Chapter -VI

Guru Nanak's Concept of Human Rights

The rights a state maintains are the index of its nature. Every state is supposed to guarantee a certain number of rights to its people to enable them to live a full life. Human rights are essential for the attainment by every individual of his full intellectual, moral and spiritual status. The word 'human' means "belonging or pertaining to or of the nature of man or mankind." The word 'right' denotes a "just and fair claim to anything whatever power privilege etc. that belongs to a person by law, nature or tradition; also that to which one has a just claim.".

In the words of Laski, "Rights are those conditions of social life without which no man can be his best self."

Hobhouse says that rights are "what we may expect from others and others from us and all genuine rights are conditions of social welfare. Thus, the rights any one may claim are partly those which are essential to every man in order to be a rational human person, and partly those which are necessary for the

3. Laski, quoted in V.D. Mahajan, Political Theory, p. 316
fulfilment of the function that society expects from him. They are conditioned by, correlative to his social responsibilities."¹ Bosanquet says, "We have a right to the means that are necessary to the development of our lives in the direction of the highest good of the community of which we are a part."²

During the times before the emergence of State, the head of the family - the eldest male member - who was called Patriarch, enjoyed absolute rights over his family. According to Homer, "It was his authority to give law to his children and to his wives."³ Thus, he ruled over his children and wives. All the members of family living under him were obliged to surrender their individuality in return for the security granted by him to them. So there arose no question of individual's rights.

Gradually the area of authority of one person over other individuals expanded. Mighty persons started enslaving the physically or mentally weaker persons. This practice gave rise to the slavery system.

1. Hobhouse, quoted in V.D. Mahajan, op.cit., P.316
2. Bosanquet, quoted in V.D. Mahajan, op.cit.p. 316
3. Homer, Odyssey, IX, p. 114, quoted in T.S. Batra, Human Rights; A Critique, p. 8
"If there was one institution which was really common to all people of antiquity, it was slavery,"¹ writes H.F. Jolowicz.

With the emergence of state, the absolute authority passed on to the head of the state or the king. He became the master of the people whom he treated as his subjects. He kept the sources of income and power in his own hands and the masses were his mere tenants having no rights. In the states in which the Kings were weak, the power slipped from the hands of the kings and went into those of the feudal barons. It resulted in deterioration of the common man's condition. He was never granted any right or liberty, and had to fulfil the wishes of his master whosoever he may be.

But it does not mean that individual had no wish for any rights. Impelled by his innate nature he always longed for liberty and equality. Many philosophers and spiritual leaders all over the world, from time to time, brought consciousness among the people about their rights. Many of them who struggled

for the rights, had to bear punishment as a consequence of the so-called offence. These thoughtful men spoke of 'rights' which men had in common and which were inherent rights in the sense that they were based on man's 'rational and social nature'. They called these rights natural rights. Natural rights these were because they could not be taken away by any man whosoever he may be since they were the rules of life created by Nature itself. Here, a brief study of various perspectives on rights will be helpful in comprehending the scope of human rights.

The Western Perspective :-

In the Western political thought, Protagoras, a Sophist thinker, first of all, spoke of 'man as the measure of all things', and Happias of the 'equality of all men'. To Socrates, such life was not worth-living as was examined.

For Plato justice was a right of the citizens of the ideal state. "Thus the construction of the ideal state culminates as it was planned, in the conception of Justice. "Justice is the bond which holds a society together, a harmonious union of individuals, each of whom has found his life-work in accordance with his natural
fitness and his training."¹ It is the state who is to provide the citizens with justice the right of every individual. He attaches even more importance to the education of the King as a right of the citizens. For him, "Law does not and cannot give everybody his due. Law has no meaning other than to give the least bungling rule that will fit an average case; but a Philosopher's wisdom gives to everybody what he deserves. Hence it is always expedient to have the government of a Philosopher-King."²

According to Aristotle, it is the obligation of the state to protect the natural rights of man. For him, complete justice is such "as exists among people who are associated in common life with a view to self-sufficiency and enjoy freedom and equality."³ He also regarded owning of private property as a natural right. In his opinion, "property is essential for the existence and proper functioning of the household. Man needs food to satisfy hunger, a house to live in, and garments to protect himself against the rigours of climate. The household which is a condition of good moral life cannot function well without a certain amount of necessaries of life."⁴

1. R.M. Bhagat, Political Thought : Plato to Marx, p.18
2. Ibid., p. 51
3. Ibid., p. 156
4. Ibid., p. 109
One of the basic tenets of Stoicism founded by Zeno and later on developed by Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius upholds equality of all human beings. "According to the Law of Nature, all human beings are equal despite the differences in languages, nationalities and races. All can lead universally one kind of life i.e. a life according to Reason. The civil laws of various states cannot separate them, rather they should conform themselves to the Law of Nature. The Stoics, therefore, drew the conclusion that men should stop living as citizens of various stages, under different conceptions of justice and law. Rather they should live as citizens of one world under one Law of Nature. It is for this that the Stoics propounded the concepts of universal brotherhood and cosmopolitanism. As members of one great family, all men are brothers and equals and have equal rights." ¹

The Stoic philosophy exerted great influence on Roman thinkers like Cicero and Seneca. Cicero spoke of cosmopolitanism, universal brotherhood of man and world citizenship. He talked of equality of man. "Man is the only living creature endowed with the faculty

of reason. Hence all men are equal at least in the possession of reason. According to Cicero so far as the capacity of discriminating between right and wrong is concerned all men are equal."¹ Seneca, another Roman thinker, also upheld the right to equality of man. According to him, equal treatment should be meted out to all men-slaves as well as free men.

