CHAPTER IV

SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS PREVAILING IN INDIA DURING THE TIME OF GURU NANAK

In order to have a proper perspective of the evolution of the educational philosophy of the Guru Nanak Dev, it is essential to know the temper of his time and the political, religious, social, economic and cultural conditions of the period in which he lived.

In the words of Bhai Gurdas: 58, 59

58. ਗੁਰੂ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਰਚਾ ਸੰਤ ਕੁਬੀ
ਧਿਆ ਦੋ ਕਲੇ ਸੰਤ ਬਣੀ ਅਕਲਮ॥
(Var I, Stanza 23)

God listened and applauded the true supplication and the hearty prayer, and thus sent Guru Nanak to this world.

59. ਗੁਰੂ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਰਚਾ ਸੰਤ ਕੁਬੀ
ਧਿਆ ਦੋ ਕਲੇ ਸੰਤ ਬਣੀ ਅਕਲਮ॥
(Var I, Stanza 27)

When Guru Nanak appeared, misty darkness is dispelled and the entire world lightened.

VAR I, STANZA 27.

4.1 POLITICAL CONDITIONS:

From the close of the tenth century to the time of Guru Nanak, successive waves of Muslim hordes poured into
India from the North-West. As many as about sixty foreign invasions had taken place in five hundred years, thus on an average one invasion occurring in a time span of every eight years. These almost continuous invasions, associated with plunder and mass killings could not affect the entire but social, political and economic fabric of by far of the largest area of northern India, Punjab being one of the worst sufferers as it exists on the way to Delhi. The bloody and ferocious invasion of Timur in 1394 A.D. caused widespread anarchy in Hindustan. The Government at Delhi was completely paralysed. An era of decline and break-up of the empire started.

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 when Bahlol Lodhi (1451-1489) was reigning at Delhi. It was an age of disintegration. The central authority was weak and centrifugal tendencies were strong. The smaller kingdoms were engaged in fighting each other among themselves on trifle matters and often encroached upon the territory of others. India was thus a congeries of splinter groups, small principalities and misorganised States during the fifteenth century, mostly ruled by organt kings and were thus likely to be an easy prey to an invader like Babur.

60. बहपे तुमं तुमी त्रासती प्रासादो यमनु निमु रदक विनिमी शुभं पदात्रम्
    "तुर्त पलत तुमु देशु तुमी तुमी विक्री बनिमा"
    -(१४६९ श्रीमान बलदेव नागर क्रांति २, अप्रेल तिथिः १५५४)

The dark-age is the scalpel, the kings are the butchers, and righteousness has taken wings and flown.
In this no-moon night of falsehood, the moon of truth is not seen to rise anywhere.
In my search, I have become bewildered.
In darkness, I find no path.
By taking pride, mortal bewails in pain.

(Var Majh, Slok Mahalla 1, Ad.1 Granth page 145).

Behlol's son, Sikander Lodhi (1489-1517) was a bigoted Muslim. By his fierce religious persecution, he completely alienated the sympathies of the Hindus. The State assumed a theocratic character under him and he officially imposed Islam upon the Hindus. Forcible conversions were ordered. His iconoclastic zeal found an expression in the destruction of Hindu temples at several places. At Nurwar, he looted and broke down many Hindu temples and built mosques in their places. He entirely ruined the shrines of Mathura. Their stone-images were sold to the butchers for use as meat weights. In the territory of erstwhile Punjab, the celebrated temples of Kangra and Jwalamukhi were plundered and demolished by him and their idols given to butchers.

After Sikandar Lodhi, Ibrahim Lodhi (1517-1526) ascended the throne of Delhi. He was a foolish and headstrong ruler. It was during his rule that Babur invaded India in 1520. An orthodox Sunni in his religious views, Babur treated Hindus with contempt and recognised 'Jehad' (Holi war) as a sacred duty. He easily captured, sacked and burnt Lahore. Seeing his cruelties Nanak addressed God:
Having conquered Khurasan, Babar has terrified Hindustan.
The Creator takes not the blame on Himself, and has sent the Mughal as Death's myrmidon.
So much beating was inflicted that people shrieked. Didst not Thou, O God, feel compassion?

(Asa Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 360).

He further says:

Thou chargest tax for the cow and the Brahman, but the cow-dung will not save thee.
Thou wearest a loin-cloth putest a frontal mark, carriest a rosary and eatest the muslims provisions.

