Chapter-I

Guru Nanak and His Contemporary

Politico-social Conditions

Guru Nanak, though primarily a spiritual mentor, was, indeed, a thinker par excellence. There is much misconception among people about him that he was merely a religious thinker and that he had nothing to do with the political affairs of the people around him. True, he was neither a statesman nor a politician. He kept himself aloof from active participation in politics. He never coveted any political authority or power for himself. His state of mind can be well expressed in the following words of the fifth Guru:

I seek no dominion for me, nor Deliverance,
for I crave for nothing but the Love of Thy Lotus-Feet.¹

But it does not mean that he had no political thought. It is not necessary for a political thinker that he should also be a statesman or politician. The biographies of the great Greek political thinkers like Plato² and Aristotle³ show that they never became statesmen, yet their political ideas still carry weight. Guru Nanak was, indeed, a great, liberal and enlightened thinker who attached due importance to all the positive

¹ Guru Arjan Dev, Adi Granth, P.534
³ Ibid., pp. 120-23.
aspects of human life. How could, then, the political affairs, a vital aspect of human life, pass by him unnoticed and how could he show apathy and callousness to the contemporary politics? Rather he had an acute awareness of political instability and turmoil of his times and reacted to it in very poignant terms. In fact, his reactions to the contemporary political conditions have become the fountain-head of his Philosophy of Politics.

According to the American College Dictionary, "Philosophy is the study or science of the truths or principles underlying all knowledge of being or reality." It is concerned not only with facts but also with values. It tries to understand reality not only of what actually is but also what it actually ought to be. If philosophy is a search for truth, Political Philosophy is a search for good political order. Leo Strauss holds that "If men make it their explicit goal to acquire knowledge of the good life and the good society, political philosophy emerges." According to Alan Gewirth, political philosophy is concerned with the moral evaluation of political power. According to Arnold Brecht, "Political Philosophy examines not what is but what ought to be done or to be approved."

It is in the above-mentioned sense that the observations

1. American College Dictionary, quoted in R.M. Bhagat, Politican Thought : Plato To Marx, p.15
2. R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p.15
3. Leo Strauss, quoted by R.M. Bhagat, op.cit.,p.21
4. Alan Gewirth, quoted by R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p.21
5. Arnold Brecht, quoted by R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p.22
made by Guru Nanak regarding his contemporary political conditions, bring forth his Philosophy of Politics.

Though Guru Nanak does not advance and argue his political thought logically and systematically in a typical political philosopher's fashion; and whatever reflection is made, is made by him in his devotional hymns; whatever political thought is formed, is through the interpretation of his inspired and panegyric poetic compositions into temporal meanings; it is not correct to say that Guru Nanak, a Faqir as he is known to be, devotes himself entirely and solely to spiritual matters and he has no interest in political affairs. Notwithstanding the spiritual and pacific note of his psalms, there is an under-current of a forceful and dynamic approach to political and social thinking. His verses, though predominantly religious in tone, are not entirely apolitical in subject-matter. Rather these are marvellously thought-provoking in the sphere of politics. According to J.S. Grewal, "Guru Nanak was primarily a social and religious thinker, but it is also suggested that even if he did not systematically probe into the affairs of the state it is possible to form an idea of his reaction to political authority."¹

"Every political thinker worth the name, howsoever secluded, must represent, in his writings and personality,

1. J.S. Grewal, Guru Nanak In History, p. 146
the contemporary problems simply because he cannot rid himself of them. The issues and the controversies of his times are bound to find a reflection in his political reflection. The physical, intellectual, social, political and economic environment leaves an indelible impression on the mind of the political thinker. That is why Laski says repeatedly that "No theory of state is ever intelligible save in the context of its time." Guru Nanak is such a political thinker in whose compositions, not only the contemporary political developments and turmoil but also his prompt reaction to them find a reflection in abundance. In fact, his philosophy of politics can be studied only with reference to his contemporary political set-up.

