social life. For cultivation of realized meaningfulness, we aim

to retrieve and redirect knowledge production from transhistorical sources and those faculties of human mind, which continue to offer a gush of human understanding flowing from unconscious realms of human mind to those that are conscious. This practice in Sikh tradition is imbued in what is better known as *Sadhna* (concentration of mind on the transcendent). Although *Sadhna* is often cognizable as a bodily practice than textual knowledge or text production, it certainly provides an opportunity to engage creatively in enunciating the ineffable contents of human mind and implied epistemic unveiling. Through its dual nature as both a physical and mental discipline, we explore profound insights and understandings that involve the dynamic consolidation and reverberation of concrete forms of empiricism, while remaining receptive and responsive to the transcendent.

The third vital influence is that of *Shabad*, which in a standard literal translation signal towards 'The Word,' but in Indian, and particularly Sikh understanding, it represents a complete philosophical system that drives its meaning from within its own constitution. The idea of *Shabad*, or more appropriately *Shabad* philosophy, is not a canonical stagnation of meaning into a sound structure of the word. Instead beyond any form of stagnant *concept-percept dualism*, a term coined by Prof. Himat Singh, *Shabad* continues to expand in its meaning and expression with active reflection.¹ It is through this infinitely expansive mode of realization of *Shabad*, theories of metaphysical materiality continue to remain in a perpetual state of dynamism in *Shabad* philosophy. This creatively increasing expression of meaning of *Shabad* remains realizable through *relational reasoning*, another term coined by Prof. Himat Singh, which elevates both consciousness and its object of empirical inquiry to unwind itself beyond facts and forms.² Prof. Jagdish Singh expresses this process of unfolding of *Shabad* as *Mauldi Nischitta* (Blossoming Certainty). In this realized process of rationality, which is central to moving into the realm of *Shabad* philosophy, the subject of inquiry gets *re-epistemized*, while the object is 're-ontologized' through the perpetual unfolding of a paradoxical relationship. Therefore, empiricism that we continue to explore in reflective and philosophical inquiries is not external or alien to our subject of inquiry, but it remains explicable in a continuous process of an explorable determination.

In light of these influences, *Shabadārth* is not a literal fusion of *Shabad* (The Word) and *Artha* (its meaning), but a philosophical conception of how the meaning unfolds itself in the very conception of *Shabad*. In a way it is

a meta-conception of *Shabad* that continues to unfold through different modes of its being extending its meaning in its perpetual becoming. This does not signify any idealized transcendence of *Shabad* into a metaphysical entity, like Hegel's 'absolute idea,' which exhausts itself while exerting pressure over a progressive conception of material history. Its connectedness, or rather convertibility, into philosophical conceptions incorporates the constitutive nature of its material manifestation, which remains empirically intelligible and reveals itself through its creative articulation. The tension between form and content, spirit and being, etc., of *Shabad* is mediated through the contextualization of a blossoming selfhood that simultaneously engages in the process of embodiment and decomposition of stagnant ontologies. In other words, the convertibility of *Shabad* creates possibilities that enable us to simultaneously locate and dislocate the meaning of being both in its material existence and transcendence. This process in the Sikh lexicon is experienced in the *Naam* primacy of *Shabad* allowing for the emptying of signifiers as soon as they become loaded with static meanings in historical unfolding. Thus, *Shabad* gets recontextualized and reemergent in *Naam*, escaping the totalizing grasp of 'epistemizing ontologies.'

While appreciating the primacy of *Naam* in *Shabad* philosophy, we endeavor to prepare a turf, or rather an ecosystem, that enables cultivation of fresh meanings to blossom in this landscape of *Shabadārth*. Fostering reflections about religion and philosophy, we make this platform available to scholars and critical thinkers, who can assist in nurturing the journey of self-excitation. Although we prefer well-narrated flow of arguments, we will continue to prioritize content over form. Therefore, ample opportunity shall be provided to young scholars who wish to publish research papers that are rigorously researched and present original arguments.

In closing, it is pertinent to mention that the range of the discourses that can be expected from *Shabadārth* can be drawn in the light of the influences that determine the vision discussed above. Considering the influences that shape our experiences in the embodied worldhood we inherit, there is indeed an urge to liberate ourselves from the bindings of our conditioned being. Not only does this require recontextualizing the ontologies of our age, but also developing authentic epistemologies that create new possibilities and dispensations beyond the dialectics of colonialism, postcolonialism, or ethnic studies, without undermining the historical contributions that these domains continue to offer. Transcending

various ideological foundations, these influences will enable us to maintain originality in this involving endeavor. Therefore, besides being approachable in the secular discourses of life, we are undauntingly unapprehensive to accommodate the classic modes of theorizing and philosophizing 'the discourse'. To advance this initiative, we are dedicated to fostering a paradoxical subject-object relationship while weaving connections beyond established frameworks, which some might consider as a daunting overreach. Yet, with an involved [un]conscious, we cater to the demand to unwind the exercise of human intellect, exploring the horizons that remain less attended. Lastly, we are indebted to Prof. Jagdish Singh for fostering the academic acumen of many of the authors and who has always remained an inspiration figure in the publication of this unique Journal of Religion and Philosophy.

References

1. Himat Singh, *Mega Vision Mega Philosophy* (Patiala: Akali Kaur Singh Trust, 1999), 20.
2. Singh, *Mega Vision Mega Philosophy*, 26.