

Glorious Guru Nanak & His Empowering Message

GURU NANAK'S INFINITE WISDOM transcends time. Celebration of his birth anniversary is a privilege that the present generation should be eager to cherish.

But beyond the celebration is the priceless heritage of his Scriptural precepts, sanctified in Guru Granth Sahib, which need to be understood, analysed and practised for the benefit of all humanity. Guru Nanak loved people of every faith, as evidenced by his astonishing outreach to far corners of the world.

To grasp the relevance - and urgency - of Guru's message, you do not have to step back in time. His prescience pours out in soulful hymns. Sample his statement depicting socio-political milieu of the late 15th and early 16th centuries:

ਕਲਿ ਕਾਤੀ ਰਾਜੇ ਕਾਸਾਈ ਧਰਮੁ ਪੰਖ ਕਰਿ ਉਡਰਿਆ

ਕੂੜੁ ਅਮਾਵਸ ਸਚੁ ਚੰਦ੍ਰਮਾ ਦੀਸੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਹ ਚੜਿਆ ॥

ਹਉ ਭਾਲਿ ਵਿਕੁੰਨੀ ਹੋਈ ॥ ਆਧੇਰੈ ਰਾਹੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ ॥

(SGGS: 145)

This agonised depiction of his times has a strangely familiar ring: a fragmented social (dis)order where, today, intolerance and ignorance afflict the masses, even as the self-serving ruling class is busy in exploiting and slaughtering the innocents. Righteousness has taken wings, receding into murky darkness.

Guru Nanak could have been speaking of the clutch of crises afflicting the world today, while articulating the distress and the dilemma of the masses in Asia and Africa, or even America. His agonized prayer to God of the universe seeks peace and well-being of the whole of human race. He does not stop at an in-depth analysis of socio-political problems; he exhorts and challenges communities to live in harmony among themselves, as also with the fragile environment that sustains humanity in widely divergent climates.

Above all, Guru Nanak affirmed the unity of God inherent in the earth's mind-boggling diversity. The basic moral code enunciated by Guru Nanak rises above denominational religion and glorifies the Creator and urges everyone to make honest living, while sharing one's earnings with the needy. The common human failings - lust and anger, greed, arrogance and obsessive attachment to wealth - must be tamed, if not eliminated.

Such a moral code knows no boundaries. All men and women who have faith in God can benefit from practicing the way of life - better described as walking God's Path. Every human being willing to walk this path becomes a Sikh, learner, and eventually, a Gurmukh - God oriented.

But the seeds of disaster are sown when men at the helm of affairs, whether political or religious, become selfish, arrogant and exclusivist, breeding fanaticism and intolerance. When we look around, we find innumerable examples of such

arrogance and the “holier-than-thou” mindset. One side-effect of these burgeoning antipathies is noticeable among multitudes of young people. Restless by nature, youth is intensely preoccupied with self, and, therefore, cynical and disrespectful of the older generation whom they mistrust and dismiss as old-fashioned.

The result is reflected in a moral crisis of vast proportions. Indian youth crave for Western life-style. While their Western counterparts seem to be desperately looking for stable and durable moral basis in which they can anchor their mercurial minds.

In the Punjab matters are made worse by the setback in agriculture and rural indebtedness. Educated unemployed in that state have drifted away from the basic moral postulates as well as the Sikh identity. Many are willing to barter their future to unscrupulous middlemen for the promise of emigrating to the Western countries - unrecognizable as Sikhs. On the other hand, hordes of landless agri-workers from Bihar and eastern UP, who have settled down in Punjab in recent times, far from adopting Guru Nanak’s faith or learning the Sikh way of life, threaten to reduce the Sikhs to a minority in their own homeland. A callous state administration mutely looks on, adding to the moral crisis by increasing liquor shops and shrugging off any responsibility to combat drug addiction. Its beardless turbaned police personnel makes a mockery of the Sikh *persona*.

Doubtless Guru Nanak celebrated religious pluralism and taught respect for other cultures. But he never compromised with apostasy and charlatanism.

His divine mission demands strength of moral character and submission to the sovereignty of God, who created all men in His own image (*sâbat sûrat*). In his pursuit of an ideal man - the *gurmukh* and the Khalsa - he was unforgiving when his own son, Baba Sri Chand deviated from the path.

Even as Guru Nanak agonizes for the welfare of all humanity, he wants every Sikh, of whatever nationality, to become *jivanmukta*, - redeemed in this very life. Let us not fail the glorious Guru Nanak, forever our Father, friend and guide.

