

# GURU NANAK'S UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

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## INTRODUCTION

Time to time in the history of India, there has been Godly-people who have been creating revolution and transforming societies and nations in an unpredicted way. From time immemorial the personalities like Mahavira, Jesus and Guru Nanak have brought great changes in the world and particularly in India. The birth of these numerous saints, philosophers, religious preachers has made India the land of saints and sages.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh tradition, is one of the great men of Indian history. His memory is enshrined in the hearts of the millions of people who follow the Sikh religious practices. The universality of message combined with a dynamic approach to religion and the deep humanism and concern for the outcastes and downtrodden immensely raised his stature in the eyes of the people. In most part of India, especially in the area of Punjab, Guru Nanak is widely known and respected as a prophet, redeemer of the downtrodden and spiritual teacher.

The religious problems and the social problems, like idol worship, child marriage, untouchability, caste system and *sati* are the evils of Indian history. The teaching of Guru Nanak addressed such problems. Social reformation is the upper most concern for him and thus it became the part of his religion. He says the best way to serve God is to serve human beings. His famous saying, "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman" indicates that we all are sons and daughters of the same God who is *Ikk* (One) (Raj, H. 72).

At present, many think that religions are poisoning the world. Religions are the cause of the fight between Hindus and Muslims, and Muslims and Christians. It is not the sophisticated arms, which are going to unite the breaking of nations but understanding of each other and application of the valuable teachings of the various saints and leaders like Guru Nanak, Jesus, and Gautama Buddha etc. We need to have understanding and positive attitude towards other religions.

The aim for selecting this topic for my dissertation is the influence by such thinking. According to the latest statistics available, there are 16.3 millions Sikhs in India. They are the fourth largest religious group in our country. I want to know more about Guru Nanak's idea of God and philosophy. My desire is that this dissertation provides an opportunity to know more about this youngest religion of the world.

I have divided this dissertation into six chapters. In the first chapter, I have highlighted the development of Sikhism. It talk about what is Sikhism, the historical development of Sikhism, the meaning of the word 'Sikh', the distinctive features of Sikhism, how martyrdom helped in the growth of Sikhism, the arising of heroism out of Sikh tradition and the importance of the sacrament of steel.

In the second chapter, I have dealt with the early life history of Guru Nanak. It tells that Guru Nanak developed his spirituality from his childhood onwards. After the mystic al experience, Guru Nanak distributed his earnings among the poor and worked for the needy and the down trodden. He condemned different social evils that were prevalent during that time like sati, child marriage caste system and untouchability etc. according to him all human beings are equal in the sight of God.

The third chapter deals with Guru Nanak's understanding of God. Guru Nanak stresses on monism. God is one, who is the source of all things. He reins the universe through his *hokum*. Guru himself is the Guru of human beings. The ultimate Guru is formless. Thus He cannot take human form and thus Guru Nanak rejects the idol worship.

In the fourth chapter, I have brought out the philosophy of Guru Nanak like his understanding of man, sin, death, cycle of birth and death, conception of soul, heaven and hell, evil, and the highest good etc. Guru Nanak says that everything in the world is perishable; the only immortal being is God.

The fifth chapter talks about the religion of Guru Nanak. Here, I have dealt with the concept of God according to Guru Nanak, the duty of the human beings to God, the need of a guru in showing the path to God, the duty to neighbor and the duty to self.

The chapter sixth mentions the Divine Praises. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and other different Holy Scriptures of Sikhism, different types of prayers and their importance etc. The Holy Scripture contains the hymns and *slokas* of the Sikh gurus and other saints and

the poets, who are meant to sing God's praise. *Japji*, the Morning Prayer is the essence of Sikh faith.

Besides being a social reformer and religious leader, Guru Nanak is a philosopher. The lived-experience and learning by reading and writing are two different things. The knowledge of any tradition, acquired by studying is limited. We cannot reach the core of any teaching unless we experience and practice them in our hearts. I would be happy to have some glimpses of Guru Nanak's teachings and Sikhism as a whole.

Let us change this hellish world into heaven by joining all religions of the world. Guru Nanak says, heaven and hell are not any geographical localities in time and space, but real state of mind. Heaven and joys are symbolically represented in joys and sorrows, ecstasy and agony, light and darkness.

## CHAPTER 1

### The Development of Sikhism

#### 1.1. What is Sikhism?

Sikhism is the youngest of the World Religions, barely 500 years old. It was founded by Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji in 1469 who laid the basic principles of Sikhism. The Sikh religion was founded at a time when people were groaning under the religious tyranny of Islamic and the Brahmanical order and the atrocities of the Mughal rule. At that critical moment Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, raised his voice against that tyrannical order. Thanks to the genius of Nanak, he contrary to the popular belief, did not merely stop short at reform in religious or social conduct of the individual but planted the germs of a new people in whom the whole man could find self-expression and fulfillment (Gupta, M. 6).

It offered the people a simple Sikh religion teaching "Oneness of God", whose name is TRUTH. "There is light in all and that light is He. Through this light everything is illuminated" (Singh, H. 22). A Sikh is the disciple of ten Gurus. In this sense Guru, Nine Gurus followed him who all reinforced and added to what was taught by the first Guru. After which in 1708, the holy book of the Sikhs, The Sri GURU GRANTH SAHIB JI was proclaimed to be the only Guru by the last Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. This holy book embodies the philosophy and fundamentals of Sikhism. It is the only holy book of a major religion which was written and authenticated by its founders ("Features of Sikhism").

All the fundamentals of Sikhism emanate from the concept of love for God which follows the love of man. God is the Supreme Being, Universal and all powerful. For a Sikh, all human beings are creatures of God and must be treated equally. One must work hard and share one's earnings with the less fortunate which had to be earned by righteous means. One must be always active in mind and body. Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the last Guru gave the Sikhs a distinct uniform and appearance so that they were easily recognized. So, in 1699 on the day of *Vasakhi* April 13, he assembled his Sikhs and baptized five beloved who were brave and obedient to his orders and called this brotherhood - The *Khalsa*. Also he gave them a new surname "SINGH" (Lion) to be

added to their first names. He gave them the five symbols and five basic prayers. These saints - soldiers were devoted to mankind. The women were given equal status with men as the new brotherhood had no distinctions of caste, creed, color or sex. The women were to add "KAUR" (Princess) to their names and were to be always protected.

## 1.2. The Historical Development of Sikhism

The development of the Sikh community has been strongly influenced by the course of historical events. Guru Nanak, who was a Hindu by birth, was born at the time of religious reform movements in northern India. While his thought shared many of the features of his contemporaries, his religious doctrine nonetheless marked a radical departure and soon attracted many followers. Guru Nanak was succeeded by nine other gurus. Guru Angad (Guru between 1539 and 1552) established the *Gurmukhi* ("from the mouth of the guru") script in which Punjabi is written. Guru Amar Das (Guru between 1552 and 1574) founded Goindwal where Sikhs were encouraged to gather twice a year. Guru Ram Das (Guru between 1574 and 1581) is remembered for founding the current site in Amritsar of the *Darbar Sahib* (Golden Temple) on land granted by the emperor Akbar. When Guru Arjan Dev assumed the leadership of the community (1581-1606), Sikhism had developed a considerable following in Punjab's central districts. During his Guruship the *Darbar Sahib* (1604) was completed and the *Guru Granth Sahib* (also known as the *Adi Granth*) was compiled. Sikhism's increasing influence, however, led the Mughal emperor Jahangir to check the growth of the new faith (see Mughal Empire). This move resulted in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev in 1606.

Guru Hargobind (Guru between 1606 and 1644) reacted to these developments by establishing a fortress at Amritsar and the *Akal Takhat* (seat of temporal authority) opposite the *Harimandar Sahib* (temple of God) within the *Darbar Sahib* complex. The linking of these two forms of authority was further symbolized in his decision to wear two swords that signified the temporal and the spiritual. The leadership of the seventh and eighth Gurus (Guru Har Rai, Guru between 1644 and 1661; Guru Har Krishan, Guru between 1661 and 1664) was largely uneventful as they sought to avoid a direct confrontation with the Mughal rulers, but their successor, Guru Tegh Bahadur (Guru between 1664 and 1675), was martyred after making representations to the emperor

Aurangzeb against the religious persecution of Kashmiri “pundits” (from Sanskrit *pandit*, “teachers”). Guru Gobind Singh’s guruship (1675 to 1708) was marked by a growing conflict between the Sikh community and the Mughal and Hindu princely rulers in Punjab. In 1699, at Baisakhi, Guru Gobind Singh decided to further consolidate the development of the community by baptizing the Khalsa. Upon his death Guru Gobind Singh vested the guruship in the Guru Granth Sahib. Thereafter the spiritual and the temporal were embodied in the *Guru Panth* (the temporal Sikh community) and the Guru Granth Sahib (which would spiritually guide it) with the collapse of the Mughal Empire and the decline of Afghan influence in Punjab; the 18th century saw the rise of Sikhs to political power in the province. During the “heroic century”, against considerable odds, the Sikhs, who were the minority religious community in the province, achieved political dominance in Punjab. This rise culminated in 1801 with the establishment by Ranjit Singh of the Kingdom of Lahore, which included Afghan territories to the west, and Kashmir to the east, and extended to the borders of Tibet. Although Ranjit Singh’s state was the embodiment of Punjabi identity, its fortunes were largely guided by a powerful military meritocracy that was dominated by the *Khalsa*.

Ranjit Singh’s kingdom lasted until 1849 when it was annexed by the British. During the next century Sikh fortunes waxed and waned as they were first treated with suspicion by the ruling colonial rulers and then recruited in large numbers into the Indian Army. In response to the competitive religious revivalism that took place in Punjab in the late 19th century among the three main traditions (Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh) following the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries, the Singh *Sabhas* attempted to reassert Sikh identity by seeking the removal of Hindu influence and ritual that had accreted into the Sikh tradition during the dislocation of the *Panth* in the 17th and 18th centuries. The work of the Singh Sabhas was completed by the *Akali* Movement (1920-1925), which successfully removed Hindu *mehants* (hereditary custodians) of leading *gurdwaras*, including the *Darbar Sahib*. This movement established the two premier institutions that have controlled Sikh affairs ever since: the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandak* Committee, which manages the affairs of the leading *gurdwaras*; and the Akai Dal (its political wing).

The Akali Dal opposed the partition of Punjab, but when it became a reality in 1947 Sikh political leadership opted for the Indian Union. Partition divided the Sikh community into two and precipitated the mass transfer of Sikhs (and Hindus) from West Punjab and Muslims from East Punjab. Almost 250,000 people were killed in the riots that followed.

After 1947 the Akali Dal leadership attempted to preserve the distinctive identity of the community by campaigning for a *Punjabi Suba* (Punjabi-speaking state). This demand was opposed by the central leadership as communal but was eventually conceded after the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. Although the linguistic reorganization of Punjab in 1966 created a majority Sikh state (60 per cent) it left many Punjabi-speaking territories outside the new state. Centre-inspired dismissal of the Akali Dal governments (1967-1971) and lingering resentment about linguistic reorganization led the Akali Dal to adopt the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) in 1973 that called for greater autonomy for Punjab.

Following the dismissal of the Akali Dal government in 1980 the ASR became the focus of an autonomy movement led by moderate *Akalis*. However, as this campaign failed to achieve a political settlement with the centre, the militant faction led by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale called for direct action that resulted in the gradual breakdown of law and order in Punjab. On June 5, 1984, the Indian Army, in an operation code-named Blue Star, entered the Darbar Sahib complex in order to evict Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers who had taken refuge in the precinct. The clash resulted in deaths of 1,000 security personnel and Sikh militants.

