

# Essentiality & Relevance of Guru Nanak's Ideology

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Guru Nanak (1469-1539) laid the foundation of Sikhism during the 15th century, the period of Renaissance (between 14th century and 17th century) when the scientists were challenging some of the concepts of the church in Europe. During this period Guru Nanak was busy in challenging the ancient mythology and rituals in which the peoples of South Asia were shackled for centuries and were unable to express their free will in any aspect of their lives because their lives were controlled by their religious mentors. It was Guru Nanak who promulgated a scientific and logical philosophy during the 15th century to the world to create a sense of morality to establish peace on earth. His philosophy has all the characteristics that have universal acceptability.

the irony is that after five centuries if we examine the effect of Guru Nanak's philosophy on humanity in general, and on the Sikhs in particular, it will not be difficult to come to the conclusion that what the Sikhs are doing today is largely contrary to his philosophy. It is so because in my opinion Sikhism has been represented by those Sikh theologians, historians and scholars who failed to cleanse their minds and thought from the ancient mythology and ritualism. They are still being continuously bombarded with ancient mythology and rituals by the *Biprans* (rivals of Sikhism). It is so because of the absence of preaching of *Gurbani* and Sikhism in their real perspective after the Gurus' era, i.e. after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh, 1708. After the time of Banda Bahadur most of the Sikhs were living in the forest and during this period preaching of *Gurbani* and Sikhism, and control of the Sikh institutions fell into the hands of *Biprans*. This situation continued to be in the same state even during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

It was only during the 1930s and 1940s that some concerned Sikhs thought about the deterioration of Sikhism and its being misconstrued by other religions authorities. Consequently, the Singh Sabha movement started renaissance of Sikhism. Soon, thereafter, some members of the Singh Sabha, holding authoritative positions, who could not get themselves free from the influence of *Bipran kee Reet* (the culture of the *Biprans*), started to put hurdles in preaching of *Gurbani* and Sikhism in their real perspectives by Prof. Gurmukh Singh, Gyani Ditt Singh and their colleagues.

How difficult and risky it is to challenge the religious authorities? I would like to record here some of the punishments given by the church to those who raised their voices against some concepts of the church as Bender and Leone<sup>2</sup>.

- Roger Bacon, a 13th century English priest, spent 14 years of his life in a dungeon for writing that, in the quest for truth, experimentation and observation are valid challenges to the uncritical acceptance of spiritual and secular authorities.

- In spring of 1633, Galileo, an Italian scientist, was imprisoned for life for challenging the concept that earth is the center of the universe and sun revolves around the earth.
- During the 19th century, Charles Darwin was mocked and maligned for claiming that all living things evolved from lower life forms.
- In 1925, John Scope, a high school biology teacher from Dayton, Tennessee was accused and convicted of violating a state law, which specified that only divine creation, as an explanation for the origin of life, could be taught in Tennessee public schools.

Since the truth is eternal, it cannot be kept conceal forever. Recently, Easterbook<sup>4</sup> had reported that the church has finally accepted the truth of those persons who were cruelly treated by the Church for their so-called heretic acts: "The Vatican has at last formally apologized for its arrest of Galileo, while last fall Pope John Paul II gingerly acknowledged evolution to be 'more than just a hypothesis'. Later this year, the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, the intellectual hub of conservative Protestant denominations, will publish a book acknowledging a natural origin for the human family tree. And increasingly, spiritual thinkers are endorsing the propositions of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote in the early 1940s that growing understanding of natural world simply means people need no longer look to the church for answers to questions they can now answer for themselves."

Guru Nanak promulgated a unique philosophy that is scientifically and logically sound, having universal acceptability. His philosophy is termed as *Nanakian Philosophy*. It was preached and enriched by the nine succeeding Sikh Gurus to the *House of Nanak*, the *Nanakian School*. The follower of his philosophy is known as 'Sikh' and the philosophy is called as 'Sikhi' in Punjabi. The word 'Sikhi' gave rise to the modern anglicized word 'Sikhism' for the modern world.

It is a pity that the Sikh theologians, whose minds are still very strongly imprinted with ancient mythology and ritualism, are misrepresenting Nanakian Philosophy. By doing so the originality and uniqueness of Guru Nanak's philosophy have been lost. Anybody who dared to interpret Gurbani and represent Sikhism scientifically and logical in their real perspective had been either excommunicated, or harassed in Gurdwaras and in conferences, or their work was banned. It happened in the past with Prof. Gurmukh Singh, Ditt Singh, Karam Singh historian, and many others. The Draconian sword of excommunication and harassment is always hanging on the heads of Sikh scholars and they are afraid to expose the wrong concepts, rituals and practices that have crept into Sikhism during the last three centuries.

