

CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION IN GURU NANAK'S PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The mystery of life and death has puzzled man since his stepping onto the threshold of 'Homo sapiens' or perhaps even before. The endeavor to solve this puzzle provided a fertile ground for the growth of several philosophies. All major religions have belief in some sort of life after death. Hinduism believes in the doctrine of karma which leads to the doctrine of reincarnation or transmigration of souls. The concept was also adopted by Buddhism and Jainism. Followers of the present day western religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam do not believe in reincarnation as such but hold that the dead will be raised on the Day of Judgment (Resurrection). This paper deals with the unique concept of reincarnation and/or transmigration according to the philosophy of Guru Nanak embodied in his Bani.

INTRODUCTION

Life and death are like two poles of a magnet and death is an inevitable consequence of birth. ਜੇ ਜਨਮੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਸਰਪਰ ਮਰਣਾ ਕਿਰਤੁ ਪਇਆ ਸਿਰਿ ਸਾਰਾ ਹੇ ॥ (AGGS, M 1, p. 1032) [1].

Probably there is no fear more horrible than the fear of death. Our great grand elders helped by their faculties of cognition and imagination, sought for elixirs and potions for immortality. As a solution to the mystery of life and death, the thinkers surmised the existence of an immortal soul and continuity of life after death. Beliefs about evil spirits, ghosts, miracles, hell, heaven, and purgatory also emerged along with. Eastern traditions held the diversity of life (plant, animal or human) as the result of one's deeds; good actions led to be born as a human in a rich class and bad actions leading to a birth in a toiling caste or as an animal or plant, till one is released from this cycle by attaining *Moksha*. Almost all major traditions believe in the continuity of life after death in some form, though under opposing tenets, like resurrection, transmigration or reincarnation.

Resurrection implies the act of rising from the dead or returning to life; the rising again of the dead at the Last Judgment [4]. (Panjabi: ਪੁਨਰ ਉਥਾਨ) Reincarnation is believed to occur when the soul or spirit, after death of the body, comes back to life in a new born baby. Panjabi words for Rebirth and reincarnation are ਪੁਨਰ ਜਨਮ, ਪੁਨਰ ਅਵਤਾਰ. Modern theosophists have considered rebirth under three categories:



The doctrine of pre-existence (ਪੂਰਵ ਅਸਤਿਤਵ): No new soul is created at the birth of a baby. A pre-existing soul enters the body for the first time. It will not be born as another body again.

Transmigration or Metempsychosis (ਤਨਾਸੁਖ, ਆਵਾ ਰਾਮਨ): Before taking birth as a human, the soul has passed through many births as animal bird or plant etc. and after death will pass through many such generations before being born as a human again.

Reincarnation (ਪੁਨਰ ਭਵ): The human soul has taken birth as a male or female before but never as an animal, bird or a plant. And after leaving the present body shall continue to be born as a male or female till its release from the cycle. [3, p-108]

For the purposes of this article however, the term Reincarnation is used to cover all categories of rebirth.

Ancient Beliefs: Many early pagan religions held some idea of resurrection, but the range of their conceptions is obscured by lack of original literature. Egyptians believed in transmigration according to Greek historian Herodotus (Book 2,-53, 81, 123). Wrote Herodotus: “The Egyptians are also the first who reported the doctrine that the soul of man is immortal and that when the body dies the soul enters into another creature which chances then to be coming to birth. Ancient Jews, Christians and Muslims also believed in it in one form or the other, hold modern theosophists. Greek theosophists also preached this belief [3]. Reincarnation is to be found in practically every known religion including all the great religions, even Christianity should not be surprising [6].

Modern Religions and Reincarnation:

Many religious skeptics including some progressive Christians, Atheists and Agnostics note that almost every religion teaches specific beliefs about life after death. But religions seem in almost total conflict with each other [16].

Judaism: The notion of reincarnation, while held as a mystical belief by some, is not an essential tenet of traditional Judaism. It is not mentioned in traditional classical sources such as the *Tanakh* ("Hebrew Bible"), the classical rabbinic works (Mishnah and Talmud), or Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith. However, books of Kabbalah — Jewish mysticism — teach a belief in *Gilkul-neshamat* (transmigration of souls) and hence the belief is universal in Hasidic Judaism (a branch of Orthodox Judaism that promotes spirituality of Jewish mysticism) which regards the Kabbalah as sacred and authoritative.” [7]. Judaism believes in an afterlife which is called *Olam Ha-Ba* (The World to come). Resurrection and reincarnation are within the range of traditional Jewish belief. Temporary (but not eternal) punishment after death is within traditional belief [14].

