

NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY

Basics for Humanity

FOREWORD

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Religion has always played a prominent role in the lives of individuals, communities and nations. Today often one's religious beliefs conflict with new advances in science and technology causing confusion. This conflict can be resolved if science and religion are considered two different approaches to understand reality. Since their aim is the same, so there should be no clash between them. The two, understood properly, can supplement each other. Einstein truly says: "*Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind*". Hence enlightened persons apply scientific knowledge to give 'eyes' to religious wisdom. They re-interpret their religion to retain its contemporary relevance.

Prof Dr Devinder Singh Chahal has done this for Sikhism – the youngest among major religions. With his scientific training and firm religious faith, he is eminently qualified to do so. According to him the essence of Sikhism is Nanakian Philosophy which he defines as, "*A philosophy promulgated by Guru Nanak that is embodied in his Bani and has been further*

explained and strengthened by the Sikh Gurus, who succeeded to the House of Nanak, in their Bani, which is incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib along with that of Guru Nanak."

Prof Chahal repudiates the views of earlier scholars who said Guru Nanak's teachings were based on Vedantic philosophy. He also disagrees with those who think that Guru Nanak merely syncretized Hinduism and Islam as did some saints of the Bhakti Movement. On the contrary, Prof Chahal argues that Guru Nanak propounded original and unique philosophy which can stand the test of scientific scrutiny. Nanakian Philosophy is perennial and universal and most suitable for the humanity of the Current Science Age.

Obviously, orthodox Sikhs object to Prof Chahal's interpretation of Bani. Some consider it even blasphemous. No wonder Prof Chahal remarks, "*... what the Sikhs are doing today is exactly contrary to Nanakian Philosophy.*" Only bigots would question Prof Chahal's credentials and his right to interpret Bani according to his



L to R: Prof Balwant Singh Dhillon, Director of the Conference, Prof Dr Devinder Singh Chahal, the author of the book, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki releasing the book to Prof Dr Jai Rup Singh, Vice Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

inner light. Prof Chahal, following the example of Guru Nanak, is trying to differentiate between the essence of religion and mere religiosity and rituals. He does not claim that his interpretation is absolute. In all humility like a true scientist he says he is open to reason and welcomes debate and discussion to settle the issue. In a way, he is following the method which Guru Nanak adopted during his dialogues with people of different faiths.

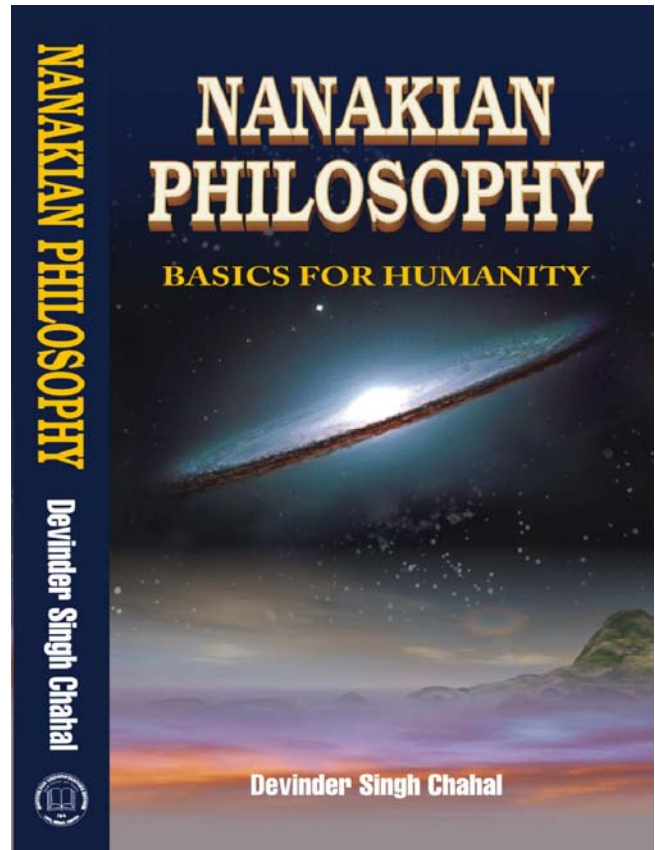
The vital questions which all religions have to deal with are: the concept of God, the creation of the Universe, the origin of life, the reality of death, the immortality of soul. The answers provided by different religions do not convince the inquisitive people of twenty-first century. Prof Chahal proves successfully that answers given by Nanakian Philosophy are in consonance with the discoveries of modern science. This way he has rendered great service to bring out the valuable message Guru Nanak had for the world. His book, being in English will have a greater reach to the philosophers and research scholars of the world.