In the aftermath of Operation Blue Star, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was killed by her Sikh bodyguards. Her death was followed immediately by pogroms against Sikhs in Delhi in which approximately 3,000 people were killed. In 1985 Rajiv Gandhi attempted to restore the political process through the Rajiv-Longowal Accord but his reluctance to make concessions on the main Sikh demands undermined the moderate Akalis and led to the rise of militant groups campaigning for a separate Sikh state of Khalistan. Between 1984 and 1993, almost 25,000 people were killed in Punjab as a result of militant violence and counter-insurgency operations conducted by the security

forces. By the end of 1993 the use of overwhelming force by the police, the paramilitaries, and the army succeeded in eliminating most militant groups.

In February 1997, in the first free and fair elections held in the province since 1985, the Akali Dal won a landslide victory in the Punjab Legislative Assembly elections. Although the party is still officially committed to ASR, the campaign for more autonomy has been superseded by efforts to establish a regional power base (Singh, G. "Sikhism").

### 1.3. The Sikh

The word Sikh goes back to Sanskrit *shishya*, meaning a disciple or a learner. In Pali, *shishya* became *sissa*. The Pali word *sekha* (also *sikka*, *shiksha*) means pupil or one under training in a religious doctrine (*sikkha*, *shiksha*). This was the Pali form of Punjabi Sikh. The term Sikh, in the Punjab, came to be used for the disciples of Guru Nanak and his nine spiritual successors (Singh, H. 1).

The Sikh-today a well-knit community of nearly twenty million are a unique people in the religious civilization of the world. Practical and progressive in their outlook, they are deeply attached to their faith. Religious belief is their living impulse and the mainspring of their national characteristics and history.

Sikhism had its birth in the Punjab and most of its followers live in this state; yet many have migrated to other parts of India and to countries abroad. Whenever they may live, Sikhs are easily recognized by their beards and turbans. They value these as the signs of their religious faith. As their history reveals, their religious forms and symbols have been of supreme importance to them. They give them a sense of identity and are an essential part of their way of life.

The Sikhs are widely known as good soldiers and farmers. In a foreign land a Sikh may be hailed as representative of the oriental princely order-such is his physical mien and stature. Tribute has not been lacking for Sikhs' handsome beard and headgear and for their qualities of courage and adventure, but appreciation of the underlying sources of their inspiration and tradition has generally been rather limited.

The Sikhs are a deeply devoted people and faith is an essential trait of their nature. An immense reserve of spiritual energy has been their strong asset in many a crisis during their 500-year-old history. In the latest, when at the partition of the Indian

subcontinent in 1947 nearly one-third of the community was reduced to a homeless and landless refugee population, they exhibited great recuperative power. The Radcliff line, which marked off the two sovereign states of India and Pakistan, from each other, ran through the middle of the Sikh population (Singh, H. 2). Migrating from what then became the west Punjab province of Pakistan, the uprooted sections of the community established themselves gradually, but securely in their new homeland. A firm and unflinching faith was their sole support in that most trying situation.

Rather than produce any truculent or fanatical spirit, the Sikhs' religious zeal had resulted in some shining deeds of heroism and sacrifice. For, at the root of their history lie simple virtues such as tolerance, compassion, and service, so sedulously inculcated by their Gurus, or prophets-teachers.

#### **1.4. The Distinctive Features of Sikhism**

Each prophet gives some light and message to the world. Guru Nanak, the Founder of Sikhism, and his nine successors made a distinct contribution to religion and religious thought. Sikhism may be distinguished from other religions from three stand-points: philosophy, community or institution and physical appearance.

From the philosophical stand-point, the contribution of Sikhism may be called *Naam Marg*. Guru Nanak emphasized the need for man's devotion to the Timeless Almighty. He illustrates the attributes of God in his *Mul-Mantra*. He asks man to dedicate himself, day and night to the remembrance of God and His Name.

The Guru also gave to his followers the form of a community with certain institutions such as *Deg*, *Teg*, and *Fateh*. By *Deg* is meant the system of community kitchen (*Langar*) maintained by contributions of the Sikhs. Everyone is to donate one-tenth (*Dastard*) of his income. *Teg* is the sword or *Bhagwati* represents power, which was necessary to preserve freedom of religious worship and to end tyranny. For this reason, Guru Gobind Singh gave to God among other names, the name of *Sarbloh* (All steel). The Sikh believes in God's victory (*Fateh*). His salutation is *Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*: the victory is God's and the Khalsa is God's. Sikhism also believes in discipline. Guru Gobind Singh gave the Sikh a new appearance and administered him the Baptism of the Sword. He infused in him a spirit of fearlessness and

a belief in his own invincibility and told him to maintain the five symbols, each beginning with the letter K (symbols are: Hair (*Kes*), Sword (*Kirpan*), knee-long Underwear (*Kachhera*), Comb (*Kanga*), and Iron Bracelet (*Kara*).

Another tenet of Sikhism is humility (*Garibi*). The Gurus asked their followers to regard themselves servants of the Congregation (*Sangat*). The tenth Guru, after administering his new baptism to the five chosen ones, asked them on bent knees and with folded hands, to administer baptism (*Amrit*) to him. In the entire human history, there is no other case of a Guru kneeling before his followers ([hh://www.sikh.net](http://www.sikh.net)).

### **1.5. Martyrdom helped in Sikhism**

The essential condition for entry into the Sikh fold is self-surrender and devotion to the Guru and God. Readiness for the supreme sacrifice or of offering one's head on the palm of one's hand to the Guru is an essential condition laid down by the Gurus for becoming a *khalsa* Sikh. Seeking death not for personal glory, winning reward of going to heaven, but for the purpose of protection the weal and the oppressed is what made the *Khalsa* brave and invincible. This has become traditional reputation for the *khalsa*. Right from the times of gurus till the last India Pakistan conflict (1971), the Sikhs have demonstrated that death in the service of truth, faith, justice and country is part of their character and their glorious tradition. They do not seek martyrdom but they attain it.

Dying is the privilege of heroes. It should, however be for an approved or noble cause. Sikh history furnishes outstanding examples of Guru Arjan, Guru Teg Bahadur, sons of Guru Gobind Singh and countless other Sikh men and women, who laid down their lives to uphold the cause of the religious freedom and the uproot of tyranny. According to Guru Gobind Singh, the true hero is one who fights to uphold "the truth." A true martyr regards himself as God's instrument. Sikh history is replete with the glorious deeds and the heroic sacrifices of the Sikhs who suffered for upholding decency, truth, and moral values.

### **1.6. Heroism out of Holy Tradition**

Guru Arjan's martyrdom marked a turning point in the history of the Sikh faith. Instead of the rosary and other saintly emblems of spiritual inheritance, his son Guru

Hargobind wore a warrior's equipment for ceremonies of succession. He put on two swords, declaring one to be the symbol of his spiritual and the other that of his temporal investiture. This was a significant act crucial to the future evolutionary of the Sikh *panth* (Singh, H. 46).

Until the time of Guru Arjan, the Sikh had been a sect of peaceable people. Guru Hargobind foresaw that sterner methods were required to meet the growing oppression of the Mughal emperors. So he adopted the style of a soldier. "Great hero is Guru Hargobind. He is the breaker of enemy ranks, yet his heart is full of love and charity" (Singh, H. 51). The synthesis of the heroic and the spiritual was Guru Hargobind's distinctive contribution to the evolution of the Sikh people. The Guru Hargobind took up arms only to uphold the values established by his predecessors. For the Sikhs, the role of saints and the soldier had become mutually complementary.

### 1.7. The Sacrament of Steel

The Guru Gobind created a new metaphor of the sword. The sword was the symbol of *Akal* himself. God is described as *Sarbloh*, i.e., all-steel.

I bow with love and devotion to the Holy Sword

Assist me that I may be able to complete this work (Singh, H. 81).

God and sword became interchangeable terms. When Guru Gobind Singh referred to God as *Sarbloh* or the Sword, he was not oblivious of His characteristics of love and compassion. A couplet in his *Jap Sahib* reads:

I bow to Thee, Lord, Who art the wielder of the sword!

I bow to Thee, Lord, Who art the possessor of arms!

I bow to Thee, Lord, Who knowest the ultimate secret!

I bow to Thee, Lord, Who lovest the world like a mother! (Singh, H. 82).

God is symbolized in the weapons of war. He is presented as the Punisher of the evil and the destroyer of the tyrant the benevolent aspect is simultaneously and equally forcefully emphasized and he is invoked as the Fountain-head of Mercy, the Kinsmen of the Poor and Bestower of Felicity.

A brave death on the field of battle for a holy cause was set out as noble and worthy end. Thus does Guru Gobind Singh supplicate God:

Grant unto me this boon, O Lord,  
That I may never be deterred from doing good deeds.  
I should have no fear of the enemy when I go to battle,  
And turn victory decidedly to my side.  
In my mind there is but one desire  
That I may ever be singing Thy praises.  
And when the time comes, I should die  
Fighting in the thick of action (Singh, H. 82).

The glorification of the sword itself was to secure fulfillment of God's justice. The sword was never the symbol of aggression. It stood for righteous and brave action for the protection of truth and virtue. It was the emblem of manliness and self-respect and was to be used only in self-defense, as a last resort. For Gobind Singh said: "When all other means have failed, it is but righteous to take to the sword" (Singh, H. 83).

## CHAPTER 2

### Life of Guru Nanak

#### 2.1. Birth and Childhood of Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born on April 15, 1469 in a small village called Talwandi, which later came to be known as Nanak Sahib, now in Pakistan. His father Kalyan Chand, belonged to kshatriyas in caste was a *patvari* or a revenue collector for Rai Bhoj, the Muslim owner of the village of Talwandi. His mother's name was Tripta. There are many legends connected with his birth and childhood, of a very fascinating nature. The Guru bore upon himself the imprint of greatness. The family astrologer predicted that the child would wear the umbrella, a symbol of a prophetic dignity.

#### 2.2. Early Signs of Guru Nanak's Spirituality

It is common understanding that the life of the great prophets shows some early signs of their nature and future life. So it happened in the life of Guru Nanak. Mr. Kartar Singh accounts that at the early, unripe age of five, he began to talk of divine things. When he was among his playmate he would, at times, seat them all around him and bid them repeat after him the name of the Formless Lord (Singh, K. 22). For example, at the age of twelve Jesus says to his mother, "why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my father's house?" (Luke 2:49). With regard to him it is said that when all alone, he would sometimes sit for hours with half-shut eyes. Those who beheld him thus occupied were struck at the radiance and glory that emanated from his calm, rosy countenance (Singh, K. 23). To elders he spoke with humility and wisdom-qualities considered surprising in one so young. His presence seems to feel the entire village. To quote from *Meharban Janamsakhi*, "Great is Gobind, the Lord! Such a small child and yet he speaks so auspiciously. His words are as immaculate as he is handsome. He is the image of God Himself" and if the Turk saw him he would remark with equal enthusiasm, 'Wonderful is Thy creation, Merciful Master! How good looking is the child and who polite his speech! Talking to him brings one such satisfaction. He is a nobler one blessed of the Almighty Allah (Singh, H. 70). He was fond of contemplating and giving

alms to the beggars. The child Guru Nanak took quite pleasure in visiting the *sadhus* of his village. He would sit by them for hours. He would offer them what article of food he could lay his hands on at home.

From the aforementioned accounts we can draw his early qualities like, devotion and generosity was part of his life. Such qualities of Guru Nanak continued all through his life. And on this early foundation of spirituality he built a successful religious life.

### **2.3. Perturbed Parents**

Like every father, Kalyan Chand too had great expectations from his son. He did not like those other-worldly signs in his only son and was troubled by them. He wanted to see him become a great man of the world. To He wanted to see him as a person who could add more reputation to the family. But his son strived more for the excellence of spirituality or knowledge of the other world. Kalyan was troubled over the strange ways of Guru Nanak. *Mata* Tripta had great love towards her son but his father could not but detect his son's gifts to beggars and *sadhus*. How could a man whose heart was after storing wealth and riches in this world relish such 'wasteful' conduct of his son? He rebuked the child. The latter promised to obey his father. But what he could do? Charity open-handed charity was in his grain. But the divine urge could not allow the worldly things to prevail or dominate his open-minded charity. His father went to the astrologer, who had predicted Nanak as a great ruler over men and lands and who would win the untold wealth and honor for himself and his people. Yet he has begun the other way. He seems bent upon throwing away what little he had honestly gathered. The astrologer replied, "I still hold that Nanak is to be even greater than rulers of men and lands. Judge him not too hastily, nor measure him with your own standards" (Singh, K. 24).

