

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“After religious teachers accomplish the refining process indicated, they will surely recognize with joy that true religion has been ennobled and made more profound by scientific knowledge.”

Albert Einstein

When I looked deeply into Sikhism, as it is being preached, I found it is being promoted as a mystical, esoteric, enigmatic, and ritualistic religion. While on the other hand, everybody, especially all the Sikhs, believe that Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE) is the founder of a new and modern religion; however, it has never been represented as modern religion in any of the Sikh writings. Instead I came across various principles of Sikhism being preached in total contradiction to the philosophy of Guru Nanak. The main fact is that Sikh and non-Sikh scholars failed to go into the depth of the thought process, to understand the philosophy of Guru Nanak embodied in his Bani.

The critical analysis of Bani of Guru Nanak clearly shows that he has promulgated universally acceptable philosophy during the 15th and 16th centuries. This fact makes him the greatest philosopher of modern era, and possessor of a lucid scientific mind of the Period of Renaissance (14th - 16th centuries). His philosophy has been termed as ‘*Nanakian Philosophy*’ (Chapter 4 & 5).

My critical research on Nanakian Philosophy has also clearly indicated that Sikhism cannot be understood in its real perspective until one comprehends the Bani of Guru Nanak in the light of today’s knowledge of Science and use of logic. Hence the necessity arose in my mind to write a book to interpret the Bani of Guru Nanak scientifically and logically to portray his philosophy for the

humanity of the Current Science Age. The other major factor that brought about the writing of this book is to bring Nanakian Philosophy to the notice of philosophers of the world, since it has remained out of sight of most of them since the time of its formulation during 15th and 16th centuries.

The Bani of Guru Nanak and that of other Sikh Gurus, who succeeded to the 'House of Nanak', was incorporated into a Granth, now called as '*Aad Guru Granth Sahib*' (AGGS), by Guru Arjan during 1604 [1]. The AGGS is the only authentic source of the Bani of Guru Nanak. The word, '**Bani**', represents singular as well as plural form. In this book 'Bani' has been used in singular form. Guru Arjan also added the Bani of Bhagats, *Sants*, Sufis, minstrels, etc. in the AGGS to acquaint the Sikhs with the philosophies of these sages. But majority of the Sikh theologians are of the opinion that the Bani of these sages was added not only because of similarity but is at par with that of Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. This concept needs to be researched very critically. However, it is beyond the scope of this book to discuss that issue.

MISUNDERSTANDING OF SIKHISM

Bouquet [2] writes that "Sikhism is the fruit of hybridization between Islam and Hinduism." McLeod [11] says that it is the usual interpretation of the religion of Guru Nanak and his successors, and among Western writers it would appear to be a universal assumption. Accordingly to this interpretation Sikhism is properly regarded as a blend of Hindu beliefs and Islam by quoting Noss [14] 'an outstanding example of conscious religious syncretism' a noble attempt to fuse in a single system with elements drawn from two separate and largely disparate religions. McLeod further quotes Khushwant Singh [21] as another metaphor which evidently expresses the same interpretation: "Sikhism was born out of wedlock between Hinduism and Islam."

McLeod [11] continues to strengthen the above assumption but slightly differently:

"Sikhism cannot be located wholly within the area of Hindu tradition, it cannot be regarded as sect of Islam, and we can hardly accept the claim that it was delivered by direct, unmediated inspiration from on high."

In continuation of the above discussion McLeod [11] takes this topic into Sant tradition:

“In contrast to this ‘mixture’ theory, we can postulate an ‘admixture’ theory, and it is this second interpretation which is advanced in this paper. It affirms a basically Hindu origin and holds that Muslim influence, although certainly evident, is nowhere of fundamental significance in the thought of Guru Nanak. The religion of Guru Nanak, and so of Sikhism as a whole, is firmly imbedded in the Sant Tradition of northern India, in the beliefs of the so-called *Nirguna Sampradaya*.”

I sometimes wonder that the above observations about placing Guru Nanak in ‘Sant Tradition’ might be based on the writings of some Sikh scholars, especially Sahib Singh [24] who emphatically proved that Bani of the Bhagats of Sant Tradition is exactly in the conformity of the Bani of Guru Nanak. If it is true then McLeod is right because some Bhagats had written their Bani before Guru Nanak did.

