

Universal Relevance of Guru Nanak's Teachings

Dr. Devinder Pal Singh

Center for Understanding Sikhism,
Mississauga, ON, L5A 1Y7, Canada
drdpsn@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Although 550 years have passed since the birth of Guru Nanak, his life and teachings still hold great power and meaning for humanity in the 21st century. He was not only the founder of the Sikh religion but was a great poet, an eminent philosopher, a notable humanist, and a leading social reformer. His philosophy for a social revolution and universal brotherhood is relevant more than ever before. He not only propounded a new way of life but a realistic and optimistic world view. Quintessentially, his most penetrating insight is that the ultimate goal of human life, to be a *sachiarā* (truthful being), can be achieved by following the path of truthful living. He envisaged the emergence of a race of gurmukhs (God-conscious beings). The teachings of Guru Nanak focus on the upliftment of the weaker sections of the society and their empowerment to live a life of dignity. Love of God (who is the epitome of virtues), egalitarianism, altruism, harmony with nature, cultivation of scientific temper, Interdependence, impermanence, inter-faith harmony, multiculturalism, lifelong learning, pro-active social justice, and peaceful co-existence are the lodestars of Guru Nanak's message to humanity. Three cardinal points of his teachings: *Kirat Karo* (honest living), *Naam Japo* (devotion to God) and *Vand Chhako* (sharing with others) have become an integral part of the lives of Sikhs all over the world. The crux of his teachings found expression by the establishment of *daramsals* (gurdwaras) and the development of langar (community kitchen), *pangat* (sitting in a row on the same level) and *Sangat* (holy congregation) traditions among his followers. Thus even in the contemporary world, Guru Nanak's universal teachings are as relevant as ever.

Guru Nanak and His Time

About five hundred and fifty years ago, when Guru Nanak was born in this world, political and social conditions in the country was far from normal. Political strife and religious fanaticism dogged the steps towards progress and peace. Religious persecution¹ was rampant and the people were subjected

to political tyranny and harassment. People had lost sight of the essential principles of religion. Then the practice of religion was devoid of spirituality. Priests concerned themselves more with the rituals and formal religion. People were superstitious and self-oriented. Untouchability and casteism were practiced in a pernicious manner. Religion tended to demoralize and accentuate the divisions among humans. Women were not looked upon as equal citizens.

Guru Nanak's advent² (1469-1539) is an epoch-making singular event in the recorded history. He rejected earlier religious traditions along with their entire stream of dogmas and doctrines. For example, the concept of God, the incarnation of God, the caste system, transmigration and karma, soul and salvation, hell and heaven, gods and goddesses, and idol worship were all swept into the dustbin. Nanak denounced oppressive rulers and their allies in no uncertain terms. He called for universal liberty and the establishment of a benevolent rule of justice for all. His unique, revolutionary and liberating philosophy of universal humanism –liberty, love, respect, justice, and equality, is applicable for all.

God - The Eternal Truth

God - is a term³⁻⁹ used to denote an object of worship or evocation. It signifies the belief of most modern religions in the existence of a Supreme Being, who is the source and support of the spatiotemporal material world. The fundamental belief of Sikhism, too, is that God exists, though it is indescribable yet knowable. God's nature is two-fold in the Sikh religion and the first part is transcendent (*nirgun*). God exists outside of the material world and has no gender and no form. In the transcendent form, God exists outside of time and the cycle of death and rebirth. It has no limits and cannot be understood by a mind grounded in the limits of the physical world. Although God is transcendent, it also has a very real presence within the world, known as its immanent form (*sargun*). God's immanent form manifests itself in its Divine Will (*hukam*), which guides and sustains the universe. For this reason, Sikhs believe that God is close to them at all times and pervades every aspect of reality. Unlike its transcendent form, the immanent form is knowable, but only to individuals blessed by God. Guru Nanak discards⁵⁻⁷ the entrenched beliefs in magic and miracles like virgin birth and resurrection from death and discourages the magical thinking inherent among the followers of traditional religions by emphasizing reason and logical thinking in the understanding of God and life.

For Guru Nanak, God is Truth and Knowledge (*Sabd*) understandable through wisdom and discerning intellect (*bibek buddh*). The Eternal Truth is manifested in nature through cosmic law (*hukam*).

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1)

There is one Ultimate Reality (God). Eternal Truth is its name; Creative is its nature. Fearing nothing and at enmity with none, Timeless is its Image, Not begotten, Self-Existent, Enlightener, Gracious. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 1)

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਚਲਾਏ ਰਾਹੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਵਿਗਸੈ ਵੇਪਰਵਾਹੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 2)

The Commander, by His Command, leads us to walk on the Path. O Nanak, It blossoms forth, Carefree and Untroubled. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 2)

Knowing the Truth (God) helps us with a better understanding of our own identity. Before we can appreciate who we are, we need to know who made us and why we are here on the earth. Therefore the more we learn about God, the more we will be able to learn about ourselves. The more one knows God, intellectually and experientially, the more they can grow spiritually.

Divine Love

Divine Love is the very essence of the Creator-God. It is not like the emotional love - the natural love - that we mortals are familiar with. It is a real essence, something tangible like electricity, magnetism or gravity. This can flow from the Creator into our souls, and being a real essence, it has the power to transform that soul. We simply need to ask for this Divine Love and to ask often. It is not a one-time gift; it is more like sustenance, but one whose effects are cumulative. Guru Nanak affirms the existence of the essence of God in all beings.

ਜਿਸ ਦਾ ਜੀਉ ਪਰਾਣੁ ਹੈ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਅਪਾਰਾ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 140)

The Divine Light of the God, who owns the soul and the breath of life, is deep within all beings. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 140)

The greatest love you can experience¹⁰⁻¹¹ is in communion with God in meditation. The love between the soul and Spirit is perfect love, the love you are all seeking. When you meditate, love grows. Millions of thrills pass through your heart...If you meditate deeply, a love will come over you such as no human tongue can describe; you will know divine love, and you will be able to give that pure love to others. In the universal sense, love is the divine power of attraction in creation that harmonizes, unites, binds together...Those who live in tune with the attractive force of love achieve

harmony with nature and their fellow being and are attracted to a blissful reunion with God. Guru Nanak emphasizes on imbibing love of God in ourselves.

ਗਾਵੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਮਨਿ ਰਖੀਐ ਭਾਉ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 2)

Sing, and listen, and let your mind be filled with divine love. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 2)

Divine Love can transform our lives into steady peace and joy. It's a very real feeling and energy. The ability to experience Divine Love makes it possible for us to share the love with the people at a much deeper and more real level. In the consciousness of one who is immersed in the divine love of God, there is no deception, no narrowness of caste or creed, no boundaries of any kind. When you experience that divine love, you will see no difference between flower and beast, between one human being and another. You will commune with all nature, and you will love equally all mankind.

