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GURU NANAK, THE HARBINGER OF THE SIKH ART OF LIVING

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Abstract:

Five hundred and forty three years ago Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, laid the foundation of Sikh art of living. His educational philosophy aimed at the socio-spiritual development and moral excellence of human beings. Virtues are essential to living well and, even more, to worth living. Sikhism accepts the temporal life as an opportunity given to human beings to practice virtuous life which paves the way for reunion of human beings with Supreme Being (God). The virtues like altruism, benevolence, contentment, courage, detachment, forgiveness, generosity, righteousness, self sacrifice, service, truthful living etc can be acquired and cultivated through education system. Social change, social development and collective salvation are inseparable goals of educational philosophy of Guru Nanak. His Divine compositions are teaching manuals on the art of virtuous living for mankind. He taught the mankind to vigorously strive for liberty, equality, fraternity and justice, and to get ready to lay supreme sacrifice for the defense of eternal truth. His conception of an ideal society and an ideal man is primarily based on fundamentals of Sikh art of living.

KEYWORDS:

Educational , Philosophy , Compositions , Society.

INTRODUCTION:

Guru Nanak (1469 AD - 1539 AD), the founder of Sikhism, a Divine Soul was born with a Divine mission of emancipation of mankind. He delivered His message in simplest form in the spiritual history of human race to liberate it from mutual strife, socio-religious disharmony and political chaos. He throughout in His life strived for classless, casteless, pluralistic, egalitarian and peace-loving social order. To achieve these objectives, He travelled all over the world to deliver the eternal message of love, peace and unity. Prior to analyze His teachings on art of living, it would be rewarding to be acquainted with His educational philosophy.

The highest aim of education for Sikh Gurus and especially for Guru Nanak was to raise a group of people who were different from the masses, who lived not only in that age with their value system, but would live in the times to come by inculcating the same values in their personalities. It was perhaps why that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru termed them Khalsa i.e. the pure man. Such pure persons were to be so developed that Guru Nanak used the word Sachara for them. It means the truthful being, whose spirits were highly elevated to the extent of self realization. Sikh way of life is, in fact, based on principle of truthful and honest living. The ideal man to Sikh Gurus is an embodiment of truth.

Divine journey which began with Guru Nanak's search for Sikh or Gurmukh, Brham Giyani or Sachara reached at its climax in their transformation into Khalsa or Singh or Sant Sipahi who is enlightened, educated and trained in art of living. In the contrast to Western education system which promotes epicurean way of life and enhance the obsession for materialistic growth, Guru Nanak's educational philosophy was directed towards ultimate goal of human life i.e. realization of Supreme Reality (God). Materialistic growth was not a one and only objective of Sikh educational heritage.

According to Sikhism, the purpose of human life consists not in going to paradise...of the folk beliefs of Hindus. It consists in searching God and achieving Unity with Him. The ultimate purpose of the religion of Sikhs consists in Mergence with the Highest Soul in Eternal Unceasing Bliss. Sikhs desires a spiritual unity with the Lord. In Sikhism, the human life is considered as an opportunity of achieving this goal. Guru Nanak said, "This human body has come to thy hand. This is thy chance to meet the Lord of the world". Bhagat Ravi Das said, "For many births, have I been separated from Thee, O Lord. This life, I now dedicate unto Thee. Says Ravi Dass, pinning my hope in Thee, I live, it is long since I has seen Thy vision".

In his Japji, Guru Nanak has described Gyan Khand (the realm of wisdom) which is illumined with Knowledge. The flames of thought keep it bright. A million brooks of joy are there. It is only after passing through Gyan Khand that man passes into Sach Khand (the realm of truth), meaning thereby that acquisition of divine knowledge helps in self-realization. For Guru Nanak, education is not synonymous with book learning. He differentiates education from mere information and passing of examinations in the modern times. One may read and read innumerable books and still may not be rightly educated person. Reading heaps of books without realization and understanding of the knowledge so gained is useless. It is just burden on the mind. Formal education has created ego-centric individual which has not required competence to play a role of emancipator for mankind. The split and inward personality as an offshoot of the formal education system he engrosses in duality and he is unable to comprehend Ultimate Truth (God). Guru Nanak's main objection to the education system of His times was that it served to increase egoism. To Him, learning unless it helps in understanding the purpose of life and in the singing of the Lord's praises, only feeds egoism which increases the inner restlessness.

