INTRODUCTION

A great deal of work has already been done in the field of dynastic history. Monographs have been written on each of the important sultans of Delhi and on almost all the great Mughals from Babur to Aurangzeb. But very little work has been done in the field of social history. The main problem for the study of medieval Indian society is that the chroniclers of that time were mainly the court historians, who only concerned themselves with the task of giving an account of the battles, reforms and achievements of their kings and nobles. While the contemporary court historians and other chroniclers throw enough light on the ruling elite, there is practically no mention of the masses, who constituted the bulk of the medieval Indian society. In those cases where some of the foreign travellers tried to mention about the masses and various social institutions, they could not do much justice because, due to language barrier, they could not really communicate with the masses and depended more upon oral traditions given to them in distorted form. Moreover, their travel accounts were limited mainly to coastal areas.

Although history had become a professionalized subject in the hands of scholars who were patronized by the court and who produced, by and large, the largest number of chroniclers, we have yet another kind of literature in which history, particularly the history of society, is treated by the Sufi and Bhakti saints. This kind of
literature is useful for studying socio-religious movements and for the growth of intellectual ideas. Most of the saints lived like common men, in the midst of society, following common vocations, of an ordinary individual, but the impact of their moral integrity was profound among those with whom they lived. This literature forms a very useful source of information about the spiritual and ethical standards of the times, and the socio-economic conditions.

Guru Nanak, one of the Bhaktas of medieval period of Indian history occupies a unique place amongst the spiritual leaders, preceptors, reformers and saints of the Bhakti movement in India. His teachings have universal appeal and they hold good for all ages. The impact of his teachings on the Indian society has been incredible indeed. These teachings have greatly influenced the people of India in general and those of Punjab in particular. Guru Nanak did not confine his mission to this country alone. He travelled far and wide, to far off lands and countries, in order to enlighten humanity as a whole and administered to it his message of love, peace, devotion to God, social justice - religious toleration and universal brotherhood. For Guru Nank no country was foreign and no people were alien.

Guru Nanak was born on 15th of April, 1469 A.D in village of Rai Bhoi Di Talwandi now known as Nankana
Sahib in Pakistan. By this time, the Lodis had firmly established themselves in the Punjab. His father Mehta Kalu, a khatri of the subcaste bedi, was patwari of Rai Bhoi di Talwandi, where a pandit and a mulla imparted elementary instructions to Guru Nanak with due care. He easily learnt what his teachers had to offer to him in the form of three R's which he vastly improved through his own genius. Moreover, his inquisitive mind did not rest here. As a young man, he associated himself with intinerant sadhus and saints and this association marked the beginning of that deep understanding of contemporary socio-religious life, which is best reflected in his Bani. This association resulted also in a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the traditional Hindu beliefs and practices.

After marriage, Guru Nanak moved to Sultanpur where his sister's husband, Jai Ram, was in the service of the Lodi administrator of that pargana. On Jai Ram's recommendation the store-keeping of the administrator was entrusted to Guru Nanak who performed his duties to the best satisfaction of his employer. At Sultanpur, Guru Nanak obtained an intimate knowledge of the Lodi administration at the pargana level. More important than this insight into contemporary administration was Guru Nanak's contact with the representatives of Islam at Sultanpur. His dissatisfaction with the existing forms of religious beliefs and practices, grew stronger and stronger and led
to a deep spiritual experience which culminated in the form of teachings meant for both Hindus and Muslims.

At the age of thirty, Guru Nanak left Sultanpur to spend nearly twenty years in visiting numerous places in and outside the Indian sub-continent. He saw shops, cities, their markets and centres of pilgrimage situated on river banks. During his sojourns, the Guru came in contact with the religious beliefs and practices of his times. He discussed, debated and preached, testing and enriching his experience. The path which he discovered through a long and deep searching was offered to all who came in contact with him.

In early 1520s, Guru Nanak settled down in Kartarpur (near Dera Baba Nanak) on the bank of river Ravi and gave a definitive expression to his beliefs and practical shape to his ideas. He visited some leading centres of the Sufis and the Gorakhnathis even from Kartarpur, but most of the time he imparted instructions to regular gatherings or individuals at Kartarpur itself. Here he died in A.D. 1539 at the age of 70.

Guru Nanak Bani containing his teachings, afterwards was collected and preserved in the Adi Granth, the sacred book of the Sikhs. His writings constitute the most authoritative portion of the Adi Granth and are considered to be the primal creed of the Sikh faith.

The Adi Granth was compiled and edited by the
fifth Guru, Arjan Dev. It is a lengthy volume of 1430 large-size printed pages in Gurmukhi script, containing hymns, not only of the Sikh Gurus but also of 36 other Hindu and Muslim saints and bards, who wrote between the 12th and 17th centuries. This work was completed in A.D. 1604. The original compilation is said to be preserved at Kartarpur (district Jalandhar) but the oldest copy now in use is the one which is placed in the Golden Temple - primer-Sikh shrine at Amritsar. It was prepared by Bhai Mani Singh under the supervision of Guru Gobind Singh.