The central theme of the subject introduced by Saint Augustine in the City of God² is whether there can be a populus without justice. In De Republica, Cicero's dialogue, it is written - "a people is a multitude of men or an assembly associated together by a common acknowledgement of right (juris) and by a community of interest."³ Augustine then proceeds to interpret this Ciceronian statement, "Juris' derived from 'Jus', means 'justitia' - "righteousness" or "justice". And he is at pains to show that he believes Cicero meant 'Vera justitia' - true righteousness or justice. If legal right must be based on 'justitia' and 'justitia' is, in fact, 'vera justitia', then one vital aspect of 'vera justitia' is surely the recognition

1. R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., pp. 188-89.
2. Trooltisch, Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, I,1.
which man must accord to the one true God."\(^1\) The kingdoms where rights and justice are taken away, are great robberies, so thought St. Augustine.

Saint Thomas Aquinas' concept of Justice is based on proportionate Equality.\(^2\) He also acknowledged the right of "the people to sit in judgment upon the laws of their state."\(^3\)

In the opinion of Thomas Hobbes, the individual "was a creature of passions and moved more by instincts than reason, all his activities were centred on two focal points that is the self-presentation and the pursuit of felicity. Hence in the state of nature individuals definitely had the right of life, liberty also to some extent property also."\(^4\)

John Locke, one of the greatest individualists in the history of political thought, preached that "the earth and all the institutions thereof were made for the individual and not the individual for them. What now is known as individualism, is in reality, the product of Locke's writings. Hobbes was also an individualist, but he was also authoritarian and an absolutist, who would compromise his individualism

3. Ibid., p. 293
4. Ibid., (Hobbes), p. 54
for the sake of discipline or order in the state. The only precious thing for him was the life of the individuals for which he would allow his individuals the right to resist the state even. After all, man would require his liberty, property and other facilities like laws, impartial judges etc. in order to lead a good life. Locke's individualism is met uncompromising in the sense that he would not part with the rights of the individuals at any cost."

Gradually the situation began to change materially. This change inundated the world with novel ideas in every domain of human life. The people in England resented the authoritarian activities of the King Henry II. He had no alternative but to sign Magna Carta in 1215 A.D., which is known to be the first landmark in the history of human rights. Magna Carta set a new trend. With its implementation nobody was to be denied the right to justice. Now no free man could be captured or imprisoned or outlawed or exiled or in any way destroyed except by the lawful judgment of the King's peers only. Then in 1628 A.D., the petition of Rights was introduced.

After that, from time to time, the theories on human rights propounded by various political thinkers exerted their influence on the political situation in the world. With the efforts of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke the Bill of Rights was brought in 1689 A.D. King James II fled, and William and Mary signed the Bill which granted many rights to the Parliament, a house of representatives elected by the people of England. With J.J. Rousseau came the French Revolution in 1789 A.D. and the French Declaration of the Rights of man was introduced in the same year. More rights such as right to resist oppression, freedom of the press and other civil and political rights were accorded in 1793 A.D.

The Indian Perspective :-

The approach of the ancient Indian political thinkers to the problem of human rights was quite different from that of the one adopted by the Western political thinkers. The former generally enjoined certain duties on the state and seldom described the rights of the citizens. It is from the duties of the state that the rights of the citizens can be inferred. "We are quite in the dark about the details of the political life in the Vedic period. At that time popular assemblies (samities) existed and controlled the King's activity. It is quite possible that not all the inhabitants
had the right to become the members of the samiti; only it may have constituted a privileged class corresponding to the aristocratic order. Since the Brahmins were the privileged class, equality of all individuals before law did not exist in ancient India.

Both Mahābhārata and Dīghanikāya "aver that for a long time after the creation of Society, there prevailed a golden age of harmony and happiness, when people led happy and peaceful lives on account of their innate virtuous disposition, though there existed no government to see that the laws of nature were respected and followed."  

About the times of Mauryan rule, "Megasthenes leaves no doubt that peace, prosperity and contentment prevailed throughout the empire." Ashoka worked for recognition of the sanctity of life and the elevation of his subjects. His policy of non-violence constrained him to enforce law for the sanctity and security of not only human beings but all living creatures. Thus the people were granted many rights by the Hindu rulers.

1. A.S. Altekar, *State And Government In Ancient India*, p. 65
3. R.C. Majumdar, *The History And Culture Of The Indian People*, vol. two, p. 67
But the advent of the Muslim rule in India made the life of the Hindus miserable. The Delhi Sultanate deprived them of many rights particularly the right to freedom of religion and culture. A tax known as Jazia was imposed on the people belonging to the Hindu religion. So much so that "if the revenue collector spits into a Hindu's mouth, the Hindu must open his mouth to receive it without hesitation."\(^1\) Even the social rights of the Hindus were withdrawn. They were forced to lead the lives of slaves. Many a time they were massacred and their temples were razed. The condition of the Hindus became more critical and pitiable after the invasions of Chengiz Khan and Timur. Forcible conversions of Hindus into Islam were exercised.

Among the Hindus none dared resist the oppression wielded on them. Guru Nanak was the first Indian to raise his voice against the atrocities of the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and those of the Mughals. He strongly advocated some human rights for human beings.

In the State of Guru Nanak's vision, all human beings have human rights simply due to the

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1. R.C. Majumdar, *op.cit.*, Vol. Six, p. 25
very fact of their being human. The state does not grant these rights; but it ensures the non-violation of these rights either by the ruler or from any other quarter.

1. **Right to Work and Fulfilment of Essential Needs:**

The state, in ancient India, was obliged to promote *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksha*. The domain of *Artha* implied the people's right to have employment and the things of basic needs. "The state, however, was to secure not only the moral but also the material well being of its citizens. The kingdom of King Parikshit, idealised in the *Atharvaveda* (XX.127), flowed with milk and honey. All round welfare of the public was clearly regarded as the Chief aim of the state during the Vedic and Upanisadic ages, i.e. down to C. 600 B.C."\(^1\)

Guru Nanak stresses the people's right to work when he says that the Creator of the universe has Himself assigned some work to every being. It implies that God has endowed everyone with the ability of doing some kind of work. To quote Guru Nanak:—

*He Himself has created the whole universe,
He who created the universe, has to
everyone assigned certain occupation.*\(^2\)

1. A.S. Altekar, op.cit., p. 40
Moreover, Guru Nanak enjoins upon everyone to engage in some productive work to earn his/her livelihood and share the fruits of his/her work with his/her fellow-beings. To quote him:

He alone, O Nanak, knows the way,
Who earns with the sweat of his brow and then shares it with the other. ¹

It also brings forth the emphasis laid by Guru Nanak on the individual's right to work as one will engage in work only if one has the right to work. It also implies that one has the right to fulfill one's essential needs.

