

# VOICES OF SIKH GURUS: REPRESENTING WOMEN, NATURE AND SPIRITUALITY IN NANAK- THE CORRESPONDENT OF THE ULTIMATE AND TIMES OF GURU GOVIND SINGH

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## ABSTRACT

India has been a country of many religions, castes and ideologies since ancient time. Religions like Hindu, Muslim and Sikh have been dominating her for many years. Although one can notice a few events of violence among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs during Mughal Era, Partition of India and during 1984, yet their co-operation during freedom struggle, their pivotal role in eradicating Britishers and their support in wars like 1962, 1965, 1971 and 1999 can never be forgotten till the very existence of united India. History is the witness to the fact that Sikh community, despite being in minority, contributed a lot in maintaining India's grand culture and unity. Sikhs are not only considered as warrior, fighter and brave but also kind-hearted and helpful when they are seen helping the poor and serving in Langars. Sikhs are followers of their Gurus who have always been peace-maker during horrible situations. Their preaching and teachings convey a message to all of us to preserve nature and save women from tyranny of evil people. The present paper titled as 'Voices of Sikh Gurus: Representing Women, Nature and Spirituality in Nanak-The Correspondent of the Ultimate and Times of Guru Govind Singh' is an attempt to explore the hidden voices which have been under surface due to rigid regime of Mughals and other veiled reasons. It also explores how Sikh Gurus maintain peace; preach spirituality and preserves nature through their teachings.

## KEYWORDS

Women, Nature, Culture, Religion and Spirituality.

## INTRODUCTION

Sikh community is known for its ten Gurus who took this community to marvelous heights. History is the witness to the fact that Guru Nanak has been first Guru of Sikh. After that, Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Hari Krishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur became Gurus and preached people with their sense of spirituality. And Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth and the last Guru of Sikh. After him, Sikh lineage of Gurus is believed to be ended. Guru Gobind Singh said that *Adi Grantha* would be the spiritual Guru of Sikh community in the coming times. If one talks about the role of Gurus in political and social arena, one comes to know that they played a vital role in constructing nation and contributed a lot in maintaining peace in society. They came forward when the country was under the dark cloud of fanatical forces. The voices of Sikh Gurus were full of nationalism and spiritualism paving the way for the coming generation to have tolerance and peace. Although all ten Sikh Gurus hold philosophical and imaginative sense, yet a few Gurus are replete with poetic sensitivity and sense of critical analysis. History tells us that Gurus like Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed their lives for the sake of their

community. Most importantly, the voices of Guru Nanakji and Guru Govind Singh found an imperative place in the society and became popular. So the present paper chiefly focuses on the voices of Guru Nanakji and Guru Govind Singh.

Coming to the voices of Gurus we begin with Guru Nanak Dev, the first Guru of Sikh. He sang divine songs in praise of Lord and persuaded people towards the spiritual essence of the Lord. In *Janamasakhis*, he often used to direct his companion Mardana to play on his *rabab* (a musical instrument) as he vividly sang *bani* or Divine word descending upon him from the heaven. The philosophy of Nanakji is to lay stress on secularism. He stressed on the equality of man irrespective of the caste and religion one belonged to. He advocates that all are the creation of God. He believes that "*Akas te sab upat hoe- From the one all have arisen*" (Aurora 157) He says that God is all in all and man is helpless before Him. Everyone is equal in His eyes. Guru Nanak says that "*sab ko uchcha akhiyai, nich na disai koi- Call everyone high, let there be no one seen as low*" (158). His protest for equality was given a practical shape through the concept of *Langar* he inaugurated at Kartarpur, restricting the threatening crawl of social differences in the society. He further says "only a house-holder man as well as women of every caste and creed-could experience this state, though not the one who is self-indulgent, but the one who keeps detached in the midst of attachments, like the lotus flower sticking out its head proudly through marsh and mud, as a duck floats, care-free in the stream" (Singh 135). The lines are indicative of the fact that Nanak is both a supreme mystic and a prophet of secular hope.