Therefore, to understand Guru Nanak's philosophy of politics aright, it is necessary to first discern the milieu in which he lived, what influenced his thinking and how he reacted to the milieu. "In the absence of reliable records of Guru Nanak's life, travels and encounters with people, all we have left to us is the Guru's own writings from which to decipher what influenced his thinking and his reactions to the milieu in which he lived. We can however presume that he must have breathed his share of the religious, social and political atmosphere of the time

1. R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p. 359
2. Laski, quoted by R.M. Bhagat, op.cit., p.359
and places in which he lived. Thus a clear understanding of the political, social and religious conditions prevailing immediately before and during Guru Nanak's times is essential for a proper understanding of his philosophy of politics.

Guru Nanak's life spanned the period from 1469 A.D. to 1539 A.D. He was born in the fifteenth century at Rai Bhoi Ki Talwandi, a town near Lahore, situated in the plains of the Punjab (now known after him as Nankana Sahib and forming a part of West Pakistan). The scholars often divide human history into three periods - ancient, medieval and modern. According to this division, the fifteenth century marks the advent of the modern era. In fact, the fifteenth century witnessed the transitional phase of the world (especially Western) from the medieval into the modern age and many political upheavals. "In a sense, therefore, Guru Nanak was one of the torch-bearers of the so-called modern age, though in the case of India, the medieval age continued right up to the eighteenth century. In Europe, the spirit of 'new learning' started spreading with the rise of Italian Renaissance during the fifteenth century. The authority of science began asserting itself and the authority of the Church showed signs of the loosening of its hold. The transition from the rule of feudal aristocracy to an industrial democratic State

was gradually taking place there. The adventures of Vasco-da-Gama and Columbus, 'who enlarged the world' and the influence of Copernicus, who 'enlarged the heavens, contributed their share in laying the foundations of a new era in the Western World.'

The notion that the earth was round like a ball and rotated round the sun, and the immensity of the size of the universe suggested by Copernicus undermined the medieval conception of the structure of the universe. The Mediterranean ceased to be the centre of the world; the theatre of the world events shifted to the Atlantic.

Thus "a new universe opened at the end of the fifteenth century before the staggered gaze of men already eager to explore, intoxicated with the intellectual stimulants they had received from their study of antiquity."

The life-span of Guru Nanak (1469 to 1539) was an epoch-making period during which a number of significant historical events took place both in the East and the West. "It was a period of the emergence of leaders in the regions of politics, religion and science. Lorenzo the Magnificent came to power in the 'most civilized city' of Florence in the year of Guru Nanak's birth, that is, A.D. 1469. Machiavelli, a Florentine

and noted political commentator, was also born in 1469. Erasmus and Thomas More, Copernicus and Martin Luther, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci were some of the other outstanding contemporaries of the Guru.

The scene in India presented a confused picture, with the Lodi Dynasty facing downfall and Babar, the ruler of Samarqand, crossing into India and capturing the throne of Delhi. It was during the life of Guru Nanak that the Moghul Empire was established in India.¹

Before the birth of Guru Nanak in the second half of the fifteenth century, several Muslim dynasties had reigned India. "The armed might of the Hindus had been broken by Qutb-Ud-Din Aibak, the first king of the Slave dynasty in 1193 in the battle of Narain. Several efforts were made to exterminate Hinduism."² "Tens of thousands of temples were destroyed and millions of Hindus butchered,"³ "There was great religious intolerance on the part of the conquerors and the vanquished people suffered heavily. There were forcible conversions. Those Hindus who did not accept them, had to live under the pressure of severe taxes and were subjected to Muslim Laws."⁴

² Surinder Singh Kohli, Philosophy of Guru Nanak, p.14
³ Lt. General Sir George Macmann, Afghanistan, quoted in Surinder Singh Kohli, Ibid., p.14
Syed Mohammad Latif writes, "Great jealousy and hatred existed in those times between the Hindus and the Mohammdans, and the whole non-Musalman population was subjected to persecution by the Mohammadan rulers."¹

According to Prof. Arnold Toynbee, "Their (of Hinduism and Islam) principal meeting ground has been in India, where Islam has impinged on Hinduism violently. On the whole, the story of the relations between these two great religions on Indian ground has been an unhappy tale of mutual misunderstanding and hostility."²