To Guru Nanak, "the scholar, who harbors greed avarice and pride is said to be a fool". Guru Nanak also said, "By continually reading books men commit mistake and by wearing religious garbs they take great pride". To Him, "By mere talk and say we are not saved nor by reading loads of books". He is of view that, by reading and reading, man forgets the Name and suffers punishment. Through his excessive cleverness, he continues coming and going. For Guru Nanak, true understanding, realization and carrying out of knowledge can fulfill the purpose of education. He said, "If man, understands, reflects and comprehends what he reads and peruses, he ultimately comes to realize that the True Lord is within all.

Guru Nanak raised strong voice against Brahmins, Yogis, and Qazis who were interested in imparting that education which help them to maintain their hegemony in then existing society. He rejected the formal modes of education. To Him, worldly wisdom has not sufficient potential to comprehend the Infinite Reality. He recommend good deeds, truthful living and quest for true knowledge which can fulfill the ultimate purpose of life i.e. reunion with Supreme Being. He said, "In this body (lamp) put the oil of the practice of reciting the religious books and the wick of Lord's fear. Light this lamp with the fire of the knowledge of the Truth. With this oil thus shall (thy) lamp burn. Make such light and then shalt thou meet the Lord. To Guru Nanak, true understanding of holy religious scriptures creates the constructive fear of God and which leads to pious living.

Sikhism is way of life that requires constant intellectual curiosity and quest, and a living critical faculty of mind in man, a continuous living desire to know and understand, not only himself but the phenomenon that surround him. Such intellectual activity that leads to scientific research, intellectual and artistic creation, is the only true base for the Sikh way of life.

According to Sikhism spiritual, moral and social perfection of man go simultaneously in the formation of a perfect society and in that society man form an intractable link in the process of evolution. Thus the Sikh education envisages the preparation of Godly men and Godly society where man develops all his potentialities by living in society and performing his duties with the full understanding of Sikh values.

It was the Guru's endeavor to pull man out of the mess of his own doings to a fully emancipated level. Guru Nanak initiated this task when he pointed out in Babar Bani that citizens of this country had become weak due to their own faults and actions. He would not blame the creator for this. Baba Nanak further stated that if these people want to become strong and powerful they must shun their decadent modes and culture and follow a different path. The new path indicated by him was difficult and demanded sacrifices; but by following it they could become self-reliant superman.

Kam (Lust), Krodh (Anger), Lobh (Greed), Moh (Attachment) and Ahankar (Ego) are the most important five evils or sins, which had deviated the mankind from her real purpose of life from time immemorial. Sikh art of living train and motivate an individual to overcome these evils and to pursue the five virtues viz., Sat (Truth), Santokh (Contentment), Daya (Compassion), Nimrata (Humility) and Piyar (Love). Guru Nanak's Sikh art of living transform evils into virtues and enable a person to be cosmopolitan in outlook, democratic and egalitarian in spirit, and virtuous in action.

Guru Nanak made comment on Dark Age of His times in which man was in clutches of mutual strife and greed. He said, "The Dark Age is the vessel filled with the wine of lust and the mind is the tippler. Wrath is the cup, filled Wrath is the cup, filled with worldly love and pride is the server. Through excessive

drinking in the company of falsehood and avarice the mortal is ruined. Let good deeds be thy still, truth thy molasses and therewith make thou the sublime wine of the True Name. Make virtue thy thin loaves civility thy clarified butter and modesty thy meat to eat. Such delicacies, O Nanak, are obtained through the Guru, by partaking which, the sins depart". Guru Nanak's Divine compositions are ray of hope for mankind in the present Dark Age.

Sikh religion suggests the positive way to conquer the evil. There is need to eliminate the evil. Sikh Holy Scripture emphasises the idea of transforming evil into good. There is nothing bad in the life of man and world. It is the man only who is responsible to make it so. There is no need to depart from the evil. Returning to good, or involve in the goodness, is the only way to transcend the lower self which are called animal passions. Material attachment causes impurity. Impurity further proceeds to imperfection. Materialistic attitude never satisfies the man and he becomes spiritually bankrupt. It hampers the realization of ideal life. The spirit which is essence of Divine surrounded by matter prays to the Lord to liberate her.

