

SOCIAL VISION OF GURU NANAK: PRELUDE TO NEW SOCIAL ORDER

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ABSTRACT

The paper includes the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Jiregarding the social values of life, well suited quotations from the holy book. Guru Nanak emphasized that the essence of the Divine is imminent in the hearts of all human beings, this in turn entailed that all human beings are equal. Guru Nanak's rejection of caste based discrimination was not confined to his philosophical outlook alone: it was expressed on the everyday practical level. Guru Nanak initiated new innovative structural changes in the society and paved the prelude for social transformation in the orthodox set up by introducing progressive and universal normative pattern of social relationship.

Keywords: Social Vision, Guru Nanak, New Social Order.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh tradition, is one of the great men of Indian history. His memory is enshrined in the hearts of the millions of people who follow the Sikh religious practices. Guru Nanak is widely known and respected as a prophet, redeemer of the downtrodden and spiritual teacher. Nanak was born into a middle-class Hindu family and raised by his parents, Mehta Kalu and Mata Tripta. Bebe Nanaki was his elder sister. As a child, Nanak went on to astound many with his intelligence and his interest towards divine subjects. Guru Nanak from an early age seemed to have acquired a questioning and enquiring mind. At age seven, his father, Kalu Mehta, enrolled him at the village school. As a child Guru Nanak astonished his teacher by describing the implicit symbolism of the first letter of the alphabet. He described it as denoting the unity or oneness of God. His deeds, actions and words he uttered gave clear indication that Nanak was different from any other man. For his 'upanayana' ritual, he was asked to wear the sacred thread, but Nanak simply refused to wear the thread. When the priest insisted him, a young Nanak took everyone by surprise by asking for a thread that is sacred in every sense of the word. He wanted the thread to be made of mercy, contentment and truth to hold the three sacred threads together and his hymns were as follows:

ਦਇਆ ਕਪਹ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਸੁਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੀ।

Adi Granth, p. 471 (Anmol Kalmi)

Thus Mehta Kalu did his best to involve his son in business of different type. But Guru Nanak's attention was towards God only. In Sultanpur he employed as a storekeeper. There, too, while his body was engaged in performing his work, his heart and soul were with his Maker. It is recorded that when, in weighing out rations, he reached the number thirteen, which in the official Persian language was call tera, which, in turn, meant 'Thine' in Panjabi, he would pause, his face would assume a look of strange intoxication, and he would several times repeat, in his sweet, melodious voice, 'terahantera, tera, I am Thine, O Thine, O Lord, Thine'. One day, in the year 1497 A.D. he had gone for his morning bath near by the river. But as usual he did not return after bath. His clothes, found on the bank of the river, made people think that he got drowned. Soon after his reappearance Nanak declared that, "there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim". The meaning of this sentence can be understood differently. It could mean that there was no basic difference between Hinduism and Islam or all human beings were the same and dividing them into different religions was pointless. The most popular meaning could be that Guru Nanak rejected the distinction between man and man on the basis of religion or caste. Guru

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Nanak's judgments, teachings and philosophy are as appropriate and relevant today as they were five hundred years ago. He advises us to consider the holiness of life and deem the body as "the temple of God". He advocated the existence of one God and taught his followers that every human being can reach out to God through meditation and other pious practices. Interestingly, Guru Nanak did not support monasticism and asked his followers to lead the life of honest householder. While most of the major religions advocated monasticism in order to achieve salvation, Guru Nanak came up with a religion that supports the lifestyle of an average householder. Most importantly, he also taught his followers the methods to attain salvation while leading a normal life within the society. He, in fact, stressed on the importance of leading life with one's family members. Not only did he teach his ideals, but he also served as a living example. When Guru Nanak left for the heavenly abode, nine other Gurus followed his teachings and continued to spread his message. Guru Nanak lived what he preached and his whole life is a reflection of his philosophy.

No doubt that Guru Nanak was not only a spiritual leader but also a social reformer and a political thinker who gave importance to all aspects of human life. He was a great philosopher who applied his mind to a large number of problems of human concern. His struggle for securing basic Rights of the masses is very significant. People at the time of Guru Nanak were devoid of basic Rights. They were being exploited politically, socially and religiously. Guru Nanak fought boldly for the preservation Rights and raised his voice against social injustice, inequality, and religious repression, exploitation of women and degradation of human values. Guru Nanak realized the preciousness of human life and wished to create an ideal society free from every kind of exploitation and sufferings. Guru Nanak expected such a social life for his followers where they must be aware of their rights and duties.