### **2.3.His Education**

Nanak's education has been very controversial. There are two groups of people who try to represent Nanak as uneducated (Gupta, M. 15). Some of his early faithful disciples of his own, the Sikh biographers of the past, who contended that the guru was sent to the village school but he did not study anything there. They thought it below the dignity of their prophet to learn to read and write from the ordinary men and like ordinary

men. The second group includes the Hindu thinkers, who belong to *Arya Samaj* say that Nanak's condemnation of the Vedas and other Hindu *sastras* was due to his ignorance because as he was uneducated he could not have read them. In fact, it appears that after the elementary education in his village schools, Nanak took to private study, spent much time in meditation and in association with religious men. He wandered in the dense forests around his home, and there met the religious teachers and reformers of his day, ascetics and wandering fakirs. From them he must have learnt the subtleties associated with religious controversy.

But according to some other sources Guru Nanak was sent to school at the age of seven to the village Brahmin teacher from whom he learnt reading and writing in *Devnari*, arithmetic and book-keeping. From the *Maulvi* he learnt Persian and Arabic (Singh, P. 4). It is also said that on the very first day, he surprised every body including the teacher by composing the following hymn:

“Burn the worldly attachment, grind their Ashes and make thy ink. Write on the clean paper of thy heart with the pen of love, and write down as instructed by Divine Master. Write the, name of God His praises; Write that he hath neither end nor limit” (Bakshi, Vol. I, 3).

When the teacher asked Nanak to write the alphabet on a wooden plate, he wrote a beautiful composition based on the thirty-five letters of the alphabet giving each letter a new meaning. Throughout the composition he spoke of one God, which later became the principle of Sikhism (Bakshi, Vol. I, 4). The teacher was surprised to see his new student and considered Nanak an extraordinary student. Thus later he developed his skill of thinking by meditation and association with the religious men.

The composition of hymns and the composition based on the thirty-five letters seem to be unbelievable, for the question arises in the mind if every reader is “how can a child on his first day of schooling compose beautiful hymns and can appear wiser than his teacher?” But people believe because it is there in the *Adi Granth* compiled by Guru Arjan, who himself believed in the composition of Guru Nanak. Also the faithful

believed that the *Adi Granth* is not a mere composition of the words of the gurus but is it sacred. The eternal word (*shabda*) has been incorporated in the *Adi Granth* (Cole. O. 32).

## 2.5. The Sacred Thread Ceremony

Whatever education Nanak got in his life, all were divine-oriented. Even his hymns, which he composed on the first day of schooling, were about Divine Power. In 1480, the parents of Nanak, as was the custom of the place, called a priest to perform the sacred thread ceremony. According to Hindu belief, a Hindu without the thread is a man without a religion. It helps the wearer both in this life and that of the next life. But Nanak refused to wear cotton thread and demanded the thread for the soul, which cannot be lost or be broken. According to Nanak, a man who has such thread round his neck is truly blessed. According to him:

The true thread is to behave by the acquisition and practice of noble, by praising God, and by leading a life of an ever-constant, unbroken consciousness of his presence in and around us everywhere. By realizing the will of the supreme Lord in his daily life does a man obtain a thread in which he can rely with confidence? Thus the thread obtained will be truly the thread of the soul. It will never get old or fall away. It will take him into the presence of the Blissful Lord and win for him a place of honor in this court. Such a thread would I gladly wear (Singh, K. 38).

The Brahmin could argue no longer. So he said, what you have said is all true. We are truly without a true thread of the soul; we would wear that too. But you are without the thread of the body. Wear it now, and then we all can strive to have a thread of the soul too.

## 2.6. Marriage of Guru Nanak

According to the wish of his brother-in-law, Jai Ram and sister Nanki, Guru Nanak went to Sultanpur where he was employed as a storekeeper in *Nawab* Daulat Khan's storehouse. In spite of having been the *Nawab's* employee, Nanak was unable to save money, because most of what he earned gave away to the needy. Because of his open-handed charity his sister and brother-in-law planned to marry him, thinking that family life will change him. Nanak knew that the life of religion could be lived amid the ties and duties of family life. So he agreed to get married. At the age of nineteen he was

married to Sulakhini, the daughter of Sri Mool Chand Chona, of Pakho village in Gurdaspur district. It was conducted in the usual style and was attended by many friends and relatives. But marriage was powerless to divert his heart and soul from the path he had come to lay down for humanity (Singh, K. 55). He tried to be a faithful husband as well as a religious person. Two sons were born to Nanak. The eldest, Sri Chand, was born in 1494, and the younger one Laksmi Das was born in 1497.

## **2.7.The Social Condition of Guru Nanak**

After marriage, Nanak lived a life of happiness and peace. This seemed to be the ideal life for a young man. But Guru Nanak had a higher mission. He continued to do his duty in the service of the best of his ability. In the other hand, he kept on reflecting on the miserable life around. The constant contact with the people made him aware of the hard realities of life. Thus he used to spend some time daily or at least on holidays in the nearby forests or solitary places. In the forest too, he kept contact with *sadhus* and discussed the problems of life. At the time of Guru Nanak the scenario was one of chaos and confusion. There were uninterrupted scenes of tyranny and blood shed. The country was utterly weak and disintegrated. The rulers had lost all sense of justice and fair play. Like present days corruption was prevalent in the society. Power and position were bought and sold (Bakshi, Vol. I, 1). The people were backward, ignorant, and chained in superstitions. They believed in prejudices. Big sums of money were spent on useless ceremonies. Thus poor were becoming poorer. The Mohammedan king was considered the “Deputy of God” on the earth. The rulers were Muslims. Behlol Lodi was the sultan of Delhi till 1450-1488, Sikander Lodi ruled from 1488 to 1517 and the Mughals after 1526. The Muslim subjects were the favorite children of the state. They alone were occupying the high offices and were given great respect and honor. They enjoyed several concessions. Under the Muslims reigns the Hindus were considered infidels. They were overburdened with taxes. Thus social and political inequalities could be seen clearly in the society.

In the area, of religion the idol worship was prevalent among the Hindus (Bakshi, Vol. I, 2). Annual pilgrimage was a common feature of Hindu life. They had unnecessary faith in the water of Ganges. They had belief that just a dip in the holy Ganges washes

their whole sins. Such blind faith brought disrepute to the Hindu religion. Practices like the wearing of the thread, applying streaks of saffron on the forehead, the repetition of few mantras without understanding the meaning of the words, the cruel sacrifices of animals and sometimes of humans to appease the gods and goddesses had come to dominate religion.

In the realm of politics the Muslims had dominated the Hindus, but in the area of religion, they were no better than the Hindus. “They were even ignorant of their own religion and the teachings of Islam were unknown to them. *Qazis* and *Mulla*, who professed to have knowledge of tenets of Islam were in reality ignorant of Shari’at” (Bakshi, Vol. I, 2). Such condition of politics and religion opened the eye of the young Nanak and forced him to have further reflections and solutions of such problems. In a true sense, India was in need of such a leader to lead humankind from darkness to light. By his effort, Guru Nanak was to some extent successful because he led men to the path of goodness and virtue and kindled the flame of love and good in the hearts of millions of his countrymen. He preached equality of all religions and of humankind.

## **2.8. Mystic Experience of Nanak**

From the childhood onwards Nanak showed himself as an extraordinary man. His deeds, actions and words he uttered gave clear indication that Nanak was different from any other man. His parents were aware of his “abnormality” but did not understand the real situation. This is the reason why they allowed him to be employed at *Nawab’s* storeroom. They wanted him to come into contact with people and bring change in himself.

One day, in the year 1497 A.D. he had gone for his morning bath near by the river called *Bein*. But as usual he did not return after bath. His clothes, found on the bank of the river, made people think that he got drowned. All the people in the city including the people of *Nawab* searched for him but were unsuccessful.

### **2.8.1. Interpretation of His Disappearance**

There are different interpretations of his disappearance (Raj, H. 71). Macauliffe in his book ‘The Sikh Religion’ says that after bathing, Nanak disappeared for three days in

the forest and was taken to a vision of God's presence. On the other hand, Mr. Gupta in his book says Nanak fell into the trance but hid himself in a cave near the bank of the river, facing the cremation ground. Intense concentration on God brought him divine light. God enlightened his mind and heart.

According to another interpretation he might have purposely gone for a retreat, a sort of prayerful recollection. Some other people, mainly those who were against him said that he committed suicide to hide the corruption he had done in the *Nawab's* account. But his coming back disclosed that such rumors were baseless.

The author of the old chronicle (*Puratan Janamsakhi*) written in 1635 A.D. says that as the Guru took a dip in the stream, angels of God bade him follow them. They took him into the presence of God. The lord gave him a cup of nectar as a mark of His favor. The Guru was then charged with the duty of going forth into the world to show the right path to the humankind. The faithful believed in the following songs, which describe this event

A minstrel pout of work wad I  
To His work He did me apply.  
The Mighty Lord to me did say,  
Sing my praises night and day (Singh, K 63).

### **2.8.2. Change in Guru Nanak**

Soon after his reappearance Nanak declared that, "there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim" (Raj, H. 72). The meaning of this sentence can be understood differently. It could mean that there was no basic difference between Hinduism and Islam or all human beings were the same and dividing them into different religions was pointless. The most popular meaning could be that Guru Nanak rejected the distinction between man and man on the basis of religion or caste. He pointed the way for people to look beyond these barriers. By saying this he was not refuting any religion. He was only saying that all men were the creations of God, and hence equal.

The mysterious disappearance made a change in Nanak. From that onwards, he spent his time in the praise of the Nam (word of God), *Daan* (giving alms), *Ishnanan* (taking bath, or keeping oneself pure by ablution), doing *Seva* (service to others), and

spending time in *Simran* (prayer and meditation). Thus he set an example for entire human being to praise God as well as to serve the human beings. Even today virtues like, *Daan* and *Seva* are seen among his followers.

## **2.9. Spiritual Life of Guru Nanak**

After the mystic experience, Guru Nanak gave up his job, discontinued to live with his wife, distributed his property among the poor and started to live a life of preaching. Having given away all his material wealth, he was now ready to distribute, with an equally liberal and generous heart, the spiritual riches that he had received from the Lord. He finally took leave of his sister, wife and sons and set out for his mission. He was a missionary in the truest sense of the word. His life was a life of message. He traveled widely and faced the challenges and hardship that came on his way. He traveled for about thirty-five years, which is almost half of his life (Singh, P. 14). After visiting some places in Punjab, the Guru proceeded on his long tours called *Udasis* (a commonly used for his preaching tours). His tours can be divided into following two phases:

### **2.9.1. The First Phase (1497-1510)**

The guru's tour was towards the east, which included the important religious places like Benaras, Patna and Gaya (Singh, P. 14). He visited the holy places of the Hindus, mostly on restive occasions. For example, he went to Kurukshetra during the time of the big *mela*. Similarly he reached Haridwar, where a large number of Hindus had assembled to have a dip in the sacred waters of the Ganges. In the morning he saw the devotees tossing water towards the rising sun, as oblations to their departed ancestors. He also went into the river and stood opposite of them and threw water to the west. The pilgrims asked him, what he was doing. He replied:

My farm in Punjab needs watering. I thought I had better do something about it. The listeners laughed at him and one of them asked, how could any one send water so many miles away? The guru politely replied with a smile, if this water could not reach my farm, how could it reach our ancestors in the world beyond? (Singh, P. 15).