MISUNDERSTANDING OF NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy of Guru Nanak remained unexplored in its real perspective right from the time of demise of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 till to the beginning of 21st century. In old Sikh literature (*Janam Sakhis* – biographies), Guru Nanak has been described only as a mystic man of God with all spiritual powers to perform miracles of various types, but never represented as a philosopher or scientist of the Period of Renaissance, who promulgated universally acceptable philosophy for the humanity of Current Science Age. He traveled for about 21 years throughout the whole India, Tibet, Ceylon, China, Middle East and had discourses on various topics with Pundits, Bhagats, Sidhs, Jogis, and Sufis at their important religious places [7, 8, & 17].

The irony is that nobody has ever written or was lost in time about various discourses he had with other religious sages. However, his Bani, e.g. JAP, Asa Di Vaar, Babar Bani, Sidh Gost, Oankar Bani, and others clearly indicate how *he conducted philosophical, scientific, and logical discourses with Sidhas, Pundits and Mullahs*. On the other hand many unscientific, illogical, and miraculous

stories have been fabricated about his life in various *Janam Sakhis* [20].

When we critically analyze the Bani of Guru Nanak and of the successor Gurus, enshrined in the AGGS, it becomes crystal clear that the Sikh Gurus have explained and strengthened the philosophy of Guru Nanak. This aspect has been discussed under Chapter 6. No Sikh Guru has portrayed Guru Nanak as a miraculous man in their Bani.

Although the old Sikh literature and *Janam Sakhis* contain some useful historical information, but from theological point of view, most of it is contrary to many basic principles of Nanakian Philosophy.

I would like to add here the views of some scholars about the old Sikh literature.

According to **Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha** [12], Sikh literature of the 18th and 19th centuries has been written according to the level of intelligence and beliefs of the writers. Although some information we get from these sources is useful, there is other information that runs contrary to *Gurmat*. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha [12] has also emphasized that:

“It is very regretful that there are very few intelligent researcher; however, there are many enemies of them.”

He further says:

“The number of persons, who would declare the writers and speakers of truth as the atheists, is too large.”

This fact kept the sincere Sikh theologians and researchers away from writing the truth embodied in the Gurbani.

About the *Rehit Namay*, **Piara Singh Padam** [15] said, *“It is a mistake to accept that information given in every Rehit Nama, is according to Gurmat. Many authors have written according to their own level of intelligence or under the influence of manmat (and under the influence of Vedantic philosophy, ritualism, etc.), that are not right.”*

About the misinterpretation of Gurbani, **Prof Puran Singh** [23] wrote in the 1920s that:

“It is to be regretted that Sikh and Hindu scholars are interpreting Guru Nanak in the futile terms of the colour he used, the brush he took; are analyzing the skin and flesh of his words and dissecting texts to find the Guru’s meaning to be the same as of the Vedas and Upanishad! This indicates enslavement to the power of Brahmanical tradition. Dead words are used to interpret the fire of the Master’s soul! The results are always grotesque and clumsy translations which have no meaning at all.”

Critical analysis of the following observation of **Dr Gopal Singh** [18] clearly indicates that due to improper understanding of the Guru’s Word, the Granth started to be worshipped more than read, uttered as a magical formula or a mantra for secular benefits:

“The confusion of interpretation has occurred because the Sikhs themselves, for historical and other reasons, have never seriously attempted a scientific and cogent exposition of the doctrines of their faith, based on the Word of the GURU-GRANTH and related to the historical lives of the Gurus who uttered it. Without reference either to one or the other, casual attempts made at the interpretation of small portions of the Granth has resulted in such interpretations being incoherent, lop-sided, and therefore unreliable. During the present (now last) century, several attempts were made by the Sikhs to translate into Punjabi the Word of the Guru, but all such attempts ended in an all-too-literal translation, leaving the seeker as uninitiated to the Guru’s Word as he was before. And the word of the GURU-GRANTH became as involved and distant for an average reader as the Word of the Vedas, and it started to be worshipped more than read, uttered as magic formula or a Mantram for secular benefit than as a disciple of spiritual life for the achievement of ideals higher and beyond the world of sense and for the integrity of mind and soul in the world of the living.”