Christianity: The church teaches that when a person dies the soul leaves the body and is immediately evaluated in a particular judgment. Those whose love for God has been perfected in this life are immediately taken to heaven. If they have committed mortal sin which has not been forgiven or have rejected God they are taken to hell. If a person dies in a state of grace but loves God imperfectly then their souls enter Purgatory where they suffer for a time to cleanse their imperfections. However if their friends or family offer masses, prayers or other acts of piety and devotion their stay in Purgatory will be shortened. Later when Jesus returns to earth in the ‘second coming’ he will conduct the final judgment. The beliefs of Eastern Orthodox Churches are closely parallel to Roman Catholic Church. However they have no formal belief about the existence of the Purgatory [16].

Islam: Rebirth is not taught in the Islamic scriptures, the Koran; and Muslims generally disavow the notion of reincarnation. However, the mystical wings of Islam, the Sufis, who incorporate considerable oriental teaching and practice into their Muslim faith, have been believers in reincarnation since their inception [5]. Muslims believe that the present life is a trial in preparation for the next realm of existence. God states in the Quran that on the day of occurrence [i.e. Resurrection] you will be exhibited for judgment so as for he who is given his record in his right hand will be in a pleasant life - In an elevated Garden, Its [fruit] to be picked hanging near. Eat and drink in satisfaction for what you put forth. But as for he who is given his record in his left hand, God will say “Seize him and shackle him. Then into Hellfire drive him. Then into a chain whose length is seventy cubits insert him.” Indeed, he did not use to believe in God, the Most Great (Quran, 69:13-33) [17].

Hinduism: The people of India by tradition have believed in metempsychosis or transmigration of soul. The goal of all human beings is to attain *moksha*— liberation from the endless cycle of births and rebirths. When a person attains *moksha*, he or she is believed to enter into a state where one's *atman* becomes one with *Brahman* [13]. But the belief in reincarnation is not very old. There is no trace of reincarnation in the *Samhitas or Brahmanas* according to R.C. Zaehner, the well-known oriental scholar from Oxford University. In the Rig Veda, the soul of the dead is carried aloft by the fire-god, Agni to the heavenly worlds. It is only in the Upanishads that we first meet with this doctrine which was to become central to all Hindu thought. Reincarnation's first complete mention is found in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* [5]. This topic is developed in greater detail in the Puranas so that specific destinies are worked out according to each kind of "sin" one commits. Thus the makers of bad karma, having experienced the tortures of hell, are reborn with the residues of their sins, in these stated forms (Garuda Purana 5). Similar specific punishments are stated in *The Laws of Manu* (69-54 ,12) .[11]

The idea of reincarnation was fully developed in *The Bhagwad Gita*: As a person gives up old and worn out garments and accepts new apparel, similarly the embodied soul gives up old and worn out bodies and accepts new bodies. (Chapter 2, verse 22). Again for one who has taken birth, death is certain and for one who has died, birth is certain (Chapter 2, verse 27). The soul never takes birth and never dies at any time nor does it come into being again when the body is created. The soul is birth less, eternal, imperishable and timeless and is never terminated when the body is terminated (Chapter 2, verse 20) [12].

Buddhism was rather circumspect about reincarnation, as stated in the *Majjhima Nikaya*: I have not elucidated that the world is eternal, and I have not elucidated that the world is not eternal. I have not elucidated that the saint exists after death, I have not elucidated that the saint does not exist after death. I have not elucidated that the saint both exists and does not exist after death [5].

Jainism: Depending on one's karma and level of spiritual development, death may mean being reborn in another physical appearance in the earthly realm, suffering punishment in one of eight hells or joining other liberated souls in the highest level of heaven. Unlike hell imagery in most other systems, the eight hells of Jainism become progressively colder as they go down. Suffering in these hells is not eternal. Once a soul has been severely punished, he or she is reborn into another form. For Jains, the purpose of life is to attain *moksa*, or release, from the cycle of rebirth [18].

The question of Reincarnation is linked to the concepts of Creation of the universe, origin of life, good and bad deeds, and their resolution. It is worth noting here that though most religions believe in one Creator and claim to have a direct communion with Him still they hold widely divergent beliefs.