From Haridwar, Guru Nanak went to Benaras where he met *pundit* Chatur Das a leading Hindu *pundit* and told him that God reside in very human heart and that His Holy

Name could be the medium of His adoration. From there he went to Patna, Gaya and Kanrup (Assam) and had important religious discussion with the Hindu *pundits*.

In 1509, Nanak came to Puri where he saw the priests and other devotees of *Jagannath* performing *arti*, and explained the meaning of the term '*Arti*, he said, means to get absorbed or merged in to the Lord (Aa=come+rat=get merged)'" (Gupta, M. 56). He elaborated the concept and said that it refers to the ascent and journey of the spirit entity upward toward the region of pure spirituality, through deep love and yearning, true humility and total surrender to the will of the Supreme Creator. Traveling through various parts of India he came to Punjab and founded a new town called Kartarpur or the Creator's city, at the bank of the river Ravi.

### **2.9.2. Second Phase (1510-1531)**

After spending sometimes with his family members, Guru Nanak went to the north and visited some yogis of the lower Himalayas, Nepal and Tibet and told them to be some use to the world and tried to convince them that they should exert themselves in the service of human beings (Singh, P. 18). He said this because they were busy achieving their own *moksa* neglecting the entire human race. They were even ignorant of the situation in the plains

In 1519 he left for the Middle Eastern lands including Mecca, medina and Mesopotamia. There he wore the blue dress of Mohammedan pilgrim, took a fakir's staff in his hand and a collection of his hymns under his arm. It is said that at Mecca he slept with his feet unknowingly turned towards the *Kaaba* the Holy place of the Muslims. The head priest Rukunuddin was incensed at this, and directed Nanak to remove his feet. Nanak told him that he was too tired to rise but that he could turn his feet in a direction, where God does not exist. The priest rudely dragged Nanak's feet towards direction after another but saw the vision of the *Kaaba* everywhere. Nanak then told him that, "There is no fixed place of God: neither a house, nor a mosque nor a temple" (Gupta, M. 77). What Nanak meant was that one might seek god everywhere. Then they asked him, whether he was a Muslim or a Hindu. Neither of the two was the reply. They asked again, who was he then? Nanak replied, "I am only a play thing made of five elements" (Singh, P. 19).

Thus he taught them that all are human beings and the sons and the daughters of the same God.

At the age of sixty-two, Guru Nanak returned to settle down at Kartarpur where he took upon himself the duties of every day life. He worked on his farm and provided for his family. He held congregations and recited his hymns in the morning and evening. Kartarpur became the center of the Sikh faith which was gradually developing the characteristics of an organized religion.

In 1539 at the age of seventy, Guru Nanak passed away, leaving behind his spiritual successor Guru Angad, a large number of devotional hymns and also innumerable followers scattered all over India and in other lands. After his death both Hindu and Muslim claimed for his body but it mysteriously disappeared. Under the cloth-sheet there remained only the flowers, which both Hindu and the Muslims divided into two parts. The Hindus cremated and the Muslims buried them according to their respective rites (Singh, P. 21).

## **2.10. Social Instruction of Guru Nanak**

Though the teaching of Guru Nanak led a new religion, in the true sense he was a social reformer. He journeyed almost all the important places of different religions and saw the social status of the people. He saw poverty, superstition, caste system and the miserable conditions of the women. Therefore social liberation of the people was a must. From the beginning of his social life, Guru Nanak was very conscious of the dignity of human beings. For him, the best way to serve God is to serve human beings. Guru Nanak considers God as the creator of all human beings. Therefore, all people are equal, irrespective of the diversity of caste, belief, faith, color, sex, and race. He stressed on universal brotherhood. He regarded the entire humanity as one family (Raj, H. 85).

### **2.10.1. His Attitude to Caste System**

Whenever we think of caste system in India, we refer mainly to the hierarchy structured Hindu society, which is based on four *varnas*. In the Hindu society, caste and religion are inseparable since time immemorial (Raj, H. 154). This structure is based on two sources, namely, the social and mythical. Socially, it is based on the occupation and

mythically it is based on past *karma*. But the people of the last *Varna* i.e., the *Sudra* face a lot of problems. Similarly *chandal* in the north India were treated as inhuman. The pathetic condition of the people of these two groups attracted the attention of Guru Nanak. It clearly indicates his support to such least people. He says, “There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim” (Raj, H. 72). One of the meanings of this saying is that all human beings are equal and created by the same God. Such religious and humanitarian thought encouraged the other Sikh gurus to fight against the evils of caste system and other social problems. According to him serving the needy is the meaningful service. Without such work, all sacrifices and charities are profitless. Guru Nanak and other Sikh gurus were very practical in their teaching. They not only taught others but they followed them. For example, they included the writings of untouchables like Raids and Kabiraj in the *Adi Granth*. The fifth guru, guru Arjan even appointed Bhai Buddha as the first *granthi* (Singh, Pashaura 1999, p. 257). Guru Nanak’s idea of serving the outcastes was based on the dignity of human persons and the belief that all are created by God. Besides this, serving the nation by uniting people of different castes too is an important factor.

### **2.10.2. Function of Caste in Sikh Society**

The Sikh gurus rejected *Varnashrama dharma* and gave equal status to all people. But unfortunately, there is division in Sikh society too, but the question of purity and pollution does not arise in Sikhism. Unlike Hinduism, the division of Sikh society is based on various occupations and professions, and these are more social and economic in character than religious. Such division is still prevalent due to the *jajmani/sepindari* mode of production. *Jaman* means patron and *sepidars* means hereditary servants. Thus the term *sepindari* denotes the system of patron-client relationship in which the land owning dominant caste exchanges share of crop for good and services provided by the village *karmins* (hereditary servants). The *Karmins* are collectively known as *chhotian janat* of low castes. *Sepidar* or *karmins* includes all the low castes or servants. For example, barber, water-carrier, leather worker and sweeper etc. even the boys of upper castes marry the girls from the upper castes or from their own standards. Thus even they believe that all people are the children of the same God, it is difficult to wipe away the biological factors one has received by his birth from one’s parents (Raj, H. 157).

### 2.11. Experience of Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak was born when all India was in the bondage of caste system, untouchability, superstitions and other social problems. By his long journey he saw the reality of social life with his own eyes. He saw that the *chandals* and *sudras* in north India were denied of their human status. They were kept far away from society. “Even their touch, shadow and even voice from a distance was considered contaminating and could defile the piety and religion of the higher castes (Raj, H. 156). On the other hand, Guru Nanak opposed the prevalent *sati* in society and tried to give equal status to the women. Thus he traveled almost all part of India and awakened the demoralizing people to live a better life, but he himself lived a life of harmony and brotherhood. In fact he was a true social reformer who understood the problems of the people and tried to solve them.

He had a great love for human beings. According to him all human beings are the sons and daughters of the same God. He believed that it has his responsibility to serve and save God’s children. Because of such attitudes he left his family and worked for the betterment of the people. He says, “It is not man that brings forth children into the world. They are denting hither the Creator and Sustainer of the world. We are here to carry out his divine plan” (Singh, K. 75).

## CHAPTER 3

### Understanding of God

#### 3.1. God: Some General Notions

Those who believe in God, consider him the most powerful being. They accept and worship him and show great sense of respect and love. The devotees believe that he is the creator and the sustainer of the whole world. Most of the world religions accept the oneness of God. He is addressed by the name such as *Ram, Rahim, Allah, Yahweh* and *Akal* etc. religion may be seen as different ways to reach the same god. The believers make sense of God's attributes, such as love, justice, charity, mercy, peace, wisdom, truth and goodness. Through the prayers, meditation and religious ceremonies people experience these qualities and achieve peace in their minds and hearts.

#### 3.2. Concept of God in Sikhism

Like Christianity, Hinduism and Islam there is place for god in Sikhism, which is called *Akal* or timeless. Sikhism believes in a just and merciful god. According to Guru Nanak God in One, Immortal, Omnipotent, and Omniscient. In brief, Guru Nanak stated his concept of God in the following manner:

There is one god  
 His name is truth,  
 He is the creator  
 He is without fear and without halt.  
 He is beyond time immortal,  
 His spirit pervades the universe.  
 He is not born,  
 Nor does He die to be born again,  
 He is self-existent  
 By the guru's grace shalt thou worship Him (Singh, K. 43).

### 3.2.1. God is *Ikk* (One)

Guru Nanak can be said to be the pioneer of a mighty religious revolution. Monotheism is the beginning and the end of Guru Nanak's faith. According to him God is *Ikk*, without a second. Oneness of God is the first principle of Sikh faith. Guru Nanak regards god as the one but he can be called or addressed by many manes. The multiple names are the forms of addressing God. But in reality, God is one (Raj 87).

Guru Nanak supports his idea of monotheism with similes and metaphors. One metaphor is related to different seasons and it is the sun that makes them into a unity. In the same way the creator has many garbs, but is one. He further compares God with a beautiful lake: god, according to him is like a large lake in which many varieties of water lilies blossom. Thus god is one and source of all things (Singh, K. 26).

According to Nanak God is both transcendental and immanent. He is present in all things. When God is seen through the universe, we think of him as *sargun* (quality-full). On the other hand, when we realize his transcendence, we think of him as *nirguna* (abstract). We may say that god is both in and above the universe. God is the whole and the world a part of that whole. A complete knowledge of God is impossible. According to Guru Nanak, only one who is as great as god himself can know him fully. We can only have some glimpses of him.

Guru Nanak's God is *nirankar* or formless and therefore beyond our description. Guru Nanak further states that, "The implication of God being formless is that he cannot take human incarnation, nor can he be represented in any concrete shape through any material medium" (Talib, G. 166). The idea of formless god is ruled out the idea of any image or worship of any statue. The guru, like Buddha believes in heroes, Teachers, Spiritual guides, and man of enlightenment, but finds to accept the idea of incarnation.

The formless being is also eternal. Since God is without beginning and end, he is immortal. It is beyond time and space. It is deathless, ever living, ever present Absolute. The Sikh gurus, therefore, regard the Eternal "*Akal Purusha*", as the only reality. He strengthens his statement by saying, "A hundred thousands of Muhammads, a million of *Brahmans, Vishnus, Krishnas, and Rams* stand at the gate of god, the Most High. They all perish but god alone is immortal" (Raj 88). Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita also speaks about the Imperishable *akal purusha* or Atman, "Weapon cannot cut this dry" (qtd

in Singh, I. 16). According to Guru Nanak, birth and rebirth does not affect Him, because god is ever new, that is changeless and unaffected by time. The fifth guru, Arjan also says, “Sky and earth will pass away, only the one will remain for ever” (Cole, O. 34). This view also implies that god is immortal and eternal.

### 3.2.2. Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer

According to Guru Nanak, god himself created and recognized his creation. He created the sun and moon and infused his light into them. He made the wonderful play of night and day. Thus he created everything in the universe. He accepted the Vedic notion of creation, according to which there was nothing in the world. When he willed, he shaped the universe. In a long hymns consisting of 48 lines, in *Rag maru*, Guru Nanak speculates on the origin of the universe. He says:

Millions and millions of years ago there was utter darkness,  
There was neither earth nor sky,  
There was only the lord’s unfathomable will,  
There was neither day nor night, nor moon nor sun,  
There was only god in a state of deep meditation (Iyengar, K. 111).

This hymns sound similar to the Christian story of creation. The Christians too believe that in the beginning there was nothing except god. Guru Nanak says that the time of the creation is unknown. He says that only the creator, created the universe, knows when and how he created the world.

The creator himself sustains this world. He does not remain apart from his creation. Guru Nanak rightly says, “He is the creator of all men and of all Sikhism, the ultimate source of all that is in us in God alone. Without Him there is no strength in us. Nobody, not even the evil man, can do anything independent of God. God is in and around them:

The fish may run against the current of the river or along with it,  
Just as it likes, but it cannot escape the river itself. Similarly man may run counter  
What is received as good or moral, but he can never escape from the pale of god’s  
Will (Singh, T. 13).