We may be biologically hard-wired to worship at the altars of consumerism this holiday season, buying gifts with expectations of what we will receive in return, but those people who say they regularly experience the love of God are much more likely to reach out beyond family and friends to serve humanity, according to a national survey of more than 1,200 adults. The Godly Love National Survey¹¹, led by researchers at the University of Akron and the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love, found people who most often reported feeling God's love were more than twice as likely as the average American to give time to those in need more than once a week.

Egalitarian Social Order

For the past several decades, societies of the world have been examining¹²⁻¹³ the concept of equality, debating bias in the workplace, in social arenas, in the home, and in religion. Guru Nanak's hymns provide a guiding light for humanity to live in a spirit of unity and equality for all people. Guru Nanak has addressed the concept of equality as one of the core instructions of Sikh faith. He taught Ik Ong Kar, which means that there is One Creator of the Creation and the Creator and the Creation are One, and One Spirit which moves throughout all creation. During the very turbulent times in India, when Guru Nanak was born, caste hierarchy, sexual prejudice, and bigotry were rampant everywhere. Into this melee, he heralded a simple, yet profoundly universal message, teaching the equality of all humankind. It is according to his teachings that all sit equally together in a pangat (queue) at our langar (community meals) and in Sangat (holy congregation).

ਜਾਣਹੁ ਜੋਤਿ ਨ ਪੂਛਹੁ ਜਾਤੀ ਆਰੈ ਜਾਤਿ ਨ ਹੇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 349)

Recognize the God's essence within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 349)

ਨਾਨਕ ਉਤਮੁ ਨੀਚੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 7)

O Nanak, no one is high or low (thereby all are equal). (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 7)

The egalitarian principle¹²⁻¹³ as laid down by Guru Nanak advocates the equality of all human beings, irrespective of birth and gender. It rejects all distinctions of caste and color. In the egalitarian society as enunciated by Guru Nanak, all are equal, the lowest to the highest, in the race as in creed, in political rights and religious hopes. In this system, women enjoy equal status with men. Guru Nanak sought to release the people from the bondage of caste tyranny by laying emphasis on the unity of mankind. It is given an explicitly social character through a series of measures adopted by the Guru. The establishment of the institutions of *Dharamsala* (a place for public worship), *Sangat* (a corporate body of the devotees), *Pangat* (seating of the devotees in rows on same level), *Langar* (community kitchen) and *Kirtan* (collective singing of hymns) has led a powerful movement to release people from the stranglehold of the ritualistic, caste-ridden, priest-dominated and a retrogressive social order.

Altruistic Way of Life

The aim of Guru Nanak's teachings is to make most of our lives. A man should make the best use of his ability and capacity with which he is endowed. This can be done only by maintaining a true relationship with the Creator, who is the embodiment of all virtues, and it is through Him that one can establish a meaningful relationship with his fellow beings. When Guru Nanak set on wide tours to disseminate his teachings he invoked three principles¹²⁻¹³, which constitute the basic ingredients of the Sikh teachings, are;

(1) **Naam Japo** — It depicts the objective love of God i.e. Love of Life as against Love of Death (materialism and power seeking).

ਨਾਨਕ ਗਾਵੀਐ ਗੁਣੀ ਨਿਯਾਨੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 2)

O Nanak, sing the Glory of God, who is the Treasure of Excellence. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 2)

ਸੁਣਿਆ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਕੀਤਾ ਭਾਉ ॥ ਅੰਤਰਗਤਿ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਮਲਿ ਨਾਉ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 4)

Listening and believing with love and humility in your mind, cleanse yourself with the *Naam* (love of God), at the sacred shrine deep within. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 4)

(2) **Kirat Karo** — earn your own livelihood by engaging in creative work. This results in freedom as a man dependent on others cannot think and act freely.

(3) **Vand Chhako**—share your earnings with others. This signifies objective living, free from the selfish exploitative character.

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1245)

He, who earns his living by the sweat of his brow and shares it with others, has discovered the path (of righteousness,) says Nanak. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 1245)

Thus Socio-spiritual welfare of humanity is one of the major concerns in Guru Nanak's hymns. He describes this world as 'dharamsal' (an abode of righteousness). His objective is the creation of a new egalitarian social order, with emphasis on work ethics and the attainment of the goal of an ideal personality through the cultivation of the essential attributes of God.

Gender Equality

Women, represent half of all humanity, yet they¹² continue to face discrimination in many parts of the world. The feminist movement has done much to address gender discrimination in western societies, but women in much of the rest of the world still face very serious problems including violence, illiteracy and many kinds of economic and social deprivation. It is being increasingly recognized that better education and economic empowerment of women can play a major role in raising the economic level of impoverished areas of the world, as well as lowering birth rates, which is an important factor for addressing climate change.

Having observed many popular traditions and rituals of his time, Guru Nanak saw that women were degraded, thought of as property, and treated as lowly and unworthy. He condemned these practices. Thus several centuries ahead of the feminist movement, Guru Nanak spoke out against gender discrimination in the highly male-dominated environment of India. He confronted established orthodoxy with the radical assertion that women were worthy of praise and equal to men. Besides, God is gender neutral, both man and woman and Its creative aspect is portrayed as that of a mother:

ਆਪੇ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਨਾਰੀ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1020)

God is both man and woman. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 1020)

Both men and women are infused with the same Divine light. Instead of being denigrated and mistreated, woman should be cherished and respected:

ਭੰਡਿ ਜੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨਿੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਚਲੈ ਰਾਹੁ ॥ ਭੰਡੁ ਮੁਆ ਭੰਡੁ ਭਾਲੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਬੰਧਾਨੁ ॥ ਸੇ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥ ਭੰਡਹੁ ਹੀ ਭੰਡੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਝੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਭੰਡੈ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਏ ਕੇ ਸਚਾ ਸੋਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 473)

We are born of woman; we are conceived in the womb of woman. To woman, one is engaged and married. We make friendship with a woman; through woman, future generations are born. When one woman dies, we take another one; we are bound with the world through woman. So why should we talk ill of her? From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all. O Nanak, God alone is without a woman. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 473)

Guru Nanak and the Gurus who succeeded him actively encouraged the participation of women as equals in worship, in society, and on the battlefield. They encouraged freedom of speech and women were encouraged to participate in any and all religious activities including a reading of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The practice of sati or widow burning and female infanticide were forbidden and remarriage of widows was encouraged. Remember all of this was going on in the midst of the male-dominated Muslim and Hindu societies in India hundreds of years before the feminist movement in the West! Sadly, Sikh society has not been able to fully overcome old cultural traditions and live up to the ideals of gender equality taught by Guru Nanak. Sex-selective abortions driven by a desire for male children are driving down the sex ratio in Punjab. It is encouraging to note that all Sikh religious organizations including the Akal Takhat have spoken up against this practice.

