



# Historical Perspective of Folklore of Guru Nanak

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## Abstract

The folklore surrounding Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism, occupies a significant place in the cultural and historical memory of South Asia. From a historical perspective, this folklore functions as both a devotional tradition and a medium through which social, ethical, and spiritual values were transmitted to diverse communities. Stories of Guru Nanak's childhood miracles, extensive travels (udāsīs), dialogues with religious leaders, and symbolic acts—such as the episode of the Sacha Sauda (True Bargain)—emerged primarily through oral tradition before being preserved in janam-sakhis (hagiographical biographies). While these narratives are not always verifiable by modern historical standards, they offer crucial insights into the socio-religious environment of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century India. Historically, Guru Nanak's folklore reflects a period marked by rigid caste hierarchies, ritualism, and growing religious tensions between communities. Through simple, memorable stories, the folklore emphasizes his core teachings: the oneness of God, the rejection of caste and superstition, the dignity of labor, and the importance of compassion and social equality. These narratives allowed his message to reach illiterate populations and transcend linguistic and regional boundaries. Over time, folklore also played a key role in shaping Sikh collective identity, reinforcing moral ideals, and legitimizing the spiritual authority of Guru Nanak. From a critical historical viewpoint, the evolution of Guru Nanak's folklore illustrates how memory, devotion, and historical experience intertwine. While historians distinguish between factual biography and symbolic storytelling, both are essential for understanding Guru Nanak's enduring influence. Thus, the folklore of Guru Nanak should be viewed not merely as legend, but as a cultural and historical source that reflects the values, struggles, and aspirations of early Sikh society.

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## INTRODUCTION

folk represent a vast majority of the people of the world, who follows the same belief system. Basically it's like the Durkhem's concept of 'collective consciousness'. Chanting during the day and celebrating Gurupuravs are the main external feature of Sikhism but the appropriate way of celebrating or believing our religion would be to follow over prophet (founder) teachings. The purpose of our life is not to amass material possessions but to purify ourselves to attain spiritual harmony through prayers and meditation and by establishing

communion with the super being. The story begins with the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 AD.

In the order to understand the compatibility between Guru Nanak and folk, it is necessary to know the socio-political and religious situation of obtaining in that time, when the guru came of age, saw complete darkness around him. The rulers were corrupt and brutal. There was no self respect and honesty left in the people. There was complete confusion in every sphere of life. Moral disintegration and spiritual slavery were widely prevalent at that time. The guru came to show the true way, out of the darkness of superstitions he came to show us the path of integration. Guru Nanak has given a simple doctrine a pure faith. According to him the law of life was to love one another and in that loving, to awaken the spirit of devotion and find God. We can see the essence of the art of living in all his hymns including 'Sidh Goshti' and 'Asa Di vaar'. We find a demand for the cultivation of a belief which should present a way of life consistent with truth.

Guru Nanak stressed the fundamental truth of all religions and ask Hindus to became better Hindus and Muslims to be better Muslims. Sikhism has no orthodoxy or a set traditional doctrinaire way of thinking about our social structure. Guru Nanak touches each and every aspect of human life (social, moral, spiritual etc) with the help of their hymns. As Guru Nanak was not concerned with the individual alone, his concern covers the society as a whole. The above issues social, moral, spiritual etc. was very comprehensively treated in the Bani enshrined in the 1430 pages of Guru Granth Sahib. The holy scripture Guru Granth Sahib can be a model in many ways, in the present time because it addresses the humanity in their social, economic, political, religious, cultural and spiritual problems and has universal approach for the sickness of humanity. Guru Nanak model of humanity is not only for the sikhs but is for every human being.

## **SOCIAL PROSPECTIVE**

Religion has involved in human society in response to meet the human need of psychological, social, spiritual and economic nature. A social problem is a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable about which it is felt something can be done through collective social action.<sup>1</sup> The Sikh gurus systemized all the past Hindu and Islamic philosophies and brought a confluence in an organised manner for the temporal and spiritual uplift of all humanity without any discrimination. Guru Nanak socialized religion, making it a social force for spiritual attainment, moral revival as also for politico-economic transformation. Religion no more remained a metaphor thing or an abstract other worldly pursuit for liberation of the individual soul. Guru Nanak, prefigured a new social order characterized by the value of equality and equity, justice and compassion, tolerance and mutual accommodation and nonviolence.<sup>2</sup>

Guru Granth Sahib is the holy scripture of Sikhs. The fifth Guru (Guru Arjun Dev) compiled the Bani of his predecessors in 1604 AD and also added the sacred writings of the prominent Bhagats and Saints, who were denounced of their lower castes in the religious hierarchy. Sikhism is the only religion which gave the sacred status to the writings of Bhagats and other who was denounced by upper caste religious priests. Therefore the founder of Sikhism (Guru Nanak Dev) gave equal status to the sermons of those saints. Who were otherwise rebuked by the religious exploiters in society. Guru Nanak seems to be fully alive to the problem of the composition of a society and favours the development of highly disciplined and cultivated individuals, imbued with ideals of Sewa (service). The idea of Sewa is a very old on in Indian social religious thought, but Sikhism made service the soul aim interpreting in very general ways "Sarbat Da Bhala". the solution of all human problems physical, emotional, social etc. can be found in religion.