The hymns of Guru Ram Das beautifully express the presence and sustaining power of God. He says, “Thou are the creator of all, Thy glory is everywhere; Thou

settest every thing in motion as Thou pleasant” (Macauliffe, Vol. I & II, 314). He is the source of all life, and inspires, enlightens, and sustains every heart. For the well being of the life on the earth, god projected a part of himself in his creation and he thus became a part of that very creation. It simply means that god is present everywhere and protects his creation in their trouble. According to Guru Nanak, the three ways of seeing God as the creator, sustainer and destroyer are the three qualities of god (Raj, H. 93). Though there is one God, his nature has spread all over the universe, that power has come to be accepted as three subordinate powers. One is the creator and the other is the sustainer and the third one is He who from his court of justice passes orders for death and destruction. Thus God is all. He is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all things. “He is the Scribe as well as the Script. He is the play write as well as the director, and all of us are the actors on the stage of the world” (Singh, I. 12).

### **3.2.3. God is Perfect, Absolute and Independent**

As the absolute being god is perfect and independent. Unborn and undying are his attributes. All things and being take birth in him, but he is never born. All things and beings die in him but he never dies. Thus deathlessness and birthlessness of God present him as an eternal being. The following quotation brings forth the attribute of God:

O Ye stupid, he hither takes neither nor dies,

Burn be the lips that utter God takes birth;

He comes not in to flesh and died not,

Neither he comes nor departs from this earth,

He, God of Nanak, is all absorbing and ever present. (qtd in Singh, I. 17).

Guru Nanak’s God is thus both *abinashi* (indestructible) and *anadi* (without beginning). On this basis, Guru Nanak rejected the theory of reincarnation or *avatarvada*. For, to be incarnated means to be involved in death (*binash*). Thus god is formless. It is composed and cannot be decomposed.

### **3.2.4. God is Merciful, Just and Loving**

God is merciful by nature. Because of his compassionate nature, he is manifesting himself everywhere. Being a merciful god, he is the friend of every person. That is to say

god pardons man's sins. According to Guru Nanak ritual bath aimed at inner purification, makes no meaning. He says, "He who hears and obeys and loves god in his heart, shall wash off his impurities in the place of pilgrimages" (Raj, H. 197). Real purity according to Guru Nanak is from within. Impurity of the heart is greed and the impurity of the tongue is untruth. Impurity of the eye is coveting another's wealth and his wife. Impurity of the ear is listening to calumny. Even if he is living in sin, God will take care of him. On the other hand god is just. God does not take any sides. He does justice to all equally.

God is love and He loves the whole creation. He is present everywhere in the form of love. When a man loves someone, he too is loved. He realizes the presence of God in love. God himself is love, and he reciprocates our love with open arms. Thus God becomes intensely personal like any other beloved human being. The creation itself is the evidence of God's love; because without creator, a creation is not possible.

### **3.3. *Hukam* of God**

*Hukam* is an Arabic word which means Divine Order. Sometimes *hukam* is translated as God's will. Thus *hukam* can be understood as God's will or God's command. The entire creation depends on *hukam* i.e., God's will. His *hukam* is the principle of all life. This creation is the outcome of the will of the Conscious Being. He is the first cause. There was neither earth nor sky. Before creation there was darkness for countless years. There was only his will. This universe came into being when he willed to manifest himself. Thus, all are subject to God's order and nothing lays out side it.

In *japji* guru Nanak affirmed that god is truth and it is attained by submitting to the *hukam*. The *hukam* is the fundamental principle of God's activity. Man's duty is to seek an understanding of the divine *hukam* and to live a life wholly in accord with it. This is the way to break the wall of falsehood. Guru Nanak says, "Walk with *hukam* (the divine will) as your guide" (Singh, H 23).

According to Guru Nanak man is under different bondages. The primary cause is of the bondage is egoism (*haumai*). It is egoism that separates man from primal reality and dims the divine spark within him. Egoism or the self-concern creates a wall around the individual and separates him from his original source as well as from society. This is what leads him to spiritual blindness. One becomes alienated from the universal will and

considers *samsara* as the real. In such situation one cannot overcome from the five evils, i.e., *kama* (sensuality), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (avarice), *moha* (attachment), and *ahankara* (pride). Haumai is the cause of all suffering (Singh, H. 25). By overcoming Haumai one can have realization of truth.

Attainment of union with the eternal one is the ultimate purpose of man. Such union ends the cycle of birth and death. Thus for one's *mukti* he/she has to overcome from the egoism. Many people accept pilgrimage, fast and ascetic practices as the means for salvation but Guru Nanak rejects such ideas. For Guru Nanak the first step toward enlightenment is the awakening of the belief that the Transcendent is the only ultimate truth. This awakening must be accompanied by an intense love of God. He further says that self surrender and complete faith in his hukam or will, frees a man from the bondage of ego. Besides the faith in god, he/she needs to understand oneself, for self-realization helps people to overcome from their weakness. Thus accepting God's will and by overcoming one's weakness people move towards the ultimate truth.

### **3.4. Manifestation of God**

According to Guru Nanak god manifests himself; and makes the seeker know Him, have a vision or realization of Him. God is infinite and so ultimately beyond apprehension but this does not mean that he is wholly unknowable. He is knowable. He is knowable, may be in glimpse, when he reveals himself to his devotees who knock at his door by means of "*Hari-sumiran*" remembering him with single-minded love, regard and devotion. He reveals himself when the Guru is pleased with the disciple or seekers of truth.

Within all here is light, and  
It is thy Light, which is in all.  
Through the guru's leading  
The Light is revealed (Singh, I. 18).

For Guru Nanak, He who creates, sustains, and destroys reveals himself in His creation. Manifestation does not mean the clear vision or appearance of God but the realization of Him. Guru Nanak says: "God is manifested through His omnipresent name and the voice and the word of the Guru" (Eliade, Vol.10). It is also understood that God

embraced onto only matter and spirit, but also all the moral, social, emotional, and the intellectual attributes, and these are made manifest in His creation (Iyengar, K. 115). God is self-caused, omnipresent and all-powerful.

### 3.5. God the Ultimate Guru

In the Sikh tradition, there was the transfer of the guruship. The Guruship passed from one guru to the other as one candle lights another. The real Guru is God for He is the source of all light. In the Sikh faith, ten gurus held the office. After Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru of the Sikh tradition, the transfer of the guruship ended. When the Sikhs asked him who their guru would be in future, the Guru Gobind said:

I abolish from now on the succession of persons through heredity or selection. God's word enshrined in the *Adi Granth* will be the eternal and the spiritual guru, and the secular guru will be the *Panth*, or the whole community of the *khalsa* (Singh, G. 27).

Thus the last Guru passed on the Sacred Book, the Guru Granth. Since then, the Sikhs accepted the *Guru Granth* as their guru. They look upon their holy book the *granth sahib* or the Guru as the visible embodiment of the gurus. They accept it as their living guru keep their holy scripture in all *gurudwaras*.

All the teaching of the gurus and all that they need to believe is contained in the *Adi Granth*. This holy scripture of the Sikh faith is called by various names such as *Sri Adi Granth*, primal scripture, *granth sahib*, holy *grnath* and *guru granth sahib*. Being the repository of the Divine Word it is worshiped and held in great respect. In the religious assemblies of the Sikhs they keep holy Granth and all who enter now before it and make offerings. Thus it is not merely a book but is like a Sacred Person. Because of the sacredness, they fold their hands and pray and give reverence to it.

### 3.6. Meaning of Guru

Guru is one of the most important words in Sikhism. It has a number of related meanings (Cole, O. 75). First, it refers to God, because the ultimate guide of the whole beings is God. In Sikhism “*sat guru*” is meant to imply the Supreme.

Secondly, the word guru is used for the ten Sikh gurus. All are regarded as the messengers of God. The Sikh Gurus are highly respected. It is often said that their birth was non karmic, that is they were born in obedience to the divine will and not as a

consequence of *karma*. However, they are not objects of worship. Their pictures should never be placed in such a position in the *gurdwara* that people bowing towards the Guru Granth Sahib, accidentally towards them.

Thirdly, the word “guru” refers to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy scripture of the Sikhs. The messages and the writings of the gurus as well as the compositions of Hindus and Muslims are included in this sacred book. Thus the *Adi Granth*, the eternal and the spiritual guru will guide the Sikhs.

Fourthly, the word guru refers to the *Guru Panth*, the Sikh community, which lives according to the teaching of the scriptures and is inspired by them (Cole, O. 76). Sikhism is based on the idea of monism. God alone is the creator and sustainer and the source of all life. He is the ultimate Guru who guides the entire world. According to Guru Nanak God does not need man’s praise. Guru Nanak further says, if all people start praising Him, it will not make the least difference to His greatness. Just as the sun does not need light of the lamps, so in the same way, God does not need the praises of men. But people worship Him from a sense of duty and *dharma*. They love or show their reverence by singing His praises. On the other hand such duties increase the spirituality of the people and help them to live a better life. They have faith in the words of Guru Nanak, which says, “He that repeats the name of the Lord in this world will reap his reward in the world to come” (Singh, K. 2).

## CHAPTER 4

# Philosophy of Guru Nanak

### 4.1. Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Man

According to Guru Nanak the meaning and the purpose of human existence centers in the divine existence of EKK, the one, he who creates, sustains and destroys, He who having created reveals Himself in His creation, He who by His grace communicates to man the way of salvation and calls forth the response which enables him to appropriate that salvation. Nanak divides entire mankind into two classes: those who belong to God and those who belong to Maya. Thus the human beings of this world are either '*Haridas*', the servant of God or '*Myadasas*' the servers of the Mammon (Singh, I. 20). The former ones are the conscientious travelers pm the path of God-realization while the latter are the willing but ignorant prisoners of passion on life. It is up to the people themselves to choose either God or Mammon. Since God and Mammon are different in nature, their followers are different and opposite of each other.

#### 4.1.1. Attachment to the World

Guru Nanak says that "whatever is visible is perishable." Nothing that comes to the eyes lives for ever. It is, therefore, futile for man to cling to the things and beings of the world for that plain reason that those things are subject to decay. In other words, the world is transitory in nature and God alone is all abiding for ever living reality. So they alone are happy who crave for the Real, the rest who are mad after transitory things of the world are ever struck by misery. Thus Guru Nanak points out that "false is the discretion to attach importance to the world" (Singh, I. 22). This attachment grows and deepens ever more and till man keeps his back to God and firmly denies his love of God. Till he turns his face towards God through the Guru's grace, he will go on regarding the world as real and thus fall into the deceitful cycle of birth and death. According to Guru Nanak:

The awareness of the impermanence of the world, and of the permanence of the only One is the epitome of spiritual life. It follows, therefore, that the only objective of human life is God-realization and the

golden way to it is the loveful remembrance of *Hari* and repetition of His name which comes through Guru's grace (Singh, I. 23).

Those who cling to the fleeting world are asleep and those who cling to God alone are awake. Sleep is bondages and wakefulness is freedom from bondage. Guru Nanak shows them the way to come out from such prison by the constant meditation on the name of God.

#### **4.2. Sin**

The sense of delusion of blindness, and sleep is not the only incentives to spiritual life; the consciousness of sin too serves as a very powerful incentives. To forget God is man's positive act of denying His existence, omnipresence, and authority. It is a stark disobedience by man of God's word. It is a willful turning away from *Hari* and implies a deliberate choice on the part of man to open his lustful eyes on the world of passions. Ego is the root of sin. It is the willful disobedience of what is known to be God's will. Nanak differentiates sin from evil. Sin for him is not the same as evil; because sin has its meaning only is association with totality of those values, which have roots in the belief in God. Evil is related to social life i.e., good and bad behavior but is not relates to spiritual life.