Guru Nanak said, "Abandon thy avarice and merge in thy Infinite Lord. This wise shalt thou find the door of salvation. Forgetting whom the Death's courier begins to spy thee comforts flee and misery confronts thee in the Yond. Meditate thou on that Lord's Name, by the Guru's grace, O my soul of all the deliberations this alone is the supreme quintessence". Guru Nanak also said, "When one renounces the false greed, then does one come to realize the truth. Be absorbed in Guru's instruction and thou shalt know the Excellent Thing."

Guru Nanak was strongly against self-centered education system. He said, "Evil-intellect is the she-drummer, heartlessness is the butcheress, other's slander in the heart is a sweepress and deceitful wrath is a pariah-women. What does the drawing of lines avail thee when these four are seated with thee? Make righteousness thy abstinence, pious way of life thine lines and the Name's meditation thy abolition. Nanak, they alone shall be exquisite here-after who do not walk the way of sins."

He advised that one should burn worldly love and pound it into ink and turn thy intelligence into superior paper. Make Lord's love thy pen, mind the scribe and write God's deliberation after consulting the Guru. Pen down the praises of God's Name and continuously write that He has no end and limit. O' Brother! Learn how to write this account; so that where an account is called for, there thou may have a true Mark. Pause.

He suggested that make continence thy furnace, patience thy goldsmith, understanding thy anvil, Divine knowledge thy tools, God's fear thine bellows, practising of penance thy fire and Lord love thy pot, where in filter the Nectar of God's Name. Thus in the true mint the Divine word is fashioned. This is the (daily) routine of those on whom God casts His gracious glance. O' Nanak ! The Merciful Master, with his kind look, makes them happy.

He also recommended making thy mind thy ploughman, good deed the farm and, modesty the water and thy body the field. Let Lord's Name be thy seed, contentment the earth-crusher and garb of humility thy fence. Doing deeds of love, the seed shall germinate and flourishing then thou shalt see such a home. He also said that make God thy well, string to its chains the buckets of His Name and yoke thy mind as an ox thereto. Irrigate, thou with Nectar and fill the small plots therewith. Then shalt thou belong to the Gardener. Make both lust and wrath thy hand -hoes and therewith loosen thy farm, O brother.

Guru Arjan, fifth Nanak, also call for transformation of evils into virtues. He said, Lust, wrath, conceit of wealth and jealousy all these I have lost in the game of gamble. Chastity, contentment, compassion, faith and truthfulness, these I have admitted into my home. So all the load of my birth and death is removed. By joining the saint's guild, my soul is rendered pure, the perfect Guru has saved me in an instant. Pause.

The Sikh Way of Life, so to say, is the art of living a pure and beautiful life like a flower, by abiding in the True Source of its being and emitting its fragrance and sweetness all around. And this life is to be lived in fullness in all its aspects. It is the Life of Light, Love and Service (Gyan, Prem and Seva) a life filled with the fire and fervor of God, a life of vigor, vitality & valor in the midst of perils. This life of inspiration is the gift of the Guru, the Divine Master. Man achieves this illumination through his Goodwill and Grace.

Sikhism is a Guru Nanak's way of life that he guided us to tread for living this human span of life successfully, effectively, actively, purposefully, usefully, forcefully, and in accordance with and in tune with the will of the Master, who ordained to live this life, and in such a way that one may earn His pleasure and blessing. It was this way of life, (Marg-Panth) which was owned and finally brought to perfection by the 10th Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Nanak's Sikh art of living motivate, train and educate an individual to live in Chardi Kala i.e to live in high spirits with positive state of mind in every moment of life. Chardi Kala, commonly translated as "high morale" or "high spirit", signifies in the Sikh tradition, to which the usage is peculiar and native, a great deal more. It stands for a perennially blossoming, unwitting spirit, a perpetual state of

certitude resting on unwavering belief in Divine justice. It is that everlasting spirit of bravery which makes light of all hardships and handicaps - a spirit that will prompt one who had nothing better to eat than a mouthful of gram to say that he was eating almonds, and spirit which would lead one to describe death as an expedition to the next world, a man with an empty stomach declaring himself to have gone mad with prosperity.

Guru Nanak's vision of ideal life style revolves around the socio-spiritual and ethical values. The ideal of social ethics of the Sikhs is universal brotherhood which includes equality and altruism as expressed in the attitude as well as the conduct of the person. Every Sikh is required to work and pray for this universal brotherhood by praying for and seeking the good of all which is described in Sikhism as sarbat da bhalla.