According to Guru Nanak, God who creates the beings, Himself provides them with sustenance:

Creating the beings, He Himself provides them sustenance..... ²

It also clearly indicates the individual's right to satisfy his essential needs.

It was centuries after Guru Nanak that a Western political thinker, Harold J. Laski, observed, "every citizen has a right to work. That does not mean that he has a right to any particular kind of work.

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 1245
2. Ibid., P. 1042.
The right to work merely means the right to be occupied in producing a share of those goods and commodities which are useful for society. If a citizen is not given the right to work he is virtually denied the right to express his personality.\(^1\)

Further, a "citizen has also the right to adequate wages. The right does not mean that every individual has the right to equal wages. Such a proposition is impracticable. What this right means is that all those (who) work be given sufficient wages to maintain themselves. Nobody would like the idea of dying from starvation when he is giving his very best to society."\(^2\)

It was Guru Nanak who initiated the advocacy for every human being's right to work and fulfil his essential needs. Ultimately, the right to work and the right to basic needs were included in the U.N.'s Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, under the Article 23 and the Article 25. The article 23 reads, "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment."\(^3\)

1. V.D. Mahajan, *Political Theory*, p. 877
2. Ibid.
The Article 25 of the Declaration reads:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care..."¹

2. Right to Freedom:

Guru Nanak forcefully advocates for the individual's right to freedom. This right includes certain freedoms which are very essential for the development of an individual. These freedoms are described as under:

(a) **Freedom of Religion:**

It provides that every individual is entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion or faith of his own choice. Every religious denomination or any section thereof has the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes; to manage its own affairs in matters of religion. No person can be compelled to pay tax for promotion of any particular religion.

No person practising any religion or faith can be forced to convert into any other faith or religion.

Many Western political thinkers have advocated the right to freedom of religion. But this was not true in the case of Plato, a great supporter of justice in his ideal state. In his older age he expressed the idea about religion in his book The Laws that in "sub-ideal state religion is subject to the regulation and supervision of the state as Education is. Plato forbids the private religious exercises." ¹

"The Christians emphasised that spiritual side of man was beyond the scope of the state." ²

In the opinion of St. Augustine, "The individuals need the security and order which it provides in order to be free from disturbance and molestation in the performance of their religious duties." ³

In the opening of a chapter of his Discourses, Machiavelli says: "Princes and Republics who wish to maintain themselves free from corruption must above all things preserve the purity of all religious observances

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¹ R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p. 72
² Ibid., p. 194
³ Ibid., P. 204.
and treat them with proper reverence, for there is no greater indication of the ruin of a country than to see religion condemned.\textsuperscript{1}

Guru Nanak's advocacy for this right of human beings is quite evident from his condemnation of the rulers of his times who deprived the people, especially the Hindus, of this right to practise their religion according to their own faith and way. He severely criticised the rulers' policy of mulcting the Hindu temples and their religious rites. To him, it is the violation of the people's right to practise religion of their own choice. To quote him:

And the (Hindu) temples and gods have been taxed
such is the current way.\textsuperscript{2}

It was much later that Bodin "propounded religious toleration as a matter of policy because during his time an acute civil war was going on in France. He believed that the state should allow all types of religious sects to flourish in the territory of the state and must not impose any religion of its own on the population."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1} Michael B. Foster, Masters of Political Thought, Vol. I, Plato to Machiavelli, P. 269.
\textsuperscript{2} Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 1191
\textsuperscript{3} R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p. 426.
In view of Thomas Hobbes, the individuals have complete liberty in the sphere of the intellect and conscience and the private faith and belief. "Laviathan, wrote Hobbes, "cannot oblige men to believe... thought is free." Wayper says "he is an opponent of all authority in philosophy, belief, opinion."¹

"Locke is in fact the first of English thinkers the basis of whose argument is secular. State will not interfere with anybody's soul..."²

Harold J. Laski, a British thinker, referred to three aspects of liberty - private, political and economic. "Private liberty means the opportunity to exercise freedom of choice in those areas of life where the results of my effort mainly affect me. Such a thing is religion and the state should not interfere in it."³

The right to freedom of religion advocated by Guru Nanak much earlier was included by the United Nations Organisation in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, after the second World War, under the Article 18 which reads:

1. R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p. 426
2. Ibid., pp. 114-15
3. V.D. Mahajan, Recent Political Thought, p. 558
"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."\(^1\)

Now many countries have included this right in their constitutions. The articles 25-28\(^2\) of the Indian constitution grant this right to the people of India.

(b) **Freedom of Culture** :-

It implies that any section of people having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same; and the rulers or officials will, in no way, impose their own language or culture on the people of the state. Man will be free to follow the culture of his choice and to speak the language he likes. The state will make no interference in the sphere of culture and language. The condemnation of the rulers of his times by Guru Nanak

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for treating the Hindu culture and their language viz. Sanskrit with contempt, and imposing their own culture and language on the people determines the stress Guru Nanak has laid on the people's freedom of culture and language. He also criticises the Hindus for shedding their own culture and language under the duress of the ruling class (Muslims) and switching over to the culture and language of the ruling class to please them. Guru Nanak says:

Now that the turn of the Sheikhs has come,
the Primal Lord is called Allah;
And the (Hindu) gods and temples have been taxed:
such is the current way;
The ablution pot, the prayer, the prayer mat,
the call to prayer, have all assumed the,
Muslim garb: even God is now robed in blue
(like the Mughals did).
And men have changed their tongue and
the Muslim way of greetings prevails. ¹
And:
Who (Hindu) Decked himself in (the Muslim) blue

¹. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p. 1191
and assumed the attributes of turk and Pathan.