Equality for Women

Guru Nanak raised a forceful voice against injustice towards women. He had pleaded for the

full rights to women. The condition of women at the time of Guru Nanak was very deplorable. According to him woman has the same rights as man has. There is no scope of any discrimination against women because of their sex. They are fully at par with men. At the time of Guru Nanak, Muslims had imprisoned their women within the four walls of the house, open air and other outside gifts of nature were denied to them. They were allowed under a thick covering of burqua. The birth of a daughter in a family was sign of misfortune. She was denied of her rights and was treated as a slave. In Islam women were not admitted to prayers in a mosque with their man folk. None of the prophets or messengers, before Guru Nanak, dared to champion her cause, rescue her from the wretched conditions and put her at par with man. He also awakened men to the reality that a female is equal to them because a woman gives birth to kings as he said in his bani :

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖਿਐ ਜਿਤ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ॥

Adi Granth, p. 473 (Anmol Kalmi)

Guru Nanak took initiative for the advocacy of the women's Rights and later on Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared under it. Similar provision has been made in the Constitution of India.

Rejection of Caste System

The most important right which was advocated by Guru Nanak was right of equality which implies equality of all individuals in the state. No discrimination made against anybody on account of his/her religion, caste, colour, creed, race, sex or descent etc. Guru Nanak taught people that all men are the children of one god and as such all are brothers. He taught his followers that every human being can reach out to God through meditation and other pious practices. As rightly said in his preaching:

ਫਕੜ ਜਾਤੀ ਫਕੜੁ ਨਾਉ॥

ਸਬਨਾ ਜੀਆ ਇਕ ਛਾਉ॥

Adi Granth, p. 83 (Anmol Kalmi)

Guru Nanak also raised his voice against such division of Varna and gave right of equality to all men, without discrimination of caste, creed, sex or

nationality. He established the equality by breaking up the caste system, achieved liberty from the age-old customs and traditions and brought about fraternity by striking at the root of the sense of the high and low. Guru Nanak rejected the caste system. According to him all human beings are equal. It is the deed of man that makes him high or low, good or bad.

ਜਾਤਿ ਜਨਮੁ ਨਹ ਪੂਛੀਐ ਸਚ ਘਰੁ ਲੇਹੁ ਬਤਾਇ॥

ਸਾ ਜਾਤਿ ਪਤਿ ਹੈ ਜੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇ॥

Adi Granth, p. 1330 (Anmol Kalmi)

By birth everybody is free to do any job of his/her choice provided that he/she has the ability and competence to do it. Guru Nanak abolished all the barriers of caste system by introducing the institution of Langar. Guru Angad took special step to popularize the institution of Guru Ka Langar (the community kitchen), where people of all castes and creeds, Sikhs and non-Sikhs are made to sit in one row (signifying equality) and partake a common food. Differences of social status and restrictions of caste were ignored in the kitchen service. Right to equality was firstly advocated by Guru Nanak, later on this right was granted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under article 2 according to which everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without the distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language. The Constitution of India has also introduced the right of equality.

Right to Education

Education is essential for bringing about awareness among the human beings and everybody has the right to get education. In ancient India, the right to get education was given only to upper three classes, i.e Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya. The Sudras who were placed at the lowest caste could not get education. Of the three classes only the Brahmins had the right to teach, Kshatriya and Vaishya could get education, but could not impart it. But according to Guru Nanak all people have right to get education. Guru Nanak stressed the inculcation of humanistic values in man through his proper education. According to Guru Nanak only

that education is meaningful and worthwhile which dispels ignorance and leads enlightenment. He said:

ਦੀਵਾ ਬਲੈ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਜਾਈ॥

ਬੇਦ ਪਾਠ ਮਤਿ ਪਾਪਾ ਖਾਇ॥

ਉਗਵੈ ਸੂਰੁ ਨ ਜਾਪੈ ਚੰਦੁ॥

ਜਾ ਗਿਆਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸ ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਨਿਟੰਤੁ॥

Adi Granth, p. 791 (Anmol Kalmi)

Just as darkness disappears when a lamp is lit so is evil removed by reflecting on scriptures (knowledge) just as moon elopes at sunrise so does ignorance vanish with enlightenment (wisdom). Guru Nanak also emphasized the attainment of Divine knowledge. It is with such knowledge that deliverance is attained. It is with the broom of Divine knowledge that filth of timidity can be removed. From the Bani of Guru Nanak we come to know the content of education favoured by him. Guru emphasized that education should be based on right actions, sportsmanship, sense of responsibility, discipline of life and optimism. But it should be God centered. The Guru's teachings are amazingly modern and progressive, morally as well as sociologically. The right of education to the individual first stressed by Guru Nanak has been granted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of United Nations Organizations under article 26. According to which for the fullest development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, education is essential. This right has also been granted to the Indians in the Constitution of India.

