

## **Good Governance - A Perspective from Sri Guru Granth Sahib**

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### **Abstract**

Governance encompasses the processes by which organizations are directed, controlled and held to account. It includes the authority, accountability, leadership, direction, and control exercised in an organization. Greatness can be achieved when good governance principles and practices are applied throughout the whole organization. Ethical Governance requires that public officials adhere to high moral standards while serving others. Authentic Governance entails the systematic process of continuous, gradual, and routine personal/corporate improvement, steering, and learning that lead to sustainable high personal/corporate performance and excellence. Thus authentic governance represents the ability to discern right from wrong and the commitment to do what is right, good, and proper. Benevolent governance is perceived to be for benefit of the population as a whole.

Sikhism, a panentheistic religion, originated in the Punjab province of the Indian subcontinent, during the 15th century. It is one of the youngest and fifth major world religions, founded by Guru Nanak. The fundamental beliefs of Sikhism have been enshrined in the sacred scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib [1-3]. These beliefs include faith in one universal creator, unity of all humankind, engaging in selfless service, striving for social justice for all, honest livelihood and ethical conduct while living a householder's life. Sri Guru Grant Sahib provides very useful insights for governance through religious or secular organizations, that address human rights, education, or diplomacy to end all forms of disparity/discrimination among people [4-5].

In this article, an attempt is made to understand how the doctrines of Sikhism encourage us for better governance and by which means. Whether these doctrines align with the above-mentioned forms of governance or conflict with these. It is pointed out the most of the attributes of good, ethical, authentic and benevolent governance are genuinely supported by the Sikh doctrines. The adherence to democratic and republican organizations, for providing a high quality governance, is encouraged in Sikh principles and practices.

### **Introduction**

As we know, Governance is about the rules of behaviour, especially in organizations. It encompasses the processes by which organisations are directed, controlled and held to account. It includes the authority, accountability, leadership, direction and control exercised in

an organisation. Greatness can be achieved when good governance principles and practises are applied throughout the whole organisation.

Good governance encompasses both the public sector and the private sector and especially the large MNCs in the private sector. Certain shared principles of good governance for the public and private sectors are considered here.

An institutional set-up that ensures good governance usually has the following 11 major characteristics. Herein we are going to learn how these characteristics of good governance are supported and encouraged by Sikh doctrines, as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

### **1. Rule of Law**

Good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced by an impartial regulatory body, for the full protection of stakeholders. Access to justice is a basic principle of the rule of law. In the absence of access to justice, people are unable to have their voice heard, exercise their rights, challenge discrimination or hold decision-makers accountable. For the right of Justice for all, Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, proclaimed:

ਅਦਲੁ ਕਰੇ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨ ਸਮਾਨਾ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1040)

One must administer justice by being absorbed in the spiritual wisdom of the Guru. (M. 1, SGGS, p 1040)

### **2. Transparency**

Transparency means that information should be provided in easily understandable forms and media. It should be freely available and directly accessible to those, who will be affected by governance policies and practices. This type of openness between managers and employees creates trust and leads to a successful organization. Guru Arjan Dev articulates;

ਨਾ ਕੇ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਪੰਨਾ 1299)

None is my enemy, and none is stranger, I am in accord with everyone. (M. 5, SGGS, p 1299)

### **3. Responsiveness**

Good governance requires that organizations and their processes are designed to serve the best interests of stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. For availability to public and timeous reaction to the needs and opinions of the public, Guru Arjan Dev advises:

ਸੀਖਰ ਕਾਰਜੁ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਵਾਰਿ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਪੰਨਾ 19)

you shall quickly resolve your affairs. (M. 5, SGGS, p 19)

#### **4. Consensus Oriented**

Good governance requires consultation to understand the different interests of stakeholders in order to reach a broad consensus, to know what is in the best interest of the entire stakeholder group and how this can be achieved in a sustainable and prudent manner. Sikh doctrines emphasise on such an approach.

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 661)

Nanak says: As long as we are in this world, we must share knowledge/spiritual wisdom by listening , or speaking it. (M. 1, SGGS, p 661)

ਖੇਜਤ ਖੇਜਤ ਬਹੁ ਪਰਕਾਰੇ ਸਰਬ ਅਰਥ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਪੰਨਾ 714)

Continuously engaging in research in all possible manner, rationalize every opinion before accepting it. (M. 5, SGGS, p 714)

#### **5. Equity and Inclusiveness**

The organization that provides the opportunity for its stakeholders, to maintain and improve their well-being, provides the most compelling reason for its existence and value to society. Guru Nanak vouched for the right of **Equity** for all by raising his voice against discrimination based on gender, race, and religion. He emphasized on treating everyone in the same respectful way and for the equal access to the opportunities for growth development of all. In his hymns, he says as;