Under the circumstances explained above by Dr Gopal Singh [18], now in almost all the Gurdwaras in the world, whether they are under the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Amritsar or any other organization, the AGGS is treated almost as an idol [16] although the idol worship is condemned in Nanakian Philosophy. I think because of the above fact the publishers of *“The Cambridge*

Factfinder”, has mentioned under the subheading of **Beliefs in Sikhism** as: **“Worship of the Adi Granth”** as one of the beliefs [9 - p 411].

The practice of reciting of many *Akhand Paaths* of the AGGS under one roof or in many rooms has become an important feature of many Gurdwaras [4]. Deliberation on the *Sabd* (verse) is totally absent except that which is done by a few *parcharak* (preachers) without involving the *Sangat* (congregation) in the deliberation of the *Sabd* (Fig. 1-1 and 1-2).

LACK OF ORIGINALITY

Now I would like to quote views of some scholars who are portraying the lack of originality in the philosophy of Guru Nanak:

Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, President, Sahitya Akademi has belittled Nanakian Philosophy in the ‘Foreword’ to the book *Guru Nanak: Founder of Sikhism* written by **Dr Trilochan Singh**, who is held in high esteem as a scholar, and the book was published by Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Delhi [26]. This book was written on the eve of celebration of the 500th Birthday (*Parkash Divas*) of Guru Nanak. It is ironic that Trilochan Singh failed to notice Chatterji’s following statement belittling the Guru:

“The people of the Punjab (and along with them those of the rest of India) became immediately conscious of the value of Guru Nanak’s advent and his teachings after he began to preach to them; and Guru Nanak built up and organised during his life time a very important religious persuasion which was broad-based on the foundations of Vedatic Monotheistic Jnana and Puranic Bhakti. The faith preached by Guru Nanak was nothing new for India, it was basically the old monotheistic creed of the ancient Hindus as propounded in the Vedas and the Upanishads - the Vedanta with its insistence upon Jnana or Knowledge of the One Supreme Reality. And this monotheistic basis was fortified, so to say, to put the matter in a simple form by Bhakti or faith as inculcated in later Puranic Hinduism. The Sikh Panth was nothing but a reformed and simplified Sanatana Dharma of medieval times.”

The book, *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*’, is the

part of the Indian Series of the Translations Collection of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [27]. It is published in accordance with an agreement between UNESCO and the Government of India, and for furthering mutual appreciation of the cultural values of East and West. This book was printed in 1973 just after the celebration of 500th Birthday of Guru Nanak. The sacred writings of the Sikhs have been translated by the prominent Sikh theologians, scholars and historians like, Trilochan Singh, Jodh Singh, Kapur Singh, Bawa Harkrishan Singh and Khushwant Singh. **Dr S Radhakrishnan** undermined the philosophy of Guru Nanak in INTRODUCTION to that book as follows:

*“At a time when men were conscious of failure, Nanak appeared to renovate the spirit of religion and the humanity. **He did not found a new faith or organize a new community.** That was done by his successor, notably the fifth Guru. Nanak tried to build a nation of self-respecting men and women, devoted to God and their leaders, filled with sense of equality and brotherhood for all.*

*The Gurus are the light-bearers to mankind. They are the messengers of the timeless. **They do not claim to teach a new doctrine but only to renew the eternal wisdom. Nanak elaborated the views of Vaisnava saints.**”*

It is clearly apparent that Dr Radhakrishnan failed to comprehend Nanakian Philosophy and refused to accept that the Guru founded a new faith based on unique and universally acceptable philosophy. And he further undermined the philosophy of Guru Nanak by saying that Guru Nanak elaborated the views of Vaisnava saints whereas Guru Nanak has emphatically condemned the Vaisnava views in his Bani.