Right to Justice

In ancient India, it was the one of the fundamental aims of the state to promote Dharma or justice. In Vedic literature peace, order, security and justice were regarded as fundamental aims of the state. The king or the head of the state was supposed to be the upholder of the law and order. He was to punish the wicked and help the virtuous. According to Guru Nanak, justice is one of the attributes of God. Injustice has no place in God's order because He is absolute just. As it is said by Guru Nanak: The judiciary of Guru Nanak's

contemporary society was almost in the hands of Brahmins and Mullahs. There was no punishment for the administration for social and religious sins. He condemned the unjust ways of Qaziz and Brahmins:

ਕਾਜੀ ਹੋਇਕੇ ਬਹੈ ਨਿਆਏ॥
ਫੇਰੇ ਤਜਬੀ ਕਰੇ ਖੁਦਾਇ॥
ਵਢੀ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਹਕੁ ਗਵਾਏ॥
ਜੋ ਕੋ ਪੁਛੈ ਤਾ ਪੜਿ ਸੁਣਾਏ॥

Adi Granth, p. 951 (Anmol Kalmi)

Modesty and righteousness both have vanished and falsehood marched as head O Lalo, The function of Qaziz and Brahmins is over and devil now performs the marriage ceremonies. To ensure peace Guru Nanak preached for protecting the Human Rights of the people, particularly of the lowly and the weak. According to him true religion lies in providing justice to all. Guru Nanak said that true kings are those who respect truth and delivered justice to all. The corrupt religious teachers as well as corrupt judges were exposed through very harsh and strong words. Guru Nanak was totally against exploitation of any kind. He said that if we have respect for the rights of others around us it will certainly prevent exploitation. Guru Nanak time and again stressed that there can be no justice without social justice. Respect for the rights of others, prevents the exploitation of one by the other.

Protection and Preservation of Environment

The environment is the sum total of all external conditions that affect the life, development and survival of an organism including air, water, soil, and trees. Guru warns that natural balance cannot be sustained by walking on the path of vices. The human beings, in their greed for material gains, have become careless towards their duties as citizens of this universe and are making the environment hellish. Since we are the inhabitants of this pious land and benefit from its innumerable benedictions, it becomes our duty to protect and sustain it. Walking on the path of virtues we should take care of the treasures bestowed on us by the Lord as He

takes care of the whole humanity. As this is best described in his words:

ਪਾਣੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਣ ਪਵਣਿ ਬੰਧਿ ਰਾਖੇ,
ਚੰਦੁ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਮੁਖਿ ਦੀਏ॥
ਮਰਣ ਜੀਵਣ ਕਉ ਧਰਤੀ ਦੀਨੀ,
ਏਤੇ ਗੁਣ ਵਿਸਾਰੇ॥

Adi Granth, p. 877 (Anmol Kalmi)

Gurbani cautions that the natural resources namely water, earth, air and space are precious and a free gift to humanity thus these should be used judiciously and wisely without depleting or polluting the natural resources. According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, God has bestowed us with natural resources and we need to maintain them as desired by Him.

ਪਵਨ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ॥
ਦਿਵਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ॥
(Anmol Kalmi)

Thus it becomes the moral and social responsibility of each individual and each corporate house to contribute positively for the protection.

Conclusion

Guru Nanak visualizes an egalitarian and classless society based on communitarian mode of living. Guru Nanak's vision is so scientific and logical that it has universal acceptability and applicability even during 21st century. Guru Nanak is the harbinger of a truly democratic society without any barriers of caste, creed and with a deep sense of equality of all men and women. Love for freedom, fearlessness, positive thinking, honest earning, sharing with others, feeling of brotherhood and commonwealth, sangat and pangat, casteless society, hard work and pray for welfare of humanity are gifts of Guru Nanak. Modern age has created such problem that needs immediate solution. In this context Guru Nanak's message is relevant to play creative role. So man needs to have a fresh look at the whole situation. It is the dire need of the hour to understand and implement the philosophy of Guru Nanak. This is the only way to save humanity from degeneration.

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