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## Betting on God: Applying Pascal's Wager to the *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

In the *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji*, there are several lines which indicate that the individual should bet on God and not gamble on the World. The purpose of this article is to examine this unexplored metaphor in the sacred text itself. To do this, the article will turn to Western philosophy arguing that both Western diaspora Sikhs and non-Sikhs can benefit from the Western intellectual framework. This framework already has a significant scholarship on wagering on God, notably Blaise Pascal's famous argument. Specifically, this article will examine Pascal's wager to assist in analysing the concepts of betting and gambling in the *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji*. Furthermore, William Wood's examination of the wager as a form of artful rhetoric will also be applied to this study. Ultimately, this article intends to show that the thoughts of Pascal and the selected subsequent scholarship can facilitate a deeper understanding of belief and faith in the *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji*.

**Keywords:** *God, Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, Sikh, Sikh Philosophy, Pascal's Wager.*

### Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyse a metaphor in *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji* (AG)<sup>3</sup> which advises that individuals should bet on God rather than gamble on the World. The reason for this recommendation is that if we bet on God then we are betting on God's truth and *Naam* (name) whereas gambling on *Maya* (worldly illusions) means risking our life on deception and falsehood. In the AG, the metaphor of betting

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<sup>2</sup> I owe a large debt to my son Eric ("Bambino") who passed away on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 11 days old. His strength is inspirational to me. As I sat down next to him to recite various Sikh prayers with Bambino in the Neonatal Unit, I thought about several themes which occur in this article. So, I want to thank him for being with me as I thought about certain parts of this article. I would like to thank Dr. Andrew Field (University of Surrey) who read an earlier draft of this work and provided invaluable feedback on how to make my argument clearer. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers and editors at the *Sikh Research Journal* who provided me with excellent feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>3</sup> The references to the *Adi Guru Granth Sahib ji* (AG) were accessed through the Sri Granth online resource developed by Punjab University, Patiala, available at: [www.srigranth.org](http://www.srigranth.org). There are three important things to note regarding my use of the primary sacred text from this online resource. First, I have chosen to use the term *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* instead of the terminology of either the *Adi Granth* (the first compilation by Guru Arjan Dev Ji) or the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. This decision is not to conflate terms but to recognize the cultural, historical, and theological context of the sacred text especially as it has been referred to in my family. This choice is not meant to critique or judge other scholarly or personal terminologies but to honor the rich history of the text. Second, I want to caveat that the translations from the Sri Granth online resource include certain phrases and terms that carry a colonial context, such as the term 'Hell.' The focus of my article, however, is not to conduct a piece of etymology or philology. Rather, I want to examine the concept of the bet and gamble in the AG. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that some of the English translations in this article cannot be seen without their colonial context. Finally, I also want to bring to the reader's attention that Jeevan Singh Deol (2001) highlighted several issues regarding the textual history of the AG, noting that the 'textual study of the *Adi Granth* has generated a great deal of initial hostility and resistance' which has 'yet to be overcome' (p. 35). Deol continues by stating that there have been 'issues connected with the printing of the text' (p. 35) which has 'degenerated into harsh invective and, occasionally, outright hostility' (p. 36). He bravely references the examples of Piar Singh and Pashaura Singh, who were 'excommunicated' and 'given symbolic religious punishment[s]', and G. B. Singh who was beaten for authoring manuscripts of the AG (p. 36). Therefore, I elected to use references from this online resource, focusing on the theological content of the AG rather than engaging in examining the controversy and politics surrounding the sacred text.

serves as a spiritual tool to cultivate belief and faith in God and in God's truth and name Conversely, if the individual gambles on the World, and falling into the traps of Maya, then they deny God's truth.

In Western philosophy, we can see a similar use of the betting metaphor in Blaise Pascal's thought. For Pascal, when deciding whether God does or does not exist, it is more prudent to wager on God's existence. On first encounter, it may seem unconvincing or even a futile exercise to connect Pascal's wager to the bet mentioned in the AG. After all, the AG is considered a *living* sacred text, while Pascal's thought is the work of a mortal human. Also, there are significant cultural differences between the two bodies of work, and the context in which they function and operate. Furthermore, there is a theological tension as Pascal held that the 'Christian religion alone is appropriate for all' (Pascal 1670: Fragment 219, 70).

This article intends to use Pascal's wager, along with selected scholarly interpretations of it, to inform an examination of the metaphor of betting and gambling in the AG. It is not my intention to argue that the entirety of Pascal's thought is in harmony with the AG and the tenets of the Sikh religion. Instead, my intention in this article is to show that it is a valuable exercise to apply established Western philosophical thought to understand uncharted areas of the AG.

This article will argue that the concepts of betting and gambling in the AG should be taken with great seriousness. These concepts, which Sikh theologians have largely overlooked, are crucial to initiate a discussion of the significance and role of betting and gambling in the AG when it comes to believing in God. The reason for using Pascal is that there is already a body of thought on the wager and the belief in God. Although originating from a Western perspective, Pascal's thoughts can still serve as an intellectual compass to help us better understand the complexities and depth of the AG, particularly in relation to the concept of betting on God.

Furthermore, there is an emerging use of Western thought in Sikh theological and philosophical discourse. Gurbachan Singh Sachdeva, for example, cites several Western philosophical and scientific thinkers to create a better understanding of the AG's revelations on the Universe and its origins. This approach is part of Sachdeva's overall message that Sikh thinkers need to 'dig deeper, thoughtfully and reverentially, to interpret the true meaning [of the AG]' (Sachdeva 2012: 280). Ultimately, for Sachdeva, the incorporation of diverse thought and resources will 'stimulate greater research for transcendental revelation' (p. 280) of the AG.

This article intends, to an extent, to align with Sachdeva's approach by incorporating broader and more diverse thinking and resources to provide a deeper insight into the theology of the AG. In doing so, however, I am consciously distancing myself from Arvind-Pal S. Mandair who prefers to elevate 'Sikh philosophy' over 'Sikh theology.' Mandair writes:

[T]he idiom of philosophy can enable us to think and experience an infinite repetition of the 'original' moment, but differently each time, never as repetition of the same. Sikh philosophy is able to do this because it allows access to the realm of the impersonal (the not-I, or non-ego) without eradicating the personal (which keeps the ego intact). By

contrast, 'Sikh theology', and the idiom of theology in general, is unable to do this, as it absolutely needs to privilege the 'original' moment of revelation. (Mandair 2015: 179)

Although there are merits to Mandair's position, it unfortunately does not acknowledge the ways in which theology can benefit philosophical exploration. By integrating Pascal's thought into our study of the AG, I intend to initiate further examination of the AG's theology through these philosophical methods.

I will begin by outlining the five key ways in which Pascal's thoughts, and selected subsequent scholarship on the wager, relate to the AG. These connections form a thematic thread which runs through my article illustrating how the AG utilises the metaphor of betting and gambling to cultivate and sustain the belief in God. Thereafter, I shall examine Pascal's wager itself, opting to not examine the probabilistic dimensions of the wager but rather through the lens of William Wood's interpretation of Pascal's project. I choose to emphasise Wood's perspective because his constructive interpretation of Pascal's wager can situate itself within the wider Pascalian scholarship. Notably, it aligns with the scholarship which suggests that Pascal's wager helps the individual to cultivate and sustain their belief in God rather than following the traditional probabilistic arguments. The fact that Wood focuses more on the artistic metaphor over the probabilistic dimensions of the wager makes his perspective more applicable to my analysis of the bet and the gamble in the AG.