When Guru Nanak appeared on the scene in 1469 A.D., Delhi kingdom was being reigned by Bahlol-Lodhi (1451-89) who had overthrown the tottering Sayyad dynasty and founded the Lodhi dynasty.³ According to V.D. Mahajan, the Lodhi Territory "included the Punjab, the Doab, Jaunpur, Oudh, a part of Bihar, Tirhut and the country between the Sutlej and Bundhelkhand."⁴ Bahlol Lodhi was a clever, tactful and sagacious ruler


2. Prof. Arnold Toynbee, The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs, p.10, quoted in Dr. Hari Ram Gupta, A Life-Sketch of Guru Nanak, the article published in Guru-Nanak-His Life, Time and Teachings edited by Gurmukh Nihal Singh, p.29.


4. V.D. Mahajan, India Since 1526, quoted in Surinder Singh Kohli, op.cit., p.15.
who through his ingenious policy kept the Afghan nobles friendly to himself. "In his social meetings he never sat on a throne and would not allow his nobles to stand; and even during public audiences he did not occupy the throne, but seated himself on a carpet."¹ His son and successor Sikandar Lodhi (1489-1517), though benevolent and just to his own co-religionists,² was a prosecutor of the Hindus. According to M.A. Macauliffe, under him "the state once more assumed a theocratic character and officially imposed Islam upon the Hindus."³ Firishta says that "Sikandar was firmly attached to the Mohammadan religion, and made it a point of destroying all Hindu temples."⁴ Praising him Abdulla, the author of Tarikh-i-Daudi, writes; "He was so zealous a Musalman that he utterly destroyed diverse places of the infidels, and left not a vestige remaining of them. He entirely ruined the shrines of Mathura, the mines of heathenism and turned their principal places of worship into caravan sarais and colleges. Their stone images were given to butchers for using as weights for weighing meat and all the Hindus were strictly prohibited form shaving their heads and beards and performing their

1. N.K. Sinha and A.C. Banerjee, History of India, quoted in Surinder Singh Kohli, op.cit., P.15
ablutions. He thus put an end to all idolatrous rites of the infidels there; and, no Hindu, if he wished to have his head or beard shaved, could get a barber to do it. Every city thus conformed as he desired to the custom of Islam."\(^1\) It is said about him, "Wherever he went, Hindu temples were destroyed and mosques erected on their site... He was a bigot, and his zeal is shown in treatment of Hindus and Hindu shrines."\(^2\) He executed a Brahman, Budhan, for the sole offence of saying that "the religions of both the Moslems and Hindus, if acted on with sincerity, were equally acceptable to God."\(^3\) After Sikandar Lodhi, Ibrahim Lodhi (1517-26) accessed to the throne. But he was a tactless and weak ruler. According to Erskine, the Lodi possessions, though extensive, had no very strong principle of cohesion.\(^4\) "The monarchy was a congeries of nearly independent principalities, jagirs and provinces, each ruled by a hereditary chief, or by a Zamindar or delegate from Delhi; and the inhabitants looked more to their immediate governors, who had

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absolute power in the province, and in whose hands, consequently, lay their happiness and misery, than to a distant and little known sovereign.\(^1\) Ibrahim's arrogant and overbearing temper alienated the Afghan nobles and he made himself an object of almost universal distrust. Daulat Khan Lodhi, the Governor of the Punjab, started intriguing with Babar. He invited Babar to invade India and occupy the throne of Delhi.\(^2\) It was in the field of Panipat that Babar defeated and slain Ibrahim. Thus, after triumph, he laid the foundation of Moghal Empire in India.

According to A.C. Banerjee, "The political uncertainties during the reign of Ibrahim Lodhi and early years of the Mughal regime had their repercussions on the life of the people, and, of these, Guru Nanak was not merely a casual witness."\(^3\) "Although Guru Nanak kept himself aloof from active politics, he did not, at least in his mature years, ignore the political trends which affected the people's lives. Indeed, he was fully alive to the disastrous impact of political

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turmoil and inhospitable atmosphere on society and religion. This was quite natural in view of the fact that he was not an ascetic in the traditional Indian sense. He lived the life of a householder...."¹ "Had the founder of Sikhism been an ascetic of the traditional Indian type, he would have ignored these political developments and noticed in them nothing but the manifestation of inscrutable Divine will."²