What happens to the sinner is quite terrifying. In this very life, he suffers by deprivation of grace and the enlightening bliss of saintly contacts; in the next, he suffers miserably in hell, the result of his own ill deeds, until he falls back, deliberately indeed in the lap of the gracious and merciful God. the agonizing experiences of the sinner in the hellishness of life creates an acute sense of awe and fear, struck by the depressing feelings of horror he prostrates at the feet of the Almighty, bemoans his lot, cures himself for the evils perpetrated by him, and approaches Him with beseechful prayers seeking His shelter and mercy.

Guru Nanak says that the sinners can be changed to good life or can attain powerful spiritual life. He therefore asks the sinners i.e., the non-believers to repent for their worldliness, their deeds of violence, their sex perversions, their desire for wealth etc., and to pray to the Almighty so that they might imbibe virtues in place of vices in their life. Chastity and purity of mind, word and deed count in the spiritual rejuvenation

of man. Repeatedly thus Nanak says, “Relinquish your sins and have recourse to good actions; repent if you have committed any sin” (Singh, I. 29). Putting briefly, God willing, the dual consciousness of evil and of God’s grace as the only annihilator of all evils serves as an incentive to the spiritual life.

### 4.3. Death

The consciousness of sin may instill in human heart the idea of the inevitability of the cursed old age and death. Some do die young without having any opportunity to entertain old age as guests in their life spans. Barring them, old age visits all creatures as the fore runner of death and waits upon them till the last flicker of life.

Whatever is born, lives and dies. For Guru Nanak, the separateness from God is man’s real death (Singh, I. 35). In other words, people who lose their link with *Parmatma*, become victim of death. Only those moments are beyond death, which are the moments of meditation on the Name divine. They never die who resort to and reside in God. Guru Nanak asks people to remember two things in life: Death and God. For, death befalls the Godless ones; Godful ones alone are deathless. He says that (death) is the lot of all these who have forgotten (God) and those who remember Him are beyond death” (Singh I. 33). Mortality of man is the result of his sinfulness, separation from God being the original sin. Though destined for immortal bliss, by the delusive pleasures of the world the soul of man is trapped in the false belief that the body is his self and that the needs of the body are his own wants. Thus entrapped in the perishable things of the world, body itself being one of them, bodily death is common to all who take the body. Guru Nanak points out that the human body is like just like an ash and when the life leaves the body it false motionless and is still and is only a corpse fit to be burnt, buried or blown into the blue for being disposed of. They are ash and return to ash. This reminds us of biblical saying: “from dust hath thou come, and unto dust shalt thou go” (Genesis 3:19). No use then to take pride and enjoy glory in the might, majesty and beauty of the body. Guru Nanak, therefore, declares at the trumpet beat, “those who have come, will have to quit: this world is an expanse of falseness” (Singh, I. 34).

All die and all their belongings lie in this very world. Disposed of life, man is dispossessed of all his property. Nothing goes with the dead. What is that then on which

man takes a vain glorious pride? Mortality is thus the inevitable fate of the biological world, as immortality is the reality of the spiritual life. Once this realization dawns upon human beings that to God alone he belongs and that only His name to be meditated upon, the consciousness of old age and death serves as a surer incentives towards the spiritual life of man.

#### 4.4. Cycle of Birth and Rebirth

Man's inquisitiveness to what happens after death has been, in its ultimate analysis, a strong psychic force in pushing him on the pathway of spiritual life. The great question persists whether there is life before birth and after death and the saints and seers of the ages and climes have given the answer in the positive. These God's men, both in the east and the west, have asserted ever and anon (except the Christian tans and Mohammedans) that the '*jiva*' is subject to the eternal law of transmigration.

Guru Nanak believes in the Hindu idea of birth and rebirth and the transmigration of the soul. He says that the journey of soul comes to its final end only when the Nectar Name is permanently lodged on the tip of the pilgrim's tongue. Only the God-bound is not bound in the cycle of 'coming and going', only when '*jiva*' establishes its perfect communion or merger with 'Shiva' that the wheel (of births and rebirths) releases '*jiva*' from its hellish spell. Says Guru Nanak:

“He who dies with the divine Word on his lips dies to death

He need not die a second time

Without the Word, people wonder in error.

They die only to be reborn, over and over again” (Singh, I. 38).

Nanak does not stop at the inevitability of soul's transmigration. He gives the reason for these wanderings of *jiva*. I-ness is the root of all this coming and going. This I-ness is the result of *jiva* separation from God or of his forgetfulness of God. Without the root anchor, the egoically cut away *jiva* gets bound by the triple chord of worldliness and is thus caught up in the wheel of births and deaths. According to Nanak, it is sinful life that leads a person to birth and rebirth. In other words, Nanak believes in the Vedic theory of Karma. As the biblical saying goes 'As you sow, so shall you reap' is the essence of this 'Karmic' law too (Singh, I. 40). Evil deeds are attended by hellish

suffering and good deeds are accomplished by heavenly pleasures. The law of karma is thus related to the idea of heaven and hell. Nanak, like Kabir believes that all the creatures who are born are the inescapable subjects of transmigration.

#### **4.5. Nanak's Conception of Soul**

As in transmigration, so in metempsychosis Guru Nanak's belief is markedly evident. Guru Nanak's notion of birth and rebirth indicates the immortality of soul. The soul, *jiva* is part of God. It is deathless like Him. Before creation, it lives with God. After creation it takes bodily forms according to His will. Metempsychosis is similar to transmigration. But transmigration implies only the process of the soul's passage from the body; metempsychosis implies the taking of another body to another of the same type but to different categories also (Singh, I., 41). One can be reborn as birds, animals or even *preta* or ghost. After death, people come to the next birth according to what they deserve. If they have been wicked and evil, they take birth in the lower species. If they have done good deeds, they take birth in the good family. Nanak says that '*jiva*' takes on several aprons as a result of his passionate urges. The wicked soul merges with God, only if the individual makes spiritual effort to overcome his/her past sinful life.

#### **4.6. Heaven and Hell**

Guru Nanak uses popular terms found in the Indian tradition, such as *Svarga* and *Baikunth*, paradise or heaven and even the name of the god of death, Yam (Cole, O. 83). According to Guru Nanak and Sikhism as a whole, it may be called a demythologized concept of heaven, hell and after life. Heaven and hell therefore are not any geographical localities in time and space, but real states of mind. But heaven and hell are symbolically represented in joy and sorrow, bliss and agony, light and darkness. In Sikh faith there is no eternal damnation or an everlasting pit to fire created by a revengeful God to punish man (Raj, H. 204). Sikhism teaches us that the suffering and torment come due to sinful life, and to be in hell is to be out of the presence of God. To be in heaven means to be in God's presence. Therefore heaven and hell can be experienced here and now in earthly existence. Guru Arjan also says, *Baikunth* is wherever God's praises are sung and wherever godly people live, that is *Baikunth*. On the other hand, in the midst of myriad

joys, if one does not cherish the Lord's name one lives as it in the depths of hell (Cole, O. 83).

#### **4.7. Evil**

Sikhism does not believe in the principle of evil, though it admits that there are things that are evil. But man's core essentially being of God-nature is nothing but good and pure (Singh, G. 95). The world being the seat and the arena of God's expression is sanctified and, hence it is neither illusory nor it is sinful to engage in the activity-any activity-of the world. Again if God's laws are uniform and universally applicable, the peculiar ideas of good and evil super-imposed by a particular society or sect upon its constituents have no validity whatsoever for the God-conscious. It is the awakened inner-man by whom the God-man is directed, effortlessly on to the path of the Good. "No food, no pleasure is in vain" says Nanak, except the one which fills the mind with evil or brings pain to the body. The greatest sin according to Guru is one's separation from oneself, which disintegrates one's personality and tears him apart from the others, and also from God who is in oneself as well as in others. Egoism is the first sin that erects a standing wall between one's soul and the over soul. But even though ego is a primary malady, its cure also is within it. It is by being 'I' that one can also overcome "I-amness". It is that I which practices the universal degrees of God, and through God's grace overcomes himself and becomes another, like unto God.

What we regard as evil has a special purpose to serve. The purpose of the evil is to test the character of man. Man is inherently liable to succumb to temptation. The greater is his faith the greater the evil that challenges him. People face evil in the form of a persecutor. The company of the evil-minded should be avoided at all costs, for such company is the gateway to the cycle of birth and death. The company of evil defiles whoever comes in contact with. The mind of man is more prone to evil than to good. Man is slow to take virtue but swift to succumb to vice. Evil actions arrive from evil thinking, motivated by lust, anger, drinking, gambling and backbiting. Egoism is the greatest evil, because it creates the wall between man and the Creator.

Someway or other our senses of bodies causes the evil. For example, our ears are evil that hear slander. Evil are the hands that grab what belongs to another. Evil are the

eyes, which feed upon the beauty of another woman. Evil is the tongue that tastes other than God. Evil is the mind that craves for the other and evil is the body that does not do good to another (Singh, G. 99). By the hard effort one can overcome evil. He who seeks to fight the evil must first uproot the evil within himself. The company of holy men has a positive role to play in spiritual attainment.

#### **4.8. The Highest Good**

Guru Nanak's philosophy is the philosophy of God realization, for the highest and the noblest purpose of human life is the realization of one who creates, sustains and dwells on every human heart. According to Guru Nanak, everything that is visible is perishable. It is, therefore, futile for man to cling to the things of the world, for those things are subject to decay. Therefore only reality is the creator of these visible things. Guru Nanak calls it the highest good. For Guru Nanak, the meaning and the purpose of human existence centers in the divine existence of EKK, the one, He who is the source of everything (Singh, I. 19). Such men who do not respond to the call of God and choose the path of anger, lust and passions, are "*Manmukhi*". But those who lovingly listen and respond to the voice of God are "*Gurumukhi*" (Singh, I. 20). Such humans alone are the followers of the True-way, the path of God realization. There are five virtues prescribed in Sikhism. They are truth, contentment, patience, faith and compassion. These virtues are helpful to attain the highest good and peace and happiness. The most important in the teaching of the gurus are the practice of truth. On the other hand the contented person is free from worldly ambition, envy, greed and jealousy. It is contentment that gives peace in mind and heart. Perfect faith is the fourth virtue, which a Sikh has to cultivate. Those who have strong faith move positively towards their goal. Those whose faith is diluted or deficient cannot serve the guru truly or gain the goal of their hearts desire. A compassionate person shares the sorrows of others and helps them in their difficulties. The Sikh regards the practice of virtue as a means to an end. His goal is the integration of human personality with spiritual realization. The virtues can be acquired only through meditation upon the name of God for these are characteristics of God from that the devotee derives them (Cole, O. 159). Besides the five virtues, Sikhism cautions people from five vices. They are *Kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (worldly

attachment), and *ahankara* (pride). These are great enemies of people because they cause suffering and become barrier on the way to God realization. With the grace of guru these may be avoided from one's life. Thus to attain highest good (God) one has to be watchful of the five vices and has to strengthen oneself in the five virtues (Singh, H 24).

## CHAPTER 5

# THE RELIGION OF GURU NANAK

God, man, and the universe are the three main themes of the teaching of all great religions. All religions seek to enlighten man about his right attitude, and hence his duty, towards God, his fellowmen, the things of the world and his own self-soul and the body alike.

### 5.1. The Concept of God

Sikhism cannot be understood as a system of philosophy, but as a way of life, as a mystic rather than a metaphysical path. It is a strictly monotheistic religion. God is All-ground. He is both absolute (Nirankara), and personal (*Purusha or Mind*) (Singh, G. 30). There have ever been two conflicting and opposite conceptions about God. He has been regarded by some as Immanent and by others as Transcendent. Pure immanence, or pantheism as it is also called, believed that God is present equally in every part of His creation, or as a typical saying puts it, "The learned behold God alike in the reverend Brahmin, in the ox and the elephant, in the dog and in him who eateth the flesh of dogs" (Singh, K. 287). No degrees, no difference. This view cuts at the morality of all morality. This view leaves no room for progress and aspiration. In it there is no place or justification for prohibiting and condemning even the vilest acts. Morality and the highest teachings of all religions become meaningless. There is no God in any way distinguishable from the created things. There is neither good nor bad, neither better or worse; for everything, just as it exists, is divine and therefore, equally perfect.