In this article, we will see that Wood views Pascal's wager as an artistic and persuasive argument which deviates from the traditional arguments for God's existence. This article will not explore the entirety of Wood's excellent argument. Instead, it will focus on a particular part of it which concerns the use of language to create a convincing argument to maintain the belief in God. Wood's insights on Pascal's wager will underpin much of my analysis of the bet and the gamble in the AG.

In doing so, I shall not argue that the bet is an argument for the existence of God. Moreover, I will not specifically examine the contours of the bet itself. The central objective of my argument is to show that the sacred text uses an artistic metaphor to encourage the individual not only to bet on God but also to *keep betting and believing* in God. Consequently, this article will examine constituents of the bet such as meditation and remembrance of God, the concept of *asking* God for a bet to establish a transcendent rapport between the individual and God, and the consequences of gambling on Maya. Ultimately, I argue that the bet in the AG functions as an artistic metaphor to bet and keep betting and believing in God, establishing a constant practice of prayer and faith in God through Gurbani.

Later in this article, I will acknowledge that there are limited references to betting in the AG. While this is a significant limitation, it does not imply that the metaphor of the bet should be ignored. This limitation, however, does mean that I will not analyse the contours, conditions, or the nature of the bet itself in this article. Instead, the purpose of this article is to show that we should approach the bet in the AG with great care and seriousness. Therefore, this article intends to initiate an exploration of the bet within the AG. My intention is to offer a perspective on the bet that future scholars and thinkers can further examine and elaborate upon.

Before I analyse betting and gambling in the AG, it is essential to understand what the AG is and its role in Sikh theology. This is particularly important because, although the AG advocates for betting on God, it does not imply that the individual should bet on the AG itself, despite the theological tenet in Sikhism that recognises it as a living sacred text. Consequently, I shall first define the AG. Thereafter, I shall provide an interpretative context to my argument from a Sikh perspective. I will then explore the artistic metaphor of betting and gambling in the AG. From this exploration, I will examine the AG's guidance on why we should bet on God and not gamble on Maya. This article will also explore the inescapability of this cosmic choice in the AG and how betting on God is a constant spiritual practice that cultivates belief in God. I will conclude by discussing how Pascal's wager, along with the selected subsequent scholarship, can enhance our understanding of certain aspects of Sikh theology.

### **The Five Connections Between the AG and Pascal's Wager**

This article argues for five key connections between Pascal's wager and the metaphor of betting and gambling in the AG. First, I shall argue that both arguments are in the form of an artistic metaphor which is the central premise in my argument. The second connection is that both present prudential arguments to bet and to *keep betting and believing* in God. The AG advocates that the individual should bet on God because everything else is gambling on Maya. Similarly, Pascal posits that it is the individual's 'best bet' (Hájek 1998) to wager on God. The function of the betting metaphor in both sources is to argue that we ought to cultivate and sustain our belief in God.

The third connection is that both sources present an inescapable choice for the individual. In both accounts, the individual is compelled to decide. With Pascal, there is a coin being spun at the edge of infinity. In the AG, there is a cosmic game of dice where the consequences reside in the individual's body. For Pascal, the individual is forced to wager regardless of their belief in God. Similarly, the AG explains that the individual is born into the game where they are continually tempted by the illusory and treacherous Maya. Therefore, the individual must decide whether they bet (and maintain their bet) on God or gamble on Maya.

The fourth connection relates to human passions. For Pascal, human passions can prevent the individual from believing in God. The AG mirrors such a sentiment. According to the AG, the human passions will cause the individual to lose the game of life by drawing them to gamble on Maya. In both the AG's concept of the bet and Pascal's wager, human passions prevent the individual from believing in God.

The final connection concerns the constant and ongoing cultivation of belief. Both the AG and Pascal hold similar sentiments about belief in God: that belief means constantly betting on God, and that this requires a life of authentic meditation and focus on God. This spiritual practice must be sustained to avoid the risks of gambling on Maya, which tempts individuals through their passions.

Before unpacking our analysis into Pascal's wager and the metaphor of gambling in the AG, and keeping these five connections in mind, I want to emphasise that my argument is not intended to prove the existence of God. I do not propose that Pascal's wager should be employed to construct an argument for

God's existence within the AG. Rather, I focus on the aspect of the wager which concerns sustaining one's belief in God, which is pertinent to our study of the AG. Specifically, after betting on God, the individual needs to keep betting on God because it *is* the best bet. The individual must constantly remind themselves that it is the best bet and persist in betting on God. In doing so, the individual will keep believing in God. Later in the analysis, I will show that this dimension of the wager is useful when exploring the betting metaphor in the AG.

In making this argument, I recognise that there are significant cultural differences between Pascal and the AG. To force a connection between these cultural and literary traditions would undermine my overall argument. Therefore, to examine the cultural context of a particular *shabad* (prayer) in relation to Pascal's wager would not be beneficial. Similarly, aligning certain features of Pascal's notion of a fallen world and making a tenuous connection to the concept of Maya in the AG would not be useful when examining the sacred text itself.

Transitioning from the cultural to language differences, my intention is not to compare the linguistic traditions of each discourse, as it beyond the remit of the article, which aims to examine the betting metaphor which convinces the individual to bet and keep betting and believing in God. It is important to note, however, that 'Sikhism does not have a sacred language identity and uses Persian, Arabic, English and many other languages to vehicle its message to the community' (Rajdeep Singh 2018). Rajdeep Singh states that this 'balanced language identity helps it [Sikhism] to grow under different conditions and to attract people from other ethnicities' (Rajdeep Singh 2018). He continues: 'The comparison between the Sikh [sic] and the Christian faith clearly shows how language plays an extremely important role in the formation and continuation of religions despite the differences in geography and ethnicity' (Rajdeep Singh 2018). This article acknowledges and values the linguistic differences between Pascal and the AG, as the language of the AG allows the 'religion to grow and have followers from diverse ethnic backgrounds' (Rajdeep Singh 2018) without 'the mediation of a priestly class' (Nirvikar Singh 2018: 1) when approaching the AG.

### **Pascal's Wager**

This section shall briefly explore Pascal's wager, which involves an imaginary dialogue between a believer and an unbeliever. All references to Pascal in this discussion are taken from Fragment 418 of Pascal's *Pensées*, titled: '*Infinity – nothing*' (Pascal 1670: Fragment 418, 121).

Echoing Wood, this section intends to interpret Pascal's wager 'as an example of artful and persuasive rhetoric, and not just as an example of probabilistic reasoning' (Wood 2004: 528). While the entirety of Wood's argument will not be explored in this section, we will specifically focus on how Wood analyses the believer's, or, as he understands Pascal, the Christian believer's use of language when speaking the unbeliever in Fragment 418. For Wood, the Christian's artful and 'subtle linguistic tricks' (Wood 2004: 529) show the falseness of the unbeliever's conclusion 'that his bodily existence makes God unintelligible to him' (p. 530). In subsequent sections, I will show how this interaction between the believer and the unbeliever is relevant when examining the metaphor of the bet and gamble in the AG.

