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GURU NANAK-THE EMANCIPATOR OF MARGINALIZED PEOPLE

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Abstract :

The Sikh history is replica of heroic struggle for the protection and restoration of human rights of deprived sections of society. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, aimed at amelioration of conditions of oppressed sections of society and wanted that there should be sense of brotherhood and mutual respect among people to establish a free, equitable and fair social order. He propounded a social philosophy, which is based on spirit of social equality, individual freedom and social justice. He understood the plight of lower strata of society, women and working classes and shown keenness to uplift them to enable to live in dignified manners. He established several socio-religious institutions to liberate the downtrodden people, women and labour class from the age-old shackles of caste system, social prejudices and economic disparities.

KEYWORDS :

Marginalized People , protection and restoration of human rights .

INTRODUCTION :

Five hundred years ago, Sikhism is founded by Guru Nanak on the principle of social equality and its history is replete with examples showing strong resistance to socio-religious discriminations, inequalities and injustice. With the passage of time, Sikhism and social justice became two sides of the same coin. Guru Nanak's vision of social justice is very close to the egalitarianism and he heralded the egalitarian society in which there will be social equality in letter and spirit. Sikhism stands for fraternity, liberty, brotherhood and equality for everybody belonging to all sections of the society as all the Sikh Gurus were unrelenting crusaders against every kind of injustice, untruth and inequality. They fought for the right of the downtrodden and unprivileged classes and advocate equality for everyone.

They emphasised on Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Mankind. Guru Arjan Dev said, "The One Lord is the Father of all and we are the children of the One Lord. Thou, O Lord, art our Guru." Sikhism rejected all kinds of manmade social distinctions, which divide the society and create caste conflicts, religious rivalry and class struggle. In Sikhism, there is no low or high on basis of his/her caste, class, creed, colour, sex, race etc. Sikhism raised the strong voice against long-standing hierarchical Hindu social order. Sikh Gurus disapproved the special privileges of upper castes and ruling classes. They tried to uplift the socio-economic status of deprived and vulnerable sections of society.

Guru Nanak took due notices of marginalized sections of society. He tried to uplift the wretched people. He was much in advance of His time in his thoughts. He was a friend, philosopher and guide of the poor and the downtrodden. He was a socialist to the core. He was a practical saintly philosopher. Much before the introduction of the 'earn your bread' policy enunciated by modern scholars, Guru Nanak insisted

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that one must not be dependent on anybody. His concept of equality is all-inclusive, making no distinction between man and women, man and man based on his caste, creed, colour or race. All outward differentiations between man and man, man and woman are immaterial-whether of colour, creed, dress or language. He was a liberator and champion of the weak and the oppressed sections of society. His teachings focus on the upliftment of the downtrodden masses and their empowerment to live a life of dignity in a society of pious people. Casteless society is the foundational principle of his vision of social justice. Guru Nanak in His times had witnessed and experienced the social fragmentations based on caste system in Indian society. Caste system had divided the Indian society into watertight compartments. People were classified in stratified structure and there was no idea of brotherhood among them. There was no vertical mobilization among people belonging to different caste groups due to the evil practices like untouchability and sense of being polluted if one mix or touch a person of lower caste groups. Caste system at that time provided safe haven for Brahmins and Kashtriyas and made hell for downtrodden and lower strata of the caste ridden Medieval Indian society. Guru Nanak reacted sharply against the social divisions, discriminations, inequalities, exploitation and injustice in society.

Guru Nanak condemned the theory of Varanashram Dharma, which had segregated the society into hierarchical social structures. He rejected all caste prejudices and made harsh comments on false sense of pride among people belonging to upper caste groups. He raised strong voice in favour of oppressed, deprived and vulnerable sections of society. To him, all human races are equal and manifestation of Supreme Reality (God). To him, the caste system is not only a social evil but also a root cause of social disharmony, social conflicts and social injustice. He said, "Nanak seeks the company of those who are of low caste among the lowly, nay rather the lowest of the low Why should he (he has no desire to) rival the lofty. Where the poor are looked after, there does rain the look of Thy grace, O' Lord !" Caste differentiations to Guru Nanak were unacceptable. He emerged as Messiah of the vulnerable sections of society. To Him, all are equal irrespective of their caste, class or occupation.

Guru Nanak espoused the amelioration of all human beings but emphasized on equal opportunities, equal access to sources and resources; equal participation in decision making; equal rights, egalitarianism, equitability and social justice for the marginal, disadvantaged, deprived and exploited ones. Guru Nanak gave a simple, unique and dynamic way of life, which can be summed up in three simple words- Kirat Karo (honest labour), Naam Japo (meditation), Wand Chakho (share the earnings with needy people). His commandment of Kirat karo, Naam japo and Wand Chakho is the most comprehensive and simple philosophy of life ever given. The three components of this philosophy go together and if applied separately are vulnerable for distortion and misuse. The true way of life is to work honestly while nourishing love for God in your mind, being socially active and sharing your earnings with those who are unlucky and need your help.