(Var Asa, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 471).

At the time of the capture of Saidpur by Babur, Guru Nanak and his companion Mardana were eye-witnesses. Guru Nanak cried in anguish when he saw the people being tortured by Babur and his troopers. "Who like a revenous lion fell upon a herd of cows. "It was death disguised as a Mughal who made war on us." There was a general massacre of people. Houses,
mansions and palaces were burnt. Even the women were not spared. In agony Guru Nanak narrated the pitiable conditions of the people all around.

4.2 RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS:

During this period the Hindu religion had reached its lowest ebb. It was reduced to farce, mockery and hypocrisy. The priestly classes exploited the masses for their own selfish ends. They considered it their exclusive right to study scriptures. Rituals, orthodoxies and ceremonies had chained the people. Life was viewed with extreme passlmlism and was thought to be not worth living. The rigid caste system had led to moral degeneration. The Brahmin who was quite submissive to his Muslim neighbour, was tyrannical against his own Sudra brother, for whom he adopted a very dangerous weapon of social exclusion, contempt and hatred.

63. ੧੪੯੩ ਭੇਵਾ ਭੇਵਾ ਮੇਲੁਤ ਕ੍ਰਿਰਕਤ ਵਰਤੀ ਕਰਨੁ ਕੁਰਿ ਸਰਜੀ ਸਰਜੀ।

ਚਿਤਰੀ ਚਿਤਰੀਜਾਲ਼ ਦੀਵੇ ਦੀਵੇ ਦੀਵੇ ਦੀਵੇ ਦੀਵੇ।

Divided in twelve sects, the yogis are ruined and so are the four and six sects of sanyasis.

Similarly, the disciples of Gorakhs, the mendicants in tatters and the plucked-headed ones are loaded with the halter around their necks, bereft
as they are, of the Lord's Name.

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The Brahmins read about strifes, do the ceremonial deeds and daily routine and make others perform rituals.

But without knowing the Lord, those egocentrics understand naught and, separated from God, they suffer pain.

(Parbhali Mahalla 1, Adi Granth Page 1332).

64. The more the man wanders on pilgrim stations, the more he talks.
The more he takes to religious garb, the more discomfort he causes his body.

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He who eats not corn, loses the relish of life.

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He who wears not clothes endures calamity, day and night.

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He, who eats filth and throws ashes on his head,

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He who dwells in wilderness and at burial and cremation-grounds.

That blind man knows not the Lord and regrets afterwards.

(Var Asa, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 467).

65. The deer, the hawks and the officials;

they are called learned and clever.

(Var Malar, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1288).

66. The Hindus have forgotten the Primal Lord
and are going the wrong way.

As Narad instructed so they worship the idols.

They are blind, dumb and the blindest of the blind.

The ignorant fools take stones and worship them.

Those stones when they themselves sink, how shall they ferry thee cross?

(Var Bihagra, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 556).

With the sacrificial mark on the brow and on his waist the ochre-coloured loin-cloth.

In his hand he holds the knife he is verily the world butcher.

Wearing blue clothes, he becomes acceptable (in the eyes of Muslims)

Taking bread from the Muslims he worships Puranas.

He eats the he-goat killed by uttering the foreign (Muslim Kalima) words.

He allows none to enter his cooking enclosure.

They, cry touch not, O touch not.

Otherwise, this food of ours will be polluted.

(Var Asa, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 472).

The religion was confined to peculiar forms of eating and drinking, peculiar ways of bathing and painting the forehead and other such mechanical observances. The worship of idols, pilgrimages to the Ganges and other sacred places, the observance of certain ceremonies like the marital and
funderal rites, obedience to the mandates of the Brahmans and lavishing charitable gifts upon them, constituted almost the whole of Hinduism as it was then current among the masses.

68. नौ यथावति सूत सुभाषिति।
गुरु चौलिज्ञा परवियो गति। ।

मात्रु भेदू भम्ने बेद्क।
अग्ने अमे युजु रेद्दि।।

(Var Ram Kali, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 951)

The men of charity, give in charity the wealth, amassed by committing sins.
Their Guru goes to their home to impart instruction.

No body obeys the Shashtras and the Vedas.
Everyone worships but himself.

(Var Ram Kali, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 951).

69. अनुभवे युजिके भ्यां भाल्यत॥

(Var Bihagra, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 556).

The ignorant fools take stones and worship them.