The validity of Wood's interpretation is not the primary concern of this article. Instead, my argument sees Wood's argument as part of the wider Pascalian scholarship which analyses the dimension of the wager which concerns sustaining the belief in God even with the wager itself. In other words, my argument centres on how once the unbeliever is convinced, the wager itself keeps convincing the now-converted believer to keep believing in God. This is because, like Pascal's wager, the AG not only uses a similar betting metaphor but advocates that the individual should cultivate and constantly practice spiritual wisdom through reflection on God. The following quote, albeit lengthy, contextualises how Wood sees Pascal's wager:

Pascal criticises traditional arguments for God's existence on the grounds that they are too remote from human experiences and, hence, unattractive. At the same time, he criticises the imagination for its often deceptive attractiveness. An ideal apologetic argument, therefore, would be one that harnesses the attractive forms produced by the imagination to the true claims of natural theology. Pascal presents just such an argument in fragment 418, the wager fragment, entitled 'Infini-Rien' (infinity-nothing). (Wood 2004: 528)

For Wood, in the debate between the Christian and the unbeliever 'the cognitive barrier between human beings and God lies in the fact that we, unlike God, "have extension"' (Wood 2004: 529). The unbeliever acknowledges 'that we can conceptualise limitlessness but only limitless extension' (p. 529). Pascal's Christian 'must undermine this idea if the unbeliever is to believe that God exists' (p. 529). According to Wood, Pascal does this by undermining the unbeliever's 'concept of self' (p. 529).

The use of the term 'infinite' is an important tactic for the Christian, especially since the wager 'is set in a context that questions how infinity is intelligible' (Wood 2004: 529). Wood charts how the Christian deploys the word infinite, which the unbeliever gradually comprehends as a concept, 'before concluding with the phrase "infinite prize"' (p. 530). It is in the unbeliever's progressive understanding of the infinite, and specifically the infinite prize, that Wood insightfully presents Pascal's intention of leading the unbeliever to 'be able to understand God' (p. 530). This leads Wood to argue:

But if he [the unbeliever] can understand this concept of God, then he himself must not be the sort of being that he once thought. The probabilistic sections of fragment 418 do not convert the unbeliever, but demonstrate to him that the barriers to his belief come from his mistaken conceptions of the self. The unbeliever is so attached to 'noxious pleasure, glory, and good living' that he identifies his true self with the body and then falsely concludes that his bodily existence makes God unintelligible to him. (Wood 2004: 530)

From Wood's analysis, we can see how Pascal deviates from traditional arguments for God's existence, which he rejects, to develop arguments that focus on persuading and convincing the unbeliever. One explanation for this shift stems from Pascal's belief that God's nature is 'beyond our comprehension' (Pascal 1670: 122). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to analyse Wood's argument on

developing an attractive 'rapport' (Wood 2004: 520) with God, we can see that using artful rhetoric is integral to Pascal's project. There is drama inherent in the presentation of the wager. Pascal writes:

[L]et us say: 'Either God is or he is not.' But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question. Infinite chaos separates us. At the far end of this infinite distance a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you wager? Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong. (Pascal 1670: 122)

The unbeliever replies: '[t]he right is not to wager at all' (Pascal 1670: 123). The Christian, however, responds: 'Yes, but you must wager. There is no choice, you are already committed' (p.123). This exchange underscores an inescapable choice that every individual must make. They *must* decide and choose whether God exists or not. The coin is being spun at the 'far end' of the 'infinite chaos', which is beyond our control and reason. Hereafter, Pascal presents his probabilistic justification for wagering on God. I argue, however, like Wood, that probabilistic reasons do not convert the unbeliever. Rather, it is Pascal's artistic use of metaphor and rhetoric that not only convinces the unbeliever but also keeps persuading the believer to bet on God.

The unbeliever, admits the truth of the Christian's explanation but still pleads to the Christian: '[B]ut is there really no way of seeing what the cards are?' The Christian replies: 'Yes. Scripture and the rest, etc.' (Pascal 1670: 124). Despite this, the unbeliever still struggles with their belief in God, particularly because they are 'being forced to wager.' The Christian's response provides an insight into the wager:

That is true, but at least get it into your head that, if you are unable to believe, it is because of your passions, since reason impels you to believe and yet you cannot do so. Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God's existence but by diminishing your passions...which are your great obstacles. (Pascal 1670: 124-125)

The individual's passions and their attachment to 'noxious pleasures, glory and good living' (Pascal 1670: 125) are obstacles to their sustained belief in God. In the pursuit of acquiring belief in God, 'Pascal recommends that we embark on a course of praxis' (Cottingham in Honderich 2005: 683) which will make the individual believe, and keep betting and believing, in God. In other words, one should behave 'just as if' you 'did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally and will make you more docile' (Pascal 1670: 125). This course of action will yield benefits to the individual. They will become 'faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works, a sincere, true friend... It is true you will not enjoy noxious pleasures, glory and good living, but will you not have others?' (Pascal 1670: 125).

According to Richard Tarnas, Pascal 'faced with his own religious doubts and philosophical skepticism, the leap of faith necessary to sustain Christian belief had become a wager' (Tarnas 1991: 303). For Pascal, God needs to be 'approached via a living tradition of faith' (Cottingham in Honderich 2005: 683). Thus, the



wager not only encourages the individual sustain their belief in God but also provides a framework for the individual to keep betting and believing in God.

Alan Hájek writes that '[b]elieving in God is presumably one way to wager for God... the act of genuine striving already displays a pureness of heart that God would fully reward' (Hájek 1998). It is not the case that you would be rewarded for 'wagering for God momentarily then wagering against God thereafter; nor that you would be infinitely rewarded for wagering for God sporadically' (Hájek 1998). Instead, the individual needs to sustain their wager on God which can be enhanced by 'adopting a certain set of practices and living the kind of life that fosters belief in God' (Hájek 1998). Crucially, according to Hájek, Pascal's objective is to show 'that *we ought to believe* in God, rather than that God *exists*. And he seeks to provide *prudential* reasons rather than *evidential* reasons for believing in God. To put it simply, we should wager that God exists because it is the *best bet*' (Hájek 1998).

Here, we start to see the connections between Pascal's wager and the AG. For both the AG and Pascal, believing in God is considered the 'best bet' and the individual should constantly cultivate belief in God by betting on God. The uniqueness of both is that their arguments utilise a persuasive metaphor. In the following sections, I delve deeper into the bet and gamble in the AG which are similar to, using Wood's phraseology, Pascal's linguistic and artful techniques.

### Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji

The AG is the primary sacred text of the Sikh religion. The prefix '*Adi*', meaning 'first', distinguishes it from the *Dasam Granth*, a subsequent Sikh scripture. In addition, the term '*Guru*', translated as 'Teacher', is pivotal and has three integral features relevant to understanding God. First, 'Guru' can refer directly to God with the term '*Sat-Guru*' specifically referring to God being the *True-Guru*. Second, it refers to the ten successive human Gurus to whom God's truth was revealed. Finally, Guru pertains to the AG itself where the lineage of human Guruship is sealed and the text becomes the authority for Divine access and revelation.

Moving ahead a little, this article primarily focuses on the first and third aspects. It argues that the individual should 'bet' on God or the *Sat-Guru* and, more importantly, this does not mean betting on the AG itself despite its authoritative status in revealing God's truth. In other words, the AG teaches the individual to bet on God above all else and not gamble on Maya.

