CHAPTER V

KARMA AND FREE WILL

We have already discussed that there are three categories of Karma, i.e. 'Sanchit', 'Prarabdha' and 'Kriyamana'. The accumulated Karma of the past is 'Sanchit' and the Karma which is ripe for reaping is called 'Prarabdha'. The 'Prarabdha' Karma cannot be avoided. It means that the question of free will does not arise as regards the performance of these two categories of Karma, i.e. 'Sanchit' and 'Prarabdha'. Now the most important problem demanding our attention in the entire law of Karma is only that of 'Kriyamana' Karma or the acts that are being performed in the present. Whether the act that we are doing in the present is an independent and of our own free will or is every present act always an effect of the action done in the past and are we never free to act independently?

The first solution of this problem is, that the present action is not an independent and fresh act. It is but a link in the long chain of our Karma. It is conditioned by our past Karma and is the effect of some of the acts done in the past. There is no free will employed in the act. This view of the concept of Karma has been criticised much. Those who believe in the inevitable and inexorable nature of the law of Karma, have generally been branded, by the critics, as fatalists and the law
itself as leading to fatalism.

The second view of this question is that the present act is absolutely free from any past ties. It is neither a link in the chain of causation nor it is governed by any past Karma. It means we are the sole masters of our selves and we can do what we will. This theory is advanced by the advocates of free will. But herein lies the fundamental fault that it goes against the very nature of the law of cause and effect. Moreover then once can goes through a cycle of births and deaths, his character is no longer free of the past. By virtue of having lived a life once before he was born a new, he inherits characteristics of his past. If he is free from his past doeds, then there remains no moral responsibility on him. Therefore no action is absolutely free either in the human or in the external world.

These are the two extreme views. But Guru Nanak has disapproved the both. He has neither denied the truth of the law of cause and effect, saying that man is absolutely free in what he does, nor he has asserted that man

1. Eminent Sanskrit scholar Prof. A.B. Keith, regards the concept of Karma as fatalistic and as not furnishing for a moral mind a good incentive to moral progress. A.B. Keith, The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanishads, p. 598.

2. Henry Neigh remarks that the doctrine excludes and almost entirely excludes pity for others. It leaves no room for betterment and bare all hope of forgiveness. "Forgiveness that word lies quite outside its vocabulary. Karma never errs but also it never spares. It knows not wrath or pardo. penalty follows sin in invariable sequence." He quotes Omar Khayyam:-

To moving Finger writes, and having writ moves on; nor all your peity and walt/ Shall lure it back to cancel half a line/ Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

is bound by the inevitable and immutable nature of the law of Karma and is unable to mould his future through earnest efforts. He has modified the doctrine in two respects. The inevitability and cyclic nature of the law of Karma can be cut down by the Grace of God. So this doctrine, in his view, no longer remains a fatalistic one. The second idea that he has incorporated in the law of Karma is, that constant human efforts made on the right path can facilitate the Īvān in achieving his cherished goal. Personal and arvum on the part of Īvān necessarily includes a certain amount of free will that he employs in doing Kriyamān Karma. So according to Guru Nanak, man is partly free and partly determined. Man is free to choose and act to a certain extent and to that extent only so is morally responsible for his actions. The limited free dom enjoyed by the human beings in doing the acts, can be well understood by knowing the difference between the physical law of cause and effect and the law of Karma.

Despite certain similarities between the physical law of cause and effect and the law of Karma, there is also a subtle difference between the two law. The casual law is related only to the elements of the world of matter, whereas the law of Karma deals with consciousness, which is above and beyond the material elements. The very nature of the

3. "No account of the Karma of a person can one speak of, whom Lord Himself hath blessed". Majh. K-1, p. 143.
5. Var Sarang, K-1, p. 1245.
world of matter is subject to the law of causation while the essential nature of consciousness is its own freedom and independence. In animals and in the lower nature of human beings, where the consciousness is not fully awakened, the law of Karma behaves in the same manner as the mechanical law of cause and effect. The lower nature of human beings is governed by instincts and not by intelligence. Instinct is a mechanical impulse which is irresistible and hence all acts done under its influence leave no room for free will.

