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IDOL WORSHIP AND NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY*

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The Public will believe anything, so long as it is not founded on truth.
Edith Sitwell (1887-1964)

I never cease being dumbfounded by the unbelievable things people believe.
Leo Rosten (1908-1997)

The above quotes of these scholars are based on the inherited behaviors of humanity, which was first noticed by the Sikh Gurus during the 15th to 17th centuries. Now Dr Sidhu has explained the above phenomenon in his paper although this weakness of humanity has been justified by some as follows:

“The next real question is, as asked by Jit Chandan: “Is idol worship bad or wrong?” He says “Not necessarily... Hindus... do not consider these idols as God but... manifestations of God.” [3] In other words, what is wrong with idol worship, especially given that one knows that the sculpted idol per se is powerless but that it is just a representation of the Divine? It cannot be denied that most people need some kind of point-of-focus or mental image in order to pray. The Swami cannot be too far off the mark, if at all, when he says “A symbol is absolutely indispensable for fixing the mind. The mind wants a prop to lean upon. It cannot have a conception of the Absolute in the initial stages. Without the help of some external aid, in the initial stages, the mind cannot be centralized. In the beginning, concentration or meditation is not possible without a symbol.” [13] Again this is not quite relevant to the intent of this paper which sets out to examine whether the professed anti-idol-worship stance is satisfied by the practices of Sikhs generally, and must therefore be left for another time.”

We are supplementing Dr Sidhu’s discussion on idol worship according to Nanakian Philosophy:

1. The first principle of Nanakian Philosophy is that God will not manifest Itself into any particular thing since God is manifested in the whole Universe. Similarly, God cannot be constructed by any human being into any form. Guru Nanak explains it as follows [2]:

God neither can be structured nor can be created.
It came into being of Its Own.
Those, who have served God, attained honor.
Nanak says:
Let us sing (understand) the wisdom (philosophy) of That,
Who is a treasure of wisdom... 5.
AGGS, Jap 5, p 2 [1].

Thus, Guru Nanak makes it clear that “God neither can be structured nor can be created”.
Nanak also says “Those, who have served God, attained honor”.

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Seva performed with ego also is useless:

* It is a supplementary article to that of Dr SS Sidhu on Idol Worship)
What is a seva (service) to the Guru?

Service to God is to comprehend the philosophy of the Guru which teaches getting rid of ego and conducting good deeds is equal to meditation, austerities and reading of Purans. Guru Nanak explains to the Jogi as follows:

Getting rid of one’s ego and doing good deeds is equal to all one’s meditations, austerities and reading of Puranas."  

The service to the Guru is to comprehend the philosophy (in the Sabd).

Thus the service (seva) to God is rendered by comprehending the philosophy embodied in the Sabd.

Clearly Nanak says that God cannot be structured or created, that one can gain honor by serving (seva) to God and that such seva is by comprehending the philosophy contained in the Sabd. The “net” result of this discussion is that God does not manifest Itself in idols.

Guru Nanak further expounds on seva:

The Hindus have completely forgotten the right way; They are going the wrong way. They are worshipping idols as Naard instructed them. They are blind and mute - the blindest of the blind. They don’t know that when those stones themselves sink Then how could these stones help them to swim across.

3. Bhagat Kabir who has been living in Benaras (Varanasi) among the idol worshipers gives his views that idol cannot be the manifestation of God:  

The sculptor carves the stone and fashions it into an idol by placing his feet upon its chest.  

If this idol is the manifestation of God then it would devour the sculptor for this blasphemous act.

4. Finally Guru Nanak quotes a very good example of a Pundit, who worships idol(s) of God/gods. In spite of regular and proper worshiping of idol still he goes to people to beg for food and clothes since the idol cannot give any food or clothes:

Pundit keeps the idol(s) of God and of other gods in his home. He washes them and then worships them. He offers saffron, sandal and flowers.

(Continued on page 6)
I am posing the above question because there has always been tension within every religion of the world right from the very beginning. Matters of authority are contentious, because it is often unclear who speaks for a religion: Who is to say what the authentic beliefs are? Who is to say what interpretation is valid and which not? Is a religion what its leaders say it is or is it what the people practice or is it what its Holy Scripture(s) says?

The answer to the above questions lies in the following principle of Nanakian Philosophy:

\[ \text{As long as one lives in this world one must listen to others and express oneself to the others (to find the truth).} \]

AGGS, M 1, p 661.

That is why we have gathered here to deliberate on this very important and sensitive issue, *Ethical Concerns of the World Religions*.

Finally, I must congratulate Prof. Balwant Singh Dhillon and the organizers of this conference for picking up this very important and sensitive issue, *Ethical Concerns of the World Religions*.

With these few words I declare the Conference open and wish all success to the organizers and the participants for serious deliberation and hope they will come up with definite recommendations of ethics for their respective religion for the present. However, it is a continuous process since some ethics would change with time and new ethics are to be formulated for new issues.

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REFERENCES