GURU NANAK'S PHILOSOPHY

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) the founder of Sikh religion introduced a unique tradition in the history of religions. The work started by Guru Nanak was continued and strengthened by later Gurus ascending to the House of Nanak and using his pen name. Guru Nanak's God is the One and the Only, One Supreme Being, the Eternal, the Creator and All-pervading, without Fear and Enmity, Not-incarnated and Enlightener. In Guru Nanak's philosophy: Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living. ਸਚੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

(AGGS, M1, p. 62). The Guru propagated the unique ideas of equality of all humans, shunning rituals, abandoning superstitions, living by honest earnings, sharing and providing support. The Guru is immersed in the love for the Lord and has no value either for worldly wealth or for the traditionally coveted salvation. "My mind seeks love of Your Lotus Feet" says Guru Arjan. ਰਾਜੁ ਨ ਚਾਹਉ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਚਾਹਉ ਮਨਿ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਚਰਨ ਕਮਲਾਰੇ (AGGS, M 5, p. 534). Using a language close to the masses, the Guru gave new meanings to many prevalent mythological concepts. The AGGS provides illuminated insight into the mystery of Creation, evolution of life, concepts of soul, reality of death and reincarnation.

Origin of life- Consciousness

In Guru Nanak's system the Creator created itself and fashioned the Creation out of itself, and that creation is evolving under the Divine Laws:

ਆਪੀਨ੍ਹਰੈ ਆਪੁ ਸਾਜਿਓ ਆਪੀਨ੍ਹਰੈ ਰਚਿਓ ਨਾਉ ॥

ਦੁਯੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਸਾਜੀਐ ਕਰਿ ਆਸਣੁ ਡਿਠੇ ਚਾਉ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p. 463.

He Himself created Himself; He Himself assumed his Name; secondly He fashioned the Creation; seated within the Creation He beholds it with delight [19].

From the same Jot (ਜੋਤ) or Primal Energy (the nearest English equivalent) originates life, explains the third successor to the House of Nanak, Guru Amardas:

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥

ਮਨ ਹਰਿ ਜੀ ਤੇਰੈ ਨਾਲਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮਤੀ ਰੰਗੁ ਮਾਣੁ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 441.

O my mind, the Universal light is within you, recognize your roots-the source of your origin-the Primordial Light-Energy. [2]

Evolution to the stage of 'Man'

Guru Arjan has described the evolution of life from lifeless matter to the present state of man; though the sequence of evolution is not the same as explained in the Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Many interpreters of Gurbani including most Sikh scholars mistakenly consider this hymn as an example of Guru's belief in the transmigration of soul. But in fact the Guru says, 'you passed through many generations as rock, vegetation, animals and now when after a long journey you are a human, it is time for you to serve humanity by abandoning pride falsehood and ego':

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਭਏ ਕੀਟ ਪਤੰਗਾ ॥

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਗਜ ਮੀਨ ਕੁਰੰਗਾ ॥

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਪੰਖੀ ਸਰਪ ਹੋਇਓ ॥

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਹੈਵਰ ਬ੍ਰਿਖ ਜੋਇਓ ॥

ਮਿਲੁ ਜਗਦੀਸ ਮਿਲਨ ਕੀ ਬਚੀਆ ॥

ਚਿਰੰਕਾਲ ਇਹ ਦੇਹ ਸੰਜਰੀਆ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਸੈਲ ਗਿਰਿ ਕਰਿਆ ॥

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਗਰਭ ਹਿਰਿ ਖਰਿਆ ॥

ਕਈ ਜਨਮ ਸਾਖ ਕਰਿ ਉਪਾਇਆ ॥

ਲਖ ਚਉਰਾਸੀਹ ਜੋਨਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਇਆ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p. 176.

You passed through many generations as (microorganisms) a worm and an insect. You passed through many generations as an elephant, a fish and a deer. You passed through many generations as a bird and

a snake. You passed through many generations as a yoked ox and a horse. 1. Now is the time to comprehend the God. Since after so very long time, this human body was evolved. 1. Pause.

You passed through many generations as rocks and mountains. Your many generations were aborted in the womb. You passed through many generations as branches and leaves (vegetative states). You (man) passed through 8.4 million (tentative mythical figure) of generations of evolution. [2, p-296].

How body is constituted

There are many a hymns in Gurbani speaking about the constitution of the body from elements. The body is a mysterious combination of the elements, sense organs and an intellect. In it the primordial self is the one who utters and the one who listens. One who contemplates this is truly wise. The body is but the dust, speech but the wind, who then ever dies? Gurbani equates death to the death of moral values in man. The death is of strife, of ego in the mind. The undying principle within, does not die:

ਪਉਣੈ ਪਾਣੀ ਅਗਨੀ ਕਾ ਮੇਲੁ ॥

ਚੰਚਲ ਚਪਲ ਬੁਧਿ ਕਾ ਖੇਲੁ ॥

ਨਉ ਦਰਵਾਜੇ ਦਸਵਾ ਦੁਆਰੁ ॥

ਬੁਝੁ ਰੇ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਏਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

ਕਥਤਾ ਬਕਤਾ ਸੁਨਤਾ ਸੋਈ ॥

ਆਪੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ਸੁ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਹੋਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਦੇਹੀ ਮਾਟੀ ਬੋਲੈ ਪਉਣੁ ॥ ਬੁਝੁ ਰੇ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਮੁਆ ਹੈ ਕਉਣੁ ॥

ਮੂਈ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਬਾਦੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ॥ ਓਹੁ ਨ ਮੁਆ ਜੇ ਦੇਖਣਹਾਰੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 152.