According to Guru Nanak, consciousness (soul) is altogether different from the inert matter, although the source of both is the same. It has a separate independent entity of its own and is ever free. So long as this consciousness or Self, under the influence of ego, keeps itself ignorantly identified with matter, it gets enmeshed in the karmic wheel of cause and effect; but the moment it realizes the true nature and gets itself established in

6. Valmiki, M 1, p. 1273.
7. Suhî, M 1, p. 766.
8. Gaurî, M 1, p. 238.
10. Suhî, M 1, p. 762.
freedom and divine bliss it defies every material bondage and is no more subject to the law of Karma. This is that Guru Nanak thinks of the law of Karma, a law according to which each individual soul, though bound by its past Karmas, is yet free to act within its limitations and environments. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes, 'The law of Karma, which rules the lower nature of man, has nothing to do with the spiritual in him. The essence of spirit is freedom. By its exercise man can check and control his natural impulses. That is why his life is something more than a succession of mechanically determined states. The spiritual nature is the basis of his initiative and endeavour. Were man merely the sum of natural conditions, he would be completely subject to the law of Karma. But there is a soul in him, which is the matter.'

11. Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, has given a beautiful description of the state of mind of a Jiva, that he dwells in Divine Bliss and Truth descends upon him.

'The eggs of superstition hath burst, my mind is illuminated, and the fetters of (my mind's) feet are sundered: I am emancipated by the Guru. Ceased now is my coming and going, and the frying pan (of the heart) hath cooled with the Guru - given cooling elixir of the Name. I have cast off the load of the wrought deeds, and have become detached in the mind. Lo, such is the compassion of the Guru, that he hath ferried me across the sea to my destined shore.

Maha, M.4, p. 1002.'

12. Ramkali, M.1, p. 940.


A close study of 'Gurbani' would convince the reader that according to Guru Nanak, man is deemed to be gifted with will or free choice of the act which he does at the present. Guru Nanak says in Japji, 'As you sow, so shall you reap'. The term 'sow' will be out of place if the sower is not sowing on account of his own will. If he is only being driven to the sowing by an agency outside himself, how is he sowing anything, the fruit of which he is to enjoy. In another hymn, Guru Nanak holds the 'Jiva' responsible for the good or bad acts he has done. The Guru says:

"Good or bad that we do, we reap the reward thereof accordingly". 17.

"Thy blamest thou others, blame thy deeds, 18
For thou receivest the fruit of what thou sowest".

It is clear from the above hymns that if the man has no free will, then he has done nothing for which he is to be blamed. The Guru does permit a free will, a volition to do good or ill, in man.

In the following hymns, Guru Nanak lays emphasis that a 'Jiva' should abstain from doing evil deeds since he is responsible for his actions and their results thereof.

1. "The man reaps what he sows in the field of Karma"

2. "If we are to gather the fruits of our actions, why should we then act in an evil manner?
Do absolutely nothing wrong.
Why should play the game in such a manner
as not to be loser before the Lord.
He should work so as to make profit in the end".

20. Var An, M.4, p. 408.
3. "The Lord driveth thee by His command, Not His pen move according to thy deeds".

4. "O my mind, thou hearest the consequences of thine own acts.". 21.

5. "As one doeth, so one is rewarded, As one sowseth, so one reapeth.". 22.

6. "You sow poison, but desire to gather ambrosia, Strange is the standard of just you want to set up thus". 24.

There are a few passages in the poetry of Guru Nanak, which apparently seem contradictory to the free will of human beings in the field of action, such as:-

1. "Destiny cannot be changed, as He wills, it takes place". 25.

2. "Destiny cannot be expelled, O Friend, what has been ordained by God". 26.

3. "What has been prepared according to our own deeds, No order can change it, we read as it is written, none can define it." 27.

4. "Who can erase the writ of my Karma? that do I know as to that will be my lot in the yonder". 28.

But a thoughtful observation of these lines would reveal, that there is no contradiction between destiny or fate and free will. It is true that 'Jiva' is bound by his past Karma. He get to the field of action because of his 'prārabdha' and his nature (svabhāva) or character is the result of his accumulated (Sanchit) Karma, but still, to some extent, he is free to act, as far as his 'Kriyāmāna.'

actions are concerned. Efforts or endeavour on the part of 'Jīva' to mould his future, become meaningful only if he is free to act. We observe that in the poetry of Guru Nanak, equal stress has been laid on the individual's efforts; that means, each individual is given a free choice of action to improve his lot.