In the context of women, Nanak sanctified the life of the household and gave woman a status equal in every way to man. Woman is not inferior to man in any sense. Guru says that "How can a woman be called inferior from whom the kings are born?" (Aurora 58). Women are well respected at home and in society if we are committed to do this. He mingles spiritual life with earthly life resulting in spiritualized secular life. For Nanak, "without ethics a spiritual life could not be consummated. (Singh140)"

Nanak also lays emphasis that nature acts in accordance with the fixed laws or what he calls *Hukam*, (The Divine Order), that is essentially moral if one must fear anything, one must fear one self, one's own ego, which flouts this moral order, and hence comes to grief. According to him nature is powerful and works without biasness playing a vital role in the affairs of human beings. Thus Guru Nanak was not in favour of establishing orthodoxy, rituals and old traditions. His focus was to unfetter people from religious oppression of the priests. His role in presenting women, nature and spirituality has been commendable.

On the other hand, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru of Sikh emerged as a revolutionary fighter against the cruel rulers. He fought many battles against

Aurengzeb and other rulers. In his life time he never surrendered to the Mughals. All his relatives and even his sons became martyred at the hands of Mughals but he never gave up hope. Although he has been a fighter, yet his teachings and treatment of women, society, nature and spirituality is worth-mentioning.

As a Guru, he respected women and treated them with tenderness. It is believed that he has been the priest of Durga Ma and devoted his prayers to Her when he used to go battle. Consequently, he used to come victoriously. Besides, he tries to abolish bad socio-religious rites of the society. One day, during Durga Ashtmi “the Guru asked the presiding priest when the goddess would make her appearance. The Pandit said that the Goddess would reveal herself only if a pure and holy man of noble lineage sacrificed himself at the altar, and had his head flung into the fire. The Guru was apparently pleased, and said to the Pandit with a smile of sarcasm on his lips, ‘where shall we find, revered sir, a holier man than yourself whose head could form a fitting offering to the goddess. The Pandit was struck dumb and decamped on a false pretext. The Guru flung all the remaining material into the fire and came out from behind the screens with a drawn sword flashing in his hand.” Here, Guru highlights religious dogmas performed by the priest in the name of God and Goddess. By worshipping Kali Ma, Guru considers female Goddess superior to men and so the male priest is made feel embarrassment by disclosing his false pretext.

Besides, Guru Gobind Singh and his followers tried their best to maintain peace and protect their community from the slaughterers. Fighting against the Muslims, another example of strong woman appears before us when Guru delivered an effective speech in which he was determined to continue the fight. Hundreds of people thronged together led by a woman, Mai Bhago, who donning a man’s dress. The character of Mai Bhago is imperative because it was she who makes those people feels shame who had earlier escaped from the battle. She censures them and asks them back to the path of suffering and sacrifice. Therefore, it is reflected that women in Sikh community proved themselves to be warrior and fighter. They were represented as strong and revolutionary.

Besides, Guru Gobind Singh gave a voice to the weaker sections of society. He tried to abolish caste and custom, old rituals, beliefs and superstitions of the Hindus and bended them in one single brotherhood. No one will be superior, or inferior to one another. Men of all castes have been made to eat out of the same bowl. In a gathering Guru Gobind Singh says that “*Chheeriya Naal Jab Baaj Laravan, Sava Lakh Ton Ek Laraanva, Ta Guru Gobind Singh Kahalavaanan*” (I shall call myself Gobind Singh only if I can make the meek sparrows pounce upon the hawks and tear them; only if one combatant of my force falls a legion of the enemy”) (Singh 291). Similarly, Guru Govind Singh established “a new sect distinct from the Hindus and Mohammedans, to which he has given the name of Khalsa. He has united thefour castes into one, and

made many followers”(Dahiya 167).These lines are the reflective of the fact that Guru considers meek and powerful, the rich and the poor, men and women, high and down-trodden equally one. He tried to lessen this gab.

Another instance of Guru Gobind Singh’s revolutionary fervor was the formation of Khaalsa. He founded Khaalsa Panth in 1699 with eighty thousand men. The main purpose behind this was to defend Sikh community against the Mughal rulers. He says that “My Khaalsa shall always defend the poor and Deg (the community Kitchen) will as much as essential part of your order as Teg (the sword). And from now on, Sikh males will all call themselves ‘Singh’ (Lions) and woman ‘Kaur’ (Prince) and greet each other with *Waheguru Ji Ka Khaalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh* (the Khalsa belongs to God: Victory be to God” (Singh 290). These lines divulge that man and woman are equally respected.