... They seek approval of the Muslim rulers by wearing blue.¹

In this way, Guru Nanak strongly advocated for the people's cultural rights which were granted by the United National Organisation much later in the Article 2,16 and 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared on December 10, 1948. The Article 22 grants "... social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality."²

The Constitution of India also guarantees cultural rights to all the citizens of India under the article 29 which reads: "Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script, or culture of its own shall have the rights to conserve the same."³

In the Conference of Religion and Peace held in Kyoto (Japan) in October, 1970, it was declared: "Members of this Conference urge religions to use all

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their moral weight in bringing about an end to cultural discrimination which deprives the common patrimony of humanity of the cultural riches acquired so slowly and so laboriously."¹

(C) Freedom of Assembly:

It implies the people's freedom to assemble and hold meetings to discuss their grievances and to find out the ways to get their redressal. The people have the right to hold the public meetings without any interference from any quarters of the authority in the State.

Guru Nanak's very concept of the Sangat (congregation) means his advocacy for the people's freedom to hold assembly. The concept of Sangat has already been discussed in Chapter No. II entitled Guru Nanak's Concept of State.

After Guru Nanak, Harold J. Laski upheld this right of the people. In his opinion, "Every individual must be guaranteed freedom of association and public meeting. Experience shows that the denial of these rights leads to the creation of secret societies aiming at the destruction of the state."²

2. V.D. Mahajan, Political Theory, p. 877
The people's right to assembly first advocated by Guru Nanak was granted by the Constitution of India to the citizens of India.¹

(d) **Freedom of Speech:**

It implies that everybody has freedom of expression without fear of any sort from the authorities. In modern times it also includes the freedom of the Press and Electronic Media.

Guru Nanak enjoins upon man to listen to something and to say something during the span of his life. To quote him:

> As long as we are in this world, Nanak, we should hear some what and speak some what of the Lord.²

It indicates that Guru Nanak advocates that the people have the freedom of speech as they would speak only if they are free to speak. Euripides says about freedom of speech:

> "This is true liberty, when free-born men Having to advise the people, may speak free."³

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3. V.D. Mahajan, *Political Theory,* P. 321
According to Harold J. Laski, "Every individual must be guaranteed his freedom of speech. Its necessity arises from the fact that man must give expression to his inner self. If that right is denied, man will stop growing. The exercise of this right will enable him to ventilate his grievances and organise public opinion in its support."¹

Milton says, "Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely, according to conscience above all liberties."²

This freedom first advocated by Guru Nanak has been granted in the Constitution of India.³

(e) Freedom of Choice of Occupation :-

It implies that every individual is free to practise any occupation of his choice irrespective of his/her caste, colour, creed, sex or descent.

The people's freedom of choice of work has already been discussed in Chapter No. III entitled Guru Nanak's Concept of Economy.

The U.N. Declaration of Human Rights has granted this right, first advocated by Guru Nanak,

1. V.D. Mahajan, Political Theory, p. 877
2. Ibid., p. 322
to the people under the Article 25\textsuperscript{1} already quoted under the sub-title, \textit{Right to Work and Essential Needs}, in this chapter.

This right has also been given to the people of India in the Constitution of India.\textsuperscript{2}

3. \textbf{Right to Equality} :-

This right implies equality of all the individuals of the state. No discrimination will be made against anybody on account of his/her religion, caste, colour, creed, race, sex or descent etc.

In India, since the Vedic period the Hindu society has been divided into four Varnas or castes - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. "The English word 'caste' is derived from the Portuguese and the Spanish word 'caste' which means race."\textsuperscript{3} "It has been used since the middle of the 15th century to denote different classes into which Hindus are divided. \textit{Varna} or colour and \textit{Jati} or race are the two commonest words in Indian languages which are interchangeably used to denote 'caste'."\textsuperscript{4}

3. Homo Hierarchicus, Dumont; p.21, quoted in V. Thomas Samuel, One Caste One Religion One God, pp. 74-75.
4. V. Thomas Samuel, op.cit., p. 75.
John Murray, on the authority of the Rig Veda, writes: When they divided the Purusa, into how many parts did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What his two arms? What are his thighs and feet called? The Brahmin was his mouth, his two arms were made in rajanya (warrior), his two thighs the Vaisya (trader and agriculturist), from his feet the Sudra (servile class) was born.¹

Chandogya Upanisad regards man's present caste as pre-determined. It holds that man's Karmas determine his destiny: "Those whose conduct here has been good, will quickly attain a good birth (literally womb), the birth of a Brahmin, the birth of a Ksatriya or the birth of a Vaisya. But those whose conduct here has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth of a dog, the birth of a hog or the birth of a Candala."²

The Laws of Manu hold the divine origin of the caste: "But in order to protect this universe He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate (duties and) occupation to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet. To Brahmins he assigned teaching and studying (the Vedas),

1. Rig Veda 10:90: 11,12, quoted in S. Radhakrishnan, A Source Book In Indian Philosophy, p. 19.
sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting (of alms). The Kshatriyas he commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Vedas), and to abstain from attaching himself to sensual pleasures; the Vaisya to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Vedas), to trade, to lend money and to cultivate land. One occupation only the Lord prescribed to the Sudra to serve meekly ever these (other) three castes."

Manu gives the duty of teaching the Vedas to Brahmana alone. For him Brahmana is the lord of all castes. Whatever exists in the world is the property of the Brahmana.

The divine origin of the caste system is also supported in the Bhagavad Gita: 'The four castes were emanated by Me, by different distribution of qualities and action; know Me to be the author of them, though the actionless and inexhaustible.'