Truthful Living

Truth is the foundation for a fair and just society. Most modern religions place a high value on the principle of truthfulness. Truth is a hallmark virtue for anyone walking the path of righteousness because it keeps us genuine and dispels the veils of illusion that would otherwise bind us in temporal life. The purpose of life according to the Guru Nanak is to become a truthful being² and to enlighten

others. In the first stanza of *Jap* composition, Guru Nanak talks about the purpose of human life in question and answer format. He raises a fundamental question as how to become a *sachiara* (Truthful person)? And to be so, how to remove the veil of illusion, which is hiding the Ultimate Reality?

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1)

How can one become truthful? And how can the wall of the veil of illusion be removed? (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 1)

Thereafter, in the final lines of the stanza, Guru Nanak provides the answer- submit to the *hukam*. Walk in its way.

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1)

Nanak says: in tune yourself with the *hukam* (Divine Order, Cosmic Law), which is embedded in the very depths of the human soul. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 1)

Harmony with *hukam* means² concern for the ecosystem; treating all beings with kindness and respect for the environment. It is knowledge of Truth that destroys ignorance, falsehood, superstition, and doubt. Guru Nanak emphasizes that a truthful person follows an ethical life - free from sin and worldly entanglements, but full of love for God and its creation. Such a person shows compassion for all living beings and practices charity. Nanakian philosophy places more emphasis on leading a truthful living than just having the knowledge of the truth. It says;

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 62)

Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living. (Mehl1, SGGGS, p 62)

Guru Nanak proclaims the five cardinal virtues for truthful living as truthfulness, uprightness, altruism, benevolence, and love for God.

ਪਹਿਲਾ ਸਚੁ ਹਲਾਲ ਦੁਇ ਤੀਜਾ ਖੈਰ ਖੁਦਾਇ ॥ ਚਉਥੀ ਨੀਅਤਿ ਰਾਸਿ ਮਨੁ ਪੰਜਵੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਨਾਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 141)

Let the first be truthfulness, the second honest living, and the third charity in the love of God. Let the fourth be good will to all, and the fifth the love of God. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 141)

To lead a truthful life, Guru Nanak emphasizes self-discipline, benevolence, and purity of mind through contemplation of Word said).

ਸਚੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਕਰਣੀ ਕਾਰਾਂ ਨਾਵਣੁ ਨਾਉ ਜਪੇਹੀ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 91)

Let Truth be your self-discipline, good deeds be your intent; and contemplation be your cleansing bath. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 91)

Guru Nanak emphasizes in his Jap composition that truthful living, imbued with love of God and its creation, is all, that is required to progress through a series of spiritual domains, to receive the grace of the Almighty. Thereon one can reach the ultimate stage of being a *sachiar* (The Truth) oneself.

Universal World View

The 550 years old Sikh tradition¹³⁻¹⁴ harmonizes well with the modern world. Guru Nanak's message is that people must ignore external appearances and recognize the divine spark of Ultimate Reality (God) in others and in the world around us. Guru Nanak proclaims that the same divine essence exists in all beings.

ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਜੇਤਿ ਜੇਤਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਇ ॥ ਤਿਸ ਦੈ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 13)

The Divine Light (essence) is within everyone; You are that Light (essence). (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 13)

It is an ideal of unity in diversity. Unity in diversity is not merely studying, working and traveling with people of different complexions, languages, religions, and way of dressing. Rather it means active engagement with others. It involves three steps: knowing the other, knowing oneself, and communicating with one another at a deep level of friendship and oneness. Multiculturalism¹⁵ refers to an ideal of equality and mutual respect among a population's ethnic or cultural groups. Multiculturalism seeks the inclusion of the views and contributions of diverse members of society while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into the dominant culture. Opening ourselves up to aspects of other cultures¹⁵—whether it's a different cuisine, a traditional music or art form, or a cultural celebration—teaches us that there are so many different ways of looking at life. This can help us come up with different ways of solving problems and doing things that we might now have considered within the constraints of our own personal bubble and ways of looking at daily life. The more we see different cultures living alongside each other, the more we are able to reflect on our position within the greater context of humanity. This can help us evolve our own beliefs and ideas in order to achieve a more fulfilling life. In Guru Nanak's compositions the ideal of the 'Universal brotherhood of humankind' have been laid down.

ਆਈ ਪੰਥੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਜੀਤੈ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 6)

See the brotherhood of all mankind as the highest order of Yogis; conquer your own mind, and conquer the world. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 6)

The fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev endorses¹⁴ this view as;

ਸਭੇ ਸਾਝੀਵਾਲ ਸਦਾਇਨਿ ਤੂੰ ਕਿਸੈ ਨ ਦਿਸਹਿ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ (ਮ. 5, ਪੰਨਾ 97)

All share in Your Grace; none are beyond You. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 97)

Thus Guru Nanak encourages us to follow a path of loving conviction and goodwill for fellow human beings. With such a universal approach, he is aiming at forging common bonds in the human race without discrimination of caste, creed, sex or nationality. Several essential attributes such as service to humanity, equality of mankind, love, and respect for all beings, and peace and harmony are repeatedly emphasized in his verses. Such a spirit of universality is the dire need of the present time when the whole world is in the grip of class conflicts and war mania.

Importance of Knowledge Acquisition

Knowledge refers¹⁶⁻¹⁷ to the information, facts, principles, skills, and understanding, etc. that is acquired through education and experience. Knowledge is the primary factor that clearly distinguishes the human race from the animals. Man has the power to judge situations, decide between what is good and what is bad and make decisions voluntarily. It is important that we make the best use of the gift of knowledge so that we achieve great feats and heights in every domain of our life. Since knowledge is the fuel that drives human life, gaining knowledge is deemed the most primary activity that prepares man for long and successful life. Knowledge saves us from dangers and helps us to stay balanced and strong during difficulties and adversities. Knowledge does not pertain only to science and technology and the fields we study in school. Knowledge is very important to shape our personality and perfect our behavior and dealings with people. Knowledge helps us to take the right course in life in a way useful to ourselves and society at large. Great men and women have put their knowledge to good use and have reached exalted heights being remembered for long on this earth. As to gain knowledge is very important, so we must look to the potential avenues to gain knowledge and make use of it positively. Guru Nanak encourages us to acquire knowledge in all spheres of life but emphasizes on learning with appropriate understanding. He asserts;

ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਦਿਆ ਬਿਗਿਆਨਿ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 903)

Liberation (from ignorance) does not come from learning without understanding. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 903)

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

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

The ability to read opens up worlds for an individual. Without literacy, the exposure to new ideas is extremely limited, as is one's ability to communicate his or her thoughts and to participate in society. With the ability to read comes the ability to access ideas and information from outside of one's own experiences, promoting cross-cultural awareness and the understanding of other points of view. According to many experts, education is a key factor when it comes to alleviating poverty and fostering development. Guru Nanak advises us to be well educated. It also emphasizes that the knowledge thus acquired should be used for the benefit of society by doing selfless service.

