

Guru Nanak and Practical Philosophy of Life

Paper Submission: 15/09/2020, Date of Acceptance: 25/09/2020, Date of Publication: 26/09/2020

Abstract

The paper underlines the dynamic and practical philosophy of life as given by Guru Nanak. He was a great social reformer who strove to bridge the gulf between the various communities and culture groups of India and preached to them the gospel of truth, love, honesty and moral integrity. He showed us the real spirit of religion which should be bereft of all rituals and superstitions and deeply rooted in a pure and pious way of living.

Keywords: Guru Nanak, Brahmin, Philosophy.

Introduction

Guru Nanak was indeed truly inspired man who propagated religious harmony and discounted meaningless ritual more than 500 years ago in a country like India. Guru Nanak was a supreme iconoclast, a spiritual revolutionary who was born in 1469, the time of religious bigotry, fanaticism and superstition.

Aim of the Study

The present study aims to show that Guru Nanak was an iconoclast who believed in one God. His teachings are deeply rooted in a practical way of life and are for all religions. They are in fact, a mantra for a happy and successful life.

The country was subjected to the tyranny of the Brahmins and the fanaticism of Islamic expansionism. Guru Nanak fought against both. He saved the Hindus from the aggressive efforts of the Muslim rulers at proselytization, and also from rigid Brahmin imperialism.

The Guru equipped himself with the fundamentals of Hindu and Islamic theologies and appealed to the basic intelligence of the common man. He began to remove the unnecessary accretions without advancing any elaborate arguments to prove the absurdity of Hindu rituals.

The Guru began his mission by declaring "There is no Hindu no Musalman". Boldly he attended prayers at the local mosque but at the same time ridiculed the insincerity of conventional practices.

Guru Nanak journeyed far and wide into strange lands propagating his philosophy of truth. He imbibed all that was best and by accepting into his fold those who accepted his way of thinking laid the foundation of a new religion. His sincerity and realism won him many followers.

The most important thing to note here is the Religious Catholicism of which Guru Nanak was a propounder and a powerful protagonist. He did not question the efficacy of the existing religious systems but only criticized the emphasis on ritual at the expense of the spirit. Also, he never claimed that belief in his ministry was essential for the salvation of man. To the Hindu he said "Be a good Hindu" and to the Muslim he said "Be a good Muslim".

Such liberalism in the 15th century was something very unusual. Guru's modesty and his refusal to claim superiority of his teachings to those of other religions make him a reformer in the true sense of the word - a reformer who believed in catholicism of religious outlook and who believed in the brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God. To regard all men as equals and not divide them into two campus - the faithful and the heathens, is the highest religion for Guru Nanak.

Equally significant is Guru Nanak's religious philosophy which in fact was practical in nature. For him, religion was not different from life. It was not just a part of our routine activities but guided and overlapped all our activities. The importance of successful living has been emphasized by Guru Nanak. He proclaimed: "Truth is great, greater still is true living." This



Manjeet Kaur Minhas

Assistant Professor,
Dept. of English,
Saroop Rani Govt. College for
Women, Amritsar, Punjab, India

principle could guide human beings in all spheres - social, political and economic, and this was demonstrated by the Guru himself.

Guru Nanak was opposed to tyranny in politics. India witnessed a great political upheaval in his times. The Lodhi Empire had collapsed and the Mughal empire was in the process of being built up. The uncontrolled military hordes exploited the common, poor, powerless and innocent people as their religious views were anathema to those of the rulers. This made Guru Nanak's heart revolt and he resisted those forces, for he considered submission to tyranny as reprehensible.

Guru Nanak condemned every form of exploitation and attached a great importance to honest labour to earn one's bread. This was the reason that at Imnabad he rejected Malik Bhago's invite for feast and preferred to have millets with Bhai Lalo. For him Lalo's modest bread contained the milk of honest labour, whereas Bhago's dainties contained the blood of the exploited poor.