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੇਤਿ ਸਮੇਈ ਜੀਉ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 559)

As Gurmukh (learned one), look upon all with the single eye of equality; in every heart, the Divine Light (essence) is contained. (M. 1, SGGS, p 599)

#### **6. Effectiveness and Efficiency or Professionalism**

Good governance means that the processes implemented by the organization, to produce favorable results, meet the needs of its stakeholders. It requires making the best use of available resources. Competent, fair and knowledge based decision-making and behaviour is needed. Knowledge acquisition about the available resources prepares a manager for an effective and efficient decision making. Appreciating the importance of knowledge acquisition, Guru Nanak encourages all to gain it in all spheres of life. He says;

ਗਿਆਨ ਖੜਗੁ ਲੈ ਮਨ ਸਿਉ ਲੂੜੈ ਮਨਸਾ ਮਨਹਿ ਸਮਾਈ ਹੇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1022)

With the sword of knowledge, one must destroy evil thoughts and desires embedded in the mind. (M. 1, SGGS, p 1022)

Recognizing the fact that education is a crucial factor in fostering development and enhancing wellbeing of the society, Guru Nanak encourages all to adopt an altruistic attitude on gaining knowledge. He asserts;

ਵਿਦਿਆ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ਤਾਂ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 356)

Contemplate and reflect upon knowledge, and you will become a benefactor to others.  
(M. 1, SGGS, p 356)

## **7. Accountability**

Accountability is a key tenet of good governance. It encompasses the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for decisions and actions. Who is accountable for what should be documented in policy statements. In general, an organization is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions as well as the applicable rules of law. Guru Nanak emphasises that each member of the organization must be accountable for his/her actions. He proclaims;

ਜਬ ਲੇਖਾ ਦੇਵਹਿ ਬੀਰਾ ਤਉ ਪੜਿਆ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 432)

When your account is adjusted, O brother, only then shall you be judged wise. (M. 1, SGGS, p 432)

ਕੀਤਾ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਲੇਖਾ ਸੰਢੀਐ ॥

Everyone receives the rewards of his own actions; his account is adjusted accordingly. (M. 1, SGGS, p 473)

## **8. Participation**

Good governance is vital in fostering a system in which the public feels that they are part of decision-making processes. Such public participation can either be directly or through legitimate representatives. Participation needs to be informed and organized, including freedom of expression in the best interests of the organization and society. Guru Nanak proclaims that sharing of views and ideas (liberty of thought and expression) must be a continuous process throughout our lives.

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 661)

As long as we are in this world, O Nanak, we must listen to others, as well as express ourselves to others. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 661)

## **9. Professional Ethics**

Awareness of the moral principles and adherence to them should guide our behaviour in every sector. Guru Arjan Dev articulates such a view in his hymns, as;

ਤਜਿ ਮਾਨੁ ਮੇਹੁ ਬਿਕਾਰੁ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਕਲਮਲਾ ਦੁਖ ਜਾਰੇ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਪੰਨਾ 459)

Renounce your pride, emotional attachment and mental corruption, and burn away the pain of wickedness. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 459)

## **10. Leadership**

Leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act toward achieving a common goal. A true leader provides a clear vision and ethical guidance that inspires and encourages. Guru Nanak emphasises the qualities of such a leader as;

ਕਰਣੀ ਕਾਬਾ ਸਚੁ ਪੀਰੁ ਕਲਮਾ ਕਰਮ ਨਿਵਾਜ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 140)

Let good conduct be your Kaabaa, Truth your spiritual guide, and the karma of good deeds your prayer and chant. (M. 1, SGGS, p 140)

## **11. Ubuntu (humanity towards others)**

For Good governance, managers must practice compassion and humanity. They must have the awareness of the importance of community. Guru Arjan promotes such a view in his hymns as;

ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਦਇਆ ਧਰਮੁ ਸੀਗਾਰੁ ਬਨਾਵਉ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਪੰਨਾ 812)

Be embellished with truth, contentment, compassion and Dharmic faith. (M. 5, SGGS, p 812)

Good governance is an ideal which is difficult to achieve in its totality. Good governance is achieved through an on-going discourse that attempts to capture all of the considerations involved in assuring that stakeholder interests are addressed and reflected in policy initiatives. As is obvious, the doctrines of Sikhism, as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib are in great consonance with the attributes required for good governance.

It is pertinent to add that good, ethical, and benevolent governance through democratic and republican organizations is inspired and encouraged by Sikh doctrines.

## **References**

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