In this article I would like to present a glimpse of the Nanakian Philosophy that allows the Sikhs to question, use of discriminating intellect, to do research, and the freedom of speech to explore truth. Such freedoms, which are not allowed in many religions, are openly granted to the Sikhs. If we, the Sikh scholars in particular and the Sikhs at large, adopt the following basic principles from Nanakian Philosophy then Gurbani and Sikhism can be presented into their real perspective for the benefit of the humanity in the world.

**Sikhism & Place of the Guru-teacher:** The following verses explain what is a Sikhi (Sikhism) and who is the Guru of the Sikhs?

isKI isiKAw gur ivcwr ]

SGGS, M 1 P 465[1].

*"Sikhi (Sikhism) is the advice/principle of the Guru's philosophy."*

But about 80% of Sikhism is being preached and taught that is based on the information available in the unauthentic old literature than that is found in the Gurus' philosophy incorporated in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) [1].

Now the question arises who is the Guru in the above stanza? In the following stanza Guru Nanak explains that the '*Sabd*' (word) is the Guru:

sbdu gurU suriq Duin cylw ]

SGGS, M 1, P 943.

*"Sabd is Guru, consciousness and intention toward it make one its disciple (Sikh)."*

According to the above stanza, '*Sabd*' is the '*Guru*' for the Sikh. The same principle, '*Sabd Guru*' was taught by the Gurus of the Nanakian School in their *Bani* that has been incorporated into the SGGS. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh reiterated in 1708 that *Sabd* of the Sikh Gurus of the Nanakian School, incorporated in the AGGS, is the Guru of the Sikhs. The irony is that some writers have declared the Granth as the *Deh* (biological body) of the Guru.

The implications of this concept lead the Sikhs to treat the SGGS as the deified *Deh* of the Guru as the *Brahmin* treat their idols as a deified different gods and goddesses. Consequently, the Sikhs have started to treat the Granth as a deified Guru and are involved in performing a number of rituals and reciting *Akhand Paths* like the practice of the *Biprans* and ignoring to understand the *Sabd* (philosophy) incorporated in it and to practice in their lives [3,10].

Why is it happening so? It is so due to the fact that we have ignored to understand and practice the basic philosophy given by Guru Nanak, which has been incorporated into the SGGS. Let us consider some more basic principles of Nanakian Philosophy.

### **Evaluation of Moral Ethics:**

pihlw vsqu isvwix kY qw kIcY vwpwru ]

SGGS, M 1, P 1410.

*"Gurbani teaches that one must evaluate the things/philosophy, if convinced, then adopt/follow it."*

But the Sikhs follow blindly what sants, preachers, Kathakaars and kirtanias say in the gurdwaras. The Sikh historians and scholars also take it granted as truth what is written in the unauthentic old literature extraneous to the SGGS. They do not care to evaluate with their discriminating intellect to find out what is wrong and what is right by testing it with the *Gurbani*, science and logic - the touchstones of truth. Thee Sikh scholars, historians, and the Sikhs at large are afraid to deviate from that the already accepted concepts and practices under the threat of Draconian sword of excommunication. Anybody who dared to do so, was snubbed immediately by the Sikh authorities as well as by the opponent scholars and their organizations. The Sikh history is full of such cases.

### **Importance of Reflection Deliberation**

sBsY aUpir gur sbdu bIcwr ]

SGGS, M 1, P. 904.

*"Highest importance is given on the deliberation/discussion on the sabd (philosophy) of the Guru ( in the SGGS)."*

But nobody is allowed to discuss or deliberate on the *Sabd* in Gurdwaras. Whatever there is any preaching that is one-way, from the preacher to the *Sangat* (congregation). Real preaching or teaching of a subject is carried out properly and is understood properly only if there is two-way flow, i.e. from the preachers to the *Sangat* and from the *Sangat* to the preacher.

### **Freedom of Expression**

There is complete freedom of expression in Sikhism. And discussion can only held if one listens to others and then expresses one's views to the others:

jb lgu dunIAw rhIAY nwnk ikCu suxIAY ikCu khIAY]

SGGS, M 1, P 661.

*"As long as one lives in this world one must listen others and express oneself to the others (to find the truth)."*

However, in gurdwara only listening is allowed but no expression by any member from the *Sangat* is allowed in many gurdwaras.

### **How to resolve doubts?**

The above philosophy (3 & 4) has been confirmed by Guru Arjun, that if there is any doubt that can be resolved by sitting together in *Sangat* and discussing the matter attuned.

hoie iekqR imlhu myry BweI duibdw dUir krhu ilv lwie ]

SGGS, M 5, P 1185.

*"Resolve the doubts by discussion and sitting together while fully attuned (to the Sabd)."*

Such a system to resolve doubts, arising about the rituals or other practices being adopted in the Gurdwaras is rarely used.

**Discriminating intellect:** There are many people who may be called intellectuals but very few are there, who have the discriminating intellect to distinguish between good and bad, true and false, right and wrong, etc.

bUJY buJnhwru ibbyk ]

SGGS, M 5, P 285.