In fact, Guru Nanak had a first-hand knowledge of the miserable plight of the people under the Lodhi rulers and of the treatment meted out by the ruling class and their functionaries to their subjects. In his hymns, Guru Nanak gave vent to his response and reaction to the contemporary political set-up in direct as well as implicit form. "For direct evidence on the Guru's reaction to the political turmoil which he witnessed in the Punjab on his return from his travels, his own compositions should be studied. The four well-known verses collectively known as Babar-Vani (Asa 39, Asa Ashtapadi 11, Asa Ashtapadi 12, and Tilang 5) claim

Guru Nanak makes umpteen allusions to the contemporary political situation and wretched state of affairs. This may be inferred from the metaphorical use of the political terminology in vogue at his times. "The number of passages often quoted by writers in illustration of Guru Nanak's political concerns is not more than ten. But there are other verses which have a bearing on the subject and the number of such verses is by no means small. Altogether, they suggested Guru Nanak's familiarity with contemporary politics and bureaucratic set up. This may be inferred from the occurrence, in these verses, of such phrases as sultan, patshah, shah-i-alam, takht, taj, hum, amr, pathani-aml, wazir, divan, naib, lashkar, umera, khan, maluk, shigdar, gazi, chaudhari, mugaddam, raiiyat, for instance. Also there are references to the court and palaces, royal conopy, elephants, armour, cavalry, trumpets, treasury, coins, mint, salary (wajh), taxes and even to revenue-free land." Besides this, Guru Nanak, conceiving God as the King and the universe as His kingdom or State, puts forth his concept of an Ideal State. At some places, he uses the image of a 'state' for human body, that of a 'ruler' for human mind and that of the 'Panches' for

the five senses, and, thus, evolves the conceptual structure of the State. Therefore, it is from the metaphorical usage of the political phraseology interspersed profusely in his verses that his political ideas can be inferred.

While condemning some unrighteous policy or misrule of his contemporary rulers Guru Nanak attributes it to the general term 'rulers' in stead of assigning it to any particular ruler with the exception of Babar.

The age of Guru Nanak was an age of political chaos, oppression, tyranny and corruption. Guru Nanak gives expression to his anguish over the age in these words:

The Kali age is a Knife, kings are butchers;
Religion (Righteousness and Justice) has taken wings and fled.\(^1\)

Corruption and bribery were rampant in the contemporary judicial system due to the weak regime and low ebb of morality of the administrative machinery. Guru Nanak exposes them in the following verses:

In this age none at sight of suffering takes pity
No one from receiving graft restrains himself.

\(^1\) Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 145
Rulers administer justice as is their palm greased. None by invoking the name of God is persuaded.¹

There was virtually no justice during the age. Kazis who were the very custodians of justice and responsible for administering justice and expounding the Law, had become corrupt. It indicates that there was the height of political degeneration. Guru Nanak expresses his indignation in the following words:-

Becoming a judge a Kazi sits to administer justice,
He tells the rosary and mutters God's Name;
Taking bribe he usurps the right to justice
( and does injustice)
If someone asks him, then he misquotes and reads out some aphorism.²

The rulers and their officials remissed in the proper discharge of their duties and performance of their function with the result that the people suffered great hardship. In one of his hymns, Guru Nanak describes the state of affairs as under :-

Greed and evil are king and counsellor;
falsehood their officer.

2. Ibid., P. 951.
Lust the officer who is called for advice,
All three hold conclave to chalk out plans.¹

They not only neglected their duties but also
oppressed and harassed their subjects. Guru Nanak
makes a scathing attack on the tyranny of the rulers
and their officials in the following verse:

The kings are tigers; their officials are dogs,
They disturb the people caring not a fig for their
convenience.
The officials cause wounds as if with their claws,
The blood and the bile left behind are swallowed
up by the dogs.²

During the times of Guru Nanak, the most
shocking and horrible event that occurred was Babar's
invasion on India which brought untold cruelties and
barbarities in its wake. Babar's soldiers not only
plundered the innocent people of India but also committed
excesses and atrocities on them. The people who had
little to do with war or politics, were slain and
degraded. Numberless women both Muslim and Hindu
were raped and molested. The heart-rending spectacle
of massacre, arson, rape and plunder, on an unprecedented
scale, struck terror all around. The people were too