Our character or personality is the outcome of three factors. Firstly, our own 'Sanskāras' which we accumulate and carry on from life to life; secondly, what we receive from the parents through the law of heredity; and thirdly, what we receive from our social environments. The fatalists believe that our nature is predetermined and hence neither an effort on the part of the parents nor a modification in the social environment can bring about a change in the basic nature of the individual. But it can be said that whatever the nature we bring from our previous births, was not determined by the impact of Karmas performed in a single life. It had been in the process of making or in the process of formation through the immeasurable previous existence. In every existence we had been moulding our nature or, so to say, our destiny by changing or by adding afresh 'Sanskāras'. It means that we bring our nature moulded from life to life. If our present nature was moulded in a previous life, then why can it not be shaped in this life also. We thus see that fate is the free will of a previous life and free will of this life would be the fate of the life to come. Hence destiny or fate is none other than the free will of previous life and as one could exercise free will in a previous life one can do it equally well in this life also. So ultimately it is our free will that determines our personality.
or character, which we mistakenly look upon as pre-destined or pre-determined.

We have seen that 'Jiva' is blessed with free will. But now the question is how far is he able to make use of it? The simple reply is, that man does not make full use of it and most of his actions are determined by some other factors. He is bound by his 'Sanchit' Karmas, that manifests in the form of character, he acquires. Prarabdhi Karma provides him the field of action. His Karmas are also conditioned through the law of heredity, social environments and natural impulses. If the 'Jiva' works under the influence of ego, or natural impulses, i.e. lust, anger, greed, unwise attachment and jealousy etc., his actions are more determined.

The more the 'Jiva' is awakened spiritually, the more the freedom he gets in performing his Karmas. Then the 'Jiva' acts at the higher plane of consciousness, he is more free; but when he does an action by sheer of habit or convention, he is least free. Mr. Shridhar Krishnan, in his book 'An Idealist View of Life', explains the middle of determinism and free will by comparing this life to a game of bridge. There is order and regularity in this Universe and we are compelled and determined to a great extent, but we have also sufficient scope and freedom.

Life is like a game of cards. The cards are distributed to us and we are determined by them. But the victory depends on our playing. A good player utilises his cards in the best manner by examining the different alternatives and discovering right actions for victory. A bad player may have good cards but may
not be able to utilise or skilfully handle them in the play. At the beginning a player is more free. He may start from any point but gradually his actions get determined as the play develops. Similarly, we are determined in our actions by our past habit, character, mode of thinking, sentiments and inherited tendencies, but we are also free to play our parts by making the best of what we may have in possession.
KARMA AND GRACE

In theology, Grace or Divine Grace means a favourable disposition on the part of God, usually without reference to any merit or desert of its object. It is that quality of God’s nature which is the source of man’s undeserved blessings, in particular those blessings which have to do with his salvation. To be in ‘a state of grace’ is to know that on ‘s relation to God is determined not by merit, but by faith in Him. Although such efforts have to be put forth to attain liberation, the result is not to be thought of as an achievement or accomplishment. When the realization comes, it is a gift or a grace (prasād) of the Lord. About Divine Grace, Swami Prabhavananda says, ‘It is the divine power which operates in man to transform him to make him attuned to God so that he can feel his unbounded love. Divine grace can be tangibly felt at a certain stage of spiritual unfoldment’.

In the poetry of Guru Nanak, great emphasis is laid on grace of the Lord. Of all the doctrines of ‘Brahman’, ‘Jiva’, Creation, ‘Maya’, ‘Dukkha’, Karma, Transmigration etc., that are mentioned in his works, it is the concept of Grace, that is integral to his total thought and it is one, to which constant reference is made throughout his works.

If the concept of Karma, which is a counterpart of the law of cause and effect, in the moral domain, is carried to its logical extreme, then there would be no scope for a ‘jiva’

32. Religion in Practice, p. 244.
to crave for His Love or to seek His Grace for getting final
emancipation. In Sikhism, the doctrine of Karma is modified by
the principle of Grace. Guru Nanak says that 'Jiva' can not
achieve the highest state of bliss unless he comes under the
fold of God's Grace. Without the grace of the Lord, he is
helpless.

1. If one were to live for Ages four,
of ten times more
Known in the nine divisions of the world,
Followed, honoured, famed, all,
If he were from His Grace to fall, 33
A worm among worms, a sinner among sinners.

2. Born of sin, one committeth sin and is committed to
sin more and more.

Then thou him a hundred times, his dirt goes not.

Smith Nanak, we are forgiven, if the Lord forgives,
34
Else hell is our life.

3. They in whose Destiny Thou so writ, O Lord,
they alone dwelt on Thee.

In the hands of these creatures is nothing; this
infinite creation is Thine.

Said Thou untest with Thyself, others Thou hast
wasted away.

Yes, through the Guru's Grace, art Thou Revealed
when Thou makest men know Thee. 35.