To better appreciate how and why the individual should bet on God, we need to examine the theological dimensions of the Sikh religion. The AG opens with the *Mul Mantar*<sup>4</sup>, which reveals several key tenets in Sikh theology:

*Ik oaankār saṭ nām kartā purakhḥ nirabhḥao niravair akāl mūrtaḥ ajūnī saibḥa gur parsād.*

<sup>4</sup> The *Mul Mantar* is the term to encapsulate the opening lines of the AG.

There is one God. The Name is truth. Creative Being personified. Without fear. Without hate. Timeless in form. Beyond birth. Self-existent. (Known by) the grace of the Guru. (AG:1)

Although each of these terms requires thorough examination, this article will briefly focus on five specific terms relevant to the study of the bet and gamble in the AG. The terms 'Timeless in form', 'Beyond birth', and 'Self-existent' suggest that God transcends the phenomenal world. Meanwhile, 'The Name is truth' and '(Known by) the grace of the Guru' highlight that without the revelation of God, God and God's truth would not be known. Crucially, without the 'grace of the Guru', individuals would not be able to epistemically access God. The revelation of God's 'Name' and 'truth' to Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Guru, bridges God's transcendence. The AG documents the revelation of God to the Gurus. It provides a pathway to God through scripture. Consequently, a textual analysis of the AG thus provides an insight into believing in and understanding God.

The textual study of the AG, however, is not without controversy and has received significant resistance. On this issue, Jeevan Singh Deol writes:

There are, as is to be expected, a number of reasons for this strong resistance to the textual study of the Adi Granth, the most prominent being that the doctrine of the Granth as Guru appears to have produced a strong reluctance to interrogate its textual history. (Deol 2001: 34)

The textual history and origins of the AG are rooted in Sikh tradition. We learn from this tradition that Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the Fifth Guru, compiled the first version of the AG. Additionally, it was Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the Tenth Guru, who ended the *human* Guru line and declared the AG a *living* sacred text (Deol 2001; P. Singh 1996).<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the textual history of the AG. If this article, however, intends to explore the concept of the gamble in the AG, then we need to establish what we are betting on. This clarification allows us to discern the fundamental distinction between betting on God rather than on the AG despite its status as the sealed Guruship. In other words, betting on the AG rather than God is another form of gamble. With this understanding, I will now provide an interpretative context to my argument.

### **Interpreting the Bet**

In this section, I outline the particular Sikh scriptural interpretative technique that I will use in my argument. In doing so, my intention is to look at Sikh scriptural interpretation broadly to understand this artistic metaphor of betting on God.

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<sup>5</sup> For further information on the textual history of the AG see Jeevan Singh Deol (2001) and Pashaura Singh (1996)

The Sikh philosophy of *Gurmat*<sup>6</sup> has been reinterpreted as '*prnālīan* – literally systems, techniques or schools of interpretation' (Mandair 2022: 25).<sup>7</sup> Mandair provides an insightful elaboration on this term, stating:

*Prnālīan* are relatively distinct but continuous techniques of exegetical, interpretative, translational practice – continuous in the sense that interpretative activity has been going on since the time of Guru Nanak – each distinguished by one or more dominant thinkers or techniques of learning reaching to changing historical contexts and challenges. (Mandair 2022: 25)

It would be beyond the scope of this article to focus on how each 'successive *prnālī*' (Mandair 2022: 25) operates. It is essential, however, to recognise, as Mandair does, that each *prnālī* is considered a 'thought-practice rather than as strictly hermeneutical schools' (p. 25) focusing on 'the Word of the Guru as embodied in Sikh scripture (*śabda-guru* as [Adi] Guru Granth Sahib [Ji])' (p. 3). This 'thought-practice' is central to my argument of the artistic metaphor in the AG.

Since I am exploring the broader application of an artistic metaphor, I will not use a scriptural interpretative method which focuses solely on the literal meanings of specific words. In Sikh exegetical practice, such a technique is referred to as "*śabda arth*" (meaning of the words) which provides synonyms as well as the meanings of difficult words in a particular hymn' (Pashaura Singh in Mandair 2022: 25). Overemphasising the meanings of words like 'bet', 'wager', or 'gamble', and their equivalents in the AG such as '*hod*' or '*jūa*', would diminish the *spiritual impact* of the metaphor in the Guru's utterances (*gurbānī*). This is because overly focusing on the meanings and etymology would shift our focus away from understanding the 'function of the body-mind complex as a receptacle of the effects of *gurbānī*' (Mandair 2022: 26) due to the 'poetry of the Sikh Gurus' (p. 25). If we adopt 'a narrow clerical method of textual analysis or philology' then we could risk moving away from the 'kind of thought-practice taught by the Sikh Gurus (*gurmat*)' which falls under the 'scope of... *prnālī*' (p.26).

Instead of focusing narrowly on meanings and etymology, my analysis will focus on the poetic metaphor of the bet in AG. I want to align myself with the 'broader activity of interpretative thinking called *vichār*, or when applied more specifically to the poetry of the Sikh Gurus, called *gurbānī vichār* or *śabda vichār* (lit. contemplative reflection on the Guru's Word)' (Mandair 2022: 25). My argument intends to show that the metaphor of the bet in the AG, similar to Pascal's wager, is an artistic and metaphorical tool to help the individual 'acquire practice wisdom (*aql, siānap*)' (p. 97). In turn, the individual will foster a deeper sense of reflective thinking (*mananā*) which evolves into *bibēk vichār*. According to Mandair, *bibēk vichār* is 'awakened or enlightened thinking, which is the kind of thought process associated with the *gurmukh*' (p.97). Mandair addresses a common misconception relating to the *Gurmukh* that supports my argument:

<sup>6</sup> For Mandair, the meaning of *gurmat* 'incorporates, but is by no means limited to, the Guru's instruction, the wisdom of the Guru, the Gurus' system or logic; the Gurus' philosophy of life as a whole; the teachings of the Guru' (Mandair 2022: 22)

<sup>7</sup> Mandair refers to Taran Singh's text *Gurbānī Dīan Viākhīā prnālīan* as 'the first systematic attempt to survey the major systems of Sikh scriptural interpretation' (Mandair 2022: 25).

There is a mistaken tendency to think that the gurmukh does not need to think, that she or he expresses merely poetic or aesthetic sensibility. In fact the Sikh Gurus use the word a great deal in their writings, and it is used almost always in a positive sense, indicating that the gurmukh does indeed indulge in thought, albeit with the difference that her speech/actions/desires do not emanate from ego, but from a different psychic structure. It is a thought process that is intrinsically imbued with aesthetic feeling, affect, and is therefore in tune with the cosmic processes of hukam [God's will/command/order].  
(Mandair 2022: 96)

I argue that the bet in the AG serves as an artistic metaphor designed to initiate a reflective thought process which leads to a higher orientation of thoughts towards God. This interpretation, together with Wood's thoughts, shows how the bet in the AG aligns with Pascal's wager. Therefore, I will not adopt an interpretative model that only focuses on the meanings of the words, whether in the AG or in Pascal's writings. Furthermore, I will neither explain the content of the bet in the AG nor elaborate on Pascal's wager beyond its use as an artistic metaphor. This decision stems not only from my focus on the poetic metaphor present in both sources but also from other reasons which I shall outline next.