¹. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 468
². Ibid., P. 1288
terrorised and demoralised to raise a protest. "In 1520 A.D. Babar crossed river Chenab and occupied Sialkot without much resistance. Then he marched on Sayyidpur (Eminabad) which was taken by assault and put to the sword."\(^1\)

Guru Nanak was deeply moved by the oppression and suffering caused by Babar's invasion. The havoc and devastation wrought by Babar's armies and the consequent deplorable plight of the Indians found a wrathful and indignant expression in Guru Nanak's verses known as Babar-Vani. Addressing Lalo, he says:

Friend Lalo! as descends to me the Lord's word,  
I express it.  
Babar with the wedding party of sin from Kabul rushed down,  
And forcibly demanded surrender of, Indian womanhood.  
Then went modesty and righteousness, into hiding.  
And falsehood was strutting about in glory.  
Set aside were Kazis and Brahmins, and Satan went about solemnizing marriages.  
Muslim women reciting the Koran, in their affliction called on Khuda.

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Other women of lower castes and of the Hindus in this suffering too include in your account.

Saith Nanak: Divine Beloved! sung are paeans of blood,

And sprinkled is blood for saffron.¹

The vividness and depth of feeling with which Guru Nanak describes the agony and destruction caused by Babar’s invasion testifies his direct, personal experience of the same. He delineates a vivid and graphic picture of the cruel drama enacted before his very eyes and describes how Babar’s soldiers assaulted the innocent women. He writes:-

The heads elegantly coiffured, with vermillion decked and painted
Now with scissors are shorn, dust upto their necks rises.

... Now are halters thrown round their necks, Their pearl-strings broken.
Wealth and beauty turn enemies of such as had enjoyment of them.
The conqueror commanded his minions to lead them out in dishonour.²

2. Ibid., p. 417.
While making a scathing attack on Babar and his army of sinners, Guru Nanak does not spare Lodhi rulers who always wallowed in luxury and revelry, and cared not a fig for the welfare of their subjects. Moreover, they were callous to the affairs of the state in general. Their weakness and sloth brought Babar on the scene. The Guru holds responsible for the tragic happenings of Babar’s invasion and the subsequent establishment of his regime. He does not negate the operation of the Divine Will in the chastisement of the Lodhi rulers which is the inescapable consequence of unrighteousness and moral depravity. He says:–

The Lord, should it please Him, exalts;

should it please Him, chastizement sends.

Should man contemplate God beforehand,

Chastizement then may be escaped.

Rulers in levity and frivolity lost their senses.

Babar’s command has gone abroad, that

   even princes now without a crust go about.¹

The (Lodhi) rulers were so irresponsive to the situation that Guru Nanak cannot help upbraiding them

(Lodhi rulers) vigorously in the following composition: -

These dogs that despoiled the jewels and wasted them,
Now in their death none shall remember them.  

The political turmoil proved very detrimental to the Indian culture. The alien rulers started imposing their own culture and language on the subjugated populace. The Hindu culture began to acquire the Islamic tinge with the advent of the Muslim rule because of the pressure exercised by the ruling class. The Muslim rulers even mulcted the Hindu gods and shrines. Besides this, the people imitated the culture of the elite in order to please them. To quote Guru Nanak: -

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 Muslim did):
And men have changed their tongue and
the Muslim way of greetings prevails. 

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 360
2. Ibid., P. 1191.
And:

In Kali-Yuga appeared Atharva-Veda,
when God was given the name Allah.
In this age people wear blue and is established the rule of Turks and Pathans. ¹

Apart from this, the socio-religious set-up had also degenerated to a great extent. Stern four-caste or four-varnas system in the Hindu community and four-fold sect system in the Muslim society, exploitation of the poor and down-trodden by the rich, elaborate and ostentatious ritualism, pitiable plight of women, child marriage, practice of Sati, Purdah system, dependence of women on male members of their family, hypocrisy, avarice and bribery were the common-place ills of the society of the times of Guru Nanak.