The human body is made out of a combination of air, water and energy etc, elements along with a brain containing a brilliant and restless intellect. It has nine doors (openings), and then there is the Tenth without the opening i.e. the brain. Reflect upon this and understand it, O wise one. This (brain) is the One, who speaks, teaches and listens. One who contemplates this is truly wise. 1. Pause. The body is dust; the wind speaks through it. Understand, O wise one, who has died. Awareness, conflict and ego have died but the One who sees (the creative principle) does not die.

Guru Arjan, in another hymn, explains that at death the constituents of the body mingle with the earth from where it came. Air merges with air and energy with energy. Life has gone back to its elemental form. Who has died? In fact the person who was, that person has gone back to its elemental form. The Guru says: I have no doubt that nobody dies and nobody is reborn or dies.

ਪਵਨੈ ਮਹਿ ਪਵਨੁ ਸਮਾਇਆ ॥

ਜੋਤੀ ਮਹਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਰਲਿ ਜਾਇਆ ॥

ਮਾਟੀ ਮਾਟੀ ਹੋਈ ਏਕ ॥

ਰੇਵਨਹਾਰੇ ਕੀ ਕਵਨ ਟੇਕ ॥

ਕਉਨੁ ਮੁਆ ਰੇ ਕਉਨੁ ਮੁਆ ॥

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਮਿਲਿ ਕਰਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰਾ ਇਹੁ ਤਉ ਚਲਤੁ ਭਇਆ ॥
ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰਿ ਭਰਮੁ ਚੁਕਾਇਆ ॥

ਨਾ ਕੋਈ ਮਰੈ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇਆ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p. 885.

Then air (gases) merge into the air. The energy is amalgamated with energy.

The minerals (of the body) become part of the soil. Who will take care of those who are lamenting since the lamenting person will also be dying?

Who has died? Oh spiritually wise men! Sit together and comprehend that in fact (a person who came and now) that person has gone (back to its elemental form (Pause) Nanak says: The Guru has dispelled my superstition that in fact no one dies and no one is born or dies. It is just the change of matter from one form to another.

Where will one 'Go'?

Guru Nanak in the following hymn raises the question: Where did we originate and where will we go after death? He himself provides the answer in the latter part. With intuitive ease (under the Laws of Nature) one comes and with intuitive ease (same Laws of Nature) one departs. We originate from the Primal Energy and into the Primal Energy we are absorbed.

ਜਾਤੇ ਜਾਇ ਕਹਾ ਤੇ ਆਵੈ ॥

ਕਹ ਉਪਜੈ ਕਹ ਜਾਇ ਸਮਾਵੈ ॥ ਕਿਉ ਬਾਧਿਓ ਕਿਉ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

ਕਿਉ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਵੈ ॥ ਨਾਮੁ ਰਿਦੈ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਮੁਖਿ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

ਨਰਹਰ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਰਹਰ ਨਿਹਕਾਮੁ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਸਹਜੇ ਆਵੈ ਸਹਜੇ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਮਨ ਤੇ ਉਪਜੈ ਮਨ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਇ ॥

AGGS, M1. P.152.

How can we know where we came from? Where did we originate, and where will we go and merge?

How are we bound, and how do we obtain liberation?

How do we merge with intuitive ease into the Eternal, indestructible entity?

With the Naam in the heart and the Ambrosial Naam on our lips, through the Name of the Lord, we rise above desire, like the Lord. Pause.

With intuitive ease (under the Laws of Nature) we come, and with intuitive ease (under the Laws of Nature) we depart. From the Primal Energy we originate, and into the Primal Energy we are absorbed.

Again Guru Nanak says: He is the subtle and the manifest. Nothing is born and nothing dies. In coming and going one simply obeys the law of nature.

