CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Guru Nanak Bani is a valuable source for the study of economic life of the 15th and early 16th centuries. From the works of Guru Nanak, we learn as to what type of economic structure existed at that time. It also suggests the type of economic structure to be evolved. Guru Nanak also suggested codes of conduct to be followed in different spheres of life in his writings.

At a time when the people were groaning under the heels of tyranny and injustice of the rulers and the spirit of freedom had been completely crushed in them, Nanak projected a faith, the cardinal principles of which were the equality of all human beings and their right to be free from social and political oppression. Through his forthright and fearless denunciation of all forms of oppression and tyranny, he symbolised the right of man to freedom of expression. The most important act of Guru Nanak in grooming the society lay in his promoting the capacity for thinking freely and independently. Guru Nanak also infused courage and moral strength among the people by upholding the divine law of justice and its ultimate supremacy in the form of establishment of a just order.¹

Guru Nanak enunciated the humanistic aspect of religion which makes no distinction between the contemplative life and social service. The purpose of
life is not to amass worldly possessions but to purify ourselves to attain spiritual harmony through prayer and meditation and by establishing communion with the supreme being.

Guru had the insight that the economic development is dependent upon the occupational structure of the society. The individual opts for an occupation according to his capacity and capability, entrusted by God in him. The occupational structure has been classified into three sectors, primary (agriculture, gardening and cattle rearing), secondary (production and manufacture of goods and service industry) and tertiary (trade, transport and communication, banking, insurance). Guru Nanak gives the greatest importance to agriculture which is akin to God's teachings. In secondary sector, he considers God as the Master Manufacturer, especially one who fashions the vessels of human beings. Guru Nanak identifies God with each of various occupations, whatever the job one is doing. Guru Nanak is particular about the means of making money - it should be through fair means only. He chided the 'human parasites' like beggars. Physicians were held in esteem. The hunters, fishers, betel sellers, and magicians find mention in his Bani. All of them are depicted as flourishing during his time.

In ancient India, occupations and professions depended on caste system, and caste determined
occupation. Later in medieval period, economic development and political set ups affected this system.

Development of all three economic sectors is equally important, but agriculture can be considered primary and basic. However, differences in profession and economy built up a diverse social stratification in Punjab. It varied from the sovereign to the slave, from the landlord to the labourer. Guru Nanak had recognised the interdependence of all the three sectors.

The occupational structure affected the day-to-day actions: from birth to death ceremonies and also marriage celebrations. It affected the economic life and social status of individuals. However, with the social developments, industry became prominent. Urbanisation took place and technology disrupted the village unity. Society was divided into have's and have-not’s. Occupation came out of the grip of caste system. Guru Nanak advocated the free choice of profession. No occupation was to determine the caste and vice versa.

India being an agricultural country from time immemorial, her vast population lived in villages. Agricultural production was mainly for local consumption. So it was a subsistent economy. During Guru Nanak Dev’s time, the farmer was the backbone of this village economy, though he lived in poverty.

Extensive cultivation, where labour and capital
inputs are proportionately less than land, was in vogue in those days. As agricultural technology was not developed, primitive methods were used. Farmers ploughed the land with wooden ploughs three or four times, then sowed and harvested. The corns were carried to the threshing floor and winnowed manually. This process continued round the year. Summer and autumn were the busiest periods. Animal dung, bones of fishes and cows, etc. were used as manures. The farmers were very particular about good quality seeds. Guru Nanak compares the three basic needs of a farmer (i.e. farm, seed and water) to the human body, actions and the Name of God respectively.

A large number of crops were sown and harvested even in those days. Both edible and non-edible crops were cultivated. Wheat was the most important, but barley, peas, pulses, sugarcane and oilseeds along with medicinal herbs, spices and fragrant wood also found favour with the farmers. Milk and milk products were quite common. A large number of industries were by-products of the surplus of these agricultural produces. Textiles, sugar, scents, liquor etc. were some of them. Guru Nanak wanted agriculture to be a service-oriented industry and not a profit-oriented one. Therefore, cultivation of harmful products like tobacco, opium, hemp etc. was strongly discouraged as they were not good for human beings.
Canals and wells, as artificial means of irrigation were common, though rainfall was the major source. Guru Nanak used the symbol of RAHAT and ARHAT in a high philosophical sense.

The feudal system was a disincentive to farmers as most of their produce was to be given as land revenue and other taxes. Even the priests and moneylenders exploited them.

According to Guru Nanak, the owner of all natural resources was only God who distributed them to the human beings. He propounded a system with the Sangat as the custodian of all the wealth on the earth. This congregation should distribute the land to the individuals. No rent was to be paid but the receiver of a piece of land would be one of the users and not its owner. He realised that individual right of property would lead to have's and have not's with their intrinsic inequality.

The farmers were an impoverished lot. Their poverty drove them to borrow more and more which in turn made them unable to pay off their debts. The money lenders squeezed them and confiscated their property. This made the farmers landless and still poorer.

The average agriculturist could get the benefit of his product either at the time of buying his requirements or at the time of selling his produce. Lack of organised marketing facilities transportation
and communication affected him. Farmers had to travel from village to village to sell manufactured goods of their agricultural produce due to disorganised 'mandies'. The farmers depended on the village moneylender-cum-trader, the village market and town mandis to sell their agricultural products.