While it is tempting to adopt the *śabda arth* approach, which involves looking at the meaning of words, when examining the bet and gamble in the AG, I will refrain from doing so. The main reason is that the *śabda arth* approach could lead to further uncertainty and speculative interpretations given the flexible and varied use of *jūa* ("gamble") and the limited use of *hod* ("bet" or "wager") in the sacred text. Consequently, this method does not allow us to gain a deeper insight into the meaning and distinction between *hod* and *jūa*.

Further complexities arise when we start introducing terms from one language into another. For example, if we incorporate English or French meanings into the scriptural language of the AG, then this would be an unsuitable methodology because we would fail to achieve a definite equivalency between the languages. This is especially the case with the Gurmukhi script which is composed of various languages and dialects. If we were to explore these uncertainties then it would divert us from the objective of this article which is not to focus purely on the meanings, distinctions, and substitutions of words of the relevant languages within the context of the bet in the AG and Pascal's writings. Consequently, I will not argue that *hod* has a distinctive meaning which makes it equivalent to Pascal's wager, as this would lead us into an exercise of etymology and philology. Such a focus would shift our attention away from the poetic and artistic metaphor of the bet itself which, I argue, is found in both the AG and Pascal's writings.

Rather, I propose that if we consider the wider concepts in the AG, we can better understand why an individual should bet on God and not gamble on Maya. In particular, exploring the concepts of remembrance and forgetting offers a framework to distinguish between betting on God and not gambling on Maya. In relation to remembrance, the AG states:

*Kaho Nānak bhaj har manā parai na jam kī fās.*

Says Nanak, meditate, vibrate upon the Lord, and you shall not be caught in the noose of death. (AG: 1426)

This is complemented by another line:

*Kaho Nānak bhaj har manā aodh jāṭ hai bīṭ*

Says Nanak, listen, mind: meditating in remembrance on Him, salvation is attained.

(AG: 1426)

These verses indicate that remembrance is an important feature of an individual's meditation on God. If an individual remembers God in their meditation, then they will not be trapped in the 'noose of death', which in Sikh theology symbolises that they will return to the world of Maya. By *choosing* to remember God in their meditation, they will achieve 'salvation.' In other words, they are liberated from Maya along with its forms of deception and attachment. This remembrance will also help the individual appreciate how God operates in their lives. For example, the AG states:

*Fan dhan sampai sukh dō ar jih nīke dhām. Kaho Nānak sun re manā simraṭ kāhi na rām.*

He has given you your body, wealth, property, peace and beautiful mansions. Says Nanak, listen, mind: Why don't you remember the Lord in meditation? (AG: 1426)

This verse suggests that if an individual remembers God in relation to their worldly affairs, then they do not risk forgetting about God. Conversely, the AG provides the individual with consequences of forgetting God:

*Nānak har bisrāṁ kai paudē narak anḍhyār.*

O Nanak, forgetting the Lord, they fall into the deep dark pit of Hell. (AG: 1426)

The concept of 'Hell' in the AG extends beyond the remit of this article, but it is pertinent to my argument as Hell has an important connection with Maya. In the AG, we see that the 'intoxication of Maya leads the others to Hell' (AG: 196)<sup>8</sup> which is 'the place of the ungrateful'<sup>9</sup> (AG: 315). At the same time, however, the AG advises that the individual should not 'be afraid to live in Hell'<sup>10</sup> (AG: 337). The reason for such guidance is that we can navigate our way through Hell by remembering God for 'Hell and disease do not afflict one who joins the Company of the Lord's humble servants, O Nanak; the Lord attaches him to the hem of His robe'<sup>11</sup> (AG: 531).

Here, we can see that meditation on God requires the act of remembrance. In essence, we need to constantly remember God as we navigate the world; otherwise, we risk forgetting about God. If we forget about God will return to Maya which will lead us to Hell. This danger is highlighted in the text:

<sup>8</sup> *Māiā magan narak lai jāi.*

<sup>9</sup> *Narak ghor baho dukh ghaṇe akiraṭ ghaṇā kā thān.* The full translation is 'In the most horrible Hell, there is terrible pain and suffering. It is the place of the ungrateful.'

<sup>10</sup> *Surag bās na bāchhīai darīai na narak nivās.* The full translation is 'Don't wish for a home in heaven, and don't be afraid to live in Hell.'

<sup>11</sup> *Narak rog nahī hovaṭ jan sang Nānak jis laṭ lāvai.*

*Sāḍhsang bhaj parmānaḍ. Narak nivār udhārahu jīo.*

In the Company of the Holy, meditate on the Lord of supreme bliss. You shall be spared from Hell – save your soul. (AG: 295)

It is a risk, or gamble, to forget God because the stakes are high. Conversely, it is less of a gamble and safer to remember God. I argue that it is not only safer but also the best bet to bet on God because it ensures the individual will save their soul and be 'spared from Hell'. Instead of getting into the probabilistic elements of this conclusion, I will show how the AG encapsulates this idea through artistic metaphor, similar to Wood's argument. This correlation between betting and remembering God is also evident in the following passage:

*Hukmai būjhai chaupaḍ khelai man jīḍ dhāle pāsā. Jo jan jān bhajēh abigaḍ kao tin kā kachhū na nāsā. Kaho Kabīr ṭe jan kabahu na hārēh dhāl jo jānēh pāsā.*

When one understands the Hukam of the Lord's Command, he plays the game of *chaupaḍ* with the Lord; throwing the dice, he conquers his own mind. Those humble beings, who know the Imperishable Lord and meditate on Him, are not destroyed at all. Says Kabeer, those humble beings who know how to throw these dice, never lose the game of life.

(AG: 793)

We can now tentatively show how betting on God correlates with remembering and meditating on God. If you remember and meditate on God, then you are backing the "winning" dice. The 'game of life' is thereby *won*. On the other hand, if you approach life by gambling on Maya, that is, by forgetting God, then you are backing the "losing" dice.

With this in mind, we are ready to examine the concept of the bet and gamble in the AG. Before doing so, however, there are several important points to address regarding the bet itself. First, there is only one reference to betting in the AG, which means we must rely on one, concise expression of the bet. This restricts our ability look at other contexts or usage of the term to better grasp its meaning and implications. Second, we are provided with no information concerning the content of the bet in the AG. Later, we will see that the extent of our knowledge of the bet is that it is used in relation to God. Consequently, we cannot definitively equate the content of Pascal's wager, which is a prudent bet on God to gain the infinite and losing the finite if it turns out that God does not exist, with the bet in the AG. The reason is that if we do not have a strong comprehension of the content of the bet in the AG then, at best, we will only speculate on how it connects to Pascal's wager.

Instead, I propose that the equivalence between the bet in the AG and Pascal's wager lies in their use as artistic and poetic metaphors. If we analyse the terms more deeply, then we can see that the AG uses the word *hod* in relation to God and can mean both "bet" and "wager." In addition, the Punjabi translation of *hod* is *saṭā* which also translates as "bet" and "wager." Moving forward, I will treat any references to betting as also pertaining to wagering. Furthermore, I will treat the term *hod* in the AG as equivalent to Pascal's wager since they are both used in an artistic and metaphorical sense. Additionally, the AG contains references to gambling, using the term *jūa* or *jūai* which translates as *gamble* or *gambling*. This

term, as we will see, is associated with the World and Maya, and not God. I will unpack these connections further in the following sections.