As a majority of people suffered tyrannical treatment at the hands of Muslim rulers on the one hand, and contempt and hatred of the priestly classes on the other hand, it was no wonder that most of the lower classes found it far better to join the ranks of the oppressors rather than be spurned by the high-born Hindus and persecuted by the powerful Muhammadans. And those who did not compromise with such a life of dishonour and had a religious bent of mind had sought safety from
persecution and death in the loneliness of the desert or the retirement to the forest and lived in single-minded investigation of truth. That is why the yogis and sadhus who had retired in the caves of the mountains were in a large number.

The Hindus enjoyed little religious freedom during this period. The slaughtering of 'infidels' gave the Muslim rulers, a peculiar pleasure and they resorted to it frequently. Thousands of Hindus temples were destroyed, Being a Hindu was a disqualification and various types of taxes like toll-tax, pilgrim tax and jazia were imposed upon the subjects for curbing the 'infidels'. Guru Nanak wrote:

70. The Primal Lord is called 'Allah', The turn of the Muslim divines has come. Tax\textsuperscript{levied} on the temples of gods Such a practice has come into vogue.

(Basant Hindol Mahalla 1, Ghar 1, Adi Granth, page 1191)

According to Professor J.N. Sarkar, the policy underlying the jazia was to increase the number of Muslims by putting pressure upon the Hindus. The State encouraged conversions under force and oppression. The Hindus who got converted were handsomely rewarded.

The spirit of both Hinduism and Islam was hidden beneath a mass of formalities and extraneous observances. The unity of God-head was lost in the worship of numerous gods and goddesses. Empty ritualistic practices had taken the place
of the real devotion of the heart. The Hindus and the Mohammedans quarrelled, the Brahmin and the Mullah wrangled. Religious and political inequalities reigned supreme and there were strife, trifle matter quarrels, perpetual conflicts, eternal strife and rivalries everywhere. Guru Nanak was very sad to see what man had made of man. He was sorry to see that Pandit recited scriptures without understanding their meaning. The yogis split their ears, smeared their bodies with ashes and without any divine knowledge went about wrecking their family life and that of their followers. The religion was reduced to farce and mockery. Look at the mockery of religion, Guru Nanak clarifies:

71. The Brahmans read books but understand not their real meaning.

(Sri Rag Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 56).

72. The man-eaters say the prayer.
They who wield the scalpel (knife)
wear thread round their neck.
In their home the Brahmans sound the conch.

(Var Assa, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 471).

4.3 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS:

The centuries of invasion, foreign misrule and persecution have produced the greatest depression and the spiritual
subjection. The spiritual set back and stagnation had aggravated the demoralisation of the Hindus to an enormous degree. This demoralisation made them introvert, peevish and escapist. They developed inferiority complex and feeling of helplessness, disintegration, inferiority, uneffectiveness, demoralisation and disgrace. The Hindu mind had become so slavish absurd and coward that in all ways of life it yielded to the Muhammadan way of thinking. The people were so cowed down and despirited physically as well as mentally that they would pay homage to any one who came to rule over them. They did not have the strength and courage to protect their life and honour. The occasional pricks and which the government and its officials inflicted on the Hindus went a long way to suppress them. The State imposed great disabilities upon the non-Muslims while the Muslims were the favourite subjects of the State. The highest offices in the State were held by the Muslims and elevation to position of honour was generally determined by royal will, whims and fancies and not by merit. The Hindus were not allowed to join the army even if they wanted. They were over-taxed. Jazia not only put financial burden on them but it was also a constant reminder to them of their inferior position. The Hindus fretted of their rights, fumed and chaffed against the disabilities imposed on them. In a climate of distrust and humiliation, they could not hold their head high. They had to bear the arrogance of the Muslims, both foreigners and the converts who considered themselves superior because they belonged to the ruling class. There was no bond of sympathy between the Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus in their own land not only lost political power but also suffered a tremendous loss in their social status.
73. Putting on the thread, 
he commits sins.
For his ablutions and washings, 
he is approved not.

The Muslim praises his faith.
Without the Guru and the 
Divine teacher, none is accepted.

(Var Ramkali, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 951).

Under such circumstances, it was natural for the Hindus 
to please the ruling class. They started learning the 
language of their masters and wearing their dress to be in 
their good books.74

74. Wearing blue clothes, 
he becomes acceptable 
(in the eyes of Muslims) 
Taking bread from the Muslims 
he worships Puranas. 
He eats the he-goat killed 
by uttering the foreign 
(Muslim Kalima) words.