4. With Thy Grace one attains the Highest state of
bliss.

Thou art the Creator, everything is Thy creation,
what is in the power of a 'Jiva'. 36.

The object of human life is to seek God and to be
reunited with Him. According to Guru Nanak the final

33, Guru Nanak, Janji, Pauni 7.
34, Var Majh, 41, p. 149.
35, Asa, 24, p. 469.
36, Asa, 4, 3, p. 423.
boditiude or union with God can be achieved only by the Grace of God. The Guru says:

1. My Lord is One, there is none other; He is realised by His Grace. 37.

2. He the One, dwells within all, but He is revealed to him, who receives grace. 38.

3. Liberation from bondage cometh at Thy pleasure. 39.

4. On whom He showers His Grace, he finds his real abode. 40

5. He Himself is the Master who leads by the nose the whole creation;

And saves those on whom He showers His Grace.

6. Man is emancipated only when God as wills and enables him to attain himself to the instruction of the Guru and cherish firmly his devotion to Him. 42.

7. God is realised through God's own Grace.

8. Truth is attained through God's Grace.

9. Then He looks with grace union takes place.

10. None is redeemed without the grace of God.

11. Thy Will is obeyed in all the four directions.

In all the four directions Thy Name is honoured.

The True Lord, O Lord, fills all souls, but the indestructible Reality is found by Thy Grace.

12. The True One pervades (all souls) second to Him, there is none.

He alone engages in His Service on whom the look of His grace falls. 45.
13. This cup of love belongs to the Lord, and whosoever the Lord wants, He gives this cup to him. 49.

From the above quotations, the impression one gathers, is, that human endeavour on the path of God-realisation is futile, since it is the Grace of God, that matters there. Whosoever He likes, He meets him spontaneously irrespective of the efforts and services he has done for his redemption.

He, Our Lord, meeteth not through effort, nor through service, but Meeteth He all-too-spontaneously.

No body can influence the Lord for His gifts of Grace. A person while awake, may not receive them, but a sleeping person may be awakened and gifts may be bestowed upon him.

'The Lord resides within every 'Jiva' and does not take advice of any person for bestowing His Grace'. 51.

Then the question arises, if our sincere efforts and noble deeds do not bear the desired fruit of salvation, then why the Sikh Gurus have emphasised the importance of good actions? We learn from the teachings of Guru Nanak that he considers the efforts of the individual, as necessary, for improving his condition. He has pointed out at so many places in his works, that man is responsible for his lot. He must not blame God for his destiny. In this way, the idea of Divine Grace and the operation of the law of Karma seem contradictory. But this is not so. A careful study of Guru Nanak's thought would reveal that the idea of Grace is not antagonistic to Karma. 'The solution that Guru Nanak provides is a compromise

50. Rehmat, Pt. 8, p. 672.
which does accord a necessary place to Karma as far as the initial apprehension of the word is concerned, but which specifies grace as the ultimate determinant. In a significant line from Japji, he contrasts the two, Karma and Grace.

The body takes its birth because of Karma,
But the salvation is attained through the grace
(of the Lord). 53.

Karma is certainly important in that it will produce a favourable or unfavourable birth, but it is through grace, that final emancipation is attained. 'The grace of the Lord begins with our acceptance of the true path in life. The amount of Grace necessitates our accomplishments on the right path. In fact, the grace is not the result of any whim of the Lord, it begins and matures with beginning and maturity of our Karma. From the beginning of the grace upto the final emancipation, one works within the fold of grace.

1. Whosoever falls within His grace meets the Guru.

2. Through His Grace we serve the Guru
   Through His Grace we serve (humanity)
   Through His Grace this mind can be controlled.
   Through His Grace the mind becomes pure. 56.

3. Through His Grace this attachment ceases
   And one merges in the Lord, saith Nanak. 57.

4. A man becomes what His grace ordains,
   There is none without His grace, saith Nanak. 58

5. Through His Grace one remembers Him
   The soul melts and attention is fixed on Him.
   The soul is united to the Supreme soul, and the

53. Japji, p. 42.
54. Dr. G.S. Fohli, Outlines of Sikh Thought, p. 60.
55. Var. An., p. 1, p. 663
57. Anu., p. 352.
58. Nanaksh, p. 661.
Explaining, as to why God's Grace is necessary for 'Jīva', Dr. C. P. Kohli, writer, 'Man is sinful and God is gracious. Thus there is a gulf which exists between the nature of man and the nature of God. This gulf can only be bridged by the grace of the Lord. Since 'Jīva' is weak and helpless, it bows and prays before the Almighty. The prayer kills the ego of the individual. The penance shown in the prayer purifies the mind and this is the beginning of the grace'. The individual prays like this in the words of Guru Nanak:-

"As the sea is brimful with water, so are my sins without count.