Sikhs have spread all over the world mainly for economic reasons. By adopting Prof Chahal's approach they can familiarize the communities of their adopted countries with Sikh religion and culture. This will enhance international understanding and make presence of Sikh Diaspora acceptable abroad. Moreover, this way Sikh Diaspora can pass on their rich religious heritage to their subsequent generations.

Paradoxically crusade and *jihads* of medieval times have resurfaced in twenty-first century. Terrorism is the greatest menace that the world is facing today. If humanity is to avoid collective suicide, it must avoid the clash of religions and civilizations. Knowledge about religions other than one's own can make one broad-minded and tolerant. The last Chapter in Prof Chahal's book highlights the value of Nanakian Philosophy for world peace.

In fact, there is nothing divisive and sectarian in Nanakian Philosophy. Understood properly and followed faithfully, it can turn this world into heaven which many other religions promise to their adherents after death.

I hope Prof Chahal's pioneering effort will receive serious attention from educated Sikhs, the theologians, research scholars of Sikhism as well as the theologians of other religions and philosophers of the world.



NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY
Basics for Humanity

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tributors)

REVIEWS

1. Prof Dr Balbir Singh, Palo Alto, California, USA

Multi-religious societies are a fact of contemporary life. In the inevitable interaction between world religions, Sikhism has a unique advantage. In this view, Prof Dr Devinder S Chahal shares historian Toynbee's enthusiasm. But he rejects any notions that Guru Nanak's philosophy represents a hybridization and syncretism of Hinduism and Islam. To Prof Chahal, Guru Nanak is the greatest philosopher of modern era who presented a unique and original message, rejecting Vedas and notions of soul and reincarnation. He would reject repetition of the word "Waheguru," or any other hymns as a valid form of prayers. It is the understanding of the lofty message of Gurbani and its application in daily life that would bring peace and harmony in a Scientific Age. Such a message could eventually find universal acceptance in resolving world conflicts.

Prof Chahal has long held that Sikhism is not being presented in its true scientific and logical perspectives that Guru Nanak brought to religion at the dawn of science. Along with Einstein, Prof Chahal believes that Science and Religion enrich each other as they have a common goal of discovering the truth. God is eternal so mankind would keep learning more and more about Him. Meanwhile Scientists would keep learning more and more about the Universe. When they have both answered the ultimate questions, they would be identical.

Some Sikh Diaspora members had hoped that Prof Chahal would himself undertake this task of presenting Guru Nanak's philosophy correctly. He has taken up this challenge but has chosen to concentrate on some of the salient aspects of Gurbani rather than present the entire Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) in modern terms. Starting with this book as a stepping stone, he now hopes that AGGS would appear in a Standardized English Translation, which in turn might lead to its translation into the other world languages so this universal message becomes available to the entire world.

Prof Chahal, I believe has gone the farthest, so far, among many authors who claim to present Sikhism in modern terms. His rejection of the Yugas, for example, is supported by the comparative tables based on the Hindu time scales against Earth's Clock of Life (pp. 228-232) of modern science. His presentation, in my view, is consistent with the latest findings in physics, chemistry, cosmology, DNA and evolution that constitute the current quantum of human knowledge.

Prof Chahal is not afraid of being labeled a heretic. Yesterday's heretics, like Galileo, eventually became celebrated as pioneers at the frontiers of science. It is rare that an author on religion is equally at home discussing nuclear fusion and fission and *Sanjog & Vijog*. Prof Chahal, however, is no stranger to controversy even on

the Sikh-Diaspora. His views no doubt would be challenged again. So we may look forward to a lively discussion for weeks if not months as more and more people become familiar with the ideas in his new book on Basics for Humanity.

