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GURU NANAK'S BANI AND ITS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

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ABSTRACT

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's bani preached its followers to lead truthful & pious life in harmony with nature and doing good to others. It is the duty of every individual to maintain harmonious relationship with nature because nature is the abode of God. An awareness of man's symbiotic relationship to his total environment is necessary. Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bounteous nature. Guru Nanak believes that an awareness of that sacred relationship between man and the environment is necessary for the health of both. The primitive man's attitude towards his environment was shaded by reverence and fear but gradually with the understanding of the laws of nature, man's attitude changed. He tried to improve the natural resources to make them more useful and to utilize it without any harm. But now, with the advancement of science and technology, man is exploiting the nature without returning it's due to it. There is unplanned and uneconomic use of natural resources resulting in the pollution of the elements.

Key Words: Guru Nanak's Baani, Environmental Concerns, Exploitation of Nature, Ecological Crisis and Eco Balance.

INTRODUCTION

Man is an inseparable part of environment and cannot understand himself by isolating him from the environment which indeed, comprises of physical, biological and cultural aspects. Environment is the sum total of conditions which surround man at a given space and time viz., the physical aspect consisting of the five elements i.e. air, water, fire, earth and space; the biological aspect concerning the vegetation and living beings; and the cultural aspect encompassing the man-made features. The hymns of Guru Nanak Dev are deeply concerned with man and nature as both are the creation of one God. The origin, sustenance and

destruction of the whole universe are in the hands of God and everything in this universe operates in accordance with the Divine Will.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Issues of environmental concerns come under the domain of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics as a philosophical discipline originated in the west. The inspiration for environmental ethics was the first Earth Day in 1970, when environmentalists started urging philosophers who were involved with environmental groups to do something about environmental ethics. For solving the problem of environmental crisis, the important requirement of the present times is to reexamine our relation with the non-human natural world and our place in the universe.

This type of thinking will reinforce our attitude for the environment and to take the message from our religious scriptures. Guru Nanak has explicitly enunciated an ideology portraying the intrinsic value of natural phenomenon, interdependence of human and non-human world as well as spiritual dimension of nature as participating in spiritual development of humans. These views provide guidance and directions for policy making and for adopting a world-view towards the surrounding non-human entities.

Reverence for Nature

Man, being an inseparable part of nature, cannot be isolated from nature. A reverent attitude towards nature is explicit in the sloka of Japuji:

Pawan Guru Pani Pitta Maata Dharat Mahat//
Divas Raat Dui Dayi Daya Khele Sagal Jagat//

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 8.

Air is our Guru, Water our Sire
And Earth the Master Great.

Day and night are nurses twin,
In whose lap the whole world plays.

The elements of air, water and earth have been conferred the status of a Guru, a father and a mother respectively. It shows the relevance of nature for who, nonetheless, has to pay obeisance to the sacredness of objects as they provide not only sustenance but also spiritual nourishment for man. The element of air referred to as the Guru because man cannot survive without breathing (prana). Even the divine message, bani is transmitted through its tedium. Water is equated to father as it is prime life by which all else is alive, and earth is sanctified as the great mother who like a mother nurtures. The maternal aspect of earth, cause the origin of all beings on whom she lavishes the aesthetic intimacy of nature. Day and night represent and

provide the ground for development. Man is a part of nature because he is born from it, is mothered by it and achieves his full potential only through its benevolent agency.

Ih Jag Sacche Ki Hai Kothri Sacche Ka Vich Vaas//

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 463

The world is the house of God and God resides in it.

If one wants to realize his self, this is possible only if he cultivates love for the whole cosmos. If nature is creation of God and is the abode of the Lord, man has moral obligation to love and respect it and recognize its independent intrinsic value.

Harmony with Nature

Shri Guru

Nanak Dev Ji enunciates the philosophy of harmonious relationship i.e. man should live in harmony with himself, with society and with nature to attain to the heights of spirituality.

Guru ji advises:

Mann Hali Kirasani Karni Saram Paani Tan Khet//

Naam Beej Santokh Suhaaga Rakh Garibi Vaes//

Bhao Karam Kar Janmasee Sae Ghar Bhagath Dekh//

The mind is the ploughman the practice is husbandary; the effort is water and the body is the field, Sow the name and put the manure of contentment and keep the garb of humility with Karma of love and crop will grow.

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 595.

God is truth and therefore, truth is highest, but higher still is truthful living. The truthful life means harmonious living with moderate desires. Such attitude to life is in harmony with the physiological balance and is also the least disturbing to bio-spherical level of environment. As a result of truthful living, the individual spontaneously lives in tune with the laws of nature which always work in direction of restoring the used up or consumed energies/residual elements back to the atmosphere for future sustaining of life on earth. This would lead to a zero level of pollution, if it can be attained.