(Var Asa, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 472).

According to Greenless Duncan, "Many found it useful, while 
in their hearts keeping a certain sentimental attachment to 
their ancestral religion, to conform outwardly with that of 
the conquerer, adopting Muslim dress, even attending the 
mosques and repeating the Muslim creed in public so as to 
secure immunity from toll-tax and persecution alike, and 
open the door to their own social and financial advancement 
for it was impossible for a loyal Hindu to gain worthy
employment at that time or to hold office in the royal court."

This fact is also confirmed by Guru Nanak, "The Kshatariyas once proud of their cultural heritage had abandoned their noble traditions and even their mother tongue and were patronising the language of the conquerers to get status and good jobs."

The highest but all the offices of considerable importance in the State were held by Muslims or their touts. The easy acquisition of wealth and the participation in the festivities of the court led to great vices. The lives of kings were governed by wine and women. Music and dancing were the important amusements of the rich and the poor. With the exception of a few, all the Muslim rulers were fond of drinking, merry making, keeping concubines and many dancers.

75. [Verse 790, Var Suhi, Slok Mahalia 1, Adi Granth page 790]

"It is the habit of thieves, adulterers, prostitutes and pimps that they contract friendship with the irreligious and dine with the irreligious. They know not the worth of God's praise and Satan ever abides within them.

Harems, full of the wives and concubines of the Sultans and of the princes of the royal blood were kept in the apartments of the royal palace.

Socially, the Hindus were divided into their traditional
four classes which were further divided into a number of castes and sub-castes. The propensity of rigidity of adherence to caste-system had created water-tight compartments in the public which had resulted in the total deterioration and annihilation of any residual sense of citizenship as well as of loyalty to the country whatsoever as a whole. "The Brahman stood at the top of social system. He was considered as the very best among the Hindus. Religion was his exclusive monomly. According to Albaruni, only the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas could learn the 'Vedas' and therefore, 'moksha' was meant for them alone. The Vaishyas and the Sudras were deprived of all sacred knowledge."

There was little inter-mixing among the different castes. The Hindus did not associate with the low-caste Hindus. The Sudras were most shabbily treated. The people of other three classes were required to attain purification by bathing with clothes on, if touched by a Sudra. In such circumstances owing to the slogan of social equality preached by Islam, to the lower classes, conversion seemed to offer a panacea for all their social grievances and victimization.

76. 'Nanak seeks the company of those who are of low caste among the lowly, nay rather the lowest of the low. Why should he (he has no desire to) rival the lofty. 

(Sri Rag Mahallal, Adi Granth page 15).
The hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world. But during this period woman was the worst sufferer. She did not enjoy respectable position. She was considered to be equal to a man's shoe and just merely an object of utility. With the advent of Muslims, her position worsened all the more. She often suffered disgrace at the hands of invaders. Young girls were carried off by them. To save themselves from this ignominy rich parents would murder their daughters at birth. Female infanticide was quite prevalent among the Hindus in Punjab during the Sultanate period. Early marriage was adopted by one and all. The birth of a girl was looked down upon as a curse. The customs of Jauhar, Sati, female infanticide, child marriage and purda had created a veritable hell for her. On the frontiers of the Punjab, there was an open trade in women. Prostitution was rampant and the profession of dancing girls was profitable and was patronised by those who should have been censors of the public morals. Traffic in women was a recognised custom of the day.

4.4 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS:

During the early days of Muslim conquest, the inhabitants of India were robbed of their wealth by the Muslim invaders. Vast booty was carried off by Mahmud of Ghazni from this country. Timur's invasion in 1399 caused much confusion and drained out the huge wealth of the country. The trading and commercial communities were demoralised and dislocated.
Agriculture was the main vocation of the people. Economically the people were divided into two classes, the aristocrats and the poor people. The rich rolled in wealth while the fate of the poor was miserable.

"While the ruling and official classes rolled in opulence and luxury, the tillers of the soil had very low standard of living". Even the Muslims were divided mainly in these two classes. The aristocrats spent all they had in luxury keeping a number of servants and slaves. The condition of the lower class consisting of workmen, labourers, farmers, petty shopkeepers, domestic servants and slaves, was very miserable as their wages were very meagre. The workmen could hardly get a single meal a day regularly. Their houses were wretched and practically unfurnished and they did not have even sufficient covering to keep themselves warm in winter or save themselves from the burning, torrential rains and furious and storm.