Most probably under the influence of INTRODUCTION given by Dr Radhakrishnan, **Arnold Toynbee** remarked about Guru Nanak in the UNESCO’s book as follows [27]:

“Perhaps Nanak himself would have modestly disclaimed the title of ‘founder’. He might have preferred to say that he was merely bringing to light, and gathering, the cardinal religious truth and precepts that had been scattered, in explicit form or implicitly, through the religious legacies of a number of forerunners of his.”

Arnold Toynbee has gone a step further than Radhakrishnan by

putting his words in the mouth of Guru Nanak to disclaim that he is not the founder of unique philosophy and he had explicated the philosophy of his forerunners.

Considering the various references discussed earlier it becomes rather obvious that Nanakian Philosophy has not only been misunderstood by the theologians, but, even the well educated scholars mentioned above have failed to comprehend and analyze Nanakian Philosophy in its originality.

Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) was established at Amritsar, India on November 24, 1969 to commemorate the 500th Birthday (*Parkash Divas*) of Guru Nanak. It is both residential and an affiliating university. In conceiving the future course of the University, the objectives enshrined in the Act 1969 emphasize that the new university would make provision for imparting education and promoting research in the humanities, sciences, especially of applied nature and technology. *Studies and research on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak*, in addition to working towards the promotion of Punjabi language and spreading education among educationally backward classes and communities were the other commitments.

The University Grants Commission's sponsored first Seminar on 'Mool Mantra' was organized by the Department of Guru Nanak Studies in March 1973. The proceedings of the Seminar were edited by Professor Pritam Singh, retired Professor and Head, Department of Guru Nanak Studies, GNDU, under the title, *The Ultimate Reality – As Guru Nanak Saw It*. But it took 12 years to publish the proceedings under a new title, *The Sikh Concept of the Divine*, in 1985 [22].

During this Seminar instead of looking into the originality and uniqueness of logo (ੴ) coined by Guru Nanak it has been confirmed by the stalwart Sikh and non-Sikh scholars that it is based on OM, the Trinity system of Vedantic philosophy [22].

In this Seminar **Parma Nand** [13] undermined the originality of the philosophy of Guru Nanak by declaring that ੴ (*Oankaar*) is not a new word coined by Guru Nanak but he borrowed it from

Upanishads because ‘*Oankaar*’ or ‘*Omkaar*’ has been used in various Upanishads. The only thing Guru Nanak did was to add numeral ‘1’ to confirm the ‘Oneness’ of God, which is also found in the Upanishads. Thus, Parma Nand also failed miserably in his ability to read and comprehend Nanakian Philosophy embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak.

Taran Singh [25], the then Head, Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, admits that it appears that universities have taken good steps, although their research could only establish that the truth in the AGGS is not different than the truth of ancient India but this is a powerful achievement:

“ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਹਰ ਪੱਖ ਵਿਚ ਚੰਗੀਆਂ ਦੁਲਾਘਾਂ ਪੁੱਟੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਭਾਵੇਂ ਸੋਧ ਇਹੋ ਸਥਾਪਿਤ ਕਰ ਸਕੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਸੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਚੀਨ ਭਾਰਤੀ ਸੱਚ ਦੇ ਸੰਕਲਪ ਤੋਂ ਭਿੰਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਇਹ ਬੜੀ ਪ੍ਰਬਲ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤੀ ਹੈ। [Taran Singh – in Foreword].

Dr Taran Singh [25] further confirmed that the Sikh and non-Sikh writers of 17th to 19th centuries had accepted that Gurus’ philosophy is based on Vedantic philosophy:

“ਵਿਆਖਿਆਕਾਰੀ ਦੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਯਤਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਤੌਰ ’ਤੇ ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟੀ ਗੋਚਰ ਕਰਨ ਨਾਲ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਇਉਂ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਕਹਿਣ ਨੂੰ ਅਠ ਵਿਆਖਿਆ ਪ੍ਰਣਾਲੀਆਂ ਕੰਮ ਕਰ ਚੁੱਕੀਆਂ ਹਨ, ਪਰ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਬੁਨਿਆਦੀ ਅੰਤਰ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਫਰਕ ਹੈ। ਗੁਰ-ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਜਾਂ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਫਿਲਾਸਫੀ ਦਾ ਨਿਰਣਾ ਕਰਨਾ ਬਹੁਤ ਚੇਤੰਨ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਯਤਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਜਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਰਿਹਾ। ਜਿਥੋਂ ਤੀਕ ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਪਰਾਪਤੀ ਹੈ, ਉਸ ਦਾ ਨਿਰਣਾ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਭ ਪ੍ਰਣਾਲੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਗੁਰ-ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਵੈਦਿਕ ਹੀ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਫਿਲਾਸਫੀ ਆਮ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੀ ਜਾਂ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਫਿਲਾਸਫੀ ਤੋਂ ਭਿੰਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ। [Taran Singh – in Foreword].