*"Those who have discriminating intellect can understand things in their real perspective."*

so DnvMqw ijsu buiD ibbyk ]

SGGS, M 5, P 1150.

*"The one, who has the discriminating intellect, is wealthy in knowledge (wise)."*

But most of the time it is preached by Sants, preachers, *Kathakaars*, and *Kirtanias* that one should continue to recite *Gurbani* without applying any discriminating intellect to understand the philosophy in it.

**Importance of Research:** *Gurbani* explains that those who research progress:

KojI aupjY bwdI ibnsY hauu bil bil gur krqwrw ]

SGGS, M1, P. 1255

*"The researcher progress while the other (discursive and aimless) perishes, (Nanak) sacrifices himself on the Guru, the Creator."*

Research on Sikhism and *Gurbani* has been ignored since a long and is being discouraged by many scholars even today. Similarly application of science and logic has been discouraged by many scholars as well as by most devout Sikhs. Once I was explaining *Gurbani* with the application of science and logic in a Gurdwara. I usually declare to the *Sangat* to ask questions, if there is any doubt, after the *Diwan* since no questions is allowed during the *Diwan* in many Gurdwaras.

At the end of the *Diwan* a very experienced and devout Sikh approached me and advised me to leave my knowledge of science at home when I come to Gurdwara since there is no place for science in *Gurbani* and Sikhism. At that time I was holding a bunch of keys in my hand and I let

it drop. I asked the devout Sikh; do you know why the keys fell down on the floor? He replied immediately without any hesitation that the bunch of keys fell down because of the gravitational pull. I very politely requested him that if you have not left your knowledge of science at home how can you advise others to leave it at home while coming to Gurdwara? I further requested to him please do not give such irrational advice to anybody in the future, because science is going to stay as a part and parcel of spiritual and temporal affairs of humans.

Whenever, my work on scientific and logical representation of *Gurbani* and Sikhism is criticized by scholars and theologians, the following words of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha [ - Preface], said about 60 years ago, resound in my ears clearly again and again:

"I am sorry to say that there are very few research scholars in our nation but there is a large number of scholars who are the enemies of the research scholars and even they will label them as atheists to defame them."

I would like to cite an example to prove that some religious scholars are so deadly against the use of science and logic that they will go to such an extent as to misconstrue the statement of a Nobel Laureate, Einsteins to justify the superiority of religion:

The following statement of Einstein:

"Science without religion is lame.

Religion without science is blind."

has been misconstrued as follows:

*"Science without religion is blind.*

*Religion without science is lame."*

to show the superiority of religion over science by ignoring the fact that it is unfair to misconstrue somebody's statement to justify own belief.

The above-misconstrued statement of Einstein has been quoted by many Christian theologians and now it has also been quoted by an Eastern scholar, Jayasudarshana, for that very reason to show the supremacy of religion over sciences. The same misconstrued statement has been quoted by some Sikh scholars (Manjeet Singh<sup>11</sup> and Nirmal Singh Kalsi<sup>7</sup>) to support superiority of religion over science.

In my opinion the scholars of *Gurbani* do not have to misconstrue any statement of anybody or any information (data) to show the superiority of Nanakian Philosophy because it is supremely scientific and logical.

The above example clearly indicates that if the scholars of today can misconstrue the well-established statement of a well known Nobel Laureate and scientist, Einstein, then one can easily

imagine how much misconstrued information could be found in the old literature on Sikhism written during the 18th and 19th centuries? Nevertheless, the Sikhs are very fortunate that they can find the Nanakian Philosophy in its original form since it has been incorporated in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjun in 1604. Thus, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the most authenticated and primary source of the Nanakian Philosophy to construct Sikhism. Therefore, it is imperative for each scholar to be diligent in quoting information from ancient writings and secondary sources to construct Sikhism. And the authenticity of information from such sources should be tested with Nanakian Philosophy in the SGGS, science and logic - the touchstones of truth, before using it to construct Sikhism.

The above type of message was given by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha [11-Preface] about 60 years ago. But this message has been ignored by most of the scholars, Sikh theologians, and Sikh authorities till today. Let us have a glimpse how scientific and logical is the Nanakian Philosophy.

