CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the various economic facets of Guru Nanak's Bani with a view to understand the economic structure prevalent during the Guru's days and to demonstrate their relevance today.

Attempts have been made to study the Bani of Guru Nanak as an authentic source-material of the economic structure prevalent during those days with special emphasis between 1469 and 1539. The economic conditions have to be brought out and studied through careful research, from the idioms, metaphors, and similes frequently used by Guru Nanak to convey his message to the people of his age. Occasionally, there are references pertaining to the agrarian system, industrial development, trade, commerce and economic inequalities of the time. In order to understand the economic structure as reflected in the Bani of Guru Nanak, it is essential to have a look at the period in which he lived and the situations he responded to.

The Bhakti Movement of the middle ages of India was surcharged with spiritualism and religion as well. This bifocal dimension of that literature gives variety to the content in such a manner that one very easily finds the social awareness of those saints and poets rising to make us believe that they were basically social thinkers and reformers. Spiritualism for them
was the means for the sublimation and upliftment of the self so that their unification with God was ensured and they could come out of the dragnet of the worries of the world. Religion, for them, was the basis of ideal social relationship. Religion stood to help the needy and the down-trodden, to feel for others and to share whatever they could have. They preached religion in order to defy the don'ts and to adhere to the do's. Thus their religion cannot be taken casually and as something which has nothing to do with the social interactions.

India was totally an agrarian society at that time. All the saint-poets of that time had emerged out of this very society which was surcharged with the process of cultural change and conflict and which contained the socio-economic factors in its deep roots. Most of the sant, poets belonged to the lower strata of the society, which was looked down upon by the upper strata and which provided the labour to the agriculture.

Actually this was the class which was usually the producer, though it worked on wages or under force. It was poor, but provided manual labour, it starved but served. Guru Nanak, the first and foremost among Sikh Gurus, represented this class by conviction. During about the last twenty years, of his life, he had adopted cultivation at Kartarpur. He had travelled far and wide, thus gaining varied experiences of all the
aspects of society i.e. political, social, ethical and economic. He had the first hand knowledge of the economic structure prevalent in that society. That is why his compositions and poetry contained vivid descriptions of the economic activities and economic relationships of the contemporary period.

The hymns in the Adi Granth are mostly devotional prayer hymns invoking for the divine grace i.e., the grace of God & Guru. The Guru gives the word or Nam and this Nam leads towards Brahma (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.

The literature of the period is admittedly the mirror of the way of life of that epoch. For this reason the study of Guru Nanak’s Bani has been taken 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 Indian society. There is no phase of human life and
society for which Guru Nanak Bani does not furnish guidance.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of the study is to peep into Guru Nanak’s contemporary society through the windows of his Bani, and study the economic conditions as per his depictions. Hence, it would be our endeavour to analyse and study:

- the occupational structure of his time,
- the types of crops, system of cultivation and other aspects related to the agrarian society of Guru Nanak’s time,
- the kind of industries and level of industrialisation during his time,
- the development of trade and commerce that took place during his time,
- the consumption pattern and Guru’s views on economic inequalities,
- the relevance of Guru’s thought in the present day life.

Guru Nanak’s time, i.e. 15th-16th century, is considered to be the medieval period in the history of India. It is also sometimes termed as the dark ages, because it was an age of political chaos, oppression, tyranny and corruption. The geographical arena of his activities was north India comprising both Indian and Pakistani territories. His teachings on the surface
structure contain religious teachings and spiritual
tone, but on the deeper structure, they are rich with
social awakening that combine economic thinking as
well. Adi Granth very vividly, bears the testimony
that he was not only a spiritual personality but a
social thinker at bottom.

Therefore, it is a study of the details of the
economic activities of that time which are evident from
his Bani compiled in the Adi Granth. Bani of Guru
Nanak as contained in the Adi Granth is rich in
economic references. No other Guru made so many
references to the economy as Guru Nanak did. He writes
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 economic structure as prevalent
during those days. The other primary sources are:

i) Guru Granth Sahib, English translation by Dr.
   Gopal Singh, Jullundur, Gurdas Kapoor & Sons.
ii) Selections from the Sacred Writings of the
    Sikhs, Unesco Publications, London, George
    Allen and Unwin.
iii) Hymns of Guru Nanak (1972), By Manmohan
    Singh, Language Department, Punjab.

The secondary sources are a large number of books
written with their commentaries on the history and
philosophy of the Gurus. See, for example. Narang
Wazir Singh (1977), Taran Singh (1977), Harbans Singh
Chapter Plan

The study is organised into eight chapters. The present chapter highlights the need and significance as well as the objectives and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 discusses the occupational distribution prevalent during those days.

Chapter 3 examines the state of agrarian economy during Guru Nanak's time.

The industrial development that took place during his time is presented in Chapter 4.

The development of trade and commerce that took place during Guru Nanak's time is discussed in Chapter 5.

The consumption pattern and state of economic inequalities prevalent during those days and Guru's concern about them is presented in Chapter 6.

The relevance and impact of Guru's economic thought in today's life have been discussed in Chapter 7.
'Summary and Conclusion' of the above chapters is presented in Chapter 8.

To substantiate the arguments given in the Chapters, translation of suitable quotations from Guru Nanak Bani (contained in the Adi Granth) have been given. The actual hymns in Gurmukhi have also been added at the end.

Limitations of the Study

The feudal tendency took its fuller shape, though it is difficult to accord a definite time or period to its origin. Our aim has been to make an objective study of the economic facets of Guru Nanak's Bani. The material is scattered and has been collected from certain works which have not been written from economic viewpoint.

The inferences have been drawn on the basis of references extracted from Guru Nanak's Bani. But these conclusions can not be supported by quantitative data because of the non-availability of economic statistics. As the title itself indicates the study has been confined to a peep into Guru Bani to visualize the economic structure prevalent during those days.