The age of Guru Nanak was an age of ignorance and strife. Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of Guru Nanak and a noted commentator on Sikhism, says:–

"The Hindus had their four castes, the Mohammadans their four mazhabs. The Hindus had their Ganges and Benaras, the Mohammadans their Mecca and Kaaba; the Hindus their frontal marks, the Mohammadans

¹. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 470
their sunnat. Although Ram and Rahim were one and same, people pursued different paths. Forgetting the Vedas, the people were misled by mammon and became enmeshed in worldly desires. Truth stood apart while the Brahman and the Maulana quarrelled.¹

Guru Nanak had an acute awareness of the situation around him and satirised the whole set-up in his compositions. To quote him:

You tax cows and Brahmins, yet plaster your kitchen with cowdung-
Cowedung shall not get you liberation.
Dhoti, the paste-mark and the rosary you adopt. Yet the sustenance you receive from those you call 'unclean'
In your home the Hindu service you perform, But outside read books of Muslims, And adopt their ways.²
Those who gorge on human beings perform namaz, Those wielding the butcher's knife wear the sacred thread around their neck.³

Guru Nanak "was greatly irked by the Brahmins' relentless advocacy of a rigid caste-system, and their

¹ Bhai Gurdas, Var, 1: 21, quoted by Indubhushan Banerjee, op.cit., pp. 49-50.
² Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 471
³ Ibid.
exploitation of, and oppression against the low-caste people who were dubbed by them as achhut (untouchables, sometimes even unapproachables). How strongly he felt on the matter may be gauged from the following lines of his:

1: These Brahmins put the paste-mark on their foreheads,
And assume the the dhoti with end stuck up;
Yet holding the knife, the world they butcher.
Wearing blue the rulers' approval they seek;
With money derived from Mlechhas the Puranas they worship.

Goats slaughtered over the unapproved Muslims' texts they eat
Yet in their kitchen with cow-dung the line they draw,
Over which sit these hypocrites.
Crying, foul not our kitchen, foul it not!
Lest our food be made impure.

2: Guru Nanak brings out the hollowness of the relation between man and woman due to the latter's economic dependence on the former in the following words:-

Woman and man are bound by ties solely of lucre-
Whether he stay at home or wander abroad.

1. Fauja Singh, Guru Nanak And The Social Problem, the seminar paper published in Perspectives On Guru Nanak, op.cit., p. 142
3. Ibid., p. 951
Woman was condemned and humiliated in the society of Guru Nanak's times. According to Dr. Trilochan Singh, "...one is shocked at the language used to condemn women by the Yogis. She was considered to be a curse to society, born from evil and living in lust to misguide and destroy all that is best in society."  

Guru Nanak questions:—

Why revile her of whom are born great ones of the earth?  

Commenting on the general character and conduct of the contemporary people, Guru Nanak says:—

In the Kali age men have become greedy and, dog-like, they usurp another's due. They titter what is false, and care not for Righteousness. In life, they are Honoured not, and after death, too, Evil is their repute.  

And:—

Women have become submissive,

While men have become tyrants; And Self-culture and Self-control and,

Piety all have abandoned, and they eat what is forbidden.

3. Ibid., p. 1242
Men have lost all sense of shame and 
lost whatever Honour they had.\(^1\)

And:-

Men study scriptures, but realize not the 
true way of life -
Not realizing the Name, into delusion fallen;
Receiving bribes false witness they give, 
with noose of foul 
thinking \textit{closing} round the neck.\(^2\)

And:-

\textit{Saith Nanak}: Men are human in shape and \textit{name-} 
Their doings dog-like : at the door waiting to 
carry out commands.\(^3\)

And:-

The subjects, bereft of understanding, are 
carcases full of straw.
The learned dance, play on instruments, 
And in historic poses, deck themselves. 
Shouting aloud, tales of post heroes, fights and 
contentions they sing. 
Foolish scholars, whose philosophy consists mainly. 