2. The Laws of Manu, opcit.,X.1, p. 401
3. Ibid., X.3, p. 402
4. Ibid., I.99, p.26
5. Bhagavad Gita, 4.13, translated by Annie Besant and Bhagwan Das, p. 81
The outright rejection of the caste-system by Guru Nanak makes it crystal clear how vociferously he advocates the right to equality for all human beings. According to him, all are the creation of the Sole Lord. None is high or low, good or bad by birth. It is the deeds of man that make him so. He is not for division of labour on the basis of caste-system. Everybody is free to do any job of his/her choice provided that he/she has the ability and competence to do it. To quote Guru Nanak:–

Caste and dynastic pride are condemnable notions;
The One Master shelters all existence.¹

Commenting on the futility of the caste-system Guru Nanak says that in the Lord's Court, no consideration is given to one's caste. To quote him:–

Know each being to be repository of Divine Light—
Ask not for anyone's caste!
In the Hereafter are castes not considered.²

Further:–
The God does not mind our caste or birth, so one must find the House of Truth;

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p. 83
2. Ibid., p. 349
For, as one’s deeds, so is one’s caste.¹

According to Guru Nanak, they are the truly low-caste persons who do not remember God. He says:—

Those forgetting the Lord are the truly low-caste.
Saith Nanak: Those without the Name are indeed low-born.²

Moreover, nobody is a Brahmin or a Kshatriya by birth. Anyone observing the required discipline is a true Brahmin or a true Kshatriya.
To quote Guru Nanak:—

He alone is a Brahmin who knows Brahma, yea, the God,
And practises Austerity and Contemplation on Self-control,
And does (the Right) Deeds,
And keeps the Religion of Contentment and Culture.
And earns Emancipation, breaking the Bond (of Desire).
Yea such a Brahmin is worthy of being worshipped.
He alone is a Khatri who is a Hero in Deed,
And dedicates his body to Compassion and Charity,
And knowing the right Far, Sows the Seed of Beneficence,
Then such a Khatri is Approved of the Lord’s Court.³

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 1330
2. Ibid., p. 10
3. Ibid., p. 1411
The fore-going discussion shows that all human beings are equal; and no discrimination is to be made on the basis of caste or birth. Everybody has the right to equality with others.

Guru Nanak, first of all, most forcefully advocated for all the human beings' right to equality, and this right was granted by the U.N. Charter of Declaration of Human Rights under the Article 2 which reads: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language."

The Constitution of India has also granted the right to equality to all the Indians.

4. Right to Education

Education is essential for bringing about awareness among the human beings and everybody has the right to get education.

Plato laid great emphasis on the need of education. He suggested spiritual method of education to attain justice. According to him, "to make the society harmonious and to bring about unity in the State,

2. Government of India, The Constitution of India
proper education is essential. Education reforms the wrong ways of living by altering the whole outlook of life. It is 'an attempt to cure a mental malady by mental medicines' (Barker). Rousseau is perhaps hitting the right mark when he says that 'Republic' (of Plato) is hardly a political work at all, but is the finest treatise on education that ever was written.¹

Aristotle also regards the state mainly as an educational institution. The main function of the Ideal state of Aristotle is ethical. It aims at inculcating moral values in man. That state is the best state which enables everyone to lead a good and happy life. And good and happy life, for Aristotle, is moral life.² According to Antiphon, the Sophist, "First of all things, I place education."³

As regards the aims and ideals of the state Chandogya Upanisad writes that "Religion was to be promoted, morality was to be encouraged and education was to be patronised."⁴

In ancient India, only the upper three castes, viz. the Brahmin, the Kshatriya and the Vaisya had

2. Ibid., p. 134
3. V.D. Mahajan, Political Thought, p. 322
the right to get education. The right to teach was granted to the Brahmin only while the Kshatriya and the Vaisya could get education, but they had no right to impart to others. The Sudras, the lowest-caste people had no right even to get education. The Laws of Manu read, "Let the three twice-born castes (varna), discharging their (prescribed) duties, study (the vedas); but among them the Brahmana (alone) shall teach it, not the other two; there is an established rule."¹

Guru Nanak emphasises the need of education among the people so that they become conscious and aware of their rights and duties. He believes that it was due to lack of education among the people of his times that they meekly tolerated the oppression wielded by the rulers on them and dared not to resist it. Describing the situation Guru Nanak comments:—

The subjects are blind and without knowledge, they are just like carcases full of straw.²

It shows that Guru Nanak lays stress on the people's right to education.

After Guru Nanak, many Western political thinkers emphasised the need of education for the

2. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p. 469
human beings and their right to education. In the opinion of James Mill, "all men were by nature equal and the differences among them were due mainly to education. Education was the best employment of all the means which can be made use of by man for rendering the human mind to the greatest possible degree, the cause of human happiness." J.S. Mill considered education so essential that he laid a lot of emphasis on the educational qualifications of the voters.

Harold J. Laski observes, "Every citizen has the right to education. It is education which makes a man a good citizen. Every citizen is authorised to demand elementary education and it is only when this much has been guaranteed to every individual that provision should be made for higher education for a few individuals."

According to Bertrand Russell, "education is an attempt to touch the evil at its source and to reform the wrong methods of life by altering the whole outlook of life. This, and not violent revolution, or paper legislation is the way out of economic greed and international brutality."

1. V.D. Mahajan, Recent Political Thought, p. 25
3. V.D. Mahajan, Recent Political Thought, p. 977
The right to education to the individual, first stressed by Guru Nanak, has been granted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of U.N.O. under the Article 26 which reads: (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."¹

This right has also been granted to the Indians in the Constitution of India under the Article 29 and 30.²

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¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, quoted in T.S. Batra, op.cit., p. 252
² Government of India, The Constitution of India
5. **Right to Justice:**

Various political thinkers and philosophers of the Western thought have propounded their theories on the Right to Justice from time to time. In Plato's Ideal State, Justice is the end. Saint Thomas Aquinas defines "Justice as the fixed and perpetual will to give to every one his own rights." It was one of the fundamental aims of the state, in ancient India, to promote dharma or justice. The Vedic literature observes that peace, order, security and justice were regarded as fundamental aims of the state. The king or the head of the state was to be like god Varuna, the upholder of the law and order (dhritavrata); he was to punish the wicked and help the virtuous.