Man Responsible for Ecological Crisis

The environment crisis caused by humanity's exploitation of nature is leading towards depletion of renewable resources, destruction of forests, over use of land for habitation. The survival of animal and plant species and possibly that of human species itself is at a stake. The earth today is saturated with problems. Its forests are being denuded. Under these compelling circumstances, it appears that human being is the most dangerous enemy of environmental equilibrium. It may be worthwhile to turn to religious scriptures of different religions with a view to know how man should conduct himself on earth and how he should avoid overloading the atmosphere. Immediate and urgent solution, which is possible to find is only by turning to basic question of the purpose of human being on this universe and an understanding of our relation with the entire cosmos. Our ecological crisis is in fact a moral crisis and needs a moral solution, which lies in environmental awareness along with material development, Earth and its inhabitants are created by God, so every being has right to live, exist and flourish. Man has no rights to destroy or exploit any species or any part of the ecosystem in general.

Solution for Eco-Balance

In Guru Nanak's Bani, there is close affinity between man and nature. Nature is defined as revealing symbol of God and not as an unconscious alien to human existence and subject to be treated as merely means for man's material well-being. The problem of man and nature starts, when man tried to exploit nature for his selfish motives and to satisfy his greed. Man's mastery over science and technology has resulted in artificial intervention in the process of nature and thus, creating impediments in the smooth working of natural course. Nature has its own laws of continuity and preservation; of maintenance, of unity and order of existence. The sustenance of all living beings including man depends upon the natural environment. Therefore, disturbance in any component of the environment is likely to affect the whole system.

Thus, Guru Nanak Dev Ji stresses on the inner harmony of man which is prerequisite condition to create harmonious environment. Man should rise from his self-centeredness to recognize a relationship of unity and harmony with the rest of creation. The best solution would be to follow the commands of religious scriptures which emphasize on good living habits, non-polluting modes, simple living and high thinking.

PRACTICES TO BE DONE

Guru Nanak Dev enunciates the concept of one God, Who is transcendent as well as immanent. The bounties of nature draw sustenance only from Him. God alone is their master, without His *Hukom* nothing exists, changes or develops. Man has no right to interfere with the creation of God and to destroy nature's beauty; otherwise he will invite displeasure of the Almighty.

Nature in Guru Nanak's *Bani* is the symbol of revelation of God. All the natural phenomena i.e. living and non-living being, fauna and flora are taken as images to make man understand his equation with nature. Humans grow in the lap of nature and receive sustenance from her. The basic needs of human beings are met by her gifts. These natural resources are not given for the selfish exploitation of one group or nation, but to be shared by all creation and these resources are also for the future generations.

Adolescence is the most crucial period of life as the Adolescents face several difficulties in life and education. Most of the adolescents do not care the natural resources, which may result into exploitation of them. At this stage, it is essential to introduce environmental education to help them to live a peaceful and cooperative life. Surely, it can help the children to conserve the environment for future generations. Environmental education should be a regular subject at secondary level. Education can be better if it's different aspects are designed according to the need and objectives of environmental education. These can be aims, curriculum and methods of teaching.

(a) Aims of Education

Ideals of human life are reflected in the aims of education. Individual is to be developed physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Guru Nanak Dev advocated the individual aims in the form of development of divine potentialities. According to Him, human life is very important and one should make the best use of it by developing it in the right direction. Education is to prepare man for salvation, art of life, satisfaction of life, bliss of life and develop a feeling that everything present in this world is important and to be saved.

Spiritual enlightenment of the individual is an important aim of education. The spiritual aim is always associated with truthful living which obviously points to the moral and ethical aims of education. Education is to develop the character of the individual. Character is the basis of becoming a perfect man. Guru Nanak Dev's contribution to the aims of education was the harmonious development of personality i.e. *Gurumukh* and *Sachiara*. The duty of *Gurumukh* is to maintain the harmonious relationship with nature.

Education is to prepare the individual for successful living in the society and working for the betterment of society. Guru Nanak Dev believed the service of man. Education should promote in pupils a spirit of service, social sensitiveness, cooperation and sacrifice. The service of man is the service of God. So it is the duty of the of society to respect the creation of God i.e. nature.

(b) Curriculum:

Curriculum should include the following:

➤ *Whole world:*

Guru Nanak Dev emphasized that the curriculum should be the whole world because God created the universe and He expressed Himself in it, so it needs to be studied and saved. So, curriculum should include the concept of global education.

➤ *Philosophy of Nam:*

Guru Nanak Dev's philosophy emphasized the development of heart and intellect. For the development of the spirit, the philosophy of Nam has been emphasized. Curriculum should include concepts or topics which helps students to develop the characteristics of both heart and mind.