He was not in favour of superficial changes in socio-religious, political and economic spheres. He wanted to bring far-reaching changes, which could renovate the whole scenario and regenerate the dying spirit of social justice in the Medieval Indian society. He geared up a new order to promote humanistic and democratic values. He strongly resented against the political disorder, hierarchical social order, social disunity and unquenchable hatred, and religious hypocrisy of His time. He established the institution of Dharmsal (a place of worship). He opened the doors of salvation for low caste people. In Hindu temples, Shudras were not allowed to enter. They were not even allowed to listen or recite the hymns of Vedas. The upper caste Brahmins denied them freedom of worship and faith. He took the revolutionary step and granted the social equality to lower strata of society. In Sikh Gurdwaras, a person belonging to any caste group can enter and meditate to seek the Divine bliss. The downtrodden people can serve and participate in Sikh places of worship with dignity. Class distinctions are antithetical to His idea of just social order. The institution of Sangat -Pangat is the logical corollary of institution of Dharmsal. Guru Nanak desire for a creation of God oriented civil society with socio-spiritual orientations. In order to help the needy, to feed the hungry, to educate the illiterate, to fight for oppressed and to offer shelter to vulnerable sections of society these institutions worked like beacon light. The institution of Sangat -Pangat has put an end to class and caste considerations and promoted the spirit of sharing. The tradition of Dasvandh is endowed with spirit of fellow feeling. These institutions inspire human beings to realize his social responsibilities and contribute towards the upliftment of humankind. Dasvandh is a tradition, which inspires, teaches and trains a man to work honestly and share the fruits of his earning with others in the Name of God for the social and spiritual development of society. All Sikhs are required to give food, clothing etc, to the needy and set apart at least ten percent of their income for such purposes. This is termed system of 'Daswand' 'Wand Chhakna' that is, first distributing and then eating implies the principle of economic equality and uplifting others to one's own level. It also implies the service of mankind and humility are virtues which please God.

It is believed that 'Guru Ki Golak Gareeb Ka Muh' i.e. Mouth of the poor or needy is equal to

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charity box of the Guru. It is integral part of Sikh ethos to fulfil the needs of deprived and vulnerable sections of society. It is the part of Guru Nanak's religious teachings for His followers to donate at least one-tenth of their earnings for the welfare of other so that the objective of welfare of all can be successfully achieved. Dasvandh is voluntary contribution for social welfare. Guru Nanak emphasised on sharing of one's honest earning with those who are relegating in every sphere of life. It is a sin for a true Sikh if he does not help the needy, weaker and helpless people. It is his socio-spiritual obligation to help and support the underprivileged sections of society.

The ultimate configuration of the society, which the Guru Nanak envisaged was egalitarian, non-exploitative, non-discriminative allowing human spirit to have a full play, free from prejudices of caste, gender, wealth and birth et al., all its members steeped deep in full faith in the singularity and unity of God, his fatherhood of the whole mankind. To achieve this aim, he evolved suitable strategy. He established requisite institutions to give local habitation to this ideas as also to preserve and perpetuate them. The institution of Guru-ka-Langar and Pangat are cases in point. Thus the his role, in this respect, was that of a creative genius who by his examples and preaching articulated the masses to awaken to new realities and new heights, both at spiritual and social levels. The institutions of Dharmsal, Sangat-Pangat and Dasvandh are primarily designed to establish social and economic equality. These institutions have catered the requirements of needy, poor, and weaker sections of society. These institutions played crucial role in inculcating, inspiring and training the masses to develop the sense of fellow-feeling, mutual cooperation, to rise above caste divisions and reshaping their social relations. These institutions boost up the morale of low caste people and gave them equal rights and opportunities.

In addition to upliftment of social status of downtrodden sections of society to accomplish the goal of creation of equitable society, Sikh Gurus played an incredible role in raising the voice in favour of women-folk. They criticised the ill-treatment given to women in the Medieval Indian society. Despite the unparalleled worth of women for their family and society, women have been victim of gender bias, inequalities and discriminations since the time immemorial. In the 21st century, women become vulnerable section of society. Gender crimes, dowry deaths, domestic violence, female feticides and honour killings have exposed the hollowness of constitutions, legal, social and political institutions. The present day state of affairs demands serious thought on Guru Nanak's views on gender equality. His ideas on gender equality have paved a way for women to develop their ability to organize and influence the direction of social and economic order. He gave novel way of life, which is based on humanitarianism, respect for human dignity and respect for women. He pleaded the case of woman and said, "Within a woman, the man is conceived and from a woman he is born. With a woman he is betrothed and married. With the woman man contracts friendship and with a woman the system of propagation keeps on going. When one's wife dies, another lady is sought for. It is through a woman that man restraints his passions. Why call her bad, from whom are born the king. From a woman, a woman is born, without a woman, there, can be none." His successors also took the due notice of inferior position of women in medieval Indian society. They emphasised on gender equality and glorified and elevated the status of women. They severely condemned the misogynist attitude towards women and rejected the male chauvinism. In Sikhism, women enjoy equal rights and can free participate in all kinds of socio-economic, religious and political activities.

Guru Nanak also made an attempt to build a just social order in which gulf between haves and have not is filled, dignity of manual labour is restored and economic exploitation of working classes is come to an end. He took the due notice of plight of working classes. He advocated the dignity of labour. He enjoyed upon everyone to work himself and not depend upon others. Everyone must have a sense of the dignity of labour. He preferred to accept things from those who worked with their own hands. He glorified the role of manual labourers in a society. He condemned the role of upper classes and denounced the parasitism and economic exploitation of working classes. Guru Nanak had declared that wealth cannot be amassed without sinning, and the Sikhs were enjoined to earn their living by their own manual labour. He raised the strong voice against those who exploits the manual workers, poor, weaker and deprived sections of society. He took side of vulnerable, underprivileged and people belonging to humble social and economic backgrounds.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that Guru Nanak's teachings is a ray of hope for the disadvantaged groups. Those who are socially excluded, politically and economically marginalized can seek their socio-spiritual development by following the eternal message of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak strived for the emancipation of downtrodden people and raised strong voice against the social injustice and discriminations based on caste, creed, class, colour, race, sex etc. He liberated the vulnerable sections of Hindu social order and gave equal rights to women. He restored the dignity of working classes, glorified the manual labour. He emphasised on honest earnings, sharing with needy and constant remembrance of Infinite Reality to eliminate exploitation, marginalisation and victimization of poor, week and helpless masses.

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