In the context of spirituality, Guru Gobind Singh’s life is replete with many examples where God plays a vital role in one’s life. One of the examples is before us when battle with Mughal was underway and during these misfortunes, finding the rations in Guru’s kitchen dwindling, his mother stopped the Sikhs from serving food to others. The Guru was greatly distressed on hearing this and pronounced a curse: “These who have given this evil advice to my mother, may the Turks destroy them”(299). The mother tearfully begged of her son to pardon her and those that had given her false reports of the dwindling rations. The Guru said, “O mother, the Gurus kitchen will never be empty, nor my Khalsa’s so long as it is meant to serve others”(299). And, he forgave those who were responsible for this misdemeanor.

Besides, a feeling of humanitarianism is reflected in Guru’s expression. Guru Gobind Singh says that eating vegetarian or non-vegetarian is not the matter of God but it is devotion to God that matters. The Guru said that “I eat whatever comes to me from God. I eat not for the taste of the palate, but to keep myself a fit and a worthy instrument of God’s mission. Men quarrel over diet, dress and ritual and over caste, community and creed, and have thus torn man from man. My mission is to restore mankind to a single brotherhood” (300). Guru further says that “By Thy power we eat, drink, clothe ourselves”(Singh 16). These lines are indicative of the fact that the voice of Guru is universal and propagates brotherhood, equality and tolerance.

Guru’s love for nature is also reflected when one notices a *Baaj* (a bird) sitting on the left arm of Guru Gobind Singh. This bird is a symbol of cleverness and awareness of Guru who has always been conscious of what is likely to be happened around him. It is also a source of information for Guru in any time. Secondly, it shows Guru’s affection for bird, for *Baaj* is part and parcel of nature representing “care and nurture Mother Earth” (Porselvi 155)and never spares snakes. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh too never spares poisonous snakes like Aurengzeb and other cruel enemies. Thirdly, *Baaj* is believed have flown above the clouds in order to avoid

rain. Likewise Guru Gobind Singh too succeeds in overcoming all the difficulties he faced during his course of time.

The voice of Guru Gobind Singh is the mirror image of those who have a sense of protest against the tyranny of Muslims. In a discussion or letter he refuses to listen to the Emperor and says "I am fighting for a cause not for myself. I have sacrificed my sons, my father and my mother for this cause. And now you come to ask me to withdraw from the fight to save my person? This will never be. Whosoever wants to live in ignoble peace may compromise with tyranny. I would not, till I have breath in me, nor one who will choose to follow me" (312). Thus, Guru's commitment for fighting reflects that he has been a great patriot and raised his voice against the suppression of any kind. It was the voice of the repressive of minority who are now unable to bear the suppression of Mughals.

To conclude, one can say that voices of Sikh Gurus are universal containing invaluable messages to the new generation. Since the time of Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh one can hear inner moral voices teaching us spirituality and making us modest in a magnificent way. As earlier discussed, Guru Nanak's teachings were based on secularism and preached that "anyone can be born anywhere and follow any form of worship. We don't find fault. We don't consider ourselves superior to Hindus or Muslims. They are equally good" (Kabir 1349). Such teachings are very helpful in making our nation (India) great and united during the turmoil caused by communalism. So in this context, the role of Guru Nanak Dev has been constructive and progressive. On the other hand, Guru Gobind Singh gave a new secular hope and spiritual dynamism to the people. The Guru created not merely a community of warrior but men, who would, even during war-time, never forsake God, and whose victories would be for the sake of Dharma, not for self-glory or greed. This is why Guru Gobind Singh fought and won many battles, he never claimed the fruits thereof. A democratic spirit was also infused in Khaalsabrotherhood in which the highest was equal to the lowest, where men and women are given equal opportunities. He believes in sacrifices and crushes the enemy powerfully. It is reflected that whereas Guru Nanak gave meaning to life, Guru Gobind Singh invested death with a new purpose. Last but not least, in order to avoid biasness, Guru Gobind Singh avows that *Guru Granth Sahib* which contains voices of Gurus, will be the spiritual Guru of Sikh community in near future. So the voices of Gurus envisage respect for women, love for nature, and appreciation for grand culture of Sikh community leaving a message of spirituality for the coming generation.

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