➤ *Philosophy and Ethics:*

For the development of the spirit of the individual emphasis should be on Philosophy and Ethics. Philosophy and ethics will have a higher place in life.

➤ *Other Humanity subjects:*

All the subjects are to be taught, however, philosophy, ethics, language, history and other humanity subjects are ranked higher.

In daily schedule, Guru Nanak Dev emphasizes the following activities:

- Congregational prayers
- Katha, kirtan and meditation in the Gurdwara
- Acts of social service
- Musical recitation

Guru Nanak Dev emphasizes a life of action and service, exchange of ideas with one another, dignity of labour and submission to God. He favours:

- Knowledge of hand i.e. dignity of labour.
- Knowledge of head i.e. intellectual development
- Knowledge of heart i.e. awakening of dormant spirit from within.
- Knowledge of *Hukam* i.e. obedience and surrender to God

He emphasized on the fact that man has to recognize his place in the universe and he has to respect the five elements of nature which are created by God.

(c) Methods of Teaching:

Guru Nanak Dev's way of teaching was very effective because these methods make the man aware of the mysteries of nature and his place in the universe. So, these methods should be adopted which could help our students to know the secrets of nature and help to save the environment.

- *Understanding and reflection:*

There are three levels of teaching and learning process, memory level, understanding level and reflective level. Guru Nanak Dev gave importance not only to memory level but more importance to understanding and reflective levels. Out of these two, again he gave primary importance to reflective level. When a person reflects, he turns his thoughts back upon ideas. Thus, reflective level of learning is based upon critical examination of an idea. Reflection upon self is also important. In this respect, He says

“He who reflects upon his self is the knower of God”.

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 152

- *Divine Method:*

Guru Nanak Dev is very close to nature. He explained almost all concepts with illustrations from the nature i.e. fire, water, agriculture, tree, air etc. to explain the depth of self-realization. He explained everything in his *Bani* including natural forces and phenomenon, flora and fauna, animal and bird life and day to day affairs of human life in the world.

- *Scientific Method:*

Guru Nanak wanted human beings to observe the problems of world scientifically and objectively. He chooses the scientific method as method of education embracing the whole life span of man, cultivated scientific outlook without superstitions, hypocrisy and blind faith. With this type of outlook, He used observation cum demonstration method. For Him, the whole life was an experiment in Truth and truthful living which is impossible unless one adopts objective and scientific outlook in life.

- *Dialectic Method:*

He used this method in his *bani siddha ghosh* while discussing the theme with *siddhas*. He discarded wrong beliefs and emphasized on *nam* for realizing the main aim of life.

- *Travelling Method:*

He used the technique of travelling for spreading education. He gave the message of peace, love, *nam-simran* and hard work during his all the four *udasis*.

- *Self-study Method:*

He encouraged self-study method and used it to educate the masses, when they come to- see Him at kartarpur, he put them on paths of *Nam-simran*.

Environmental awareness can also be introduced in the form of co-curricular activities. Various value based activities can be introduced among students to promote awareness about environmental concerns. These can be:

Home Based Activities

. Right from the childhood, the members of family can encourage the child to use the natural resources in an effective manner with all the members of the family, as it is the family which is considered as the most important social unit through which the child enters into his first contact with the world. In family, the child can be helped to inculcate environmental education through the following ways:

- Parents can teach the children various kinds of values like not to pluck the flowers and wastage of water and take care of plants.
- Teacher could assign projects on environmental education.
- Teacher can ask the students to prepare an essay or theme on environmental education e.g. global warming and save the environment.
- Teacher can give the students to make drawing on glaciers melting, environment extinguishing of the animals etc.

School Based Activities

The child spends most of his time in the school. So, the school should recognize such activities which could inculcate values among the students. Such as:

- Health and cleanliness programmes
- Celebration of world environment day
- Social service programmes like N.S.S. and N.C.C etc.
- Formation of environmental awareness clubs in schools and colleges
- Presenting thoughts of great thinkers in morning assemblies
- Conducting workshops and seminars to make the students aware about environmental problems.
- Conducting conferences such as "Environmental Ethics and World Religions" to see the ideas of different religions about environmental concerns.

Society Based Activities

Society also can help the educational system by providing environmental education in different ways:

- Different organizations should be established for encouraging social works for preserving the environment.
- Street and Colonies should be encouraged to organize on the theme of environmental degradation and protection.
- Environmental campaigns should be organized in the villages.
- Various clubs can organize lectures on the themes of environmental Street and preservation.

Government Based Activities

Govt. should also take strict steps to preserve the environment.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Guru Nanak Dev ji recommends a balanced living in harmony with outward surroundings. There should be sustainable economic development to sustain man at the reasonable comfort level, to conserve environment and its resources, to stop environmental degradation and this is possible by transcending oneself from self-centeredness and developing cosmic awareness.

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