The deplorable situation of the farmer was due to his poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. He had no sufficient storage facility though grain pits were in vogue so he could not wait for better prices.

The revenue system in those days had the powerful king on top. The farmers had more duties than rights. To cultivate and to pay taxes were his duties for which they could get the King's protection. 1/6 was the share of the King from land produce which was arbitrarily fixed. The King and tax collectors were unconcerned with the misfortunes and miseries of the farmers. Corrupt practices in the administration resulted in the emergence of thieves and decoits who were friendly with the ruling elite.

According to Guru Nanak, God should be the supreme King and everyone should be happy and prosperous. Rationally, starved persons would be corrupt and susceptible to pressure. Poverty in Guru Nanak's opinion brought in starvation, disease and even death. So he visualised a state that established and
maintained a sound economic order with agriculture on top of the list.

Development of industrial sector is necessary for economic development. Increase in per capita income, in turn demands industrial development and industry depends on the primary economy of the country.

Indian economy being an agricultural economy, agro-based industries, mainly cottage and small scale industries became most popular. Craftsmen were patronized by Rajas and Feudal lords. But the mode of production was not very refined. Small scale and cottage industries were almost a family affair. Machinery and investment were limited. Handloom industry was the most flourishing. Guru Nanak has often mentioned 'majith' colour along with other bright, long lasting and fast colours.

Guru Nanak approved every kind of industry. Embroidery, gold and silver thread work, manufacture of carpets and beddings, metal work and jewellery, pot making, stone and brick work, oil crushing, production of Gur and Sugar, perfumery, wood work, paper industry and even boat and ship building have found mention in Guru Nanak Rani.

The relationship between workers and management has been of paramount importance for better industrial developments. Adequate wages, good working conditions, chances for growth, and medical and recreational facilities could ensure cordial and co-operative
relations between them. Guru Nanak emphasized the value of manual work with honesty and was against any kind of exploitation. He tried to strike a balance between the interests of the employees and those of the employers.

Finance is and was the back-bone of industrialisation. There was no organised industrial finance in those days. Often relatives and moneylenders acted as financiers who charged exorbitant rates of interest. The result was that the clients became poorer and poorer and that ultimately they had to surrender their property. Thus the wealth acquired by the money lenders fell into the purview of extorted wealth, which Guru Nanak decried vehemently. But he was never against due profit for entrepreneur as long as he shared his profit with his fellow beings.

Production is the result of human effort on capital and land. Technological input, capital, land, and labour are the factors that influence production. In Guru Nanak's opinion, the cost of land and other natural resources did not affect the price of a produce, since they were free. But by implication the cost of labour, capital, and enterprise should be considered in the fixation of price of the produce.

The traders indulged in unfair practices, such as hoarding, adulteration, under weighing exorbitant rates of interest, and overcharging which resulted in
consumer exploitation and undue gain to the trader. Guru Nanak bitterly criticised such means and reminded people that wealth accumulated by sinful ways was of no avail to them before or after death. Trade as conceived by Guru Nanak, is based on the concept of 'business morality'. It is to be carried on by the trader considering himself as a servant of the people. The trader is to do the trade not only for profit-making but for the welfare of the people. Guru Nanak upholds earning of 'due profit' only, which is essential and sufficient for the entrepreneur's own sustenance and the subsistence of his enterprise. Nowhere has the Guru criticised the occupation of trading. He has only decried the trader's greed for money. Nanak condemned "base trafficking", as not true trading.

In India during middle ages, the Muslim Kings governed in the name of the Quran but practised its teachings very little in their lives. They exhorted all sorts of taxes from the masses but spent too little on their welfare. Excessive taxes led to exploitation by the State. "The Kings are like lions and their official like subjects, dogs who disturb the restful people",2 says Guru Nanak. In the economic system of Guru Nanak's vision, the cardinal principle of 'Kichh Hathon Dei' i.e. 'voluntarily share the earnings with the fellow beings', underlies the ways of collection of
public finance. Thus, ‘Daswandh’ and public donations are the sources of State Exchequer.

In the state of Guru Nanak’s vision, material prosperity is no doubt essential for the general well being of the society; but it is not for the determinant of happy life for man and hence of the society. Ethical and spiritual considerations are more important than materialistic enrichment. Guru Nanak never wanted human beings to die of starvation. On the other hand, he struck a balance between a luxurious and a sub-human life. To describe a proper consumption level he used the word “chhako” which means that our genuine wants should be properly satisfied so that one can maintain proper health. Guru Nanak warned against the multiplicity of wants and their further aggravation because they are the source of sufferings. At the same time, unfulfilled desires lead to frustration, discontentment and clashes in society.

Guru Nanak tells that nearly all the persons are seized by greed. One wanted to enjoy luxurious life unmindful of the way it was earned. The evil situation was because those who were supposed to lead the society were ignorant and had contradictions in their own lives. Guru Nanak was shocked at the prevailing economic inequalities which were leading to general degradation of the society.