### **Science and Nanakian Philosophy**

Science and Nanakian Philosophy are closely intertwined with each other. Therefore, to understand the Nanakian Philosophy it is important to have the latest scientific information and a discriminating intellect. Moreover, it is also important to understand the methodology used by Guru Nanak to explain his philosophy. In most of the cases Guru Nanak quotes simple science and logic and sometime cites ancient mythological works and rituals, commonly accepted by the masses and, thereafter, he explains his philosophy. He also uses many allegoric expressions to make it easy for readers to understand his own philosophy. The scholars, who would interpret Nanakian Philosophy, have to be very diligent and need discriminating intellect to distinguish it from the ancient mythological works, and allegoric expressions, cited in his philosophy. Now I would like to demonstrate a couple of examples to prove the above thesis:

**1. Use of Simple Science and Logic:** Guru Nanak has used simple science and logic to explain that how a soiled body parts and clothes are cleansed and how the polluted mind can be purified:

BrIAY hQu pYru qnu dyh ] pwxI DoqY auqrsu Kyh ]

mUq pLIqI kpVu hoie ] dy swbux leIAY ahu Doie ]

BrIAY miq pwpw kY sMig ] ahu dopY nWvY kY rMig ]

SGGS, Jap 20, P. 4.

*"If hands, feet and body are soiled with dust they can be washed with water. If the clothes become impure with urine (chemicals) they can be cleansed by washing with soap (other chemicals). If mind is polluted with sins that can be purified by understanding the Almighty and by imbibing (practicing) its philosophy."*

**2. Use of Ancient Mythology, Concepts or Philosophy:** Guru Nanak uses extensively the ancient concepts that were accepted as true by the masses in the beginning of his verse and then he cites scientific information or logic or his theory/doctrine to explain the reality.

pwqwlw pwqwl IK Agws Agws ]

aVk aVk Bwil Qky vyd khin iek vwq ]

shsu ATwrh khin kqybw AsulU ieku Dwqu ]

lyKw hoie q ilKIAY lyKY hoie ivxwsu ]

nwnk vfw AwKIAY Awpy jwxY Awp ]

SGGS, Jap 22, P. 5.

**Ancient Concepts:** "The Veda after an immense search said one thing. That there are hundreds of thousands nether worlds under nether worlds and skies above skies. The Semitic books say that there are eighteen thousand worlds, (Nanak says) But in reality it one thing (element)."

**Nanakian Concept/Modern Concept:**

*"If there could any account (of the worlds in the universe) then one can try to account, however the accountant (or account) may be exhausted.*

Finally Guru Nanak says:

*Let us say: It (the Almighty) is Great, it knows itself the infiniteness of the universe."*

Scientifically there is no nether world it is a myth. Similarly, there is no sky. What we call sky is in fact the blue color due to the thickness of the air around the earth through which the sunlight passes and looks blue. Similarly, the Semitic books have the concept of only 18,000 worlds in this universe. However, according to Guru Nanak, the universe is infinite and it is not possible to account the number of the worlds (stars and their planets in the universe). The Nanakian Philosophy about the infiniteness of the universe is so correct even today since the scientists have also declared the infiniteness of the universe.

The irony is that many preachers failed to distinguish the ancient concept from the Nanakian concept of the universe. They usually preach that it was Guru Nanak who said that there are *lakhs* (hundreds of thousands) of nether worlds under the nether worlds and skies above skies, although it is very clear that it was a concept of the Vedas, not of Nanak. Nanakian concept is that the whole universe is one thing (element) and it is infinite.

Since the philosophy of Guru Nanak is scientific and logical, as explained above, thus it should be presented scientifically and logically to the humanity of the Science Age. Therefore, I coined

a new scientific and technical terms like, Nanakian Philosophy, to make the philosophy of Guru Nanak understandable to the scientific world.

**Conclusion:** What is happening in Sikhism is simply contrary to that what happened in Christianity. During the period of Renaissance the scientists were trying to correct the wrong concepts introduced into the Christianity, while in Sikhism during the 18th and 19th centuries, the scholars were *re-introducing* myths and rituals that were condemned and rejected by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus of Nanakian school. Since then, Sikhism is continuously wrapped in a cocoon woven with ancient mythology, unscientific and illogical codes and rituals, and unauthentic writings; consequently, it is being represented as mythic and ritualistic religion. Sometimes it is represented as a sect of Hinduism or Islam, or syncretism of both.

In spite of the above basic principles of the Nanakian Philosophy, the Sikhs have never been encouraged by the Sikh theologians and the Sikh religious authorities to challenge the unscientific and illogical concepts introduced into Sikhism, and misinterpretation of *Gurbani* by some of the *sants, babas, kirtanias, kathakaars* and preachers. Moreover, it is being emphasised that, to be a good Sikh, one has to follow strictly the ancient traditions without verifying their authenticity and legality, and to accept unscientific and illogical codes and rituals recommended by the priestly authorities without any reasoning. The irony is that in most of the cases such recommendations even cannot pass the tests of the *Gurbani*, science and logic - the touchstones of truth.

Let us interpret Nanakian Philosophy and represent Sikhism scientifically and logically for the humanity in general and the Sikhs in particular of the Science Age. Let us evaluate the old Sikh literature and history in the light of Nanakian Philosophy, science, and logic - the touchstones of truth, to find out Sikhism in its real perspective.



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