

Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Social Change

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SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDE represents a spirit of critical and creative inquiry. It involves the process of logical reasoning. The ability to think objectively, logically and analytically leads to the development of scientific attitude. It is a habit of mind. It is a way of looking at things, the capacity to rid us of every kind of prejudice and to look at the object in its entirety and its objectivity, removing ourselves as much as possible from the investigation of the things.

A person endowed with a scientific attitude tries to find out the cause and the rational justification of an event objectively. He is free from all prejudices and make-believe. He would attempt to explain the cause-effect relationship between two or more events. Such a man would not like to take for granted and believe in such irrational beliefs and superstitions that an individual will fail in his task and will be unsuccessful if a cat crossed his way or if he himself or somebody else sneezed.

A person with a scientific attitude gets filled with a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural laws. The attitude to question the established irrational beliefs, superstitions and illogical traditions is a typical characteristic of a person of scientific

bent of mind.

Guru Nanak occupies a unique place amongst the spiritual leaders, preceptors, reformers and saints of India. His teachings have universal appeal and they hold good for all ages. The impact of his teachings on the Indian society has been incredible. He traveled far and wide to enlighten humanity and administered to it his message of love, peace, devotion of God, social justice, religious toleration and universal brotherhood.

He was a great thinker, a mystic and a revolutionary social reformer. He was a poet and scholar of high caliber and a person of extraordinary foresight. In addition to all this, Guru Nanak was a man with a scientific attitude. The life and works of Guru Nanak confirms this fact. In this article an attempt is made to analyse Guru Nanak's life and some of his works, in terms of the enlisted characteristics of a person with a scientific attitude.

Guru Nanak's advent was a time of transition and turmoil in Indian society. After a short and inglorious rule of the Sayyids, the Lodis established themselves at Delhi. Bahlol Lodi, the founder of the Lodi dynasty, tried to revive the power and prestige of the sultanate. But Sikandar Lodi tried to make the state theocratic. He officially imposed Islam

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on the Hindu subjects. He followed the policy of persecution and destroyed temples in most parts of north India.

Ibrahim Lodi was a weak and dissolute king. The vain and haughty ways of the sultan excited rebellion all around. The whole of Delhi kingdom was in utter confusion and disorder under him. Corruption was rife and degradation and treachery stalked openly. Honour, justice and position were bought and sold. The rulers of the land were sunk in lechery and in an abyss of enfeebling debauchery. Guru Nanak, who was alive to the exigencies of the times, bitterly criticized the contemporary administrative machinery and the ruling class who had no love for justice and fair play. He has described his times in a most telling manner, '*Kaliyuga is a dagger, Kings are butchers, Dharma has taken wings and disappeared. In the black night of falsehood, The moon of truth is nowhere to be seen.*' Guru Nanak condemned the corrupt ways of the administration as vehemently, '*There is none who receives or gives not bribe. Even the King distributes justice, when his palm is greased.*'

Guru Nanak found that the people were divided and drifting culturally away from each other, viz. the Hindu society representing Indian culture, and the Muslim society representing the Semitic culture. Muslims, being conquerors, had the upper hand. The Hindus were given the status of the *Zimmis* (i.e. the people living under contract as second rate citizens) of the state). They had to pay vari-

ous kinds of discriminatory taxes, such as *Jiziya* and pilgrimage tax, etc. to their Muslim sovereigns.

The Hindus contemptuously looked upon the Muslim as *malechhas*, and the Muslims in turn looked upon the Hindus as infidels or *kafirs*. In Hindu society, the idea of a common brotherhood was lost with the institution of castes. The Brahmin considered himself supreme over Kashtriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Shudra was highly exploited by *Dvijas*; Muslim society was also divided into two main classes based on religion. Some were *Shiyas* and others were *Sunnis*. Religion had degenerated into rituals and formalism.

The most dramatic events during Guru Nanak's lifetime were connected with the invasion of India by Babur in 1521 AD. Guru Nanak has described the suffering of the people during this invasion with deep emotion. He has uttered some of the most touching verses, which are collectively known as *Babar Vani*. Guru Nanak may be said to have been the first medieval Indian saint to condemn war and to denounce exploitation as grave social maladies. In this period of religious and cultural divisions, he did his best to encourage the feeling of religious toleration, cultural coexistence and universal brotherhood. He proposed newer ideals and revolutionary concepts to encourage self-confidence among the masses. The most important of such concepts was the concept of 'Universal Brotherhood and Equality'.

Universal Brotherhood: As mentioned earlier, during Guru Nanak's time, Indian society had two main divisions based on religion - Hindus and Muslims. Guru Nanak brought forward a revolutionary concept and said: '*Na koi Hindu na Musalman, Ram ke pind paran*'. By propagating this ideal he tried to determine the people that none is born as a Hindu or as a Musalman, rather all are children of the same Creator. Some call Him '*Ram*' while other call Him '*Rahim*'. To break the barriers 'caste and class divisions' of Hindu religion and '*shrah*' and '*shariat*' of Islam, Guru Nansk's propagation of this revolutionary concept was a marvelous effort in the right direction. Elaborating his new idea he said; '*Sabh meh jot, jot hai so-e*'.

As the same spirit is prevailing among all of us, so it is not good to divide people as Hindus and Musalmans. All of us, being children of the same Creator, are equal. No one is Highborn or Lowborn, rather one's deeds determine whether one is good or bad. He emphasized that caste, class and religious divisions are all man made. It does not make any difference whether one is born in here or anywhere. None is born '*Momin*' or '*Kafir*', '*Brahmin*' or '*Shudra*'. All belong to the same class - human beings. Hence all are equal. Thus he dared to challenge the established wrong practices of his contemporary society and propagated the message of universal brotherhood and equality.

He not only preached these ideas among people but also followed these in his life. Thus

setting an example for others to emulate. To remove the yawning gap among the rich and poor, and discrimination between (so called) highborn and lowborn he founded the concept of '*Sangat*' (religious congregation) and '*Pangat*' (Community kitchen). The symbol of Universal brotherhood and equality - '*Sangat*' and '*Pangat*' tradition is still prevalent in the Sikh society. In the concept of '*Sangat*' and '*Pangat*' there is no discrimination on the basis of castē, colour or creed. There is no special treatment for the highborn (e.g. Brahmin) or the rich. There is no separate or lowly position for the poor or the lowborn (e.g. Shudra). Guru Nanak started this tradition at first at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan). Later on, the other Sikh Gurus not only carried on this tradition successfully but also enlarged it. To inculcate the spirit of equality among all, they built common wells, *baulies* and *sarovars*. They also got the *Dharamshalas* (prayer houses) constructed. The presence of *baulies*, *sarovars* and Gurudwaras at Goindwal, Tarn Taran, Amritsar and Anandpur, conform to this revolutionary concept of Sikh gurus, and are the symbol of human equality.

Guru Nanak dared to challenge the human distinctions based on discrimination, wrong practices and superstitions. He also proposed and implemented a successful program (i.e. *Sangat* and *Pangat*) to eliminate such malpractices in the society. These facts aptly reflect Guru Nanak's scientific attitude to life.

