

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# GURU NANAK'S PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

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### **Respected Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Most of the time discussion on 'Religion and Science' is confined within Christianity, Judaism, Islam and theistic varieties of Hinduism and Buddhism but Sikhism is rarely included in such discussions. It is so because the Sikh theologians and scholars have failed to portray 'Sikhi' (Sikhism) as a distinct and independent religion from Hinduism or any other religion. Moreover, they have also failed to represent the originality and uniqueness of philosophy of Guru Nanak to the philosophers and theologians of other religions of the world.

The most salient question is whether the relation between Religion and Science is characterized by *conflict* or by *concord*. The *theistic* religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam and theistic varieties of Hinduism and Buddhism, where theism is the belief that there is an all-powerful, all-knowing perfectly good immaterial person who has created the world, has created human beings '*in His own image*,' and to whom we owe worship, obedience and allegiance. On the other hand Science deals with reasoning and experimentations to find the truth. Controversy between Religion and Science starts when some of the religious concepts are found contrary to the scientific facts.

Actually the conflict between Religion and Science started in the West during the Period of Renaissance (between 14th and 16th century) when Science was emerging as an important subject affecting the lives of human beings and the scientists started challenging certain concepts of religion in Europe.

The same situation is found in Sikhism. Some Sikh theologians are trying their best to keep Science and Religion (Sikhism) as two separate fields. While discussing with the ardent theologians it becomes very clear that they are not ready to give any place to Science in Sikhism and Gurbani. We are now living in the Science Age and it will be very difficult for us to escape from the effect of Science on our lives and thinking. For example, if any religion teaches something like that the Sun revolves around the Earth; people are not going to accept it when the scientific evidence is that the earth revolves around the Sun. There were many metaphysical phenomena in various religions that have now been found through Science to be of physical, chemical, or biological orders. Similarly, any other metaphysical phenomena of any religion if cannot be explained by Science today, the time is not far off when all such phenomena will be explained scientifically and logically tomorrow. But some Sikh theologians sternly believe that Gurbani cannot be explained or understood through Science and logic. It can only be understood by attaining the ਅਨੁਭਵ (*Anubhav*) through regular long hours of *Naam Japna and Naam Simrana*. *Anubhav* is explained by the theologians as an experience or wisdom attained not through any materialist instruments or physical process but through clairvoyance / extrasensory perception. However, my personal experience with the study of Gurbani is different than that of such theologians. I see that Gurbani is most scientific and logical philosophy and it can be easily understood and explained with the present day knowledge of Science and logic. I am also very optimistic that if there is anything that cannot be explained today will definitely be explained tomorrow when more and more Laws of the Universe are understood properly by the scientists.

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I think Albert Einstein might have declared the following statement to resolve the conflict between Religion and Science:

*“Science without religion is lame.  
Religion without science is blind.”*

It can be easily inferred from the above statement that Religion and Science could complement each other to find the truth. But some zealot theologians had gone to such an extent that they misconstrued the above quotation of Einstein as follows to show the superiority of Religion over Science:

*“Science without religion is blind.  
Religion without science is lame.”*

The above-misconstrued statement of Einstein is quoted by some Christian theologians and now it has also been quoted by an Eastern scholar, Javasadarshana, for that very reason to show the supremacy of religion over science. The same misconstrued statement has been quoted by some Sikh scholars to support superiority of Religion over the Science. The scholars of Gurbani do not have to construe any statement of anybody or any information (data) to interpret Gurbani since it is already very scientific and logical. However, it all depends upon the discriminating intellect of interpreter and his/her basic background in Gurbani and Science.

From the above example of misconstruing the statement of Nobel Laureate of 20<sup>th</sup> century by the scholars of today it becomes crystal clear that how much misconstrued information could be found in the old writings of Sikhism of the 17<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?