Sarab rog ke aukhad nam.<sup>3</sup>

It is well known that Guru Nanak suggested socio-economic and the spiritual formula for the re-organisation of social relations in the community in the form of Kirat kro, Wand chakko, Naam japo

The highest status given to women by Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, asked the woman to use Kaur at the end of their names which denotes Amritdhare women and means princess this action give the equal status to the women and denounced gender bias prevailing in the society. All gurus upheld the tradition laid by Guru Nanak to give equal status to women in society So kio mandhaa aakheeai jit jamehi rajan.<sup>4</sup>

Good society does not seem possible without good individuals who composed it. Guru Nanak choose to address the individual and plead with him to be worthy of a society of good men, which he preferred to call 'Sadh Sangat'<sup>5</sup>

## **MORAL AND ETHICAL CONCERN**

Guru Nanak and the holy scripture Guru Granth Sahib, can be a model in many ways, In the present times it addresses the humanity in so many ways, Moral or ethical is one of them. Guru Nanak employs the terms keemat and guna for 'values' .He does not confine himself only to the four categories of values, namely Dharm, Arth, Kaam, Moksh of the traditional Indian thought.

He concerns himself with the whole range of values. The ethics and religion of Guru Nanak are complementary. They are the body and spirit of his thought. The code of conduct is a necessary for a spiritual discipline and ethics give base to this conduct the guru Nanak is against of any kind of ritualism he has totally rejected the division of varnas (castes) and ashramas.<sup>6</sup>

Khatri Brahman Shudh Vais updes choh varnha ko saanjha.<sup>7</sup>

According to him ultimate goal can never be obtained through rituals. In this manner all kind of rituals are useless. In this sense only the good goodly qualities should be practiced in life. Sikhism does not believe in outer beauty but believes in inner values. Therefore the premier spiritual value of Sikhs are truth, fearlessness, love, purity, justice and many more. **Truthfulness**

According to Guru Nanak the truthfulness of man is a base for a healthy mind and lays stressed on moral values and high character.

sacho ura sab ko upar sach aacharr.<sup>8</sup> Those who recognise the truth they are always happy.

Jinee sach pashhania sae sukheeae jug char.<sup>9</sup>

## **FEARLESSNESS**

After the period of enlightenment when mool mantra reveals on Guru Nanak he utters God is without any fear, (Nirbho) therefore the seeker should also shed away all kind of fears except the fear of the almighty lord. Once we became fearless only after that we shall help the others.

bhai kaahoo ko dhaeth nehi nehi bhai maanat aan. kahu Nanak sun re mannaa Gyani thaahi bakhan.<sup>10</sup>

## **LOVE AND PURITY**

God is love that's why the seeker should always love his creation. Without love one cannot become a compassionate human. Love and devotion are complementary, thus love is an essential requisite for a devotee of the lord. Everybody, except the lord and his accepted devotees, is impure. The purity can be achieved in the company of the preceptor (Who is like a touchstone).

Maila ujalu Ta Thai paras sangi bhijai.<sup>11</sup>

Jo tho prem khelan Ka Chao sir dhar tali gali meri aao.<sup>12</sup>

As we can see Sikhism has its own distinctive value concept that can be easily determined and stated in an organised manner with the help of hymns (Bani) of various sikh Gurus and other religious elders enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib. The sphere of value content in their Bani is very wide and complete. Their notion regarding values are very relevant and have a solid philosophical base. Mainly, the sikh Gurus believed that the ultimate goal of the highest value for the human life is the achievement of 'Jivan Mukti' (corporeal salvation).

Prabh ki aagiaa aatam hitavai.

Jeevan mukt soo kahavai.

Thaisaa harakh thaisaa ous sog. sadha anand theh nahi bioug.

Thaisaa Suvaran Thaise ous maatti. Thaisaa Amrit Thaise bikh khaatti. Thaisaa maan Thaisaa abimaan.

Thaisaa rank Thaisaa rajaan.<sup>13</sup>

### **POLITICAL CONCERNS**

Guru Nanak set up a unique spiritual social as well as political platform based on equality, fraternal love, goodness and virtue. He believes that God is the ultimate and he addresses him as Sultan, Shah Alam, Patshah, Sacha Patshah etc. He is the king of kings and himself administer of true justice.<sup>14</sup>

Eko Takhat Eko Patshah.<sup>15</sup>

aapa kudrat Kare saajh saach aapa nibhra Raj Raaj.<sup>16</sup>

In his first Guruship model for the society, Guru Nanak not only nominated his successor but also handed over Guruship, when he was alive, ignoring his both sons. Now what is prevailing in the present socio-political setup the successor supersede all criterion. The political scenario is the glaring example of such actions. The son, daughter, wife, daughter in law are the only political heir of political step-up. So Sikhism in its formative stage discarded it and gives a model which believes in competency oriented democracy. Guru Nanak's concept of democracy is slightly different from modern concept of democracy. He was not happy with the cast ridden Hindu society.<sup>17</sup>

Guru Nanak upheld the right of man to equality. He stood up against the principle of untouchability. People belonging to all castes were called to assemble and to share food in langar. Under the commandments and control of guru everyone taught to lead a life of virtue and truth. Guru Nanak lead all stress on politicians to have virtuous qualities by remaining connected with their God. In this cue word 'God' representing the universal God, not a God imprisoned in the folds of any narrow religious creed. In simple words politics should be free from the bondage of religions, yet remain with God. Guru Nanak requires subject to be wise and responsible in their conduct and behaviour towards the rulers. He teaches them to shun dishonoured life and to be fearless to state the truth.

Basically sikhism advocates four kinds of unity: unity of God, unity of mankind, unity of religion and unity of classes. In fact the oneness of God and the essential oneness of humanity is the basic teaching of Guru Nanak. The uniqueness of Guru Nanak's views is that, he has linked the morality and religion with politics and this concept makes human life more practical and simple. Guru Nanak's attitude towards fundamental concerns are very much related with the welfare of man and society. In today's pluralistic world the teachings of Guru Nanak can play vital and constructive role.

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