

EDITORIAL

INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE PHILOSOPHY OF SIKHISM?

ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ]

Guru Nanak

Is there an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism?

The answer is definitely No.

It is 'No' because Sikhism being taught in these days is according to the concepts of some scholars rather than based on the Nanakian philosophy embodied in the Gurbani, which is incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS). If we look into the present day Sikhism it is about 80% based on the information available in history, *Janam Sakhis* (Biographies of Gurus), *Hukmnamae* (edicts), *Rehitnamae*, (code of conduct) and old literature written after about 100 years of demise of Guru Gobind Singh. And none of these sources have any approval of any Sikh Guru. On the other hand only 20% is based on the Nanakian philosophy. It is a pity that very little importance is given to the Nanakian philosophy embodied in the Gurbani incorporated in the AGGS. It is the only source that has been authenticated by Guru Arjan in 1604 at the time of its compilation into a Granth and then its authenticity was reiterated by Guru Gobind Singh after adding the Bani of the 9th Guru to the House of Nanak, Guru Teg Bahadur, around 1705 CE and again at the time of his demise in 1708 CE.

It is a pity that we, the Sikhs, do not have an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism, which can be used to test any so-called blasphemy or misinterpretation of Sikhism by any scholar. Beside this the Sikh scholars do not have standardized transliteration of some Punjabi words into Roman alphabet. Moreover, every Sikh scholar has its own meanings and understanding of many terms commonly used in the Sikh writings. Since these terms have not been defined specifically, therefore, many scholars use them in their own way to justify their own concept of Sikhism.

Unfortunately nobody had tried to define them specifically the way a term should be defined for academic world. The pity is that some retired scientists who tried to define such terms specifically to make the readers to understand such terms in their real perspective have been criticized recently in the Editorial

of Sikh Bulletin, Roseville, California (July 2003). Moreover, almost all Sikh theologians are deadly against the scientist Sikh scholars in spite of the fact that Nanakian philosophy is scientific and logical. What is happening to scientist/rationalist Sikh scholars in these days is comparable to that happened to the scientists during the Period of Renaissance (14th to 16th centuries) in Europe. During this period the scientists, who pointed out wrong concepts in Christianity, were persecuted. Dr Cole has mentioned another wave of persecution of rationalist scholars in Christianity about 150 years ago in Europe as mentioned in his following personal communication. The 'War of Words' is still going on between scientists and Christian theologians and it is hoped it will continue for a long time and so will be happening in Sikhism for some time.

Since the turn of the century almost all Sikh scholars and the Sikh clergy accept that Sikhism is a modern religion for the third millennium, nevertheless, it is being taught and practiced as the most ritualistic and mythical religion. Instead of working for portraying Sikhism as a scientific and logical religion almost every Sikh scholar is criticizing the work of almost every other scholar (whether Sikh or non-Sikh). Most of the time their criticism is based on their own concept of Sikhism, supported with unauthentic information from old literature, and full of un-parliamentary language and character assassination. It appears that criticism of work of other scholars has become modus operandi of almost of every Sikh scholar and Sikh individual in these days.

Recently, a new book, *Sikhs of Khalsa* by HW McLeod has been released and a discussion started about 'Khalsa' because a few months ago some discussion on the definition of a 'Sikh', 'Khalsa', *Patit*, and '*Sehjdhari*' was going on at length on some Internet Discussion Groups. During this discussion when somebody recommended the books of Trilochan Singh and Gurdev Singh about their comments on McLeod Dr WO Cole remarked as follows (Sikh Diaspora

Discussion Group, June 9, 2003): *“I wouldn't recommend the books by Trilochan Singh or Gurdev Singh. They are vitriolic rather than academic. But the main point I wish to make is read McLeod for yourself. Don't accept the judgment of others - such is the proper approach.”*

At the same time Dr Jerry Barrier remarked as follows (Sikh Diaspora Discussion Group, June 8, 2003). *“Hew McLeod deals very specifically with these and other allegations in his forthcoming intellectual autobiography, **Discovering the Sikhs**. South Asia Books will have the non-India distribution to the book, an orderly review of facts, misinformation, and the specific networks of Sikhs who published conference proceedings and individual papers, primarily in the 1980s and early 1990s. I will circulate information on the volume when it appears in September. Those who want to follow the charges and more than adequate rebuttals by McLeod probably should wait until his definitive and systematic work is out and then compare with the various items preferred on Sikh Diaspora Forum that allegedly undermine his research and question his motives.”*

I am anxiously looking forward to read this book, *Discovering the Sikhs*, to find out what has been discovered about the Sikhs by Dr McLeod?