ਜਬ ਦੇਖਉ ਤਬ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਮੂਲੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੇ ਸੂਖਮੁ ਸੋਈ ਅਸਬੂਲੁ ॥

ਨਹ ਕਿਛੁ ਜਨਮੈ ਨਹ ਕਿਛੁ ਮਰੈ ॥

ਆਪਨ ਚਲਿਤੁ ਆਪ ਹੀ ਕਰੈ ॥

ਆਵਨੁ ਜਾਵਨੁ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਅਨਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ॥

ਆਗਿਆਕਾਰੀ ਧਾਰੀ ਸਭ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p. 281.

Wherever I look, there I see Him, at the root of all things. O Nanak, He is the subtle, and He is also the manifest.

Nothing is born, and nothing dies. He Himself stages His own drama

Coming and going, seen and unseen the entire world is obedient to His Will.

Belief about Soul

Philosophers of different religions believe in the existence of soul although they differ as to its true nature and mode of functioning. For example, some accept soul only in humans, while for others all living beings (and even plants) live by virtue of soul [10]. Many theologians consider consciousness as soul. They think that it is the soul that controls all the activities of the body. As soon as the soul, which is considered as indestructible, leaves the body, thereafter the person dies [2, p-303].

In Guru Nanak's philosophy soul is no separate entity. It is the One Universal Light that is shining in every one:

ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਇ ॥

ਤਿਸ ਕੈ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 663.

The divine light is within everyone; You are that light. Yours is that light that shines in everyone.

And the same creative principle is pervading inside and out.

ਆਤਮ ਮਹਿ ਰਾਮੁ ਰਾਮ ਮਹਿ ਆਤਮੁ ਚੀਨਸਿ ਗੁਰ ਬੀਚਾਰਾ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 1153.

The lord is in the soul, and the soul is in the Lord. (They are no different) This is realized through the Guru's teachings.

Guru Arjan has described soul as ਪੰਚ ਭੂ ਆਤਮਾ the essence of the body (five elements- the body is made of) for which the word mind is used in modern day scientific

terminology. And the Guru says it does not go through rebirth.

ਕੋਮਲ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਭ ਕਉ ਸੰਤੋਖੈ ॥

ਪੰਚ ਭੂ ਆਤਮਾ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਰਸਿ ਪੋਖੈ ॥

ਗੁਰ ਪੂਰੇ ਤੇ ਏਹ ਨਿਹਚਉ ਪਾਈਐ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਮ ਰਮਤ ਫਿਰਿ ਜੋਨਿ ਨ ਆਈਐ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p. 299.

The Sweet Words of His Bani soothe everyone. The soul, the subtle essence of the five elements, cherishes the Nectar of the Naam, the Name of the Lord. This faith is obtained from the Perfect Guru. O Nanak, dwelling upon the Lord, you shall not enter the womb of reincarnation again [19].

Doctrine of Karma

Guru Nanak had retained the doctrine of Karma to the extent that one reaps the fruit of one's deeds but he emphasized that it is possible only in this life. Guru Nanak rejected the outcome of karma philosophy namely the Transmigration of souls and the Caste System.

ਬੇਦੁ ਪੁਕਾਰੇ ਪੁੰਨੁ ਪਾਪੁ ਸੁਰਗ ਨਰਕ ਕਾ ਬੀਉ ॥

ਜੇ ਬੀਜੈ ਸੇ ਉਗਵੈ ਖਾਂਦਾ ਜਾਣੈ ਜੀਉ ॥

ਗਿਆਨੁ ਸਲਾਹੇ ਵਡਾ ਕਰਿ ਸਚੇ ਸਚਾ ਨਾਉ ॥

ਸਚੁ ਬੀਜੈ ਸਚੁ ਉਗਵੈ ਦਰਗਹ ਪਾਈਐ ਥਾਉ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 1243.

The Vedas proclaim that vice and virtues are the seeds of heaven and hell.

Whatever is planted shall grow. The person eats the fruits of its actions, and understands.

Whoever praises spiritual wisdom as great becomes truthful in the True Name.

When Truth is planted, Truth grows. In the Court of the Lord, you shall find your place of honor.

According to Guru Nanak one gets the good or bad results of actions in this life. There is no other world, after death, where one can be benefited or punished for the actions in this life:

ਮਤੁ ਕੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਜਾਇ ਅਗੈ ਪਾਇਸੀ ॥

ਜੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇ ਤੇਹਾ ਹੋਇਸੀ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 730.

Do not think that you will automatically find a place of rest hereafter. According to the actions one has committed, so does the mortal become.

Hukam and Nada

Juxtaposed to the doctrine of *Karma* is the concept of *Hukam and Nadar* (lit. glance of Grace). *Hukm* (lit. order, command), i.e. the Divine will, is an original

concept introduced by Guru Nanak. It is synonymous with the Divine himself. *Hukm* may be interpreted as Divine Law which subsumes all laws of Nature. *Nader* signifies God's compassion, mercy or grace [9]. The Guru indeed emphasizes that the door is not closed even to the sinner. The sinner can also hope to be raised for it is not beyond the grace of the lord.