Strikingly modern in his attitude to social issues, Guru Nanak strongly advocated equality for women. A woman according to him, should not be regarded as inferior as she gives birth to kings. Man takes shape from a woman, marries a woman, enjoys his life with a woman so how can a woman be his inferior. Also, he stressed upon morality as being the first step towards spiritual consummation and also a ticket to a socially happy life.

The Guru's system of ethics does not comprise negative or passive virtues. A prominent place is assigned to charity, benevolence and humility. He asked his followers to meditate on God's name and also persuade the others to do so. Listing the stages of spiritual progress in the Japji, he places the Domain of Humility above the Domain of Grace

Guru Nanak's own life is a reflection of this relationship between life and religion. He was not a mystic recluse who had renounced the world and retired to meditate on God. On the contrary, he was a householder who had married and raised a family, earned his living first by service as the keeper of the state's provision store, and later by agriculture.

In spite of being given to prolonged introspection, Guru Nanak was a man fully aware of the social, political and economic issues taking shape around him. He preached resignation to the will of God but not to a tyrant's repression. Resignation to the will of God meant for him a calm acceptance of adversities and failure but not without a cheerful struggle to overcome or avert them.

The principle of justice, as conceived by Guru Nanak was applicable to all domains of life, religious, social, economic and political. In the economic field, he laid stress on haq halal (righteousness) in earnings and forbade encroachment by what rightfully belonged to another. The accumulation of property, too, does not find favour with the Guru. The reason being that it leads to greediness which is a big impediment in the way of moral and spiritual progress. An equally strong ground for opposition is that its accumulation is possible only by acts of injustice and high handedness. He

preached sharing with others what one earns and was strictly against begging of alms. For him, sharing marked an important higher stage of moral development in man.

Guru Nanak, as an ironist, is proved from the incident of his visit to Haridwar. Seeing people splash water in the direction of the Sun, he also began to do the same but in the opposite direction. On being questioned as to what he was doing he replied that he was watering his fields at Kartarpur.

People made fun of him but he retorted that if they could convey water to the sun which is millions of miles away, he too can send water to his fields which are only 300 miles away.

Spiritual means visualized by Guru Nanak were entirely different from those visualised by his predecessors. For him an individual could accelerate or retard his spiritual growth. The success of the process depended on the simultaneous development of human facilities, which could be attained through dedication.

Guru Nanak's was by no means a popular undertaking. He was a man of Divine inspiration and robust common sense who had set out to correct the world. He exposed the dearly cherished beliefs, the falsity of superstitions and condemned rituals, which is quite often more popular than the religion itself.

The approach of Guru Nanak to the social problems, his philosophy of life which was practical indeed was indeed novel and different in entirety to that of the other bhagats and saints. He was a visionary who thought much ahead of his times. Over and above being a mystic, he had an acute awareness of the various social issues facing the society of his period and suggested practical remedial measures to tackle them. Cunningham writes: 'It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform and to lay those foundations which enabled his successor Gobind to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes.' (Cunningham 34)

Conclusion

Thus, Guru Nanak is one of those great men of history whose memory is enshrined in the hearts of men and whose fame transcends the bounds of time and space. The universality of his message, combined with a dynamic approach to religion, deep humanism and concern for the outcaste and the downtrodden have made him an eternal fountain of solace.

References

1. *Cunningham, J.D. A History of the Sikhs: From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej, 1853.*
2. *Gandhi, Surjit Singh. History of Sikh Gurus Retold: 1969-1606 C.E(Vol.1), Atlantic Publishers and Distributers, 2019*
3. *Khalid, Haroon. Walking with Nanak, Tranquebar, 2018*
4. *Singh, Khushwant. A History of the Sikhs, Vol. 1, Penguin Books, 1963.*
5. *Singh, Khushwant. Punjab, Punjabis & Punjabiat.: Reflections on a Land and its People. Aleph Book Company, 2018.*
6. *Singh, Palwant. The Sikhs, Rupa, 2002*