### **Bet on God; Do Not Gamble on *Maya***

Earlier, I mentioned that the AG recommends that the individual should bet on God, as anything else amounts to gambling on Maya. To be clear, this instruction appears neither literally nor explicitly in the AG. In the following sections, we will see several references to the gamble and gambling which refer only to the World and Maya, while references to betting are limited. In fact, as we shall see, there is only one reference to betting in the AG and it directly relates to God. Therefore, any AG exegesis, in terms of betting on God, should recognise this limitation.

Looking ahead a little, we will see that in the AG describes a scenario where the individual makes two requests: the first request is to play a game with God. The second request is for God to provide them with a bet. Here, we will see that in relation to God, the term *hod* (meaning "bet" or "wager") is used.

There is an important distinction in how the terms *hod*, *jūa*, or *jūai* are utilised which supports my central argument that we can interpret the AG as saying that we should bet (or wager) on God and not gamble on Maya. If the individual bets on God, then they are betting on God's truth and name (*Naam*). If the individual gambles on the World, however, then they are risking their life on the deceptive and illusory World (*Maya*). *Maya* is depicted as a violent force that manifests itself in the world. According to the AG, '*Maya* has drawn her bow without an arrow, and has pierced this world, O Siblings of Destiny' (AG: 332).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, *Maya* can deceive the individual into attaching and identifying their true self with this World. The AG shows the illusory strength of *Maya* in a metaphor:

*Sakaṭ adher jevrī bharam chūkā nihchal siv ghar bāsā.*

In the darkness of *Maya*, I mistook the rope for the snake, but that is over, and now I dwell in the eternal home of the Lord. (AG: 332)

This illusory strength of *Maya* is such that it can seize the mind like 'the parrot caught in the trap' (AG: 336).<sup>13</sup> The individual is so deceived and 'blinded'<sup>14</sup> (AG: 338) by *Maya* that they 'cling' (AG: 338)<sup>15</sup> to the World through their human desires, passions, and emotions. Although God 'created the world of *Maya* with its various colours and species' (AG: 347)<sup>16</sup>, the individual must overcome it and maintain their belief and faith in God for God represents truth and *Maya* embodies falseness. Consequently, the AG advocates that the individual should bet on the truth of God rather than gamble on the illusory *Maya*. There is a logical sequence in the AG which leads to this conclusion.

<sup>12</sup> *Tin bin bānai dhanakh chadhāiai ih jag beḡhiā bhāi.*

<sup>13</sup> *Jio nalnī sūatā gahio man baurā re māyā ih biuhār.*

<sup>14</sup> *Andhā*

<sup>15</sup> *Laptānā*

<sup>16</sup> *Rangī rangī bhātī jinsī māiā jin upāi.*

First, the AG warns that gambling can have a negative impact on the individual. The AG states that 'the gambler's addiction does not leave [the individual]' (AG: 838).<sup>17</sup> This addiction can have a detrimental impact on the individual's ability to focus on pursuing God for 'the gambler's consciousness is focused on gambling' (AG: 1180).<sup>18</sup> By focusing more on the gains that they can make in the phenomenal world, rather than pursuing and meditating on God, the AG contends that 'In the end, the gambler shall depart empty-handed' (AG: 1158).<sup>19</sup> Maya is intoxicating to the gambler to the extent that they ultimately lose as they are now focused more on the act of gambling itself rather than meditating on God.

Second, the AG morally condemns gamblers. It categorically states: 'Thieves, adulterers and gamblers are pressed like seeds in the mill' (AG: 1288)<sup>20</sup>, as they are invested in the phenomenal world. The gambler's conscious attention on gambling is categorised along with adultery, due to the instinctual pleasure or 'sensory desires' (AG: 212)<sup>21</sup> it initiates within the individual. The AG states: 'As the man driven by sex looks upon another man's wife and the gambler looks upon the throwing of the dice – In the same way, wherever [the believer] looks, he sees the Lord.' (AG: 873).<sup>22</sup> From this, we can see that when gambling dominates the conscious and instinctual actions of the individual then they will suffer negative consequences. The only way to overcome this is to 'Realise the word of the *shabad* [prayer], and cross over the terrifying world-ocean' (AG: 1288).<sup>23</sup>

The AG does discuss the concept of gambling in facilitating the *believing in* God but re-conceptualises it as betting. The individual is encouraged not only to play a game with God, for God's sake, but they should resolutely bet on God while doing so. The reason for this bet on believing in God is clear: if they do not bet on God then they *will* lose the game of life. The AG articulates this with the words: 'Says Nanak, you never even think of the Naam; you have lost the game of life in the gamble' (AG: 1243).<sup>24</sup> The reason for this loss is provided in the two preceding lines:

*Sāhib sabaḍ na ūchrai māiā moh pasārī*

You do not chant the Shabad, the Word of Your Lord and Master; you are attached to the expanse of Maya. Within, you are filled with greed and doubt; you wander around like a fool. (AG: 1243)

In essence, the individual loses the game of life by gambling on Maya. Rather, the individual should bet on God. Gambling is associated with actions and states of being that are deeply rooted in Maya and the phenomenal world. In the next section, we will examine why betting on God is a better course of action for the individual and how it effectively cultivates a belief in God.

<sup>17</sup> *Jio jūār bisan na jāe.*

<sup>18</sup> *Jūārī jūe māhi chīṭ.* In fact, two lines later the AG states that similar to the gambler's consciousness is focused on gambling, 'the humble servant of the Lord lives by meditating on the Lord' (*Tio har jan jivai har dhiāe.* AG: 1180).

<sup>19</sup> *Chale juārī due hath jhār.*

<sup>20</sup> *Chor jār jūār pīre ghāñāi.*

<sup>21</sup> *Indrī*

<sup>22</sup> *Jio bikhī herai par nārī kaudā dāraṭ hirai juārī jah jah dekḥau ṭah ṭah rāmā.*

<sup>23</sup> *Bhaojal tārāñhār sabaḍ pachhāñāi.*

<sup>24</sup> *Nānak nām na cheṭī jūai bājī hārī.*



## The Inescapable Game and the Bet on God

For both Pascal and the AG, an inescapable game is playing out in the infinite. Pascal proclaims that a coin is being spun on the edge of infinity. Similarly, the AG tells us of a cosmic game which intimately concerns life, as revealed in the following line: 'You [God] behold Your creation, like the losing and winning dice of the earth' (AG: 474).<sup>25</sup> God is, essentially, viewing the world *sub specie aeternitatis* (in a universal perspective). The sacred text reveals that from this perspective there is a cosmic game of 'dice' unfolding in the Universe. It is an infinite game which is deeply connected to life itself. Here is an important passage which substantiates this:

*Māiā kao lūjhēh gāvārī. Janam marēh jūai bājī hārī. Hamrai har dḥarā jē halaṭ palaṭ sabḥ savārī.*

Only fools argue over Maya. They are born and they die, and they lose the game of life in the gamble. My alliance is with the Lord who embellishes all in this world and the next.  
(AG: 366)

The AG elucidates that this infinite game is the game of life where the individual stakes their life. The individual must orient themselves towards God; otherwise, they will 'lose this precious human life in the gamble' as they 'do not understand the word of the shabad' (AG: 1155).<sup>26</sup> If the individual gambles on Maya and the phenomenal world, then they will lose 'the jewel of this human life in the gamble' (AG: 705).<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the AG calls human life a 'jewel'.<sup>28</sup> The significance of human life is equated with a worldly commodity which enhances the gambling metaphor. The individual stakes a jewel, their life, in the cosmic game.