ਜਹ ਗਿਆਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਮਿਟੰਤੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 791)

Wherever spiritual wisdom appears, ignorance is dispelled. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 791)

Guru Nanak encourages us to adopt an altruistic attitude on gaining knowledge. He proclaims that only by doing selfless service to others one is able to attain inner peace.

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

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

ਸੁਖੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਆ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 25)

you shall find peace, doing selfless service. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 25)

Importance of a Mentor (Guru)

All of us have felt¹⁸ the necessity of a mentor or guru in our lives one time or the other. Someone who is more knowledgeable, intelligent, experienced and successful in life, can definitely make a difference in our lives too. The word "Guru" is derived from the Sanskrit language. Its two syllables "Gu" and "Ru" stand for the following: "Gu" denotes the ignorance and "Ru" represents the radiance of knowledge that dispels the ignorance. He who removes our ignorance with knowledge and wisdom and helps us to make our life happy, comfortable, enlightened and blessed, is our guru or mentor or

guide. Anybody and anything - from a friend, relative, teacher, boss, a good book, a CD, etc to religious and spiritual master can be our mentor or guru. Thus the importance of a mentor in our lives cannot be overstated. A good mentor inspires us, expands our knowledge base, connects us with others (helps in networking), develops our emotional quotient, opens our mind to new situations and most importantly, doesn't judge. A mentor provides a safe space to learn, experiment and ask questions, no matter how seemingly stupid.

In Sikh theology, for a mentor, the term Guru is used. Guru means a teacher, the one who removes mental and spiritual darkness (ignorance) with his teachings and conduct. In common usage, any person who is adept in some branch of knowledge and who imparts the same to others is considered a guru. However, more specifically in many religions, the term is used in the context of a spiritual teacher, or the one who helps others in their liberation. Enunciating the importance of Guru (mentor) in one's life, Guru Nanak asserts;

ਭਾਈ ਰੇ ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 59)

O Brother! without the Guru, there is no knowledge and understanding (spiritual wisdom). (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 59)

Guru Nanak, delineates in his hymns, that under the guidance of a Guru (mentor), one must become capable to destroy one's self-centeredness and worldly entanglements (Maya). He emphasizes that it is with the Guru's teachings, that one's ignorance is removed and knowledge and understanding are obtained.

ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਕਹਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਮਾਰਿ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 22)

Let the Words of the Guru abide within your mind; let egotism and desires die. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 22)

ਗੁਰ ਸਾਖੀ ਜੇਤਿ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਇ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 13)

Through the Guru's Teachings, the Light (of knowledge and understanding) shines forth. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 13)

Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" is the French motto¹⁹ which came about around the time of the French revolution in 1789. Liberty represents freedom, a word that has many meanings; firstly it stands for being able to make one's own decisions freely and having the opportunity to be able to express

one's own beliefs without fear. Equality stands for being equal in law and so to maintain a sameness of rules, status, rights, respect, opportunities, and privileges, that must be applied to all. Fraternity is a word associated with the idea of community, which is a body of people that share a common interest or purpose, such as a guild. It is also associated with brother/sisterhood and having/working /fitting /producing something together as a group. Also, a fraternity can be recognized as a group viewed as a forming a distinct segment of society. But Guru Nanak in the early sixteen century was a strong proponent of these ideas among the masses of southeast Asia. He encouraged his disciples to adhere to the right of Liberty: of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship for all. Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Teg Bahadur and several Sikhs laid down their lives for the right of liberty for all. Even Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh had to fight several battles with the contemporary rulers for it. Guru Nanak proclaims that the sharing of views and ideas should be a continuous process throughout one's life.

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 (to find the truth). (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 661)

Equality means treating every person in the same respectful way. Discrimination by gender, race, religion or other aspects, as well as prejudice against the various minorities, is not a part of a healthy society. Equality also means the equality of the opportunities, and the equal rights to all, ensuring that they have a chance to become what they want to become. Guru Nanak vouched for this right of people in his hymns as;

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

As Gurmukh, look upon all with the single eye of equality; in each and every heart, the Divine Light is contained. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 599)

ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਏਕੇ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਿਆ... ॥

He (gurmukh) looks impartially, equally upon all. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 879)

Establishment of the institutions of langar (community kitchen) and pangat (sitting at the same level in a queue) by Guru Nanak is an outstanding example of social equality among his disciples. Fraternity means a group of people associated or formally organized for a common purpose, interest, or pleasure. Guru Nanak proclaimed the brotherhood of all mankind as;

ਆਈ ਪੰਥੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਜੀਤੈ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤੁ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 6)

See the brotherhood of all mankind as the highest order of Yogis; conquer your own mind, and conquer the world. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 6)

The establishment of the institutions *Sangat* (holy congregation) and *dharamsal* (gurudwara) affirm his this assertion.

Four Pillars of Democracy - Freedom, Equity, Justice, and Representation

Democracy is widely defined as “rule of the people”. Nowadays, democracy is a common practice in most of the countries of the world. There are four basic principles²⁰ of democracy, which are also commonly called pillars of democracy. These pillars are basic guidelines that help govern how democracy works. These four pillars are Freedom (Liberty), Equity (Equality before law), Justice, and Representation. **Freedom:** All citizens have fundamental freedoms protected, such as the right to free speech, religion, travel and the right of assembly, etc. **Equity:** means that every man, woman, and child is given the same opportunity to succeed and to be what they want to be and do what they want to do. It also means that all citizens have the opportunity to participate fully in the democratic process regardless of income, gender, religion, race or ethnicity. **Justice:** All citizens are equal before the law; they have the right to a fair trial; and, governments are subject to the rule of law. **Representation:** This principle of democracy means that every citizen has to possess the opportunity to vote for their representatives in the conduct of the government. Every person has their own political views that they should freely express, and electing the representatives is a practical implementation of these views.

The Parliament of England passed the Petition of Right in 1628 which established certain liberties for subjects. The first Parliament of Great Britain was established in 1707, after the merger of the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Scotland. The American Revolution led to the adoption of the United States Constitution in 1787, which provided for an elected government and protected civil rights and liberties for some (about 6% of the population). But Guru Nanak raised his voice in favor of these rights of people as early as the early sixteenth century. As described above, he attempted to make people aware of their rights of Liberty (Freedom) and Equality (Equity). For the third pillar of democracy i.e. Justice for all, he proclaimed:

ਰਾਜੇ ਚੁਲੀ ਨਿਆਵ ਕੀ ਪੜਿਆ ਸਚੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1240)

For the king, cleansing is justice; for the scholar, it is true meditation. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 1240)

He exhorted people in power to deliver justice to all, by following the path of truthfulness.