In the opposite view God is regarded as the Omnipotent, creating and destroying the world at His will; enthroned above the heavens; the sole Agent in everything that happens; the infinite and absolute who rules the world like an All-powerful Despot unaffected by the wishes, thoughts and prayers of men. Such a view of God leaves us necessarily cold. We feel that we cannot enter into no relation with God; that no amount of effort on our part to improve our destiny can be fruitful, for God does all as it pleases

Him; that no amount of exertion or prayer can move Him to alter His arbitrarily determined course of things. Such a Being can fill us with dead and despair but not with love, faith, and hope. These saving emotions are inhibited completely. This conception leaves us with a mighty darkness filling the seat of power. We can have nothing to do with Him. Ultimately this view leads one to a practical denial of the divine. Knowing that all acts and their fruits and consequences are fore-ordained by an arbitrary will, without any regard to his feelings, thoughts, and efforts, man ceases to have any interest in his destiny and is tempted to give reins to his desires, appetites, and passions. So this view of God, too, leaves little room for man to make efforts towards bettering himself, his future state, and the world around him. If purely immanent view of divine makes all efforts unnecessary as it involves the unqualified acceptance of everything just as it is, the transcendental view rules out all such efforts as utterly futile for no betterment, however necessary, is at all possible.

The question of immanence and transcendental is thus a fundamental issue in all religious philosophy. Guru Nanak has not shirked or evaded it. In all his teachings he has persistently attempted and effected a wholesome reconciliation of these two opposite views of divine nature and action. Thus, in the words which contain the central formula, the *mul mantra*, of his religion, Guru Nanak gives us a few glimpses of the Lord as under:

“The one Supreme Being; the Eternal; the Creator Who pervadeth  
And sustaineth all His creation: free from fear and enmity;  
Timeless; not subject to birth and death; Self-subsistent, and the  
Enlightener; to be known and realized by the grace of Guru” (Singh, K. 289).

God is thus not the great First Cause of the world once upon a time, but the indwelling Spirit that creates and sustains the universe each moment of its existence. He is not equated with His creation; He transcends it; but He is also present of the transcendence, this presence of the Infinite in our finite lives, is emphasized again and again by the Guru. For example:

“Thou alone hast created the earth and heaven,  
And Thou alone art sustaining them at all times  
Wonderful art Thou art o Lord  
O supreme spirit pervading all Nature!  
Infinite art thou and inscrutable is thy action.

Thou dwellest in all creatures and all creatures dwell in thee'  
 Thou fillest the heavens and earths by an art that none is able to apprehend."  
 "He who creates the universe and sustains it for aye  
 Is to be known in and through His creation.  
 Don't look for the true one in zones far away,  
 In every heart he dwells as the spark divine,  
 Look for him and find him there.'  
 "Thou hast created the world,  
 Thou dost ever stand in the midst of thy works  
 But, all the same, art ever aloof and away from them all."  
 "The infinite, he absolute, aloof from all,  
 Timeless, unborn, confined to no rave or creed,  
 Unpolluted, inaccessible, and beyond comprehension,  
 Having no form, no features, no shape,  
 Such is He.  
 But an earnest, persistent search reveals him indwelling in every heart."  
 "Over land and sea, unseen by all, he acts  
 And through the word of God proclaimed by the guru is he seen and realized" (Singh, K. 289).

He is the life of all, and inspires, enlightens, and sustains every heart, but he is also the one of whom no effort of human intellect can form an adequate conception. He rules the universe by his supreme will from which none is exempt. All creatures simply carry out his will but are at the same time, responsible for their act as agents having a good deal of choice. He is the supreme ruler of the world but he listens to the prayers of the devout and faithful. He protects them with his own hands. Nay, he even becomes a willing servant of his servants and runs about in execution of their wishes. But, of course, such servants as come to command their master cease to have any wishes or will apart from the will of their Lord.

Transcendence thus does not mean aloofness or remoteness. God as transcendent is the perfect one who is the ideal of all human endeavors. Man is not divine as he is, but he is capable of becoming divine. Indeed to be one with god is the goal of the soul's journey through the cycle of birth and death. Man has to become like god. If he were only far away, outside of us, we could hope to see him as we see other objects all round us. But he is present also in the innermost depths of our own hearts. So we cannot see him

with the eyes of flesh as they are. By the grace of Guru, the divinely gifted teacher, we gradually come to know him; he gradually discloses his feature to us as we become able to apprehend the vision. This experience gives us contact with God; not an understanding of God but living in vital union with him is what we get. In the end we come to see him face to face as surely as we see the material world around us. We find him in every object, we recognize him as the inspiring spirit to who, all progress is due. But the immanent god is thus always infinitely transcendent. He is ever our ideal. We are ever reaching out to him. This need not confound us. We have, in our own human nature, a reflection of this immanence of the transcendent, the presence of the infinite in the finite world.

## **5.2. Duty to God**

Man's duty towards God springs naturally from this view of God. Man has to develop the divine in him so as to become like God, be one with Him. The human life is an opportunity given him for the attainment of that blissful union. In order to become God-like he has to develop in his being a love for Him. Man's daily experience tells him how to achieve this. How so we come to love a valued friend but by a constant thinking upon his good and noble qualities which endear him to us? We love him for his virtues. Similar is the way suggested by the Guru for the development of a love for God. Meditation on His divine personal attributes of beauty, goodness, and truth, rouses in the heart a desire too acquire those cherished virtues in our own persons. The attitude places us in harmony with the unseen divine forces working in the universe. As we exert to realize in our actual daily life the divine virtues which are thus the objects of our constant meditations, we come to love Him who is the embodiment of all these charming and coveted qualities.

But caught in the whirl pool of passions and low desires, borne helplessly along on the tide of world's allurements and attachments, man hearkens not to the voice of God as He speaks through His dear ones. The wall of ego gets thicker and thicker, shutting out, more and more, divine light from his being, with every victory of the lower self. A time comes, some catastrophe, some sublime contact with the Almighty, and the man is filled with fear for his safety. The world then appears hollow at the core, unreal and

unreliable. All those in whom he had been placing his hope and confidence seem to be but bits of lifeless clay and fall away from him. He finds himself utterly powerless and completely in the hands of a mysterious, Supreme powerless and completely like kneaded clay in the potter's hands. Blessed is he who gets such an experience. This fear is the beginning of wisdom, for it rescues man from the clutches of his lower self and make him hearken to the voice of his higher self and look up to his Maker and Sustainer. When he finds in Him all those powers and qualities which he lacks and which he needs most in his journey through life, he begins to love and adore Him. Indeed Guru Nanak says again and again that without the fear of the Lord love for Him cannot grow in the heart of man. Be it remembered, however, that this fear is not a deadening, benumbing, repelling sentiment; but one which fills man with a longing to run to the bosom of the Queller of all fear, the Almighty Father who alone can give him every protection. Reverence and awe as the chief components of this fear. They lead to love. Ultimately all fear disappears. Love becomes all in all. Love fills him through and through. All evil then departs from his heart. No evil can now touch him. By meditating on *Hari*, by living in vital union with Him, the devotee becomes *Hari* no difference, no distance, and no separateness are left. The two become one. Man becomes as powerful as God but also as full of divine pity, sympathy, love, and compassion, as the Beloved Lord. In fact, he thinks not of the power that his union with Almighty gives him, but only of the duty of love towards his fellow-creatures which that union entails. He can sin no more. For what is sin? "It is the self assertion, either of the one part of a man's nature against the whole, or of a member of the human family against the welfare of that family and the will of its Father" (Singh, K. 293). But, by a revelation of a love which is so intense that no heart which beats can remain indifferent to it, this self-will is overcome and transformed into conformity with the divine will. Every deed then becomes a song of praise and every thought a movement of love towards Him by whom and in whom all things and beings subsist.

It might be added here that Guru Nanak's ideal for the soul of man is not a condition of nothingness or nirvana, or a seat in paradise where there would be an abundance of means or sensual enjoyment, but a union-living, vital union-with the ever active Creator and Sustainer of the universe. As he says in one of his songs of the Lord,

“what is paradise or salvation to a man who is athirst for the Lord Himself?” His love for the Lord will be satisfied with no such toys or lifeless rest. The Lord Himself in all His glory and power is his ideal.

### **5.3. Need of a Guru**

We cannot have the love for the Lord at will. No amount of reasoning or an argument can establish in us that vital contact with the divine which is the mainspring of this love. Nor can all have revelation direct from God. But if a man desires to have a vision of the Eternal love and power rightly and sweetly ordering all things, he must enter into the fruits of the about of those who have striven and suffered and prayed and received the answering light from heaven, the great ones who ever dwelt in God, in whom God ever dwelt, and through whom He worked. For the rousing of that love for the Lord man needs both the Grace of God and the help and guidance of divinely gifted teacher. Guru Nanak does not believe in a pivotal individual on whom can turn the salvation of mankind, or because of whose sacrifice, once upon a time, all who put their faith in him are to be saved from the consequences of their actions, or who can intercede with the Great judge in favor of his followers and get them the pleasures of paradise in spite of their sins. He says again and again that human conduct in its widest sense, including thoughts and desires not necessarily externalized, in action, will be followed by its natural and inevitable results, not only in this life but also in the life to come. At the same time, he emphasizes the great part which the Guru can play in molding and transforming this conduct and rescuing the character of man from downward tendencies born of his conduct in the past. The Guru awakens the soul in man, for uses him to a living consciousness of his higher needs, and sets him on the path of love, service and devotion. He shows the light of the Lord to the seeker, and bids him go ahead on his journey to His door. The Guru washes away the devout seeker's sins in the sense that he eradicates from his character all tendencies born of those sins. He gives him even a glimpse of the Lord and helps him to establish a vital union with Him. But self-help is to be the chief, though not the only, mainstay of a seeker after the Lord. Once well on the

right path, his progress on it will depend on his own attitude and efforts, guided by the Word of God as given to him by the Guru.

In brief, man's duty towards God consists in honoring and loving Him; in so molding his character as to make his thoughts, feelings, and efforts, conform to His Will; in worshipping Him with zeal and devotion. True worship, it may be added, will always have two sides, a practical side, in our conduct, for our whole life will become an act of worship; but worship must also have its own life in adoration, prayer and communion. Hence a true worshipper of God can never sit idle or harbor thoughts of pride, hate and arrogance. Love fills him through and through. The whole universe appears to him to be a part of himself.

#### **5.4. Duty to Neighbors**

If a man has, by his earnest efforts guided and assisted by the Guru, succeeded in placing in the right attitude towards God, he will have no doubts about his duty to his fellow beings. He will love them as his own self. He cannot even think of tyrannizing over or exploiting his fellowmen. His joys will consist in loving them all in the path of progress. It is a fact that those who are filled with the love of the Lord love everybody. If a man becomes fully convinced of the presence of God in, and around, and beyond every object that He has created, he ceases to sin against his fellow-beings; for how can he be sincere with God and a hypocrite with men? With most people God is not a living God. He is a pale shadow, floating like an almost extinct memory in the little of religious sentiment that is yet left in them. This shadow has eyes but sees not, ears but hears not. They do not hesitate to commit their sins in his presence, when the presence of man would restrain them. Their God is less than a man. Their religion is but a cloak for their evil, vicious, degenerate selves. They put it on when they are about to plot and act against God and man. They hope to wipe away their sins by a prayer or two at home, an offering at a temple or a pilgrimage to some holy place.