The hymns in the Adi Granth are mostly devotional prayer hymns invoking for the divine grace i.e., the grace of God and Guru. The Guru gives the word or Nam and this Nam leads towards Brahman (God). These hymns also depict the state of separation and the state of bliss when the soul merges in the infinite. The hymns also present the idea of the concept of maya against the immortal domain of truth. Apart from this the hymns also depict the social and religious background of the time. They analyse the political, social and economic conditions of that time. Some of his hymns record the events of those days. In a work known as Baburvani, he wrote on the collapse of the Lodi administration and the chaos preceding the establishment of Mughal rule by Babur.

The literature of the period is admittedly the mirror of the way of life of that apoch. For this reason
the author has taken Guru Nanak's Bani as the base of this work. The Bani which is undoubtedly the poetry of realism is a mirror of the contemporary society. Guru Nanak was a prolific writer and depicted contemporary life, giving his own solutions to most of the social-ills, which were destroying the very fabric of the Indian society. There is no phase of human life and society for which Guru Nanak Bani does not furnish guidance.

Bani of Guru Nanak as contained in the Adi Granth is rich in social references. No other Guru made so many references to the society as Guru Nanak did. He wrote his Bani in 19 ragas, in over 958 sabads. On the basis of this literature of Guru Nanak, an attempt has been made to study the society of his times under the following chapters.

The first chapter, Guru Nanak and his times: An Overview, discusses the political history of Guru Nanak's time on the assumption that it is necessary to know something of his times in order to understand the full significance of the medieval Indian society as reflected in his Bani. Guru Nanak's life-span (1469-1539) roughly covers the entire rule of the Lodis, advent of the Mughals, rise of Sher Shah Suri and the defeat of Humayun at the former's hand. Guru Nanak made references to the attitudes of contemporary rulers towards their subjects.

Second chapter on Political Institutions, discusses
existing state, political institutions and their functioning primarily based on the references available in Guru Nanak's Bani. In these two chapters, some repetition, here and there, could be found which may appear superfluous. But it was unavoidable for many couplets from the Bani of Guru Nanak have been used in both the chapters in two different contexts.

The third chapter on Economic Conditions, deals with the urban and rural life of Guru Nanak's time. Rather than dwelling upon the economy of the medieval times, the major thrust is on the study of the professions and vocations.

The fourth chapter on the Caste System, discusses primarily the Hindu medieval society which was a caste-ridden society. It was divided into four castes or varnas. Brahmins at the top and sudras at the bottom. It also discusses Guru Nanak's views on caste system.

The fifth chapter deals with Socio-Religious Ceremonies and Customs. The most conspicuous events of domestic life are the various stages of growth in the life of a person, the birth, the marriage and the death, together with the various customs all move around him. Religious emotions found their expression in all the phases. The position of a man in society was judged by the amount of care and attention he gave to the fulfilment of these social and religious obligations. Though Guru Nanak's
compositions reveal his awareness of the social life of the Muslims, his pre-occupations appears to have been the Hindu society. The life of the two communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, was overburdened with innumerable rites and ceremonies. Huge sums were spent on fruitless ceremonies, even if a person could not afford their cost or was barely making both ends meet. It was a life of blind conventionalism which led to hypocrisy and mammon worship. These ceremonies, in the views of Guru Nanak, had more superstition than sense in them. Guru Nanak not only condemned these ceremonies but also tried to lift the man out of the moorings to which a man was trapped in for centuries. Guru Nanak laid greater emphasis on ethical and spiritual aspects of human life and told people to discard age old ceremonies which have no relevance to society.

In the last chapter an attempt has been made to study the Position of Women with special reference to married women. Quoting from Guru Nanak Bani this chapter discusses the contribution of Guru Nanak in elevating the women and giving them a respectable position and equal status in society and religion.

The Ideal Society, which was evolved through the precepts and practice of Guru Nanak and his followers, has been discussed in the concluding chapter. Model of such a society was evolved by the Guru himself when after completing his five long udasis, he settled at Kartarpur. It
was here that the high ideals of earning one's living through honest means, sharing one's earnings with others and always remembering God - which became the essence of the Sikh philosophy, were put into practice. It is significant to mention that the implementation of the teachings of Guru Nanak and evolution of twin institutions of sangat and pangat, led to emergence of a new egalitarian order which became the sheetanchor of the Sikh society.

To substantiate the arguments given in the chapters, translation of suitable quotations from Guru Nanak Bani (contained in the Adi Grath) has been given and in the notes and references the actual hymns in Gurumukhi have also been given. Wherever it is felt that the idea of the quotation is fully translated in the text, no separate English translation is provided.

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