Since the controversy about the work of Dr McLeod and that of his associates and his students started during 1980s, criticism on the work of some Sikh scholars was also started by other Sikh scholars. During this ‘War of Words’ many Sikh scholars were excommunicated and many are still under serious and systematic criticism and even under character assassinations. The recent example is of Gurbaksh Singh Kala Afghana’s work (See TV Debate On Kala Afghana by Mr Chadha and his excommunication on pages 44, 45). **Now the criticism among Sikh scholars has reached to its highest peak so much so that those scholars (Dr Kharak Singh of Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh and Prof Gurtej Singh, National Professor of Sikhism) who have been very active in criticizing other Sikh and Non-Sikh scholars are being criticized by some scholars in these days.**

It will not be wrong to state that in these days every scholar of Sikhism has been criticized and is being criticized by every other scholar. So much so that I have heard some so-called authorities on Sikhism and advisors on Sikhism criticizing other scholars and attacking on their characters, which was clearly indicating that, nobody else except them has the right to become a Sikh scholar.

Dr W Owen Cole (author, with Piara Singh Sambhi of *The Sikhs, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Sussex

Academic Press, 1995) summed up this controversy as follows (Personal Communication):

*“About 150 years ago European Christianity, especially in Germany was obsessed by tensions that can most easily be read about in a book by the great Albert Schweitzer, who earned doctorates in six subjects including theology, music and medicine. It is entitled *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The theologians whose work is listed in it attempted to analyze the Christian Gospels to distinguish between the ‘Jesus of Faith’ and the ‘Jesus of History’. They were often savagely attacked for their temerity and their findings. Some lost their university posts, some died prematurely worn out and dispirited by the viciousness of their opponents. The consequence was that scholars who lacked their bravery avoided the study of the Bible in preference for such safer areas such as church history.*

Sikhism is now a global religion, found in almost every country in the world, especially those, which had links with the UK and the English language. Is it also a World Religion, that is one that can attract non-Punjabis who find spiritual sustenance in the teachings of the Gurus and the Aad Guru Granth Sahib?

A consequence of being a world religion is that it will come under the gaze and scrutiny of scholars of religion who may possess any faith or none. The finest example of this consequence is Professor McLeod who, in contrast to Trumpp, has studied Sikhism without prejudice and with respect.

If Sikhism is to have a place in academic studies in the twenty first century of the Common Era it will have to learn to live with Trumpp, Macauliffe and McLeod. The way to respond to this newest situation is first to accept it, secondly to rejoice because for good or ill Sikhi is being studied, thirdly to read carefully the writings of Sikhs and non-Sikhs before making judgments. Don't be defensive but believe with Guru Nanak that truth will out. Please remember no one is compelled to study Sikhi and that those who do are helping to bring it to wider notice.

*Professor McLeod has certainly meant Sikhs no harm and has caused them very little if any. Incidentally, the second part of *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford) consists of an extremely good study of the teachings of Guru Nanak. This seems to be unnoticed and deserves to be widely read.”*

Why is it happening?

Every so-called Sikh authority, every Sikh Religious Organization, every *Dehra* of a *Sant*, and every individual Sikh scholar is teaching his or her own type of Sikhism. Ask any question to a certain number of

Sikh scholars every one will answer according to his/her own concept of Sikhism, which may be quite different from the basic concept in the Nanakian philosophy. This is due to the fact that the Sikhs have not formulated an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism for academic world. There is no doubt that wonderful work was done by the Singh Sabha in the past but that was to save Sikhism from the onslaught by Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Although that onslaught is not over yet still the Sikhs have to formulate an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism for the humanity of the Science Age and academic world.

Why has it not been formulated so far?

What are the reasons that the Sikhs do not have an integrated and comprehensive philosophy on which the so-called blasphemous work of any author can be tested? The main reason is that the Sikh scholars themselves have not understood Nanakian philosophy, embodied in the Gurbani incorporated in the AGGS, in its real perspective. This had already been pointed out by Guru Nanak as follows during his preaching period:
ਬਾਣੀ ਬਿਰਲਉ ਬੀਚਾਰਸੀ ਜੇ ਕੇ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਹੋਇ ॥

ਇਹ ਬਾਣੀ ਮਹਾ ਪੁਰਖ ਕੀ ਨਿਜ ਘਰਿ ਵਾਸਾ ਹੋਇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 935

"Only rare Guru-oriented will deliberate/contemplate on the Bani (word).