ਲਾਹਾ ਸਚੁ ਨਿਆਉ ਮਨਿ ਵਸਾਈਐ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 420)

The profit is earned by enshrining Truth and justice in the mind. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 420)

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

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

The fourth pillar of democracy, representation, find expression in the life activities of Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus, wherein the governance of the institutions of *satsangat*, *langar*, and *gurdwara* was vested in Sikh Sangat. The institution of Panj Piaras (Five Chosen Ones) was established and is in practice till date to guide and direct the affairs of the Sikh community. Any adherent to Sikhism can participate in any of the above institutions with any discrimination on the basis of caste, color or creed. S.G.P. C., Amritsar and D.G.P.C. New Delhi is its shining examples. Thus Guru Nanak laid down and promoted the basic principles of a democratic system as early as the sixteenth century. It is heartening to note that these principles make the basic framework for governance in most of the countries of our contemporary world. Thus Guru Nanak's teachings have universal relevance.

Interdependence and Universal Wellbeing

The technological advances over the last one hundred years have shrunk the world into a neighborhood. The lives of human beings and the affairs of nations, for the first time in history, have become much more strongly entwined. Interdependence²¹ of beings and nations is the need of the hour. Any two things, living or non-living, countries or nations that cooperate with each other are said to be interdependent or mutually dependent. Interdependence²⁰ can also be defined as interconnectedness and reliance on one another socially, economically, environmentally and politically. It is a dynamic of being mutually and physically responsible to and sharing a common set of principles with others. Guru Nanak emphasizes the importance of the interdependence of all things. Guru Nanak proclaims the principle of interdependence in his 'Jap' composition as;

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਈ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥ ਦਿਵਸੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਦਾਈ ਦਾਇਆ ਖੇਲੈ ਸਗਲ ਜਗਤੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 8)

Air is a vital force, Water the progenitor, the vast Earth is the mother of all, Days and Nights are nurses, fondling all creation in their lap. (Mehl First, SGGS, p 8)

In our daily life, we are inclined to perceive things as real and independent of each other. But in Sri Guru Granth Sahib all the elements of the material world are seen no more as external to each other, but being involved in an inter-dependent relationship, reciprocally conditioning the life of each other. Guru Nanak emphasizes this kind of inter-dependent relationship in his hymn;

ਜੇ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਸੇ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਦੂਜਾ ਕੇਈ ਜੀਉ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮੇਈ ਜੀਉ
॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 599)

Whatever is within, same as outside. See that there is nothing else. By divine prompting look upon all existence as one and undifferentiated; the same light penetrates all existence. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 599)

We humans are only one of thirty million species weaving the thin layer of life enveloping the world. The stability of communities of living things depends upon this diversity. Linked in that web, we are interconnected -- using, cleansing, sharing and replenishing the fundamental elements of life. Our home, planet Earth, is finite; all life shares its resources and the energy from the sun and therefore has limits to growth. For the first time, we have touched those limits. When we compromise the air, the water, the soil and the variety of life, we steal from the endless future to serve the fleeting present. At this turning point in our relationship with Earth, we must work for an evolution: from dominance to partnership; from fragmentation to connection; from insecurity to interdependence. Guru Nanak reports the attributes of the ideal human beings (gurmukhs) as self-sustaining.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਾਚੁ ਤਹਾ ਗੁਦਰਾਣੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 355)

Truth oriented Gurmukhs sustain themselves. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 355)

Thereby, Guru Nanak stresses that preserving the natural state of things is a sine-qua-none for the sustainability of life on earth. He also encourages us to share our virtues with others for the benefit of all and society.

ਜੇ ਗੁਣ ਹੋਵਨ੍ਹਿ ਸਾਜਨਾ ਮਿਲਿ ਸਾਝ ਕਰੀਜੈ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 765)

If my friends have virtues, I will share in them. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 765)

ਸਾਝ ਕਰੀਜੈ ਗੁਣਹ ਕੇਰੀ ਛੋਡਿ ਅਵਗਣ ਚਲੀਐ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 766)

Let us form a partnership, and share our virtues; let us abandon our faults, and walk on the

Path. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 766)

According to Guru Nanak, sustainable development of the environment is not only in terms of flora, fauna and basic elements of nature but also the general environment of humanity. Sarbat da Bhalla meaning 'prosperity and peace for everything in the world' is a statement that the adherents to the Sikh way of life, utter at least twice every day, in their morning and evening prayers. This "everything" includes all the living and non-living as well as visible and invisible things in the universe.

Impermanence

Everything in life is temporary. Everything is subject to change and alteration in the world. The darkness of the night, the brilliance of the day, the warmth and the cold, they're all temporary. Thunderstorms appear and disappear, as do rains and rainbows. Our experiences, emotions, and actions are temporary too. There is nothing in this world that is fixed and permanent. Guru Nanak enunciates the concept of impermanence²² of things, in his hymns, to make us aware of the ephemeral nature of life and the material world. He articulates that the awareness and understanding of the impermanent nature of things lead to liberation from the sorrows of human life. Guru Nanak proclaims that all worldly things are impermanent, only the Ultimate Reality (God) is permanent.

ਸਭ ਦੁਨੀ ਆਵਣ ਜਾਵਣੀ ਮੁਕਾਮੁ ਏਕੁ ਰਹੀਮੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 64)

All the world temporary; only the Merciful God is permanent. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 64)

ਅਸਮਾਨੁ ਧਰਤੀ ਚਲਸੀ ਮੁਕਾਮੁ ਓਹੀ ਏਕੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 64)

The sky and the earth shall pass away; He alone is permanent. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 64)

Thereby Guru Nanak exhorts us not to indulge ourselves in worldly passions or entanglements.

ਤਿਸੁ ਸਿਉ ਨੇਹੁ ਨ ਕੀਜਈ ਜੇ ਦੀਸੈ ਚਲਣਹਾਰੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 21)

Do not make love with one who is just a passing show. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 21)

For all that is in the world; the desires of the flesh [the sin nature] and the desires of the eyes [which relates to the warped perspective we sometimes have] and pride in possessions; leads to worldly entanglements. Pride is the root of all other sins. The awareness of the impermanent nature of such things helps us to transcend these limitations of human nature.