Guru Nanak dreamt of an ideal state, where there is no exploitation and livelihood is earned through
honest means. He preached the principle of collective ownership of land and trusteeship in the field of industry and commerce. He expected love, affection, care and better working conditions from the rich for the poor labourers. Guru Nanak was firm on the principle of earning one’s bread by the sweat of one’s brow and to part with one’s earnings for the needy fellows. Guru Nanak advocated voluntary sharing of one’s earnings with the less fortunate brethren. It was his considered opinion that moral life can only subsist on a healthy, physical and material foundation. He was in the forefront in paying attention to the physical and material side of life and in removing the deep-rooted misunderstanding that spiritual life consists in blindly negating and suppressing one’s physical and material desires.

Guru Nanak was the first to experiment with commune life, approximately four centuries before the Russian Revolution, in Kartarpur. It was used as a powerful institution for the uplift of the down trodden who had been groaning under the yoke of socio-economic-cum-political inequalities and religious discrimination prevalent in the society at that time. He introduced the system of langar and pangat to give practical shape to his teachings.

Thus, Guru Nanak wanted to create a new social order, and rid society of its evils. Guru Nanak
criticised feudalism and was in favour of the principles of socialism keeping God at the centre of every institution.

It is evident that the Guru’s thoughts have made a permanent and lasting impact on human mind. Sikhism accepts the present life to be the reality and advocates to work for the upliftment of man’s lot. It endeavours to make the world worthy to live in. It has an earthly touch. It believes in this world and the world beyond as well. Such a religion will hold the producer, the householders and the traders in high esteem and strive to bring God’s (just) kingdom on the earth. That is why the trilateral theory [Kirat Karo, Want Chhako, Nam Japo] of production, distribution and consumption are all unified in the Guru’s teachings.

The comparative prosperity in Punjab is due to the healthy influence of Sikhism, which preached ‘work as worship’ though Punjab suffers from many handicaps. It is quite deficient in mineral resources like coal and iron, which are essential for the growth of industry. It is land locked which affects expansion of trade adversely. The monsoons also get drained to their last drops when they reach Punjab. All these natural and climatic factors had been quite adverse to the expansion of agriculture and the development of industry in Punjab. But the love for work, instilled into the people of Punjab by the philosophy of Sikhism
has raised this once trampled and trodden province to the most prosperous and virile state of India.

When a Sikh prays, he does not seek blessings for himself alone, but entreats for the welfare of all. This lends him the magnanimity of mind and also imparts him a universal outlook. This is the reason that the Punjabis get acclimatized to all places and among all people. They suffer the least from the pernicious feelings like provincialism, regionalism and linguism, which tendencies are disrupting the normal political working in many other states. 3

There are numerous pronouncements by Guru Nanak, repudiating ethical validity of caste, confirming equality of human beings before God and projecting deeds rather than caste as the determining factor for one's true status. Further it is not the metaphysical utterances alone but the practical steps taken by Guru Nanak for the ablation of caste that helped to translate his message into a concrete reality. He provided a framework for a vigorous equalitarian society through the creation of institutions like langar, sangat and pangat, which constitute the original nucleus of the Sikh Panth and which have been operating in the Panth over since its inception.

While the modern revolutionary consciousness concerning the right of the working class to protect the fruits of their labour from the exploiting class had not probably originating by then, it is clear that
Guru Nanak tried to project an image of a society in which earning one's living by hard labour and giving part of it in charity were considered to be the highest virtues and in which there was to be no exploitation. Positively it constituted the acceptance of the dignity of labour.

It is significant that the aforesaid three commandments meet the modern demands of a situation where evidently we protest against economic exploitation, advocate the meeting of social obligation by donations for relief work and other noble causes and supporting the efforts of humanitarian institutions, and insist on an enlightened balanced economic activity. Thus Guru Nanak seemed to be in favour of a system in which each individual is enabled to work with due regard for collective need.

To sum up, it can be stated that the essence of religion, according to Guru Nanak, consisted in its being a force for emancipating mankind from all religious, social and political evils and injustice. Even though God remained the first and the last word in Guru Nanak's hymns, his teachings in the final analysis, were meant to serve as instruments for human welfare and social justice. The religion which Guru Nanak founded was not to remain content with the salvation of the individual alone, but aimed, more than that, at the upliftment of the society.
A healthy and virile religion like Sikhism enshrined with the teachings of Guru Nanak which underscore the doctrines of Universal brotherhood, justice, righteousness of conduct and truthful simple living, can well act for all times as a beacon light for the mankind as a whole.

In the present world, while there is tremendous progress in terms of mundane attainments, it is being increasingly realised that the full benefit of material advancement is not reaching the common man because of the increasing exploitative nature of man; a trait which is traceable, by one and all, to the progressive evaporation of moral values from the present scene. Judged from this angle, Guru Nanak may be credited with having done yeoman service to the entire humanity by stipulating the need for adherence to fundamental values of human conduct and social justice without which the material achievements would become meaningless. And herein lies the relevance of Guru Nanak’s teachings in the present age and the significance of his approach which aimed at linking all human activity, including that in social and political arena, with the concept of Dharma.
REFERENCES