\textit{in contentions},

\begin{itemize}
  \item[1.] Guru Nanak, \textit{Adi Granth}, PP. 1242-43
  \item[2.] Ibid., P. 1032
  \item[3.] Ibid., P. 350.
\end{itemize}
To garnering of wealth are attached.
The religious-minded, practising charity who seek the Door of liberation as reward, Wasted is their endeavour, Those known as celibates knowing not the right device, Discard house and home. Each considers himself perfect; none is willing to make a modest claim.¹

According to Guru Nanak, all is in vain without respect and honour. He writes :-

If the weight of honour be put into the hind scale, then, alone, O Nanak, the man appears properly weighed².

The people devoid of sense of duty, awareness, righteousness and sense of respect dare not counter an alien aggression. Guru Nanak's disgust over the attitude and way of life of the people of his times is clearly discernible in his compositions. He says :-

He whom the Creator Himself destroys;

him, He first deprives of virtue.³

It means that the people to be dishonoured are first rendered characterless.

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 469
2. Ibid., p. 469
3. Ibid., p. 417.
Even religion could not escape the grip of moral degeneration. Guru Nanak comments on the practices of the people of various faiths in the following compositions:

Khatris their true function have discarded, and to the Muhammadan tongues taken:
The whole world to same caste of wrong-doers is reduced—
Gone is the state of Dharma.¹

And:
None follows teachings of scriptures—Each his own interest worship.²

And:
The Hindus absorb through their ears the turks' texts;
By carrying tales they get people robbed.
Rare is the Hindu that keeps ritually pure his kitchen,
Yet at heart is pure.³

And:
Some claiming to be charitable, give away charity out of earnings of sin;
Their priestly mentors come to their homes to impart instructions.⁴

1. Guru Nanak, _Adi Granth_, P. 663
2. Ibid., P. 951
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
The practice of renunciation of the world was gnawing at the roots of the society. Under the garb of asceticism, men fled from their social responsibilities. Guru Nanak comments:—

Some that their families have deserted
are turned Yogis with ashes in matted hair—
Their children wailing around them.
Such have attained not Yoga, and lost the way of good life:
Why have they thus got into ignominy?
Saith Nanak: Such is the way of Kali-Yuga;
Those that teach speak from knowledge based in egoism.¹

The Muslim, the Hindu, the Yogi—neither of them was conversant with the real spirit of religion. They adopted such ways as proved ruinous to humanity. Guru Nanak says:—

The Muslim judge utters falsehood and eats filth;
The Brahmin guilty of slaughter of humanity,
makes show of pious bathing;
The Yogi, blind of insight, knows not the true praxis,
The devices of all three ruin mankind.²

In the words of Indubhushan Banerjee, "at the time of Guru Nanak's advent, religion there was none. The

1. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 951
2. Ibid., p. 662
spirit of both Hinduism and Islam was hidden beneath a mass of formalities and extraneous observances. Tyranny reigned supreme, the tyranny of might, the tyranny of forms, and the tyranny of names...social and political inequalities reigned rampant and there was strife, eternal strife, everywhere. All aspects of life, social, religious and political, presented the same spectacle...."¹

According to G.C. Narang, "The springs of true religion had been choked up by weeds of unmeaning ceremonial, debasing superstitions, selfishness of the priests and indifference of the people. Form had supplanted the reality, and the highly spiritual character of Hinduism had been buried under ostentatious paraphernalia of sects. The centuries of invasion, foreign misrule and persecution had produced the greatest depression, and the spiritual subjection and stagnation had aggravated the demoralisation to an enormous degree."²

Guru Nanak diagnosed the whole situation with his profound insight and found that the root-cause of the social and political evils lay in the tendencies of escapism and pessimism which had penetrated deep

into the lives of the people, due to the prolonged disastrous impact of the ascetic cults and Yogis. In the words of Trilochan Singh, "The anti-social and anti-human influence of Yoga undermined the cultural and political foundations of India so much that their extreme pessimism and unworldliness made the people politically weak, and indifferent to their collective responsibility and they became an easy prey to a handful of invaders."¹

Guru Nanak's religion advises man not to flee from the evils of society he comes across but to face them boldly and endeavour to eradicate them.

Guru Nanak revealed the true spirit of religion to humankind. He, himself a householder, advocated through precept and practice that it is possible to attain spiritual bliss while enjoying worldly comforts provided that one does not become oblivious of the Lord. He says:-

By contemplation of holy truth is the self illumined. Thereby even in attachment to pleasures of the world one unattached remains.