Prudent Life-Style

Guru Nanak describes²³ the norms to live such a householder's life which does not harm one's mind, health, others around him/her, society, or the environment. Therefore, he encourages us to have practice self-discipline, to shun consumption of intoxicants, to keep a simple diet and a healthy lifestyle. One of the many rewarding aspects of life is having the ability to make a lasting impact on your community and those around you. Giving back typically comes in the form of volunteering, whether it's with your time or money, to help support causes close to your heart. Guru Nanak says:

ਸੋ ਗਿਰਹੀ ਜੇ ਨਿਗ੍ਰਹੁ ਕਰੈ ॥ ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਭੀਖਿਆ ਕਰੈ ॥ ਪੁੰਨ ਦਾਨ ਕਾ ਕਰੇ ਸਰੀਰੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 952)

He alone is a true householder, who restrains his passions and practices meditation, austerity and self-discipline. He gives donations to charity. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 952)

ਖੰਡਿਤ ਨਿਦ੍ਰਾ ਅਲਪ ਅਹਾਰੰ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਤੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 15)

Sleep little, and eat little; O Nanak, this is the essence of wisdom. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 939)

ਸਚੁ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਤਿਨ ਸੋਫੀਆ ਰਾਖਣ ਕਉ ਦਰਵਾਰੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 15)

Those, who don't use intoxicants, obtain truthfulness. They are honored in God's Court. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 15)

Healthy Relationships

Words are powerful! They have the power to uplift and enlighten or put down and depress. A few cutting words spoken in a moment of anger can affect us for a long time, perhaps even a lifetime. On the other hand, a few kind words²⁴ can make a very positive difference in how we feel about ourselves ... sometimes for a lifetime. What we say to others—and to ourselves—can have a huge impact. Speaking with good purpose is about always considering the intention of our words. It's about communicating directly, clearly, honestly, and with a positive purpose. The first step is awareness. If we always think before we speak instead of just blurting out whatever comes to mind, we can learn to consider the reason for our words and make sure we are speaking with good purpose ... will our words build someone up or put them down? We all sometimes have negative thoughts, but we don't have to say everything we think. Speaking with good purpose is the cornerstone of healthy relationships. This Key fosters a positive emotional environment where people are happier, more productive, and more likely to succeed. Guru Nanak asserts this in his hymns as;

ਜਿਤੁ ਬੋਲਿਐ ਪਤਿ ਪਾਈਐ; ਸੋ ਬੋਲਿਆ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ॥ ਫਿਕਾ ਬੋਲਿ ਵਿਗੁਚਣਾ, ਸੁਣਿ ਮੂਰਖ ਮਨ ਅਜਾਣ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 15)

The words, which bring honor on speaking, that utterance is acceptable. By speaking harsh words human beings come to grief. Listen, O my ignorant soul! (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 15)

Guru Nanak warns us to not to speak ill of others, as it leads to insipid behavior.

ਮੰਦਾ ਕਿਸੈ ਨ ਆਖਿ ਝਗੜਾ ਪਾਵਣਾ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 566)

Do not speak ill of others, or get involved in arguments. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 566)

ਨਾਨਕ ਫਿਕੈ ਬੋਲਿਐ ਤਨੁ ਮਨੁ ਫਿਕਾ ਹੋਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 473)

Nanak says: speaking insipid words, the body and mind become insipid. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 473)

Harmony with Nature - Integrated Approach to Sustainability

At present, in the midst of a technological revolution, humanity is facing great challenges for its survival. Ecological crisis²⁵ is one of the gravest among these. There is a serious concern that the earth may no longer be a sustainable biosystem. Although human beings are seen as the most intelligent life form on earth, yet they are responsible for almost all the ecological damage done to the planet. According to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, humans create their surroundings as a reflection of their inner state. The current instability of the natural system of the earth is only a reflection of the instability and pain within them. The increasing barrenness of the earth also reflects a spiritual emptiness within humans.

Guru Nanak declares that the purpose of human beings is to achieve a blissful state and to be in harmony with the earth and all of God's creation. It seems, however, that humans have drifted away from this ideal. He emphasizes tells that an attitude of humility, surrender to the Divine Spirit, and maintaining a harmonious relationship with all existence is sine-qua-non for mankind to find a way out of this quagmire. Guru Nanak emphasizes the significance of various aspects of Nature and declares the Earth as Dharamsal i.e. a place for righteous action.

ਰਾਤੀ ਰੁਤੀ ਥਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ॥ ਪਵਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਅਗਨੀ ਪਾਤਾਲ ॥ ਤਿਸੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਥਾਪਿ ਰਖੀ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 7)

Nights and days, weeks and seasons; wind, water, fir, and the nether regions – in the midst of these, He established the earth as a home for Dharma (righteousness). (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 7)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib opposes the idea that the struggle of the human race is against Nature and that human supremacy lies in the notion of “harnessing” Nature. The history of the Sikh Gurus is full of stories of their love for animals, birds, trees, vegetation, rivers, mountains and sky. Many Sikhs, though not all, also have a strong tradition of being vegetarian. A simple life free from conspicuous waste is the Sikh ideal – a life that stresses mastery over the self rather than mastery over Nature.

By this portrayal of the world (earth) as a place for righteousness and purity, SGGS insists that we relate with others with equality and justice. Sri Guru Granth Sahib reveals that real peace can only be found when desire and greed are subdued and diminished. This will only happen when the individual realizes that God abides in all the elements (including water, earth, and the woods) and he stops damaging these elements purely to satisfy his material greed. The fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan expresses such a view as;

ਸਾਂਤਿ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਹੋਵਹਿ ਮਨ ਸੀਤਲ ਅਗਨਿ ਨ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਯੁਖੀ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਉ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ ਜਲਿ ਥਲਿ ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਣਿ
ਰੁਖੀ ॥ (ਮਹਲਾ 5, ਪੰਨਾ 617)

You shall find peace, and your mind shall be soothed and cooled; the fire of desire shall not burn within you. The Guru has revealed God to Nanak, in the three worlds, in the water, the earth, and the woods. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 617)

Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bounteous nature. A human being needs to derive sustenance from the earth and not deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. Guru Nanak reveals that awareness of that sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival. A new “ecological ethic” dedicated to the conservation and wise use of the resources provided by a bountiful nature can only arise from an honest understanding and dedicated application of our old, tried and true spiritual heritage. Such an integrated approach to the current ecological crisis can lead to a permanent sustainability of life on mother earth.

Scientific Temper

Scientific temper is a way of life. It is an individual and social process of thinking and acting, which uses the scientific method. Scientific methodology is defined as a mode of research in which a problem is identified, relevant data gathered, a hypothesis formulated and then empirically tested. Scientific temper describes an attitude which involves the application of logic. Discussion, argument, and analysis are vital parts of scientific temper. Viewed in this light, Guru Nanak’s life was a continuous process of scientific experimentation and statement. Guru Nanak’s life and writings are rich in several such examples wherein his scientific approach to resolve several real-life situations with logic and rationality is evident. Herein three such incidents are described, to bring home the point.