The people's right to justice must be recognised and its non-violation ensured by the state. It is suggested by Guru Nanak through his criticism of the Kazi who acts as the judge but accepting bribe gives judgment in favour of the bribing person. Thus he deprives the people of their right to get justice.

1. R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p. 27
2. Ibid., pp. 264-65.
To quote Guru Nanak:—

Kazi sits as a judge
He tells rosary and mutters God's Name,
Taking bribe, he usurps the right to justice
( and does injustice )
If anyone asks for it, he misquotes and reads out some aphorism.1

God Himself is Just. He has created the universe, His throne, to deliver justice to the beings.
Guru Nanak says:—

Thou hast created the Throne to Adjudicate truly.2
The Judiciar Lord Himself sits on the Throne,
Doubt, discrimination and fear—all are gone.3

Thus God Himself has given all human beings the right to justice which must be protected by the government.

Some Western political thinkers who came after Guru Nanak, also thought about the people's right to justice almost on the lines given by him. Among them, John Locke observes that justice lies in

2. Ibid., p. 580
3. Ibid., p. 1022
not depriving "an individual of his right of preservation of life, health, liberty and possession, his right of equality and the right to enforce the law of nature to safeguard his rights as well as the rights of his neighbour."

Edmund Burke holds, "Men have a right to justice between their fellows..." 

In the opinion of Harold J. Laski, "Every citizen has the right to be provided with those judicial safeguards which can guarantee liberty to him. This means that justice should be administered without fear or favour. It must not be harsher upon the poor than upon the rich. The officers of the Government should not be given any privileged position." 

6. Same Rights For Women :-

It implies that woman has the same rights as man has. There is no scope of any discrimination against women because of their sex. They are fully at par with men.

The position of woman in Indian society during early Vedic period, was good excepting the

1. R.M. Bhagat, part.II, pp. 93-94
2. Ibid., p. 196
3. V.D. Mahajan, Political Theory, p. 877
stray incidents of unwelcoming the female child. But it was not a general practice and the sacred writings were against it. "Some thinkers have even pointed out that a talented and well behaved daughter may be better than a son (Sam. Nik : II, 2,6)." In cultured circles such a daughter was regarded as the pride of the family. Women were given proper education to make them properly trained so that they could be successful in their married life. The Atharvaveda observes that a maiden can succeed in her marriage only if she has been properly trained during the period of studentship (brahmacharya).

Moreover, "In pre-historic times lady-poets themselves were composing hymns, some of which were destined to be included even in the Vedic Samhitas.

According to the orthodox tradition as recorded in the Sarvanu - Karmanika, there are as many as twenty women among the 'seer' or authors of the Rigveda. Some of these may have been mythical personages; but internal evidence shows that Lopamudra, Visvavara, Sikata Nivavari and Ghosha, the authors of the Rigveda 1.179, V.28, VIII. 91.IX.81.11-20, and X. 39 and 40 respectively, were women in flesh and blood, who once lived in Hindu society."

1. Kumarasambhava, VI, 63, quoted in A.S. Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, p.4
2. Ibid., XI,5,18, quoted in A.S. Altekar, The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization, p.10
During the early Vedic period, even widow marriage was in vogue. "Atharvaveda refers to a woman marrying second time. It lays down a ritual to secure the union of the new couple in heaven."¹ Custom of Sati did not exist at that time.

It was only afterwards that the position of woman started deteriorating. She was deprived of the right to practise religion. "By the laws of Brahmanas the woman, the sudra and the people of lower classes are deprived of the right to perform fire sacrifice; they can perform other ceremonies without mantras."²

She was so humiliated that she was considered no better than a dog. "Even in the later Vedic period the Stapatha Brahmana warns that while teaching 'pravarjya' the teacher should not look at the woman, the sudra, the dog and the blackbird, because they are untruth."³ Manu also prescribes like this.⁴

In Ramayana, Arya Khand XIII – 56, it is written, "There is none whom a woman sincerely loves. She, for serving her purpose, does not hesitate to

1. Atharvaveda,IX, 5.27-8, quoted in A.S. Altekar, op.cit., p. 150
2. Brahma Purana, p. 572, quoted in R.S. Sharma, Light On Early Indian Society And Economy, p. 31
3. Stapatha Brahmana, XIV, 1.1.31, quoted in R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.30
4. The Laws of Manu, XI, 224, Max Muller, op.cit., p. 476.
kill even her husband, children or brothers."¹

Woman was considered to be vice-incarnate. A passage in Mahabharata says: "A man with a hundred tongues would not be able to describe completely the vice and defects of women."²

Even the Buddha said to his disciple Ananda: "Women are soon angered, Ananda, women are full of passion, Ananda; women are envious, Ananda...."³

Manu forbids man from eating the leavings of a woman or a sudra who are forbidden flesh. In case anyone did not follow the rule he was required to eat barley for seven days as a punishment.⁴

Woman was subjugated and treated at par with slave. According to Manu, she has no right to property:

"A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong."⁵

2. Mahabharata, quoted by Bhagwant Swarup Goel, op.cit.
3. Sullivaga, X-1-6, quoted by Bhagwant Swarup Goel, op.cit.
4. The Laws of Manu, XI, 153, Max Muller, op.cit., vol.XXV, p. 461
5. Manu, VIII, p. 416, quoted in Max Muller, op.cit., p. 326.
Again, according to Manu, a woman should never be given independence. "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence." It was also prescribed for her that she must always worship her husband like a god.

