

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 Himself 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]:
ਥਾਪਿਆ ਨ ਜਾਇ ਕੀਤਾ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਆਪੇ ਆਪਿ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਸੋਇ ॥
ਜਿਨਿ ਸੋਵਿਆ¹ ਤਿਨਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਮਾਨੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਗਾਵੀਐ ਗੁਣੀ ਨਿਪਾਨੁ ॥ ... ਪ
ਅਗਗਸ, ਜਪੁ ਪ, ਪੰਨਾ ੨.

*God neither can be structured nor can be created.
It came into being of Its Own.*

Those, who have served¹ 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 served¹ God, attained honor*”.

What is ਸੇਵਾ (Seva)?

‘Seva’ in Nanakian Philosophy is interpreted as service. In the following phrase Guru Nanak has explained that there is no reward without performing any work/service (seva):

ਜੇਤੇ ਜੀਅ ਤੇਤੇ ਸਭਿ ਤੇਰੇ ਵਿਣੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਫਲੁ ਕਿਸੈ ਨਾਹੀ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੩੫੪.

All those living beings (on this earth) are Yours.

Without service (work), no one obtains any reward.

AGGS, M 1, p 354.

At the same time to perform Seva with the thought of reward, it becomes useless:

Drml Drmu krih gwvwvih mMgih moK duAwru]

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੪੬੯.

*The righteous waste their righteousness, by asking for
the door of salvation.*

AGGS, M 1, p, 469.

Seva performed with ego also is useless:

* It is a supplementary article to that of Dr SS Sidhu on Idol Worship)

ivic haumY syvw Qwie n pwey]
ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੧੦੭੧.

One who serves in egotism is not accepted or approved.
AGGS, M 4, p, 1071

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:
ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

ਹਉਮੈ ਮਾਰੇ ਕਰਣੀ ਸਾਰੁ ॥

ਜਪ ਤਪ ਸੰਜਮ ਪਾਠ ਪੁਰਾਣੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਅਪੰਰਪਰ ਮਾਨੁ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੨੨੩.

The service¹ to the Guru is to comprehend³ the philosophy² (in the Sabd).

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

AGGS, M 1, p 223.

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:

ਸਭ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਆਵਣ ਜਾਣੀਆ

ivic dunIAw syv kmweIAy]

ਤਾ ਦਰਗਹ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਾਹ ਲੁਡਾਈਐ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੨੬.

You shall find peace by doing seva (selfless service).

People in the entire world will continue to be born and die.

By serving this humanity in the world,

One finds a place of honor in the Court of God (peace of mind).

AGGS, M 1, p, 26.

2. Now Guru Nanak is convincing the Hindus that they are going wrong way as instructed by Naard. Guru Nanak further explains that only ignorant persons worship stone idol considering it the manifestation of God but they don't understand that when the stone god cannot swim how it can save the worshiper from drowning.

ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੂਲੇ ਭੂਲੇ ਅਖੁਟੀ ਜਾਂਗੀ ॥

ਨਾਰਦਿ ਕਹਿਆ ਸਿ ਪੂਜ ਕਰਾਂਗੀ ॥

ਅੰਧੇ ਗੁੰਗੇ ਅੰਧ ਅੰਧਾਰੁ ॥

ਪਾਬਰੁ ਲੇ ਪੂਜਹਿ ਮੁਗਧ ਗਵਾਰ ॥

ਓਹਿ ਜਾ ਆਪਿ ਡੁਬੇ ਤੁਮ ਕਹਾ ਤਰਣਹਾਰੁ ॥੨॥

Aggs, m 1, pMnw 556.

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.

The greatest stupid pick up stones and worship them.

They don't know that when those stones themselves sink Then how could these stones help them to swim across. 2.

AGGS, M 1, p 556.

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:

ਪਾਖਾਨ ਗਢਿ ਕੈ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਕੀਨੀ ਦੇ ਕੈ ਛਾਤੀ ਪਾਉ ॥

ਜੇ ਏਹ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਸਾਚੀ ਹੈ ਤਉ ਗੜ੍ਹਣਹਾਰੇ ਖਾਉ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਕਬੀਰ, ਪੰਨਾ ੪੭੯.

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.

AGGS, Kabir, p, 479.

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:

ਘਰਿ ਨਾਰਾਇਣੁ ਸਭਾ ਨਾਲਿ ॥

ਪੂਜ ਕਰੇ ਰਖੈ ਨਾਵਾਲਿ ॥

ਕੁੰਗੂ ਚੰਨਣੁ ਫੁਲ ਚੜਾਏ ॥

ਪੈਰੀ ਪੈ ਪੈ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਮਨਾਏ ॥

ਮਾਣੂਆ ਮੰਗਿ ਮੰਗਿ ਪੈਨੈ ਖਾਇ ॥

ਅੰਧੀ ਕੰਮੀ ਅੰਧ ਸਜਾਇ ॥

ਭੁਖਿਆ ਦੇਇ ਨ ਮਰਦਿਆ ਰਖੈ ॥

ਅੰਧਾ ਝਗੜਾ ਅੰਧੀ ਸਥੈ ॥੧॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੧੨੪੦-੧੨੪੧.

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:

ਜਬ^੧ ਲਗੁ^੨ ਦੁਨੀਆ^੩ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ^੪ ਸੁਣੀਐ^੫ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ^੬ ॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ: ੧, ਪੰਨਾ ੬੬੧.

As long as^{1,2} one lives in this world³ one must listen⁵ to others⁴ and express⁶ 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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(Continued from page 35)

He falls on their feet to appease them.

But still he begs for food and cloths from other people.

He does not know that practicing such wrong methods leads to ignorance.

Nanak says:

Since the idol cannot give any food and cannot save anybody from dying.

Therefore, it is like an ignorant argues with other ignorant.

AGGS, M 1, p 1240-1241.

In spite of the above facts the idol worshipers are still worshipping the idols by imagining it as the manifestation of God. If that is the case even then God has not given anything as explained above because the idol worshiper (Pundit) still go to other people to beg for food and clothes.

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