Sikh way of life is obeying the will of God, and praying for His grace to unite with Him. Truth, Naam and pious deeds are the divine message of Sikhism to convert human mind from selfish narrow egoistic tendencies to God-tuned activities in all socio-political affairs. Divine knowledge is to be obtained from the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. It is not the end of the matter, as these are to be acted upon in the practical Sikh way of life. It automatically leads to truthful living, which is, in fact, the way of God. Truthful living is the most cherished ideal and an integral feature of Sikh way of life. The follower of Eternal path is always expected to lead virtuous and truthful life.

Sikh art of living is based on democratic values as enshrined in Divine compositions of Guru Nanak. The Sikh art of living is based on spirit of respect for human dignity, women folk, and marginalized sections of society. Guru Nanak's vision of liberty, equality, justice and fraternity is the bedrock on which his Sikh art of living is based. Transgression of rights of others, gender discriminations and social injustice are antithetical to an ideal Sikh life style.

Guru Nanak raised strong voice against gender inequality and caste based discriminations. To Guru Nanak, both men and women are equal and women cannot be considered socially or spiritually inferior. In order to liberate the women and to counter misogynistic tendencies, He said, "Why call her bad, from who are born the king." He condemned those socio-religious and cultural practices which undermine the status of women. He repudiated the idea of purdha, sati and Johar system which were primarily designed to downscale the position of women in the social order. He gave an idea of gender justice in Dark hours of history of mankind.

Sikh art of living disapprove the age old Varanashram Dharma. Guru Nanak, an apostle of social equality, repudiated the hierarchical structure of Hindu society. He was ought rightly against inhuman treatment with downtrodden sections of society. He said, "Preposterous is caste and vain the glory." Guru Nanak strongly preached that man is neither high nor low by his caste and his uniqueness depends upon his truthful deeds. Guru Nanak upholds the principle of individual freedom and human dignity. He raised the strong voice against those who curb individual liberty, religious freedom and freedom of expression. Guru Nanak advocates the virtue of justice. He tried to make it cardinal feature of individual and political ruler. To Him, only God-centered person or ruler can deliver justice. He advocates the government of just ruler. Guru Nanak's Sikh art of living constitute democracy in social, economic and political realms in the real sense of the term.

Guru Nanak established institutions like Sangat-Pangat, Dharmsal and Daswandh, which are dynamic and capable of cultivating adequately the virtues among people. These institutions are like training schools which educates and train an individual's to lead virtuous life. These socio-religious institutions played a pivotal role in Divinizing and transformation of the society. These institutions carried the mission of Sikh Gurus and gave instructions to the followers and seekers of path of eternal truth and developed their skills for worth living. These institutions are primarily aimed at formation of Gurmukh, a custodian of Sikh values, carrier of Divine mission and vanguard of socio-spiritual concerns of human kind. Sikhism teaches neither withdrawal from the world nor acceptance of the decadent social order as it is. It calls for struggle not only to eradicate evil but to establish a renewed world order where higher values such as truth, justice, honesty, goodness, love, brotherhood, equality, and compassion are in full flower. Sikh teachings do not preach pessimism but emphasis an active and purposeful life.

Guru Nanak creates a new way of life known as "Naam Marg." Sikhism is a gospel which the Gurus have conveyed and illustrated through their own lives. Their message is not an idea but an ideal realized, not a static thought but a dynamic and creative activity, not mere words and wishes explained but deeds done, not a precept but a practice, not a myth or parable but a truth lived in flesh and blood.

To conclude, it can be said that Guru Nanak's educational philosophy build an ideal society, creates an ideal man and outline the Sikh art of living. An ideal man (Gurmukh) lives in accordance with eternal message of Guru Nanak and has strength to establish the ideal socio-religious and political order. He has enough courage to defend this ideal order by laying down the supreme sacrifices. Guru Nanak's vision of Sikh art of living indeed ushers a new pattern of socio-religious, politico-economic values which shapes

a revolutionary, exclusive and promising way of living for mankind.

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- *. SGGS implies "Shri Guru Granth Sahib", a Holy Sikh Scripture.
- ** M: 1 implies that this Divine hymn relates to Guru Nanak, first Sikh Guru.
- *** M: 1 implies that this Divine hymn relates to Guru Arjan Dev, fifth Sikh Guru.

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