With the passage of time, she came to be treated as property that needs protection, and the duty of her protection was enjoined upon the King. In Markandeya Purana, "a prince boasts that he never coveted other men's wives or wealth or anything belonging to them." Agni Purana, a work of about eleventh century A.D., holds that "woman and animal can be kept as pledge, and interest on them is the seventieth part of their original value. Very probably this is monthly interest."

So much so that she was reduced to the status of a low-caste and she came to be treated at par with Sudra. According to Agni Purana, "one who commits the murder of a woman shall be required to perform the same

kind of penance as is prescribed for the murder of a Sudra.\textsuperscript{1}

"In Gupta and post-Gupta times women and sudras were conceded the right to acquire the knowledge of the Puranas. But even in subsequent times it was not permissible to study the Veda near the woman and sudra."\textsuperscript{2}

The evil of Sati took hold of society. The widows were burnt alive along with the pyre of their husbands, even forcibly against their wishes. According to Angiras "Only course which religion has prescribed for a widow is that of Sati."\textsuperscript{3} Another evil in vogue was Purdah system for women which was very popular especially among the Muslim populace.

The Quran also keeps women at a lower level than men. It states, "Men are a degree above them (the women)"\textsuperscript{4} (XXVIII. 228). "Men are protectors of their women."\textsuperscript{5}(4.VI, 34).

1. Agni Purana, 173.13, quoted in R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.26
2. Brahma Purana, p. 572, quoted in R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.31
4. The Quran, XXVIII. 228, quoted by Bhagwant Swarup God, op.cit.
5. Ibid., 4.VI, 34, quoted by Bhagwant Swarup Goel, op.cit.
In Ancient Rome also, the condition of woman was not better. According to the Roman Law, "the children, the wife, and the slave of a Roman head of a house (patorfamilias) were equally subject to his unrestricted power (virtus necisque potestas) and equally outside the jurisdiction of the state."\(^1\)

In Christianity, as W.E.H. Lecky writes in the 'History of European Morals', "Woman was represented as the door of hell, as the mother of all human ills. She should be ashamed at the very thought that she is a woman. She should live in continual penance, on account of the curses she has brought upon the world."\(^2\) For the "sin" of making Adam eat the forbidden fruit God passed his sentence on woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception: in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."\(^3\) (Old Testament, Genesis 3:16).

Guru Nanak strongly advocates that women must enjoy the same rights as men enjoy. Guru Nanak unequivocally condemns the low status given to women at his times. He says that it is the woman

who gives birth to men, even the Kings and other great
men. Without her man's existence is not possible.
Thus he elocutes a strong plea in favour of woman in
the following words :-

It is woman who conceives and gives birth.
To woman is man engaged, and woman he marries,
With woman is man's companionship.
From woman progency takes place.
Should woman die, is another sought;
Due to woman are made relationships
Why revile her of whom are born great ones of the earth?
From woman is born woman, no human being without woman
is born,
Saith Nanak; the True Eternal alone with woman can
dispense.¹

Guru Nanak denounces the idea of considering
a woman impure during the period of her menstrual
cycle. He attaches no impurity to it as it is a natural
cycle. He attaches impurity not to the natural bodily
functions but to the bad qualities and bad habits like
that of telling lies. He says :-

As occur the woman's menses again and again,
So abides falsehood in the liar's mouth
That ever brings ignominy to him.²

2. Ibid., p. 472
He condemns also the idea of attaching impurity to the delivery of a child and the period after it. There was a system to keep the mother separate from the rest of the family for a specific period after the child-birth. She was disallowed to touch anything lest it should become impure.

The people called this impurity Sutak. Guru Nanak vehemently criticised this evil practice. He tells that everywhere pro-creation is taking place. Even the cow-dung cakes and wood used as fuel for cooking food are not free from it as the insects are procreating in them, then therein, too, must be impurity. Similarly, water and all other things human beings drink, eat or use otherwise, have life which is multiplying every moment, hence these things also must have impurity. According to Guru Nanak, actual impurity lies in evil thoughts of mind. He says:

Should sutak impurity be believed in, then know, 
Such impurity occurs everywhere, 
Inside cow-dung and wood are found worms. 
No single grain of cereals is without life in it. 
The first of living things is water, whereby is each object sustained. 
How may sutak impurity be believed when even in
the Kitchen it is occurring?

Saith Nanak: The sutak impurity goes not thus—
Enlightenment alone washes it off. ¹

Further Guru Nanak comments on the actual impurity in the following words:—

The Mind's sutak is avarice, the tongue's falsehood;
The eye's sutak coveting others' womenfolk's beauty and others' wealth.
The ear's sutak is listening to slander. ²

In this way, Guru Nanak does not find any logic in the idea of sutak, and discards it only as an illusion of mind. He writes:—

All belief in sutak is illusion, that induces in man worship of other than God.
Birth and death by Divine Ordinance occurs;
By the Divine Will beings come and go.
Food and drink that the Lord to creation has granted, is all pure,
Saith Nanak: Those that by the Master's guidance have realization,
By sutak are not affected. ³

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 472-73
Moreover, in the opinion of Guru Nanak, woman is same in substance, origin and attributes as is man. Both have each other's element in themselves. To quote him:

In the male is the female element
in the female the male...\(^1\)

Therefore, the question of any disparity between man and woman does not arise.

According to Hindu Philosophy, a female devotee even of the stature of Meera Bai can never attain emancipation in her present life in the capacity of a woman; she has to take another birth as a man in the world to endeavour to attain emancipation. "Some ancient scriptures denounced woman as unworthy of religious exercises. Woman was regarded as evil and unclean."\(^2\) In Islam a woman is not entitled to sit in the same row with men in Masjid to render namaz.