Crucially, the result of this game resides in the body, as stated in the AG: 'Within the body, one loses, and within the body, one wins' (AG: 1066).<sup>29</sup> Here, the AG is identifying the body as the site for winning or losing.<sup>30</sup> Building on this, it states that the body can influence choices which are centred on human passions, cravings, and desires instead of focusing on and believing in God. To focus on bodily passions, cravings, and desires can result in the individual losing the infinite game and gamble as the individual is now focused on Maya.

The AG cautions that focusing on such passions will produce a losing result. Elaborating on the cosmic game, it states that the 'game of chance is played on the board of egotism, with the pieces of falsehood and ego' (AG: 422).<sup>31</sup> According to the AG, 'those who forsake Truth and cling to falsehood, lose their lives

<sup>25</sup> *Dekhēh kītā āpnā dḥar kachī pakī sārīai.*

<sup>26</sup> *Janam paḍārath jūai hārīā sabḍai suraṭ na pāi.*

<sup>27</sup> *Raṭan janam haranṭ jūai parabhū āp na bhāvḥi.*

<sup>28</sup> *Raṭan*

<sup>29</sup> *Kāiā vich totā kāiā vich lāhā.*

<sup>30</sup> Although Nietzsche was not influenced by Sikhism, we can see a similar sentiment in his philosophy concerning the body and the individual's psychological and physical life. We can see this idea most explicitly in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), I:17 and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-85), I:4.

<sup>31</sup> *Haumai chaupaṛ khelnā jhūṭhe ahakārā.*

in the gamble' (AG: 919).<sup>32</sup> In other words, the individual is turning away from God. Such an individual is described here:

*Guṇ chhod aaugaṇ kamāvde ḍarageh hohi khuār. Jūai janam ṭinī hāriā kiṭ āe sansār.  
Sachai sabaḍ man māriā ahinis nām piār.*

Forsaking virtue, they practice evil; they shall be miserable in the Court of the Lord. They lose their life in the gamble; why did they even come into the world? But those who conquer and subdue their minds through the True Word of the Shabad, night and day, they love the Naam. (AG: 1284)

If the individual 'cherishes in his consciousness the Guru's Teachings' (AG: 974)<sup>33</sup> then they do 'not lose his life in the gamble' (AG: 974).<sup>34</sup> The temptation of Maya, however, will entice the individual to gamble on the passions and Maya. If the individual succumbs to such passions, then they will lose in the cosmic game. The AG makes several references to this:

*Bharam bhulāṇā sabaḍ na chīnai jūai bājī hārī.*

He is deluded by doubt and does not remember the Word of the Shabad. He loses his life in the gamble. (AG: 1012)

*Gobind na bhajai ahanbudh māṭā janam jūai jio hārai.*

He does not vibrate and meditate on the Lord of the Universe; he is intoxicated with egotistical intellect. He loses his life in the gamble. (AG: 1205)

*Anṭar kroḍh jūai maṭ hārī.*

He is filled with anger within, and he loses his mind in the gamble. (AG: 314)

*Tarisanā jalaṭ na kabhū būjhēh jūai bājī hārī.*

His burning desire is never quenched, and he loses the game of life in the gamble. (AG: 1198)

Instead, the AG recommends meditating and cultivating consciousness on God. In essence, bet on God because gambling on Maya and your passions is not only risky, but a losing gamble. The AG states that 'The five hideous demons have run away. Do not lose your life in the gamble. The Creator Lord has taken Nanak's side' (AG: 866).<sup>35</sup> The 'five hideous demons', which are representative of Maya and sensory passions, lose to God's revelation. If an individual gambles on these five demons, then they lose the game of life. Instead, the individual who has bet on God becomes the *Gurmukh*<sup>36</sup> as they chant on God. The AG

<sup>32</sup> *Kahai Nānak jin sach ṭajiā kūre lāge ṭinī janam jūai hāriā.*

<sup>33</sup> *Gur kī sākhī rākhai chī.*

<sup>34</sup> *Apnā janam na jūai hāre.*

<sup>35</sup> *Panch dūt bhāge bīkrāl. Jūai janam na kabhū hār. Nānak kā ang kī kartār.*

<sup>36</sup> The *Gurmukh* is a conceptual state of life and being wherein the individual overcomes the world and focuses on God. In terms of Western philosophy, it is tempting to draw parallels between the *Gurmukh* and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. The latter concept, however, is multi-layered as the individual must overcome the world and their weakness to become a stronger and superior individual, in other words, *Übermensch*. The *Gurmukh* denies the world and tries to face towards God. In other words, the *Gurmukh* maintains a 'sustained practice' (Nesbitt

affirms, the 'Gurmukh, unto whom the Lord becomes merciful, chants the Lord's Name and wins the game of life' (AG: 650).<sup>37</sup> Betting on God is presented the winning bet where 'one's life is not lost in the gamble' (AG: 210).<sup>38</sup>

A critical question arises: if it is an infinite game then how can a finite individual play and bet on God? If there is a cosmic game unfolding in the Universe, involving a transcendent God, then this would logically seem too remote for a mortal and finite individual to engage with. The AG addresses concerns that attempt to rationally *join* this game could lead the individual to become 'intoxicated with egoistical intellect.'<sup>39</sup>

To overcome this difficulty, the AG elaborates on this game metaphor which allows the individual to engage with God. In the AG, a rhetorical question is posed:

*Badāhu kī na hod māḍhao mo siao. Thākur te jan jan te thākur khel pario hai to siao.*  
 Why not make a bet with me, O Lord of Wealth? From the master comes the servant, and  
 from the servant, comes the master. This is the game I play with You. (AG: 1252)

Here, the individual is requesting to 'play' a 'game' with God and is asking God to provide them with a 'bet.' The individual is transcendently communicating with God through the image of betting on a game. In this process, in Wood's sense, the individual establishes a rapport with God. The term *hod* is used to denote this engagement and bet with God instead of *jūa* or *jūai* which are associated with a gamble on *Maya*. It would be prudent to make a bet with God considering that the individual's stake is their 'jewel' of human life. Essentially, if you are betting with God, then you hold 'the winning dice' (AG: 1045).<sup>40</sup> If you gamble on *Maya*, then you will 'lose this life in the gamble' (AG: 1314).<sup>41</sup>

The game of chance played with God enables individuals to *lose* the specific bodily and sensory desires while cultivating virtuous characteristics. The AG describes this process:

*Kām kroḍh māiā maḍ maṣar e khelaṭ sabh jūai hāre. Saṭ sanṭokh daiā ḍharam sach ih apunai garih bhīṭar vāre.*  
 Sexual desire, anger, intoxication with *Maya* and jealousy - I have lost all of these in the  
 game of chance. Purity, contentment, compassion, faith and truthfulness – I have ushered  
 these into the home of my self. (AG: 379)

2005: 26) of prayer towards God and not on *maya*. If the individual were to focus on *maya*, or, for the purposes of this article, gamble on *Maya* then they would become a *Manmukh* who focuses and faces towards the world and sensory desires and pleasures.