I found the time spent in the perusal of "Nanakian Philosophy – Basics for Humanity," a good investment. I may have more to say about it upon further reflection. I hope you would too.

2. Prof Dr Harbans Singh, Retired Principal, Khalsa College, Amritsar, India.

I have gone through *NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY: Basics for Humanity*. It is a scholarly document with fresh and original ideas. It is a New Year (2008) gift for the Sikh community and for research workers. The best part is that it is a readable account with scientific interpretation of Nanak's philosophy of living. To me this book removes some of my misunderstandings about the Bani of Guru Nanak. It is befitting that the author repudiated the writings of earlier writers that Guru Nanak's Bani is influenced by Vedas. Prof Chahal lucidly brings out that philosophy and teaching of Guru Nanak are relevant today during the Current Science Age. In Chapter 'Food and Fads' the author clearly shares that Guru Nanak talks about simplicity in eating.

I liked many Chapters which changed my thinking. Chapters of *Ardaas* (Prayer) and Astrology are revealing. In his last Chapter Nanakian Philosophy for World Peace, the author elaborates this concept in details. Here the author talks about Guru Nanak's views on non-violence, egoism, tolerance, freedom of expression, equality of women, jealousy, truthful living, good deeds, and revolt against caste system.

In concluding we thank the author for the time, energy and money he has spent to bring out this scholarly publication. Each chapter contains the references, which help the research scholars. This book is an excellent addition to the exiting literature of philosophy of Guru Nanak.

I enjoyed reading the book. This is the book to be read by everybody irrespective of his/her faith.

3. Dr Virinder Singh Grewal, MD,

Prof Dr Devinder Singh Chahal has investigated, explored and analyzed the philosophy of Guru Nanak scientifically by using the methodology of reason. His analysis and translation of the hymns of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) comes as he understands it and not the literal meaning as used by others. He has analytically wrestled with the issues of the Sikh doctrinaires in the philosophy. He has stressed that the practice of the Sikh faith is quite opposite to what is contained in the Bani of Guru Nanak. The first two pictures in his book paint the picture of superstition in performing the "*Larhies*" of *Akhand Paaths* as ritual commonly seen in almost all the Gurdwaras of the world.

The theme of his book is to pay more attention to inner cleanliness rather than outward showy practice of the faith, which is important to the well being of the mind with spiritual knowledge.

He has shown that there is no conflict between religion and science and both are complimentary to each other. He has discussed in detail with suitable references from the writings of Guru Nanak; the common subject of daily discussions in community about the origin of Universe, heaven and hell, death etc removing the doubts of the readers or to come in a civil debate on the points of difference. The following hymn of Guru Nanak suitably refers to Prof Chahal:

ਨਾਦ ਬਿੰਦ ਕੀ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਮਾਇ ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸੇਵਿ ਪਰਮ ਪਦੁ ਪਾਇ ॥੨॥
ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੩੫੨.

One, who merges into the knowledge of the Lord as absolute and related, serves the True Guru and obtains the supreme status.

AGGS, M 1, p 352.

Prof Chahal has stressed that science is the real redeemer. It puts honesty above hypocrisy; mental veracity above all belief. It teaches the religion of usefulness. It will destroy bigotry in all its forms. It will put thoughtful doubt above thoughtless faith. It is known that science has given us all we have of value. Science is the only civilizer. Religion and science can co-exist with a little tolerance and rationality and mutual respect, humans should enjoy the strides of science, while enjoying the comforts provided by being humble towards that unfathomable, incomprehensible Higher Power. We must accept the findings of science to understand the world, which cannot be ignored, e.g. the basic insights of theories as key as evolution, relativity and quantum mechanics.

I enjoyed in its entirety and recommend that this book should be read by the Sikhs and non-Sikhs to understand the Teachings of Guru Nanak (Nanakian Philosophy).

