

Good Governance - A Perspective from Sri Guru Granth Sahib

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Governance includes the processes by which organizations are directed, controlled and held to account. Excellence can be achieved when good governance principles and practices are applied throughout the entire organization. Various forms of governance are in vogue. Ethical governance demands that public officials stick to high moral standards while serving others. Authentic governance necessitates the systematic process of continuous, gradual, and routine personal and corporate improvement that leads to sustainable high performance. Thus it represents the ability to discern right from wrong and the commitment to doing right, good, and proper. Finally, benevolent governance is considered to be for the benefit of the whole population.

Sikhism, a panentheistic religion, 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 (SGGS) [1-3]. Moreover, Sri Guru Grant Sahib provides valuable insights for governance through religious or secular organizations that address human rights, education, or diplomacy to end all forms of disparity and discrimination among people [4-5]. Herein, an attempt is made to describe the doctrines of Sikhism that encourage us for better governance. It is concluded that most of the attributes of good, ethical, authentic and benevolent governance are genuinely supported by the Sikh doctrines. Furthermore, the adherence to democratic and republican organizations for providing high-quality governance is encouraged in Sikh principles and practices.

Introduction

Governance is about the rules of behaviour, especially in organizations. It includes the processes by which organizations are directed, controlled and held to account. It encompasses the authority, direction and control, accountability, and leadership exercised in an organization. Excellence can be achieved when good governance principles and practices are applied throughout the organization.

Good governance envelops both the public and private sectors, especially the large MNCs. Therefore, certain common principles of good governance for the public and private sectors are considered here. An institutional setup that ensures good governance usually has the following eleven significant characteristics. Herein, an attempt is made to describe how good governance characteristics are supported and encouraged by Sikh doctrines [6].

1. Rule of Law

Good governance necessitates fair legal frameworks enforced by an impartial regulatory body for the complete protection of stakeholders. Access to justice is a fundamental principle of

the rule of law. In the absence of access to justice, people cannot have their voices 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 ॥

adal karay gur gi-aan samaanaa.

Meaning: 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 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 ॥

naa ko bairree nahee bigaanaa sagal sang ham ka-o ban aa-ee.

Meaning: 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 stakeholders' best interests within a reasonable timeframe. For availability to the public and timeous reaction to the needs and opinions of the people, Guru Arjan Dev advises:

ਸੀਘਰ ਕਾਰਜੁ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਵਾਰਿ ॥

Seeghar Kaaraj Laehu Savaar.

Meaning: You shall quickly resolve your affairs. (M. 5, SGGS, p 176)

4. Consensus Oriented

Good governance requires consultation to understand stakeholders' different interests to reach a broad consensus, know what is in the best interest of the entire stakeholder group, and achieve it sustainably and prudently. Sikh doctrines emphasize such an approach. Guru Nanak says:

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥

Jab lag duniā rahī-ai Nānak kichh sunī-ai kichh kahī-ai.

Meaning: 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).

Guru Arjan urges that

ਖੇਜਤ ਖੇਜਤ ਬਹੁ ਪਰਕਾਰੇ ਸਰਬ ਅਰਥ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ॥

Khojaṭ khojaṭ baho parkāre sarab arath bīchāre.

Meaning: Continuously engaging in research in all possible manners, 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 wellbeing offers 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 treating everyone in the same respectful way and equal access to opportunities for growth/development. In his hymns, he says:

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮੇਈ ਜੀਉ ॥

Gurmukh ek darisat kar dekhu ghat ghat joṭ samoī jīo.

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

6. Effectiveness and Efficiency or Professionalism

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

ਗਿਆਨ ਖੜਗੁ ਲੈ ਮਨ ਸਿਉ ਲੂਝੈ ਮਨਸਾ ਮਨਹਿ ਸਮਾਈ ਹੇ ॥

Gīān kharag lai man si'o lūjhai mansā manēh samāī he.

Meaning: 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 the wellbeing of society, Guru Nanak encourages all to adopt an altruistic attitude on gaining knowledge. He asserts;

ਵਿਦਿਆ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ਤਾਂ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ ॥

vidiā vīchārī tān parupkārī.

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

7. Accountability

Accountability is a crucial 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 responsible for those affected by its decisions or actions and the applicable rules of law. Guru

Nanak emphasizes that each member of the organization must be accountable for his/her actions. He proclaims.

ਜਬ ਲੇਖਾ ਦੇਵਹਿ ਬੀਰਾ ਤਉ ਪੜਿਆ ॥

Jab lekḥā devēh bīrā ta'o parīā.

Meaning: 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 ॥

Kītā āpo āpnā āpe hī lekḥā sandhīai.

Meaning: Everyone receives the rewards of his 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 must be informed and organized (including freedom of expression) in the organization's best interests and society. Guru Nanak proclaims that sharing views and ideas (liberty of thought and expression) must be a continuous process throughout our lives. He proclaims:

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥

Jab lag dūnīā rahīai Nānak kichḥ sunīai kichḥ kahīai.

Meaning: Nanak says: As long as we are in this world, we must share knowledge/spiritual wisdom by listening or speaking it. (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 ਮੋਹੁ ਬਿਕਾਰੁ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਕਲਮਲਾ ਦੁਖ ਜਾਰੇ ॥

Taj mān moh bikār man kā kalmalā dukḥ jāre.

Meaning: 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 emphasizes the qualities of such a leader as;

ਕਰਣੀ ਕਾਬਾ ਸਚੁ ਪੀਰੁ ਕਲਮਾ ਕਰਮ ਨਿਵਾਜ ॥

Karṇī kābā sach pīr kalmā karam nivāj.

Meaning: Let good conduct be your Kaaba, Truth your spiritual guide, and prayer and chant your good deeds. (M. 1, SGGS, p 140)

11. Ubuntu (humanity towards others)

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

ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਦਇਆ ਧਰਮੁ ਸੀਗਾਰੁ ਬਨਾਵਉ ॥

Saṭ santokḥ dạiā ḍharaṃ sīgāṛ banāvạo.

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

The Sikh doctrines emphasize that the quality and character of persons who govern an organization, province or country must be of integrity and impeccable character [7]. Only then excellence in governance can be achieved. Guru Nanak proclaims it as

ਤਖਤਿ ਬਹੈ ਤਖਤੈ ਕੀ ਲਾਇਕ ॥ ਪੰਚ ਸਮਾਏ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਪਾਇਕ ॥

Takhaṭ bahai takḥtai kī lạ̄ik. Pancḥ samạ̄e gurmaṭ pạ̄ik.

Meaning: The deserving alone deserve to govern. Such persons, having subdued the five evils (lust, rage, greed, attachment and narcissism), become the Lord's true representative. (Mehl 1, SGGC, p.1039)

Conclusion

Good governance is an ideal that is difficult to achieve in its totality. Good governance is achieved through an ongoing discourse that attempts to capture all of the considerations involved in assuring that stakeholder interests are addressed and reflected in policy initiatives. As is evident, the doctrines of Sikhism, as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, are remarkably in accord 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.

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