The Hindus were over taxed and Albaruni writes that Alaudin took from the Hindus of Doab, fifty per cent of their produce. They had no inducement to accumulate wealth and the bulk of them led a life of poverty and want earning just enough to maintain themselves and their family. The standard of living among the subject classes was low and the incidence of taxation mainly fell upon them.

It is against this back-drop of history that one has to view the life and activities of Guru Nanak. The main object of Nanak was to give consolation and solace to the
suffering humanity. He tried to remove the bitterness prevailing between the followers of Hinduism and Islam.

77. ਅੱਠਾਂ ਨੁਸਾ ਪੱਛਮ ਹੇਠਾ
ਨੇਸੂ ਉੱਠਣ ਟਾਂਤੀ।
(ਰਾਹਾ ਸੰਸ ਥੋਟਾਂ ਭਗਤ ਦੇ ਸਰਦਾਰ, ਸਦੀਚਾ ਵਿਚ, ਸੋਹਾਗੀਤਾ 477).

0 brother, within, thou performest worship, outside thou readest Muslim books and adoptest Muhammadan way of life.

(Var Asa, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 471).

Mardana, a Muslim was a life-long companion of Guru Nanak. Owing to his liberal teachings, Guru Nanak had Hindus as well as Muslim followers. Thus the Guru tried to bridge the gulf between the Hindus and Muslims. "God will not ask man", said Nanak, "of what race and religion you are. He would but ask him, what have you done". True religion did not consist in external practices but in the inward discipline of love, faith, mercy and humility expressed in righteous and compassionate deeds. Guru Nanak asked the Hindus to become good Hindus; and the Muslims to become good Muslims.

78. The Lord asks not mortals caste and birth, so, find thou out the Lord's True Home.
That alone is man's caste and that his glory, as are the deeds, which he does.

(Parbhati Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1330).

79. ਸਤਨ ਵੀਚਿਤ ਨੀਦਰ ਨਾਮ ਜੁਦਾ ਰਾਖਿਆ॥
ਸਤਨ ਸੂੰਦਰ ਦੀੱਖ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤਾ। ਵਾਹ ਭਗਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ।
Make mercy thy mosque, faith thy prayer-mat,
what is just and lawful, thy Quran, modesty
thy circumcision and civility thy fast. So
shalt thou be a Moslem.
Make right conduct thy Mecca, truth thy
spiritual guide and pious deeds thy creed
and prayer.
Rosary is that, what is pleasing to Him
Thus the Lord shall preserve thy honour,
O’ Nanak.

(Var Majh, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth pages 140-141).

The religion preached by Guru Nanak was very simple,
direct, straight-forward, and practical. He did not indulge
in theorising. "Truth is high but higher still is truthful
living", said Nanak. He was against mechanical worship,
rituals and ceremonies. Religion did not consist in a patched
cost or in a yogi’s staff or in ashes smeared over the body.
The Guru condemned the yogis and sadhus who were just parasites
on the society and asked them to lead the lives of house
holders and earn their livelihood with the sweat of their
brow. The Guru was critical of the rich people who exploited
the poor to spend luxurious lives as is evident from the
example of Malik Bhago, made them to utilize their earnings
for the benefit of the needy. To remove the barriers of caste
and creed, high and low, rich and poor, he started the institu-
tion of Sangat (sitting together and singing the praises of God).
80. (As) everything is underneath Truth, the living with the Truth is superior to all.

(Sri Rag Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 62).

81. Yoga is not in the patched coat, nor the Yoga is in staff, nor Yoga is in smearing the body with ashes.

(Suhi Mahalla 1, Ghar 7, Adi Granth page 730).

82. Though he may be a Qazi, a Mulla or a Shaikh, though he may be a Yogi, a wandering sage or an hermit of ochre-coloured dress.

According to their deeds, they shall be judged.

(Basant Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1169).

83. Call every one exalted, none appears to be base.

The One Lord has fashioned the pots, and One Light is pervading the three worlds.

(Sri Rag Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 62).

84. इत्तम सैगाृि माधि भिगि इत्तम प्रग क्षणसति साधि उपलिंग

In the sublime association man's state and way of life become sublime and he swims across the terrible world ocean.

(Maru Mahalla 1, Adi Granth, page 1042).