4. Dr Sukhraj Singh Dhillon

Professor Devinder Singh Chahal challenges many traditional concepts in "**Nanakian Philosophy: Basics for Humanity.**" It's interesting to read his interpretations of Gurbani from new perspective. It becomes obvious that even though Gurbani is same, interpretations can be totally different. When he calls Guru Nanak a 'Scientist' (a bone of contention for many), Prof Chahal means 'Natural Philosopher' because science in ancient times was called 'Natural Philosophy'. I don't think he means a typical scientist, such as someone with white coat doing experiments in a laboratory or presenting scientific theories.

The book consists of 26 chapters covering travels of Guru Nanak, his methodology, his ancient and modern portraits, and of course his philosophy and logic behind it that

withstands the modern scientific discoveries. It includes Glossary, About the Author, and About the Institute for Understanding Sikhism.

His main thrust is that Guru Sahiban have strengthened the original concept of Guru Nanak and considered Guru Nanak the Guru. What he calls "*Nanakian Philosophy*" is philosophy of Guru Nanak that is further explained and strengthened by the Sikh Gurus, who succeeded to the house of Guru Nanak. His interpretation of Gurbani in modern terms is refreshing. I like the practicality and straight scientific approach to interpretation. There is nothing left to blind faith. No miracles and supernatural powers written largely for illiterate audience to catch their attention. His conclusions are very logical free from reference to miracles and supernatural powers.

He uses quite effectively the latest findings in science from quantum physics to molecular biology, and origin of universe and man to interpret Gurbani. He rejects old concepts of Yugas and proves them wrong in view of modern scientific knowledge. He has analyzed the philosophy of Guru Nanak scientifically by using reason and logic. His interpretation of Gurbani does not follow the literal meaning as used by other authors. He has shown that there is no conflict between religion and science and both are complimentary to each other. We must accept the findings of science to understand the world, which cannot be ignored.

He concludes that final message of Nanakian Philosophy is to make the best use of this life, and you will not get anywhere worrying about reincarnation, hell, heaven. These are not real and are used allegorically and metaphorically by Sikh Gurus.

Prof Chahal's interpretation of accepting the Laws of Nature as *Hukam* is not out of order. He explains Guru Nanak's concept of God related to Universe/Nature, *kudrat* in Gurbani (p153). The concept has no contradiction with modern scientific knowledge. He, therefore, prove his claims that Gurbani is scientific.

He gives views on various other issues and always supports with logic. For example, *Amrit Vela* to him means any suitable time, it does not merely mean early in the morning or an ambrosial time as is generally understood. His views on *Ardaas* (prayer) are not to demand for any material things but appreciating the creation (p286). The perfect *Ardaas* according to *Nanakian Philosophy*, he says, is "*Tu thakur tum pahe ardaas...*" AGGS p268.

However, it is difficult to eliminate the elements of subjectivity in interpretation. Some of the readers are likely to differ with his suggestions, such as even the term *Nanakian Philosophy*; why it is confined to Bani of Sikh Gurus and not Bhagats; *ੴ* is pronounced as '*Ek Oh Beant* (infinite)' and not '*Ek Onkaar*'; '*Mool Mantra*' addressed

as 'Manglacharan'; 'Gur Parsad' interpreted as 'Enlightener' and 'Bounteous', respectively; and *sanjog* and *vijog* as nuclear 'fusion' and 'fission'.

He suggests that Guru Nanak gave no name to God and whatever names he used are nothing more than metaphoric. *Waheguru*, so prevalent among Sikhs was never used by any Guru in their Bani. Only Bhattas have used and that for Guru Ramdas (p 246). Repeating *Waheguru* in *Naam Japna* and *Naam simrana* is against Nanakian Philosophy and is similar to ancient Vedantic mantra.

He concludes that doing good deeds and helping the humanity is the highest social responsibility for followers of Guru Nanak. Spending hours repeating or reading without helping others is a selfish act. It serves no one in God's creation. Use that time to help someone in need.

His interpretations are influenced by his views that soul, rebirth, reincarnation are not real. Their use in Gurbani is only allegorical and metaphorical, as is the use of hell and heaven. Many believe in these phenomena due to influence of ancient Hindu literature and that interferes with their understanding and interpretations. Gurbani is scientific and using modern scientific discoveries do help interpret it in the real perspective.