<sup>37</sup> *Har har daiāl hovai jis upar so gurmukh har jap jīnkā.*

<sup>38</sup> *Guṇ gāvaṭ ḍhiāvaṭ sukh sāgar jūe janam na hāre.*

<sup>39</sup> The AG warns the individual about becoming an intellectual egoist. The focus here is not only God but on the cognitive and rational faculties in understanding God. These faculties are still rooted in *Maya* and this phenomenal world. Therefore, the individual needs to take care when utilising them in pursuing God.

<sup>40</sup> *Gurmukh ḍevēh pakī sārī.*

<sup>41</sup> *Jin har har nām na cheṭio ṭin jūai janam sabh hār.*

On shedding these negative bodily sensations, individuals are 'not reincarnated again into the world of form and substance' (AG: 335).<sup>42</sup> The individual has *won* by believing in God. The AG further elaborates that 'Whoever believes in the Name, wins; He Himself [God] implants Truth within' (AG: 1035)<sup>43</sup>, suggesting that the reward for believing in God is acquiring truth. The individual will 'be a winner of the game of life and come to abide in your true home [with God]' (AG: 1072).<sup>44</sup> If you bet on God then you win by losing your sensory passions, cravings, and desires. The more you bet on God, the more you lose the sensory temptations of Maya. If you gamble on Maya, however, then you are gambling away your human life on the phenomenal world. Unlike betting on God, gambling on Maya means that you are allowing all your human passions and desires to govern your behaviour that leads to more destructive behaviour.

### Believing in God

The AG emphasises that merely believing in and betting on God will not suffice. There are several passages which suggest that believing in and betting on God is not a fixed event:

*Jūai janam na hārahu apnā bhāj parahu tum har sarṇā.*

Don't lose your life in the gamble – hurry to the Lord's sanctuary. (AG: 433)

*Siftī raṭā saḍ bairāgī jūai janam na hārai.*

Imbued with the Lord's Praises, one is forever a Bairaagee, a renunciate, and one's life is not lost in the gamble. (AG: 360)

*Kūr nivāre gurmaṭ sāre jūai janam na hāre.*

She who drives out her falsehood, and acts according to the Guru's Teachings, does not lose her life in the gamble. (AG: 244)

*Gur pūrā pāiā nām ḍhiāiā jūai janam na hāre.*

Meeting the Perfect Guru, we meditate on the Naam, and do not lose this life in the gamble. (AG: 453)

*Anāth ke nāthe sarab kai sāthe jap jūai janam na hārīai.*

Meditating on the Patron of lost souls, the Companion of all, your life shall not be lost in the gamble. (AG: 80)

*Jin seviā tin hī sukḥ pāiā so janam na jūai hārī jō.*

Those who serve the Lord find peace; they do not lose their lives in the gamble. (AG: 107)

<sup>42</sup> *Kaho Kabīr tū kao punrap janam nahī khel gaio bairāgī.*

<sup>43</sup> *Manne nāo soī jin jāsi āpe sāchḥ ḍarīāiā.*

<sup>44</sup> *Jit āvhu vashu ghar apne.*

These verses convey that betting on God must become constant practice rather than merely professing belief in God. The individual must align their lives in agreement with God; otherwise, they are still gambling on Maya. If the individual gambles on Maya rather than on God, then they will lose this life. The above verses explain that the way to not lose the game of life is to bet on God. Crucially, since human life is finite, the individual must 'hurry' to make their bet on God. In essence, the above passages, the AG presents devotion to God as a better bet than yielding to Maya, which is analogous to Pascal's wager.

Believing in God is a spiritual commitment to continually bet on God and not something that can be imitated. The AG cautions: 'Some wear religious robes and wander around in pride; they lose their life in the gamble' (AG: 911).<sup>45</sup> For the individual to win the game of life and not lose, they must genuinely focus on God which will dispel falsehood while being 'Imbued with the Lord's Praises.' Otherwise, by imitating religious beliefs, the individual will be acting from and for pride. This sensation of pride is gambling on Maya and the individual will lose in the game of life. The individual must constantly expel falsehood to prevent themselves from being 'entangled in Maya' (AG: 1428)<sup>46</sup> and 'blinded' by it (AG: 1428).<sup>47</sup>

The AG continues: 'Those who are outwardly pure and yet polluted within, lose their lives in the gamble'<sup>48</sup> (AG: 919). Such false display of believing in God is categorised with other trappings of Maya<sup>49</sup> where the individual is making a gamble but with a fatal consequence. We saw above that 'In power, pleasures, beauty, wealth and youth, one gambles his life away' (AG: 1015).<sup>50</sup> By doing so, the individual is staking their life on Maya and 'waste this human life in vain and lose the game in the gamble' (AG: 412).<sup>51</sup>

In fact, the AG describes the world itself as 'a gambler' (AG: 222)<sup>52</sup> noting that Maya is so enchanting that the individual will 'forget the *Naam*, the Name of the Lord' (AG: 222).<sup>53</sup> The fatal consequence is that the individual will lose in their gamble on Maya. It is, therefore, more prudent to not only bet and gamble on God but persist in believing in God. The more the individual believes and acts in agreement with God, the more 'Imbued' with God they will become. Otherwise, if you 'play the game of chance in this world' then you will 'lose' your 'mind' (AG: 369).<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

To conclude, the ideas of Pascal, along with selected subsequent scholarship, can facilitate a deeper understanding of belief and faith as depicted in the AG. Previously, we discussed how Wood's interpretation of Pascal's move away from traditional theological arguments for God's existence to ones

<sup>45</sup> *Ik bhēkḥ karahi firēh abhimānī tīn jūai bājī hārī.*

<sup>46</sup> *Man māiā mai faḡḡ rahio bisrio gobind nām.*

<sup>47</sup> *Anḡḡ*

<sup>48</sup> *Bāhrahū nirmal jāhu ṭa maile tīnī janam jūai hārīā.*

<sup>49</sup> I use the word 'trappings' deliberately here as the AG states that 'The Primal Lord Himself has beguiled them; they lose their lives in the gamble' (*Ḍharahu āp kḡuāian jūai bājī hārī.* AG: 429). It is tempting to gamble on *Maya*, but the consequence is that the individual will lose their life in doing so.

<sup>50</sup> *Rājan rangan rūpan mālan joban ṭe jūārī.*

<sup>51</sup> *Birthā janam gavāiā bājī hārī.*

<sup>52</sup> *Aisā jag dekḡiā jūārī.*

<sup>53</sup> *Sabh sukḡ māgai nām bisārī.*

<sup>54</sup> *Jūai kḡelan jag kē ih man hārīā.*

that persuade and convince the unbeliever through rhetoric and metaphor. This underpinning can help us understand the betting and gambling metaphor in the AG.

Writing as a believer in Sikhism, with Punjabi heritage and Sikh parentage, I recognise that the metaphors in the AG, such as betting on and with God whilst not gambling on Maya, may seem obscure given the sacred text's intricate language(s) and its extensive theological context. I argue that both Western diaspora Sikhs and non-Sikhs can benefit from the Western intellectual framework. This is largely due to the substantial existing scholarship in the West on the concept of a wager with God, as influenced by Pascal's thinking. This enterprise may seem farfetched, but it can prove to be a beneficial exercise to understand the complex arguments presented in the AG. The obscure becomes more comprehensible through familiar metaphors thus not only deepening our understanding but also allows the individual to constantly practice their spiritual commitment to God.

### Author Note

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