As is in the ethos of science, a person of scientific vision has the capacity to challenge established customs/practices if they happen to conflict with the facts of life. During his stay at Puri, Guru Nanak spoke against the efficacy of the Padmasana (a cross-legged sitting posture, in which the feet are placed on the opposing thighs.) to win over God. He exposed the claim of the Brahman 'who kept his eyes and nose closed' and claimed that 'in that state, he with his mental eyes saw the secrets of the world'. Guru Nanak hid the Brahman's lota (a round water pot, typically of polished brass) while he was in the asna (a particular sitting posture). When the Brahman, on opening his eyes, could not find the lota, Guru Nanak witted him on 'his fancy of omniscience' as;

ਆਂਟ ਸੇਤੀ ਨਾਰੁ ਪਕੜਹਿ ਸੁਝਤੇ ਤਿਨਿ ਲੇਅ ॥ ਮਗਰ ਪਾਛੈ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਸੁਝੈ ਏਹੁ ਪਦਮੁ ਅਲੇਅ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 662-63)

You close off your nostrils with your fingers and claim to see the three worlds. But you cannot even see what is behind you. It is a thing of wonder. (Mehl 1, SGGs, p. 662-63)

Dogma, in its initial Greek usage, means an authoritative decision or the opinions of a particular school of thought or sect. A dogmatic attitude reflects a mind that belongs to the past, so that, it is closed to new experiences that the present might bring. A scientific mind, on the other hand, is anything but dogmatic. It is in its very nature to question, and to seek explanations, logically. Questioning something that has been held in authority for years requires inner freedom and courage, that spurs one on to discover the truth for oneself.

Guru Nanak exhibited an anti-dogmatic attitude even in his childhood. On his tenth birthday, his father Kalu Ram Mehta had arranged Nanak's Janeu (the sacred thread) Ceremony with customary festivity. When the family priest, with *janeu* in his hands, moved forward to Nanak 'the boy caught the thread with his hand, and asked the priest what he was doing, and what advantage it was to put on such a thread on oneself'. The priest replied that 'the janeu was the basis of the Hindu religion, that without it a man would only be a shudra (lowest of the four Hindu castes) and that by putting it on, greatness should be obtained in this world and happiness in the next'. Nanak appears to have been expecting this because he immediately came out with the rejoinder:

ਦਇਆ ਕਪਾਹ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੂਤੁ ਜਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੁ ॥ ਏਹੁ ਜਨੇਊ ਜੀਅ ਕਾ ਹਈ ਤ ਪਾਡੇ ਘਤੁ ॥ ਨਾ ਏਹੁ ਤੁਟੈ ਨ ਮਲੁ ਲਗੈ ਨਾ
ਏਹੁ ਜਲੈ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਧੰਨੁ ਸੁ ਮਾਣਸ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜੇ ਗਲਿ ਚਲੇ ਪਾਇ ॥ ਚਉਕੜਿ ਮੁਲਿ ਅਣਾਇਆ ਬਹਿ ਚਉਕੈ ਪਾਇਆ ॥
ਸਿਖਾ ਕੰਨਿ ਚੜਾਈਆ ਗੁਰੁ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਥਿਆ ॥ ਓਹੁ ਮੁਆ ਓਹੁ ਝੜਿ ਪਇਆ ਵੇਤਗਾ ਗਇਆ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 471)

Out of the cotton of compassion, Spin the thread of contentment, Tie the knot of continence, Give it the twist of virtues; Make such a sacred thread, O Pandit, for inner self. Such a thread will not break, Nor get soiled, be burnt or be lost. Blessed is the man, O Nanak, Who makes it a part of life. This cotton thread, for a penny you buy, Sitting in a square, mud plastered, You put it around the necks of others. In the ears some words you whisper, O Brahmin, And you claim to be a spiritual teacher. With the death of the wearer falls the thread, Thus without the thread, he departs from the earth'. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 471)

Despite the attempts of Pandit Hardayal to prevail upon Nanak to accept the janeu in the name of religion, Nanak did not accept the thread and pointed out the hypocritical nature of the ceremony by saying:

ਤਗੁ ਨ ਇੰਦ੍ਰੀ ਤਗੁ ਨ ਨਾਰੀ ॥ ਭਲਕੇ ਬੁਕ ਪਵੈ ਨਿਤ ਦਾੜੀ ॥ ਤਗੁ ਨ ਪੈਰੀ ਤਗੁ ਨ ਹਥੀ ॥ ਤਗੁ ਨ ਜਿਹਵਾ ਤਗੁ ਨ ਅਖੀ ॥
ਵੇਤਗਾ ਆਪੇ ਵਤੈ ॥ ਵਟਿ ਧਾਗੇ ਅਵਰਾ ਘਤੈ ॥ ਲੈ ਭਾੜਿ ਕਰੇ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥ ਕਢਿ ਕਾਗਲੁ ਦਸੇ ਰਾਹੁ ॥ ਸੁਣਿ ਵੇਖਹੁ ਲੋਕਾ ਏਹੁ
ਵਿਡਾਣੁ ॥ ਮਨਿ ਅੰਧਾ ਨਾਉ ਸੁਜਾਣੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 471)

There is no string for the sexual organ, there is no string for the women to restrain themselves: So that man everyday disgraces his beard. There is no string for the feet, there is no string for the hands; There is no string for the tongue; there is no string for the eyes; without such strings, the Brahmin wanders away. He twists strings for the neck and put them on others. He takes to hire for marrying others; He puts out a scroll, and showeth the fate of the wedded pair. Hear and see, ye people, it is strange that, while mentally blind, a man is called wise. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 471)

Thus a creative and questioning mind of Nanak comes out clearly from the above episode of his life. It is this attitude that forms the essence of both science and 'true religion'. The very premise of science, by its definition, condemns belief in authority, be it scientific or theological.

A true scientific spirit has no place for superstitions and sentimental beliefs. A custom introduced for whatever reason may over a long period become a superstition or a mere ritual. The life of Guru Nanak was a powerful protest against superstition and narrowness of all kinds. This is seen in his actions at Hardwar. During one of his travels, Guru Nanak reached Hardwar. Here he drew the

attention of a great number of people gathered at the place, with seemingly an innocent act, but which really amounted to a challenge of the age-old practices.

He quietly walked into the waters of the Ganges and instead of throwing water towards the east, as others were doing, put his hands together to form a cup and began to throw water towards the west. Almost all those who saw him doing that gathered around him to inquire the reason for his unusual behavior. He replied that he was trying to send water to his fields at Talwandi so that they might remain green and not dry up. With such a remark, he pointed out the futility of the practice of trying to propitiate the Sun god by throwing water towards the east, for the salvation of one's ancestors. Thus he forcefully remonstrated against the hollowness of the religious ritual and practice.

Guru Nanak's life is full of such examples, which confirm his critical thought, intellectual attitude, and revolt against despotic authority. Thus Guru Nanak is a shining example of such a person, who exhibited a scientific spirit in his spiritual life as well as in his dealings with the world. Even in our contemporary world, Guru Nanak's Scientific approach to solving real-life problems is worth emulation.

Menace of Corruption, Drug Abuse, and AIDS

We are living in a world full of turmoil and tribulations^{13, 27}. In the contemporary world, humanity is facing severe challenges to its very existence. The prevalence of large-scale corruption at all levels in many societies and nations is threatening our social fabric. The monsters of drug menace and AIDS are trying to snuff out the very life breath of human beings. The rise of terrorism and the political rivalries among nations are threatening world peace. In such a dismal state of affairs, the clouds of destruction are looming large over humankind. But, there is a ray of hope in the form of Guru Nanak's hymns, for the salvation of humanity from its present ills. Concept of social responsibility is fundamental to the message of Guru Nanak. Socio-spiritual welfare of humanity is one of its major concerns. He condemns living by exploitation, bribery, and corruption. He asserts:

ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੁਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 141)

To deprive others of their rights ought to be avoided as scrupulously as the Muslims avoid the pork and the Hindus consider beef as a taboo. (Mehl 1, SGGS, p 141)

He exhorts all of us to avoid malpractices.