Ashok reported that Guru Gobind Singh deputed five Sikhs namely Karam Singh, Vir Singh, Ganda Singh, Saina Singh and Ram Singh dressed as upper-class students to Varanasi to study Sanskrit. After training they returned at Anandpur. When Guru Gobind Singh abandoned Anandpur in 1705, none of these Nirmalas accompanied him but went to other places in India where they established various *Dehra* (centers) to preach Sikhi and trained more Nirmalas. During the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century some of those Nirmalas came to Punjab controlled many Sikh shrines. Ashok admits that ***these Nirmalas by tradition were inclined to classical Hindu philosophy, especially Vedanta.*** Consequently, introduction of Vedic and Vedantic philosophies in Sikhi by them was a must. While commenting on the work of *Sampardaya Parnali* (School of *Sampardaya* – a sect of Nirmala Sikhs) on the exegesis of *Faridkot Wala Teeka* by Bhai Badan Singh, Taran Singh, the then Head of Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala gives their main objective of this *Sampardaya* as follows:

ਵੇਦ ਤੇ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ: ਸਾਰੀ ਸੰਪ੍ਰਦਾਈ ਵਿਚ ਵੇਦ, ਓ - ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਤੇ ਅਦਵੈਤ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਦੀ ਪਰਤਖ ਅਨੁਸਾਰਤਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਇਹ ਯਤਨ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਮੂਲ ਮੰਤਰ ਤੇ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਨੂੰ ਵੇਦ ਵਿਪ੍ਰੀਤ ਨਾ ਸਿਧ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਏ।

*“There appears a clear-cut similarity among Vedas, Om-Mantra and Doctrine of Oneness in the whole Sampardaya School (of annotation) and effort was not to place Gurbani against Vedas.”*

The same *Faridkot Wala Teeka* had become a prototype *Teeka* (interpretation/exegesis) of the AGGS since all the scholars (Prof Sahib Singh, Manmohan Singh, Sant Singh Khalsa, Gopal Singh, Trilochan Singh Talib and many more) of 20<sup>th</sup> century followed strictly its exegesis in their translations/interpretations of the AGGS. The contemporary Sikh and non-Sikh theologians are also following either the exegesis from *Faridkot Wala Teeka* or copying the translations by the pioneers scholars without making any critical study of Gurbani to get rid of the influence of Vedanta. Consequently, Sikhism has become as a mystical, esoteric, enigmatic, and ritualistic religion. Moreover, it has also become an Organized Religion like the other religions of the world.

This situation has been further emphasized by Taran Singh that the Sikh and non-Sikh writers of 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries had accepted that Gurus' philosophy is Vedic and is not different than that of Brahmanic or Hindu philosophy:

“ਵਿਆਖਿਆਕਾਰੀ ਦੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਯਤਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟੀ ਗੋਚਰ ਕਰਨ ਨਾਲ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਇਉਂ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਕਹਿਣ ਨੂੰ ਅਠ ਵਿਆਖਿਆ ਪ੍ਰਣਾਲੀਆਂ ਕੰਮ ਕਰ ਚੁੱਕੀਆਂ ਹਨ, ਪਰ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਬੁਨਿਆਦੀ ਅੰਤਰ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਫਰਕ ਹੈ। ਗੁਰ-ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਜਾਂ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਫਿਲਾਸਫੀ ਦਾ ਨਿਰਣਾ ਕਰਨਾ ਬਹੁਤ ਚੇਤਨ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਯਤਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਜਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਰਿਹਾ। ਜਿਥੋਂ ਤੀਕ ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਪਰਾਪਤੀ ਹੈ, ਉਸ ਦਾ ਨਿਰਣਾ ਇਹ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਭ ਪ੍ਰਣਾਲੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਗੁਰ-ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਵੈਦਿਕ ਹੀ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਫਿਲਾਸਫੀ ਆਮ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੀ ਜਾਂ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਫਿਲਾਸਫੀ ਤੋਂ ਭਿੰਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ।