Like the first two books "*JAP: The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy*" and "*Sabd Guru to Granth Guru*," in "*Nanakian Philosophy: Basics for Humanity*," Prof Chahal has strengthened "School of Scientific Scholars" to interpret Gurbani. It's a good start for the modern age of Science and Technology, where logic will prevail.

Prof Chahal believes Sikh writers and Sikhs in general are stuck with Vedantic philosophy and their practice of religion is quite opposite to the philosophy of Guru Nanak. For example, he shows pictures of multiple *Akhand paaths* (Uninterrupted recitation of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib) performed at the same time to prove that rituals are being performed in Gurdwaras. He makes a case that Sikhs like to call Sikhism a modern religion. But any researcher who finds anything which goes against the concept of orthodox Sikh authority is either declared as an atheist or anti-Sikh or condemned or excommunicated from Sikhism. What we see here is not restricted to Sikh religion. There are orthodox with set dogmas, the kind who blow planes, attack abortion clinics, and abolish mosques, and so on... That's what religion is for them.

The Sikhs with open mind will find a refreshing change towards interpretation of Gurbani and its universal appeal in modern times. The orthodox, who are not familiar with scientific approach and comfortable with traditional concepts, will take time to accept this approach, if they ever do. Unless the orthodox change their attitude, they will continue to push away the youth without perhaps realizing it. For scientists or non-scientists, this book is an excellent reading; irrespective of their agreeing or disagreeing with Prof Chahal's views.

Dr Satnam Singh Sandhu, Punjabi University, Patiala

The big question before the author in *Nanakian Philosophy* is what Sikh religion is and what is being preached to the masses? According to Prof Devinder Singh Chahal the fact of the matter is that knowingly or unknowingly masses are not being preached Sikhism in a proper manner and perspective. They are unable to experience the light of the knowledge given by Guru Nanak, the founder. After centuries, the same darkness of ritualism that was effectively dispelled by Guru Nanak is being spread and preached by so called *Granthies*, *Kathakars* and *Bhaijies* (traditional preachers of Sikh thought) to the Sikh masses. Basically this is the point of concern not only for the serious scholars of Sikhism but it is also going to affect the futuristic thought of the religion and this is a deviation from the light of knowledge comprehensively spread by Guru Nanak.

Prof Chahal has stated in his discourse, which is to provide the basic insights of Gurbani but this is not a point of concern for the persons who are working as professionals in the field of preaching the religion. This touches every rational and futuristic person who is seriously concerned about the future of Sikhism and Sikh studies. Prof Chahal says: "When I looked deeply into Sikhism, as it is being preached, I found that 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 a modern religion in any of the Sikh writings. ...Sikhism is being preached in total contradiction to the philosophy of Guru Nanak."

Prof Chahal has focused on most burning issues with a futuristic approach. He has tried to elaborate the following issues with references and methodological details. One can understand Sikhism if one goes through all these carefully:

- Guru, Philosophy and Religion
- Nanakian Philosophy, Methodology and Guru Granth
- Misinterpretation of Gurbani
- The basic theological concerns of Nanakian Philosophy
- Indian system of Knowledge and Sikhism
- Human concerns and Sikhism
- Nanakian Philosophy and global challenges (science and World Peace)

Thus almost all the major concerns have been picked up and analyzed by the author. Most of the ideas have been illustrated by reference to Gurbani but when Prof Chahal tries to provide a personal interpretation in the study in hand, some times his interpretation seems to be quite different and some traditional scholars may not agree with him. According to Prof Chahal it is so because: The Sikhs

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at large like to follow the concepts that have already been accepted by the Sikhs in the past although not founded on or recommended in any Bani of any Sikh Guru, incorporated in AGGS. And the majority of the Sikhs will put all their forces to defend such concepts imprinted in their brains.

He has picked up the relevant question of Sikhism that are in the minds of rational Sikhs who are feeling concerned about the future of the religion. He has covered most of the burning issues with proper focus and methodology, dealt in proper historical, spiritual perspectives with the help of primary sources. This book will be very useful for the researchers as well as for the academicians dealing in Gurbani and Sikhism.