ਲਬੁ ਕੁਤਾ ਕੂੜੁ ਚੂਹੜਾ ਠਗਿ ਖਾਧਾ ਮੁਰਦਾਰੁ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 15)

Greed is a dog; falsehood is a filthy street-sweeper. Cheating is eating a rotting carcass. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 15)

Guru Nanak emphasizes that the exploitation of others is like eating a dead man's flesh. He exhorts us to lead a life of contentment and to respect the person, property, and dignity of others. These social ideals, as propounded by Guru Nanak, can help to eradicate the menace of corruption and other malpractices from our society.

At present, human society is suffering from the various ill effects of the widespread abuse of intoxicants and narcotics. The demon of drugs abuse has taken a strong hold on the young people, giving rise to various social and physical ills. But, even in this field, Guru Nanak is capable of providing us a beacon. He proclaims;

ਬਾਬਾ ਹੋਰੁ ਖਾਣਾ ਖੁਸੀ ਖੁਆਰੁ ॥ ਜਿਤੁ ਖਾਧੈ ਤਨੁ ਪੀੜੀਐ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਚਲਹਿ ਵਿਕਾਰ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 16)

Friend, all that food and pleasures are vain, which fill the mind with Evil and make the body writhe in pain. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 16)

The overexposure to the unethical, melodramatic soap operas, the preponderance of obscene pop-music and rise of materialistic culture has provided a fertile ground for the growth of illicit/adulterous relationships among human beings. This has caused a severe setback to the physical, moral and spiritual health of the society. Consequently, the curse of AIDS and drug abuse is taking its toll on humans. The duties related to chastity and fidelity are enjoined to regulate marital relations and to ensure respect for fidelity in the family and avoidance of adultery. Guru Nanak proclaims;

ਪਰ ਦਾਰਾ ਪਰ ਧਨੁ ਪਰ ਲੇਭਾ ਹਉਮੈ ਬਿਖੈ ਬਿਕਾਰ ॥ ਦੁਸਟ ਭਾਉ ਤਜਿ ਨਿੰਦ ਪਰਾਈ ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਚੰਡਾਰ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1255)

To covet others' wives, to desire others' wealth, to have greed and egotism, is sinful; shun the evil passions, slander of others, lust and anger. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 1255)

ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਕਾਇਆ ਕਉ ਗਾਲੈ ॥ (ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 932)

Lust and anger waste the body away. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 932)

Thus by imbibing the ethical principles propounded by Guru Nanak, our society can get rid of the evils of intoxicants, narcotics and drugs abuse. Even the monster of AIDS can be controlled and eventually destroyed by its healing touch.

War, Terrorism and World Peace

In modern times, man is very well equipped intellectually and materially. Yet, the class conflicts among people and struggle for supremacy among different nations, the world over, are still raging. Consequently, several nations are at war with each other giving rise to terrorism and misery for mankind. Guru Nanak tells²⁷ us that the haumain (egoistic consciousness) is the cause of man's all problems and limitations. It is the root cause of the entire conflict between man and man, between one society and the other, and between one nation and the other. He proclaims;

ਹਉਮੈ ਮਮਤਾ ਮੋਹਣੀ ਸਭ ਮੁਠੀ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਿ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 19)

Egotism and possessiveness are very enticing; egotistical pride has plundered everyone. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 19)

The altruistic tendencies developed in man as the result of cultural conditioning over the years are only superficial. The moment the struggle for existence becomes keen, the basic self-centeredness of man comes into play. Thus start all conflicts of man, social as well as national and international. Guru Nanak emphasizes that man is capable of transcending this ego-consciousness. The remedy is to develop a higher consciousness by linking one's consciousness with God, Naam, or the Eternal Truth. The Guru proclaims;

ਹਉਮੈ ਗਰਬੁ ਜਾਇ ਮਨ ਭੀਨੈ ॥(ਮ. 1, ਪੰਨਾ 906)

When one's mind is drenched in Divine love, the person is rid of egotism and pride. (Mehl 1, SGGGS, p 906)

Treating all human beings as spiritually one, and ethnically equal, notwithstanding their different religious backgrounds is the pre-requisite for maintaining a harmonious relationship between different communities and nations. If we want the world to be set free from the siege of distrust and disharmony, oppression and violence and the reign of terrorism, we have to see others as our brothers and sisters. We need to discover how to affirm our own identity, without threatening the identity of others. Guru Teg Bahadur advocates:

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥ (ਮ. 9, ਪੰਨਾ 1427)

Neither threatens others nor be afraid of anyone. (Mehl 9, SGGS, p 1427)

Guru Arjan Dev vouches for the spirit of universality as;

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. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 1299)

The ideals of the Universal brotherhood of man and the Universal fatherhood of God as laid down in Nanakian philosophy are of fundamental importance to settle all conflicts of man.

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ॥ (ਮ. 5, p 611)

One True Lord is the father of all; and we are His children. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 611)

One True Lord is the Father of all and we are His children, happens to be the central message of Nanakian philosophy. The idea of God's love for all beings teaches us to value the other in his or her otherness. It makes love for God the *sine qua non* factor for mankind and seeks the expression of this love through *Seva* (philanthropic activities). Thus, by imbibing the ethical values enshrined in Nanakian philosophy, humanity can be ameliorated. It is focused on the creation of a just, liberal, universal and altruistic social order. It is committed to promoting mutual love, striving for high moral conduct, social equality and peaceful co-existence across the world. The basic principles are highly relevant to contemporary concerns.

Conclusion

It is a fact that Guru Nanak undertook to reform and remodel the social and communal relations among diverse societies and cultures of his contemporary times. But the relevance of his universal humanistic values such as universal brotherhood, egalitarianism, altruism, compassion, love, respect and justice for all, without any distinction, cannot be underestimated in the present age also. Thus Guru Nanak's message is a great response to contemporary problems of race, gender, and class. Nanakian philosophy²⁸ present a universal reality, that can be experienced by people of all races and creeds. The Nanakian ideal of unity in diversity offers a hopeful direction for the world of the future. In conclusion I wish to repeat the words of Inderjit Kaur Khalsa¹² : "It is my ardent prayer that God may

ignite in the hearts of everyone the inspiration to awaken to the egalitarian way, to each carry that spirit by which teachings of human dignity and equality for all people may bring the light of understanding, peace, and harmony to this world. If we unite to make this a living reality, then discrimination, fear of others, and the hatred which stems from that fear would be no more".

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