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਭਾਵੈ ਤਾ ਪਤਿਤ ਉਧਾਰੈ ॥

ਆਪਿ ਕਰੈ ਆਪਨ ਬੀਚਾਰੈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 277.

If it pleases God even sinners are saved. He Himself acts and He himself considers.

And why the Guru emphasizes remembering the attributes of the ideal, he explains in the following verse. By remembering those attributes one becomes like that. By contemplating the one with compassion, one develops compassion.

ਜੈਸਾ ਸੇਵੈ ਤੈਸੇ ਹੋਇ ॥ AGGS, M 1, p. 23.

They become just like the One they serve.

Ghosts, Evil Spirits

Gurbani does not hold belief in the existence of ghosts, evil spirits and the like. In Gurbani ghosts are those who do not realize the Name of the lord and they are (so to say) in the Dark Age; while those who remember the Name are like supreme soul-swans living in the Golden age. Guru Nanak has used the symbols from common usage and filled them with entirely new meanings:

ਕਲਿ ਮਹਿ ਪ੍ਰੇਤ ਜਿਨ੍ਹੜੀ ਰਾਮੁ ਨ ਪਛਾਤਾ ਸਤਜੁਗਿ ਪਰਮ ਹੰਸ ਬੀਚਾਰੀ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p. 1131.

Those who do not realize the Lord are goblins in the Dark Age of Kali Yuga. They are the supreme soul-swans of the Golden Age of Sat Yuga, who contemplated the Lord.

In Gurbani, people who are always busy making countless efforts for gathering wealth for the family but have no loving devotion for the Lord (here, the common fellow beings) are mere ghosts:

ਕੁਟੰਬ ਜਤਨ ਕਰਣੈ ਮਾਇਆ ਅਨੇਕ ਉਦਮਹ ॥

ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਭਾਵ ਹੀਣੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਬਿਸਰਤ ਤੇ ਪ੍ਰੇਤਤਹ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p.706.

For his family, he works very hard; for the sake of Maya (wealth), he makes countless efforts. But without loving devotional worship of the Lord, O Nanak, he forgets God, and then, he is a mere ghost.

Further the Guru has called excessive attachment to worldly pleasures, sexual desires, anger and egotism as

demons. Because of them the mortals hasten towards death.

ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹੁ ਪਰੇਤੁ ਹੈ ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਾ ॥

ਏਹ ਜਮ ਕੀ ਸਿਰਕਾਰ ਹੈ ਏਨ੍ਹਾ ਉਪਰਿ ਜਮ ਕਾ ਡੰਡੁ ਕਰਾਰਾ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p. 513.

Emotional attachment to Maya, sexual desire, anger and egotism are demons.

Because of them, mortals are subject to death; above their heads hangs the heavy club of the Messenger of Death.

But the one who follows the teachings of the Guru and moulds his life according to the philosophy of the Guru becomes a noble man leaving behind the life of lust and degradation. Thus the ghost is transformed to an angel:

ਪਰੇਤਹੁ ਕੀਤੇਨੁ ਦੇਵਤਾ ਤਿਨਿ ਕਰਵੈਹਾਰੇ ॥

ਸਭੇ ਸਿਖ ਉਬਾਰਿਅਨੁ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਕਾਜ ਸਵਾਰੇ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p. 323.

The ghost has been transformed into an angel by the Creator Lord.

God has emancipated all the Sikhs and resolved their affairs.

Heaven and Hell

The concept of heaven and hell is widely accepted in almost every religion, faith and cult. Almost every religion claims that only the followers of their faith can go to heaven. Just having a belief in the faith and accepting its prophet as the savior will lead to heaven. For atheists and scientists there is no heaven and hell. In Nanakian Philosophy heaven and hell are not known. One is born and dies under the Laws of Nature. The benefit/punishment of good and bad deeds is rewarded in this life not in any other life in any other world [2, p-321]. In the AGGS, terms for heaven and hell like ਸੁਰਗ

ਨਰਕ, ਭਿਸਤ ਦੇਜਕ, etc. have been used many times. But at most places the use of heaven and hell is purely metaphoric. Non-Sikh and even some Sikh scholars have interpreted the two terms, many a time, under the influence of Vedantic or Western Traditions, considering them as physical entities.

Guru Arjan emphasized in the verse below that living without (realizing the presence of) God is like living in hell. He says: My mind is fixated upon the lotus feet of the lord (and I feel like living in heaven); and living without the company of the Lord is just like being in hell.

ਹਰਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਜੇ ਰਹਣਾ ਨਰਕੁ ਸੇ ਸਹਣਾ ਚਰਨ ਕਮਲ ਮਨੁ ਬੋਧਿਆ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1122.

Those who are without the Lord suffer in hell; my mind

is pierced through with the Lord's Feet .

In Guru Nanak's philosophy heaven and hell are the two states of mind. Explaining his concept of heaven and hell, in the verse below, Guru Nanak has used imagery from the daily life to make his meaning more explicit. Guru Nanak preaches that doing good deeds, realizing the presence of the creator Lord, and adherence to truth as a way of life, will lead one to understand what is heaven and what is hell.

ਅਮਲੁ ਕਰਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਬੀਜੁ ਸਬਦੇ ਕਰਿ ਸਚ ਕੀ ਆਬ ਨਿਤ ਦੇਹਿ ਪਾਈ
॥

ਹੋਇ ਕਿਰਸਾਣੁ ਈਮਾਨੁ ਜੰਮਾਇ ਲੈ ਭਿਸਤੁ ਦੇਜਕੁ ਮੂੜੇ ਏਵ ਜਾਈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p.24.

Make good deeds the soil, and let the Word of the Sabd be the seed; irrigate it continually with the water of Truth. Become such a farmer, and faith will sprout. This brings knowledge of heaven and hell.

For Guru Arjan, "heaven is wherever you keep me". The Guru is in perfect state of contentment and equipoise. In Guru Nanak's system it is the acceptance of divine will (ਰਜਾ) under the universal Law of Nature (ਰੁਕਮ) that is the real heaven, and not any physical entity where all sorts of bodily desires are gratified.

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਤੁਮ ਤੇ ਲਹਣਾ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਗਰਣਾ ॥

ਜੇ ਤੂੰ ਦੇਹਿ ਸੇਈ ਸੁਖੁ ਸਹਣਾ ॥

ਜਿਥੈ ਰਖਹਿ ਬੈਰੁੰਠੁ ਤਿਥਾਈ ਤੂੰ ਸਭਨਾ ਕੇ ਪ੍ਰਤਿਪਾਲਾ ਜੀਉ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 106.

O God, from You I receive; You are my decoration. Whatever You give me, brings me happiness. Wherever You keep me, is heaven. You are the Cherisher of all.

Similarly, in Guru Nanak's philosophy hell is where despite millions of entertainments the Lord's Name does not come to mind. Such a home is like wilderness in the depths of hell.

ਕਉਤਕ ਕੇਡ ਤਮਾਸਿਆ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵਸੁ ਨਾਉ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਕੇੜੀ ਨਰਕ ਬਰਾਬਰੇ ਉਜੜੁ ਸੇਈ ਥਾਉ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 707.

In the midst of millions of games and entertainments, the Lord's Name does not come to their minds. O Nanak, their home is like a wilderness, in the depths of hell.

Interpreting Gurbani

Sikhism has often been treated as an offshoot of Hinduism and sometimes as a syncretism of Hinduism and Islam by foreign writers. Others have tried to understand it in the light of Vedic and Vedantic philosophies. For historical reasons preaching of Gurbani fell on the shoulders of

Udasis and Nirmalas whose contribution in keeping *Sikhi* alive cannot be ignored but they lacked real training in its ethos. As a result, the originality of Gurbani thought and universality of its message have often remained obscure.

Gurbani is often interpreted too literally. It is written in poetic form. The language used is condensed and often at intellectual level of the person addressed. There is extensive use of figures of speech, allegories and mythological concepts which are mistakenly interpreted as Guru's belief in that concept.

There are many instances of wrongful interpretation of Gurbani under the influence of Vedic and Vedantic tradition. In the verse below, Guru Amardas, has stated that for such a long time (as though countless generations) was I astray from realization (of The Truth). Only the Creator knows (the whole truth). But even this is known when one is absorbed in the Eternal Principle. Where is the doubt?

O Nanak the element has mingled with the element; there is no rebirth or reincarnation.

ਇਤਨੇ ਜਨਮ ਭੂਲਿ ਪਰੇ ਸੇ ਜਾ ਪਾਇਆ ਤਾ ਭੂਲੇ ਨਾਹੀ ॥

ਜਾ ਕਾ ਕਾਰਜੁ ਸੇਈ ਪਰੁ ਜਾਣੈ ਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਸਮਾਹੀ ॥

ਤੇਰਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਤੂੰਹੈ ਹਰਿ ਆਪੇ ਭਰਮੁ ਕਹਾਹੀ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਤਤੁ ਤਤ ਸਿਉ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਪੁਨਰਪਿ ਜਨਮਿ ਨ ਆਹੀ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 162.