His study further indicates that the same situation is prevailing at the universities of the Punjab as follows:

“ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਯਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਹਰ ਪੱਖ ਵਿਚ ਚੰਗੀਆਂ ਦੁਲਾਂਘਾਂ ਪੁਟੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਭਾਵੇਂ ਸੋਧ ਇਹੋ ਸਥਾਪਿਤ ਕਰ ਸਕੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥਿ ਦਾ ਸੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਾਚੀਨ ਭਾਰਤੀ ਸੱਚ ਦੇ ਸੰਕਲਪ ਤੋਂ ਭਿੰਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਬੜੀ ਪਰਬਲ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤੀ ਹੈ।

*It appears that universities have taken good steps from every aspect. Although their research could only established that the truth in the AGGS is not different than the truth of ancient India but this is a powerful*

achievement.)

It becomes evident from above information that although *Nirmalas* were the first who disseminated Sikhi in India faraway places from Punjab but they were also the first to introduce Vedic and Vedantic philosophies in the Sikhi. It is also apparent from the studies of Taran Singh that there was a systematic policy of the theologians from 17<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries right to the current period of 20<sup>th</sup> century and the contribution of the Punjab universities to declare the philosophy of Guru Nanak as the same as that of Vedic and Vedantic philosophies. And the same system of representation of Sikhi has crept into the 21<sup>st</sup> century without any change so far except that some researchers have started to feel injustice done to the interpretation of Gurbani. Now the biggest task before the scientist-theologians is to find out if Guru Nanak's philosophy is scientific and logical or Vedic and Vedantic?

During February 2011 a *Center on Studies in Sri Guru Granth Sahib* was established at the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar with a grant of Rs. 4705 Lacs (about ten million dollars) from the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) on the Long Term Basis. The Center has six Divisions:

- Division for Studies on Interfaith Understanding.
- Division for Scriptural Studies.
- Division for Studies on Musicology.
- Division for Hermeneutic & Linguistic Studies.
- Division for Social and Cultural Studies.
- Division for Scriptural Translations.

I am glad to add here that Prof Dr Devinder Singh Chahal and Dr Kulbir Singh Thind both from IUS have been appointed as the advisors to this center. We hope the research conducted at this center will be able to produce most authentic interpretation of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib in due course of time.

In continuation of the mission of the Institute for Understanding Sikhism (IUS) in collaboration with the Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford, BC and the Centre for Indo Canadian Studies, University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, BC is holding this conference, *Guru Nanak's Philosophy and Science*, of its own kind to initiate the interest among the Sikh theologians and researchers to represent Sikhi in its real perspective. This can be done only if we can study the philosophy of Guru Nanak, the Founder of SIKHI (Sikhism), from scientific point of view. Although recently some theologians having even no knowledge of Science and some scientists who have some knowledge of theology have started to interpret Gurbani with application of Science and logic but satisfactory interpretation of Gurbani is still awaited.

The Institute for understanding Sikhism (IUS) started to work on these lines since 1999 but it is facing the problem of finance to put together the intellect of highly qualified Sikh scholars on this project. However, the IUS has produced following three books on scientific and logical interpretation of Gurbani:

- JAP: The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy  
Sabd Guru to Granth Guru
- Nanakian Philosophy: Basics for Humanity.

These books are available from the IUS and Singh Brothers, Amritsar. These books are being displaced here.

I, on behalf of the Institute for Understanding Sikhism, am very grateful to S Kabal Singh, President, Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford, BC for providing facilities to hold this conference to initiate a very important mission to study the Philosophy of Guru Nanak, embodied in his Bani, scientifically and logically. I am also very thankful to Ms Satwant Kaur Bains, Director, Indo Canadian Studies, University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, BC for her collaboration to arrange this conference.

I wish all success to all the scientists and theologians in their deliberation on this important subject: Guru Nanak's Philosophy and Science.

Thanking you all.  
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