Such is the holy Preceptor's great miracle, That even living with progeny and wife man the supreme state attains.²

2. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 661
The fore-going discussion shows that sensitivity to the milieu was not alien to Guru Nanak. That is why he promptly responded to the political as well as social situation of his times. There were many ills in the society and many a foul-play in the political set-up of that period. Guru Nanak neither lived up in the clouds tight-lipped with his eyes closed and ears clogged nor did he stand by as a silent observer of the happenings around him. Rather he lived like a genius who living right on the solid ground "sees more things than ordinary men, goes deeper into the meaning of things and events he experiences and presents a more comprehensive and unified vision."¹ He being an enlightened man, perceived and discerned with all sensitivity the mist of the religious, social and political atmosphere in which he lived and which he responded and reacted to so baldly and poignantly as nobody else had ever done before him since the times of Anangpal,² the last Hindu king of Northern India, who was overthrown by Mehmood of Ghazni in 1021 A.D. "Namadev was thrown into prison by Sultan Mohammed-bin-Tughlak. Even after suffering untold tortures and humiliation he did not write a single

¹. John B.Chethimattam, The Secular Religion of Guru Nanak, the seminar paper published in Perspectives On Guru Nanak, op.cit., P. 136
sentence of protest against the political tyranny of the times. Kabir suffered under Sikander Lodhi but he did not say a word about the ruthless rule of this Emperor. Guru Nanak was the first to denounce fearlessly the cruelty and despotism of the rulers, and the tyranny of their misrule.¹ In the words of Sir Gokul Chand Narang, "After centuries of subjection, Nanak was the first among the Hindus to raise his voice against tyranny and oppression."² He also comments, "...The sword which carved the Khalsa's way to glory was, undoubtedly, forged by Govind, but the steel had been provided by Nanak, who had obtained it, as it were, by smelting the Hindu ore and burning out the dross of indifference and the hypocrisy and pharisaism of the priests."³ J.D. Cunningham observes, "... It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of the reform and to lay those foundations which enabled his successor Gobind to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes."⁴

2. Sir Gokul Chand Narang, op.cit., p. 25
3. Ibid., p.1.
4. J.D. Cunningham, A History of Sikhs, p. 34
Guru Nanak, in fact, infused the demoralised and dispirited people with a new spirit of life and awakened political consciousness among them so that they could be prepared to resist the tyrannical and oppressive rule. He not only urged them to resist the cruelties of despotic rulers but also to restructure the political order in such a way so as to make it conducive for dignified human life.

In the words of Dr. Darshan Singh, "Guru Nanak was convinced that unless people are made aware to their impending miseries, there can be no meaningful resistance to the political order. Therefore, he reminded them of their spiritual, cultural and political devaluation. He inspired them to awake and abandon the attitude of a defeated nation. He reminded them of their inner strength. In many ways, he tried to create a sort of hatredness and feeling of aversion towards the prevalent cruel and tyrannical system. He not only awakened them but also presented before them an alternative model of government, which if implemented would leave no chance for infringement of the people's rights, liberty and their choice of religion and language."¹

¹ Dr. Darshan Singh, Japu Ji Sahib: Text, Context and Concerns, p. 40.
Guru Nanak, undoubtedly a thoroughly religious leader, after a careful analysis of the given situation, comes to the conclusion that the prevailing conditions were far from being satisfactory and that the contemporary life was in dire need of change. It is his conviction that unless a change is brought about in the political system, the life in general cannot be liberated from the canker of slavery and that the eradication of this evil is the pre-condition for the development of growing society. That is why he vehemently articulates his indignation over the nefarious politics of the contemporary rulers and its defiling and degenerating impact on the society around him. He exposes the foul political practices aiming at their purgation. He wants the corrupt politics to be replaced by a fair one, and favours restoration of political order so as to make it a righteous one. He suggests an alternative political system—not an authority-oriented by a service-oriented one—in which the people could live not only happily and prosperously but also worthily, respectably and honourably, and in which there would be left no chance for assault on their dignity and obstruction in the path of their spiritual exaltation.