But the verse is traditionally translated as:

In countless incarnations, I went astray. Now that I have found You, I shall no longer wander. It is His work; those who are absorbed in the Word of the Guru's Shabad come to know it well. The Shabd is Yours; You are Yourself. Where is there any doubt? O Nanak, one whose essence is merged with the Lord's essence does not have to enter the cycle of reincarnation again. [19]

Some other words occurring in Gurbani e.g. ਜੇਨ, ਜੇਨਿ, ਜੇਨੀ, ਜੂਨਿ, ਜੂਨਾ, ਜੂਨੀ related to womb, is commonly translated in English as reincarnation.

ਕਰਿ ਅਨੁਗ੍ਰਹੁ ਪਤਿਤ ਪਾਵਨ ਬਹੁ ਜੇਨਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਤੇ ਹਾਰੀ ॥

ਬਿਨਵੰਤਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜੀਅ ਪ੍ਰਾਨ ਅਧਾਰੀ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 547.

While the verse is a plain expression of devotion to the lord, it has been traditionally translated as:

Show kindness to me, O Purifier of sinners; I am so tired of wandering through reincarnation. Prays Nanak, I am the slave of the Lord; God is the Support of my soul, and my breath of life [19].

We should recognize the pitfalls of English translations of ‘wandering through reincarnations.’ This is a literal and Brahmanical rendering of the hymn. Whereas when we substitute ‘wandering through reincarnations’ with ‘various evolutionary stages of life,’ the translation comes in sync with the Nanakian Philosophy. And that is the proper way to interpret and express the *Bani*. [9]
Guru Nanak’s philosophy is based on logic, reason, skepticism, awareness, reality, and other factors often associated with critical thinking. It is not based on faith; Guru Nanak urges us to use critical discerning intellect in every walk of life [9].

CONCLUSIONS

Birth and death is a universal phenomenon. All religions have but quite divergent beliefs about this mystery. All faiths believe in some form of life after death: Resurrection, Transmigration or Reincarnation. The problem of birth and death is interlinked with philosophies about Creation, results of one’s actions, reward for good and punishment for bad deeds, concept of soul, hell and heaven or release from the cycle of rebirths and death. For most religions belief in their particular prophet is a necessary permit to enter into their concept of heaven.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) has deliberated on these issues at length in the AAGS. His views have been strengthened by later Gurus succeeding to the House of Nanak, and other saints whose Bani is incorporated in the holy Granth. In Guru Nanak’s philosophy the Creator, The One and the Only, The Primal Truth, Itself evolved into the Creation and the process is going on according to the Divine Cosmic Law. Life is a manifestation of the Creative Principle - the primal energy and evolved out of the elements under the eternal Law. Life (consciousness) is the embodiment of the primal energy. One can understand this truth by contemplating one’s origin. Body has evolved through a sequence of events from the stage of mineral and rock, to plant, to animal and then to the highest stage i.e. human. And now when one has attained human life, it is time to serve humanity. The Guru exhorts us to abandon pride, falsehood and ego and to lead life truthfully.

Death is the cessation of the coordinated functioning of the body organs constituted by the basic elements out of the primal energy. After death the body’s elements mingle with the elements, the energy with energy but the Creative Principle does not die. In Nanak’s philosophy one gets the results of one’s actions in this very life. ਮਤੁ ਕੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਜਾਇ ਅਗੈ ਪਾਇਸੀ ॥ ਜੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇ ਤੇਹਾ ਹੋਇਸੀ ॥ (AGGS, M 1, p. 730). There is no other world after death where one can be benefited or punished for the actions in this life. For the Guru heaven is in obeying the Cosmic Law. ਜਿਥੈ

ਰਖਹਿ ਬੈਰੁੰਨੁ ਤਿਥਾਈ (AGGS, M5, p. 106) and ਹਰਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਜੇ ਰਹਣਾ ਨਰਕੁ ਸੇ ਸਹਣਾ (AGGS, M 5, p. 1122) living without the sweet memory of the Lord is hell.

Thus Gurbani does not believe in hell or heaven, reincarnation or caste system. From the primal energy we originate and into the primal energy we are absorbed. ‘The Guru has dispelled the superstition; In fact no one dies and nobody reincarnates.’ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰਿ ਭਰਮੁ ਚੁਕਾਇਆ ॥ ਨਾ ਕੋਈ ਮਰੈ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇਆ ॥(AGGS, M 5, p. 885).

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