A true devotee of God can never let himself fall so low. He adores and worships the Father and loves and serves his fellowmen. He will think neither of deserting his family, renouncing the world, and thereby becoming a burden on society, nor of aggrandizing himself and his own at the expense of others. He will remain in the world,

derive nourishment from it, do his duty in and towards it, but keep his thoughts fixed on God. He will find God in the world and the world in God. He will never think of forcing his convictions on others. He will not tyrannize but love and serve. As the Guru says, “if we practice active service in the world, then alone shall we find a place in the presence of the Lord.” “No amount of idle talk can lead us to God; it is only by the practice of righteousness that we can win our salvation” (Singh, K. 297).

### **5.5. Duty to Self**

The materialists consider matter to be the only reality. Guru Nanak did not regard man's ascetics; he did not regard the body to be only an encumbrance which had to be subdued, tortured, and reduced, so as to liberate, for upward flight, the human soul. Unlike the early evolutionists, he did not regard the human intelligence to be a product of mere chance; he did not agree with the pantheists that man with all his propensities towards evil is intrinsically divine and therefore perfect as God. He did not regard the world with all its means of good, pleasure, and joy to be only a delusion and a snare to be avoided and shunned. But at the same time he did not tell it as be all and the end all of all human life. He regarded the human soul to be a spark from the spirit of God, capable of becoming one with Him. He regarded the body as the servant of the soul designed to help its progress towards God. The world with its manifold charms and snares, pleasures and pains, is field for the soul's battle with all downward tendencies, the stone by stepping on which the soul can reach up to God.

Hence man's duty towards his self consists in his duty to his body, heart, mind, soul, and the world. Considering the body to obey a necessary helper of the soul in its journey towards the great ideal, the disciple has to tend and guard it; but knowing also that it might become a real encumbrance, if it comes to monopolize his attention, he does not pamper it. He treats it as a servant of the soul. He also knows that ignorance is the root of error and sin; hence he tries to cultivate every means of extending knowledge. This mental culture does not absorb him altogether. He keeps ever conscious of the fact that this knowledge is to help his progress towards God. Hence he uses his knowledge for the discrimination of right from wrong, and ever does the right in the light of his knowledge. All his knowledge has its root in faith and fructifies in love and service. He

knows that man's actions are performed in accordance with his nature or self. The reason and intellect are being used afterwards to justify the course chosen by the self of man. He has, therefore, to conquer this self; not by torturing the body or by practicing austerities, but by hearkening to the Word of God and getting rid of all lower, downward tendencies. He knows that the spirit in him is his real, ultimate self and he feeds his spirit on the Word of God and develops it by a life of love, service and worship. He gets ready the chamber of his heart for the divine guest. He regards the world around him as God's creation and His dwelling place. Hence he does his duty to the world by helping it onwards on the path towards its Eternal Ideal. In this way he lives a life of poise and balance, of love and usefulness. Ultimately he comes to live in God and God comes to live in him.

## CHAPTER 6

### DIVINE PRAISE

#### 6.1. Holy Scripture

The holiest book of the Sikh called *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. It is the guru of the Sikhs. The Guru Granth gives light and shows the path to the suffering-humanity. A Sikh reads the holy hymns from the Granth and finds consolation when faced with difficulties.

The fifth guru, guru Arjan collected the hymns of the first four gurus, including his own hymns, bound them together and gave it to the Sikh community. He chose the hymns and slokas, which conformed to the spirit of Sikhism and were consistent with the teaching of Guru Nanak. He gave preference to the verses, which praised God and denounced superstition and castesim. The *Adi Granth* is an authentic holy book and it contains no spurious hymns. Dr. Radhkrishnan, the renowned Indian philosopher, says, “We find in the *Adi Granth*, a wide range of mystical emotions, intimate expression of the personal realization of God rapturous hymns of divine love” (Bakshi, Vol. I, 60).

Besides the hymns and slokas of the Sikh gurus, the hymns of some well-known saints have also been included in the *Adi Granth*. For example, 292 hymns of Kabir, 41 hymns of Ravidas, 4 hymns and 130 slokas of Farid and 60 hymns of Namdev are included in the *Adi Granth* (Bakshi, Vol. I, 163). In all, *Sri Granth Sahib* consists of 3384 hymns, which are considerably more than thrice the bulk of the *Rig Veda*.

*Guru Granth Sahib* consists of the writings of different saints and poets and thus serves as a textbook of universal religion. It is applicable for every one and everywhere. Prof. Puran Singh rightly says, “the *Guru Granth* is the scripture of all nations, for it is the lyric of divine love, and all the people of the earth subsists on such a glowing lyrical prayer ...” (Bakshi Vol. I, 65).

## 6.2. Hymns of Guru Nanak

The *Adi Granth* contains almost a thousand hymns of Guru Nanak under different *ragas*. The hymns are based on verities of themes and composed in different periods of his life. There is no reliable evidence regarding the time or circumstances in which the hymns were composed. Credit goes to the fifth Sikh guru, guru Arjan who collected all the hymns of Guru Nanak including the hymns of other gurus and inserted them in the *Adi Granth*. Throughout his life, Guru Nanak proclaimed the name of god. Guru Nanak accepts his unworthiness and says that in this world, he is like a small fish and depends on god for everything (Singh, K. 75).

He believes that his creator is everywhere and sees every activity of Guru Nanak. He eats what God gives to him. He does not beg at the door of people but at the door of God. In every pain and pleasure he turns towards God, either to get help or to praise Him for His favor. His body, souls, understanding is the gifts of God. Thus he leaves his body, soul, understanding and everything in God's keeping. Guru Nanak accepts his inability to do anything. For everything is created by God and everything depends on Him alone. He beautifully presents such ideas in his hymns:

By his ordinances comes all creation into being  
 By his ordinances all labor and earn  
 Under his ordinance is death,  
 By his ordinance we mingle with Truth.  
 O Nanak! Whatever pleases Him comes to pass  
 We mortals by ourselves can do nothing (Singh, K. 81).

Thus, it is only by God's grace we can cross the ocean of life. If God wills it, we shall be liberated, because God alone can pardon us. According to Guru Nanak this world is like a turbulent sea. Without the help of God and the guru will not find the opposite shore (Singh, K.119). Again Guru Nanak compares himself with a bird *chatrik* Bird *chatrik* loves the rain and cries for a few drops of water to slake its thirst. Similarly Nanak is athirst for the name of Hari. The name of Hari fills his heart with joys and satisfies his needs. All people are united with the creator. He sings,

O Rama! River in their course break into steams  
 And steams again run back in to the river,

So our souls united with God from whom they come (Singh, K. 134).

Thus Guru Nanak composed hymns all through his life singing the praises of God. He composed his hymns while visiting different places within and outside India. Many of his hymns are related to God, whom he considers as the creator and sustainer of every thing. Following the footsteps of Guru Nanak most of the other Sikh gurus also composed hymns and slokas, on various themes. The fifth guru also composed the biggest number of hymns and slokas. He suggested the Sikhs to sing the hymns for their spiritual benefit. The temple dedicated to guru Arjan in Lahore bears the following inscription of his own composition of his own composition, "... O my brethren, every sing, listen, and read them, and the perfect Guru will preserve you" (Macauliffe, Vols. III & IV, 101). He further suggests to the Sikh communities to remember God and perform ablution for the freedom of minds and bodies from disease. By doing so God will remove the millions of obstacle and will give good fortune.

The hymns and the slokas of the ninth guru, guru Teg Bahadur are also based on divine praises. By his *sloka* he has given beautiful suggestions and instructions to the whole human race. In the *sloka* 35, he says that there are three stages of life, childhood, youth, and the old age. These stages are in vain without worshipping God. Again in the *sloka* 28 he says that the fools and ignorant people run after wealth. But without repeating God's name their lives are in vain. According to him God's praises free people from the prison of death. Thus in *sloka* 48 he gives a very common example, "As a dog never abandoneth his master's house, Nanak, in the same way worship God with single mind and single heart" (Macauliffe, Vols. III & IV, 420).

### **6.3. Japji (Morning Prayer)**

*Japji* is the opening part of the *Adi Granth*. It is a composition of 38 hymns and two slokas. It contains the essence of Sikh religion and philosophy. *Japji* is recited in the morning by every true Sikh. At the time of preparation of *amrit* for baptism it is the first *bani* to be recited. *Japji* was composed by Guru Nanak, but like the hymns of Guru Nanak the time and duration of its composition is not certain. People believe that the opening lines were recited by Guru Nanak during his mystical experience at Sultanpur. This would make *japji* amongst Nanak's earliest compositions (Singh, K. 41). But most

of the Sikh scholars do not accept this version of the *janam sakhis*. According to them, it seems to be composed after his return to Kartarpur. The reason behind this idea is the maturity of style and thought-content of *japji*. It is also believed that *japji* is the fruit of God's orders, for Guru Nanak has addressed his chief disciple Angad, in the following words, "Man, it is the command of the great Creator that I must compose a hymn of praise" (Singh, K. 42).

Angad, the second guru arranged the verses in order to make up the *jap*. He selected 38 verses of Nanak's compositions. According to *japji* God is beyond time and space and is the only reality. The opening paragraph of *japji* says, "Before time there was truth. When time began to run its course then also He was Truth and even now He is Truth" (Singh, P. 23). It is the aspect of *Sat*, meaning both truth and reality, which Guru Nanak emphasizes, more than any other qualities of God. Since God is Truth, it is the duty of each Sikh to be just. He/she should not hurt others by his misbehaviors like lying and cheating etc. Realizing God as truth and learning to be true to others help other and the society at large to live in a friendly way (Singh, K. 31).

The aim of our life is to know God and to be united with Him. But our eyes are covered with illusion. To know the Truth, one needs to remove such illusions from the eyes. In *japji* Guru Nanak guides a person to get rid of such illusions. The verse five of the *japji* says:

He cannot be established; neither can He be created;

That pure One is Self-resplendent by Himself.

Those who meditate on Him get the honor.

Nanak, sing ye men, His praises who is the treasure-house of virtue.

Sing and hear, and keep love for Him in the heart,

He will remove your pain and take you to the abode of bliss (Singh, P. 25).

Guru Nanak further states that the power of the name of God. By hearing the names of God people achieves wisdom, courage and conquer the fear of death. The name of God has the power to remove the sorrows and the sins from one's heart. The tenth verse of *japji* reveals the power of the name of God. It says that by hearing the name of God the qualities like truth, contentment, and divine knowledge can be obtained. Those, who hear

the name of God, do not need the pilgrimages and other rituals for their inner purification.

After seeking the way to find Truth and experiencing sine tastes of divinity, the out look of the devotees changes. They consider God their everything. They suggest others to rely on Him alone. According to verse twenty-nine God is the storehouse of compassion. He alone is the Lord, who has the whole creation under his control. He is the master of destiny. Thus one should have faith in Him for all the deeds. The verse thirty-one supports this idea. According to it, “His seat and His storehouses are in every world. What was to be put into them was put in at one time” (Macauliffe, Vol. I & II, 214). It means the God is the creator. Before birth itself the portion of a person is fully allotted to him /her.

*Japji* ends with the beautiful *sloka*, which reminds each and every one that the air, water, the earth and day and night etc. give us opportunities to grow and reach our destiny. The merits and demerits of each person will be judged. It says:

...Virtues and evils are read out by *dharamraj* (judge) in the Holy presence.

According to their own deeds some get nearer, others remain distant from Him.

Those who ponder on the name have departed with hard toil ever ended.

Bright are their countenances, O Nanak, and in company with them many others, are emancipated (Singh, P. 43).

*Japji* is the essence of Guru Nanak’s teachings. It is a *mul mantra* to the Sikh faith. By reciting it or meditating over it, a Sikh is reminded about the purpose of life. A person is reminded that the qualities like, self-control, patience, knowledge, fear of God, and earnest prayer are needed to achieve perfection (Macauliffe, Vol. I & II, 217).

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