*This Bani (Word) is of the pre-eminent preceptor,
That is to be imbibed in one's own mind (through its deliberation)."*

The above verse clearly indicates that Guru Nanak's observation that there would be a very few Sikhs, who will deliberate on the Bani/Sabd, is so true today as it was then at the time of Guru Nanak. Due to this fact (not deliberating seriously on Sabd) even today the Sikhs have failed to come up with an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism.

Moreover, the JAP of Guru Nanak given in the beginning of the AGGS is the essence of Nanakian philosophy. In the stanzas # 8 to 11 he has emphasized on *listening* (understanding) his philosophy and the next three stanzas # 12 to 15 he has emphasized on *accepting* (practicing) his philosophy. I have picked up the following phrase to convey to the Sikhs and the Sikh scholars that by accepting Nanakian philosophy one will not follow or preach Sikhism of his/her own instead will be able to construct an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism based on Nanakian philosophy embodied in the Gurbani, incorporated in the AGGS; and by taking the information from old literature, history and other sources after testing it on Gurbani, science, and logic – the touchstones of truth.

ਮਯੰਗੁਨ ਚਿ ਯਪੁ ॥] AGGS, Jap 14, p 3.

By accepting (Nanakian philosophy) one does not fall into the traps of any cult, sect, creed and their religious rituals/rites.

Many people reject the truth simply because it is not accepted by the majority. The fact is that *truth is not dependent on how many people believe it; truth exists on its own whether it is believed by none, one, or one million.* It is my personal experience that peoples easily accept something that is false, do something that is wrong, and follow the path that is crooked one, because the right information was not available to them. The irony is that most of the Sikh scholars do not try to conduct serious research to find the truth. Guru Arjan has pointed out in the following verse that in general people accept falseness very easily but truth does not appeal to them:

ਬੁਠੁ ਬਾਤੁ ਸਾ ਸਚੁ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਤੀ ॥

ਸਤਿ ਹੋਵਨੁ ਮਨਿ ਲਗੈ ਨ ਰਾਤੀ ॥

ਬਾਵੈ ਮਾਰਗੁ ਟੇਚਾ ਚਲਨਾ ॥

ਸੀਧਾ ਛੋਡਿ ਅਪੁਠਾ ਬੁਨਨਾ ॥

ਦੁਹਾ ਸਿਰਿਆ ਕਾ ਖਸਮੁ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸੋਈ ॥

ਜਿਸੁ ਮੇਲੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋ ਮੁਕਤਾ ਹੋਈ ॥ ੪॥

AGGS, M 5, P 185.

"What is falseness, one takes it to be true.

What is the truth is not imbibed in one's mind.

One (usually) takes the forbidden and crooked path.

One abandons the right method but weaves the wrong pattern.

Although the both ways (wrong and right) are due to the Laws of Universe,

But only those who are introduced to the right path of Nanak, are liberated."

Solution

Dr Cole is right in saying, "A consequence of being a world religion is that it will come under the gaze and scrutiny of scholars of religion who may possess any faith or none." Not only this, Sikhism is already under the microscope of theologians of all faiths, scientists, and politicians of the world to find out what is the philosophy of Sikhism. Some are trying to understand it while others are bent upon to destroy it.

Therefore, it is very important for the **scrupulous Sikh scholars** to formulate an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism for the humanity of the world and also to be used to test any so-called blasphemous work of any scholar. It is not a task of Sikh theologians only; the team should be comprised of scholars who are expert in various subjects like, Physical Sciences, Natural Sciences, Astronomy, Psychology, Philosophy, Law, Administration, Languages, etc. However, the knowledge of ancient and old Punjabi, good

understanding of Gurbani and ‘methodology’ used by Guru Nanak to write his Bani are must for all such scholars.

The formulation is to be based on the Nanakian philosophy embodied in the Gurbani incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib – the only source of information, which has been authenticated by Guru Arjan in 1604 and by Guru Gobind Singh in 1705 and then in 1708 at the time of his demise.

The information from other sources should be studied very critically and tested on Gurbani, science, and logic before using to construct the integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism.

Any work of any scholar which appears to be against the basic philosophy of Sikhism or blasphemous to Sikhism should be critically examined by the team of experts of international reputation in the subjects mentioned above and they should test any so-called blasphemous work on Gurbani, science and logic – the touchstones of truth.

Until and unless *an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism* is formulated, the rationalists and scientists will continually be persecuted and criticized by the traditional/conventional theologians, and by the so-called authorities and custodians of Sikhism. (*Also see page 42 on this issue*)

Devinder Singh Chahal