But Guru Nanak's view is totally different. He tells in a suggestive way that a woman is equally entitled to engage in contemplation of God's Naam for her spiritual exaltation and attainment of emancipation in her present life itself. According to him, just as water washes and cleans the male as well

2. Prof. Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *The Quintessence Of Sikhism*, p. 228
as female body covered with dust, without any discrimination, similarly, God’s Naam purifies the impurities of human mind may it be of a man or a woman, He says:–

If the hands, feet and body - male as well as female (Tan Deh), are covered with dust, they can be washed with water which cleans them equally.

...  

If the mind (of a man as well as a woman) is polluted, it is purified by contemplation of God’s Naam.¹

The words Tan and Deh used in the original composition, belong, in their sound-form, to the male and female gender respectively, hence they are suggestive of the male and female body respectively.

The right of woman to go to Gurdwaras and participate in the proceedings of the Sangat freely and effectively is a testimony to Guru Nanak’s advocacy of her equal right in the spiritual domain. There are several examples in Sikh History to show that Guru Nanak’s advocacy for women’s equal rights

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p. 4
cast its impact on the life-style of women. They worked and co-operated with men, sometimes with greater vigour than men. Mata Khivi, the second Guru's wife, took active part in maintenance of the Langar is. Community Kitchen. The names of Bibi Bhani, Mata Gujri and Mata Sundri are also worth-mentioning for their considerable contribution to the cause of humanity. Not only this, women, whenever the need arose, did not hesitate to take up arms like their male counterparts. The examples of Mai Bhago (who fought valiantly at Khidrana, now Muktsar, at the time of Guru Gobind Singh) and Rani Sahib Kaur bear testimony to this fact.

The advocacy for the same rights to women as to men was initiated by Guru Nanak; but it was centuries after him that the U.N.O.'s Declaration of Human Rights declared under its article 2 that all human beings are entitled to the rights listed in the charter without the distinction of race, colour, sex and language etc. 1

Similar provisions have been made in the Constitution of India also.

7. **Right to Resistance** :-

It implies that the people have the right to resistance of the authority of the oppressive and

1. T.S. Batra, op.cit., p. 248
tyrannical rulers or of the ruler who fails to serve the people. They are supposed not to bear with him under any circumstances.

In ancient India, it was a tradition with people to resist the tyrannical ruler and his functionaries. There is an ample evidence to support the argument that subjects were advised to resist the tyrants or to leave his territory and shift to better governed Kingdoms. "King Krshna devaraya of Vijayanagar warns his officers that they should not allow subjects to migrate under such circumstances, but should try to remove their grievances."\(^1\)

It was probably hoped that the prospective loss of the revenue might bring the King to his senses. In extreme cases the subjects could even replace the King.\(^2\)

Mahabharata recognises subjects' right to tyrannicide if there was no other remedy left to them.\(^3\) Thus sovereignty ultimately rested with people. It was sort of constitutional right the

3. Ibid., XIII.86.35-6, quoted in A.S. Altekar, op.cit., p. 101
scriptures had given them.

Guru Nanak's condemnation of the oppression and brutalities exercised by the rulers of his times on their subjects testifies his advocacy for the people's right to resist the oppressive and tyrant ruler. He himself confronted the ruler dauntlessly and irrepressibly. He comments:

The kings are tigers; their officials are dogs,
They disturb the people without caring for their convenience.
The officials cause wounds as if with their claws,
The blood and the flesh left behind are swallowed up by the dogs (the servants). ¹

He, very courageously raised voice against the injustice being done by his contemporary rulers. To quote him:

The Kaliage is a knife, Kings are butchers;
Justice has taken wing and fled.
This is the dark night of evil;
The moon of truth is nowhere visible, nor risen.²

Guru Nanak did not spare the subjects also. In the opinion of Guru Nanak it was the fault of the

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p. 1288
2. Ibid., p. 145
people to obey the orders of the tyrannical rulers without discriminating between the right or wrong. He comments:—

Greed and evil are King and counsellor;
falsehood their officer.
Lust the officer who is called for advice,
All three hold conclave to chalk out plans,
The subjects, bereft of understanding, are
carcases full of straw.1

He criticises such men as obey the orders, just or unjust like dogs for the sake of a morsel of bread. To quote Guru Nanak:—

Saith Nanak: Men are human in shape and name—
Their doings dog-like: at the door waiting to carry out commands.2

Thus Guru Nanak condemns non-resistance to the misrule and oppression of the rulers. It implies that he strongly advocates the people's right to resist authority if misused. The people must be aware of their right and prepared for the proper use of it whenever the need arises. In a way, Guru Nanak considers

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p. 469
2. Ibid., p. 350
it a duty in stead of a right of the people to resist tyranny.

A Western Political thinker, Saint Thomas Aquinas, also regarded it as a duty in stead of a right of the people to resist the tyrant ruler. "If he becomes tyrant and pursues his personal interests it becomes the duty of the subjects to resist. It is for this reason that the resistance of tyranny is not only a right but a duty." ¹

In the opinion of Thomas Hobbes, the sovereign must get absolute powers. But as man has entered into contract with the state and surrendered certain rights for the sake of protection of his life, and if life itself is endangered by the sovereign then the people have the right to resist and change him. "... every man has the right to disobey if his sovereign commands him to kill, wound, or maim himself; or not to resist those that assault him; or any other thing, without which he cannot live..." ²

A great defender of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, John Locke, was of the conviction that the people must resist oppression. "The true remedy of force without authority is to oppose force to it."¹

T.H. Green is of the view that when the laws of the state are tyrannical and the state fails to promote the common good, "resistance under these circumstances is not merely a right but it becomes a duty."²

But the political system of Guru Nanak's vision is suggestive of total absence of violation of the people's human rights by the ruler. In case, the ruler violates any human right of any human being, it is imperative for the Sangat i.e. the people to resist him, to recall and replace him according to the need of the situation. But if even the new incumbent (ruler) starts violating the human rights, the political system itself must be changed and replaced by some healthier one congenial for full enjoyment of the human rights by the people of the state.

1. R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p. 116