From the above statements of Taran Singh, who has been the Head of Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, it becomes quite clear that Gurus’ philosophy was not only accepted as Vedantic philosophy by the early Sikh scholars of 17th to 19th century but the contemporary university scholars are also confirming it so.

Besides the above views of the modern and famous scholars,

Joginder Singh [19] and Taran Singh [25] have also reported that right from the very beginning the old schools of Sikhism were interpreting Gurbani and representing Sikhism on Vedantic philosophy.

Alas, when the contemporary Sikh scholars for unknown reasons have exhibited their failure in comprehending Nanakian Philosophy in its originality, it certainly seems like an insurmountable task to explain the quintessence of Guru Nanak's philosophy to the masses.

Now the question before us is:

Is the philosophy of Guru Nanak Original and Unique?

My study of the AGGS clearly indicates that the Gurbani in the AGGS is original, unique, and logical when it is interpreted critically, scientifically and logically. Besides, it is also evident that though the philosophy was formulated during the 15th and 16th centuries by Guru Nanak, it has universal acceptability and applicability even during the 21st century of the Current Science Age [3, 5, & 6]. Some non-Sikh scholars have also expressed similar views about Guru Nanak's philosophy. For example, the statement by Rajanish Kumar, Director of Language Department, Punjab, about the universality of Guru Nanak's message is noteworthy [10]:

“Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, has unflinching faith in the divineness (or divinity) of man. For the emancipation of mankind, he undertook hazardous and difficult journeys from place to place and covered most of East and Southeast. His aim was to rekindle the dormant divine potentialities in man all over the universe. During his long sojourns he met people of different faiths and creeds and left an indelible impression on them all. This is a testimony to the universality of the message of the Great Guru.”

Besides the earlier remarks of Arnold Toynbee, the world-renowned historian, it is worth mentioning about his following observations about the future of the religions and the Sikh scriptures [27]:

“Mankind's religious future may be obscure; yet one thing can be foreseen: the living higher religions are going to influence each other more than ever before, in these days of increasing communication between all parts of the world and all branches of

the human race in this coming religious debate, the Sikh religion, and its scriptures the Adi Granth, will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world.

Toynbee admits that “*Mankind’s religious future may be obscure;*” I agree with him to a great extent. I also agree with his second observation that “*...the Sikh religion, and its scriptures the Adi Granth, will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world.*” His above observation inspired me for conducting research to explore if there is any uniqueness and originality in the philosophy of Guru Nanak embodied in his Bani, which could have special value to the rest of the world? The Institute for Understanding Sikhism, Laval, Québec, Canada has already held two Mini-symposia during 2006 about the uniqueness of Sikhism [5, 6].

In continuation of the above mission I have applied the current scientific knowledge and logic in this book to highlight Nanakian Philosophy embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak as the noble and profound work of Guru Nanak and meant for the humanity of the Current Science Age as suggested by Albert Einstein:

“After religious teachers accomplish the refining process indicated, they will surely recognize with joy that true religion has been ennobled and made more profound by scientific knowledge.”

Now only the erudite readers with *Babaek Budhi* (discriminating intellect) can find out if this study represents originality and uniqueness of Nanakian Philosophy and portrays it as universally acceptable philosophy for the humanity of Current Science Age.

I sincerely hope that this study could also be a foundation for interpretation of the AGGS into a Standardized English Translation. The resulting Standardized English Translation could serve as a role model for further translations of the AGGS into the world languages to disseminate Nanakian Philosophy in the world.

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