Take pity, O Lord, and in Thy Grace, let this stone also swim across". 62.

The doctrine of grace does not mean that there are certain chosen people, upon whom only, He showers His Grace. The grace of God may come to the scholar or the illiterate, the high or the low, the rich or the poor. It does not depend upon birth, knowledge, wisdom or penance. The devotee must prepare himself fully and truly for being the recipient of His favour. He should cleanse himself of all the evils and impurities. Through service and humility, he should destroy all the egoistic tendencies which are obstacles in the way of his spiritual endeavour. Good conduct, acts of love and charity, austerities, constant

60. Var Anu, ii.1, p. 460.
62. Gaurī, N. 1, p. 156.
sincere efforts and meditation are the means of winning His Grace. Guru Nanak says:

1. The Grace of the Master is on those who have meditated on Him with single mind and they have found favour in His heart. 64.

2. What shall we offer to get glimpse of His Court? what shall we utter to win His Love?

In the umbrosial hour of the mom, meditate on the Name Eternal. 65.

3. Shed yourself-hood and attune yourself thus to the service of the Guru.

And they ye abide ever in equipoise and sorrow not, and the Lord of Himself cometh to be enshrined in your mind. 66.

In the last stanza of Japji, Guru Nanak outlines the qualities, that of 'Jiva' should insculpt in himself, before he aspires for His Grace.

Chastity the smithy, Patience the smith,
Understanding the anvil, Knowledge the tool,
Fear of God the bellows, austerity the fire,
Love the crucible, immortalising nature the metal,
In such a mint of truth is coined the path of life,
Of those who in God's Grace abide,
Smith Nanak, from His Grace springeth beatitude. 67.

And again in stanza 56 of Japji, Guru Nanak affirms that meditation on the Name and spiritual Grace are necessary for

Embody grace. 68. There are no contradictory. Swami Prabhavananda quotes Sri Ramakrishna, who used to say, 'The breeze of the grace is always blowing, but you have to set your soul to catch that breeze of grace.' Setting soul means that you have to put forth some efforts. What efforts? To keep your mind in God, to struggle to meditate, to pray earnestly for divine love. Then what happens? Suddenly one day, you feel a power surging you and drawing your mind to itself, as the magnet draws the needle. Then the vision of God will open before you. Religion in Practice, p. 244.

64. Sri Raga, P. 1, p. 64.
67. Paauri, 30.
attaining the goal of life. He says:

With a hundred thousand tongues, nay, many times more,
If one were His Name a million times to utter:
(Not enough it would be)
Many steps on the path that leads to the Lord,
And unite Him with His hand.
Though the talk of Heavens
Even stir the waves,
His Grace it is that one saves,
All else is false, 60.

Thus we see that in Guru Nanak's poetry there is
a fine combination of Karma and Grace. The Guru does not
postulate a belief in the indestructibility of Karma. By
constant efforts for good actions, by ceaseless remembrance
and contemplation on 'Nam', we can counteract the effect of our
past Karman. Even the destiny can be changed or effaced by
prayer and by invoking grace of the Lord. Guru Nanak says:

1. Destiny cannot be effaced, 0, friend, what has been
   ordained by God.
   But the Almighty, who is the cause of everything
   may bless mercy. 60.

2. Destiny cannot be changed, as He wills it take place.
   But happiness is obtained by the Grace, faith Nanak,
   by meditating on the Divine Lord. 70.

3. The sin of several births are removed and man gets
   purified
   By singing praise of the Lord in true awareness.
   And further the man thus attains the balanced in-born
   state of mind. 71

4. Destiny can not be effaced if a man has not earned
   the wealth of 'Nam' ('Nam' can counteract the effect
   of past Karman). 72.

60. Japji, Para 32.
60. Ramkali, No. 1, p. 937.
70. Ramkali, No. 1, p. 937.
71. Dev Gurbani, No. 5, p. 331.
5. Thou art the Beneficent Lord, the Builder of our Destiny and the Destroyer of sorrow.

Destroyer of sorrow art Thou, it is Thy will that works, and myriads of our sins are by Thee effaced in an instant.

Thus we see that from Omar Makki's point of view, ultimately it is the Grace of God that decides the issue, but equal stress has been laid on the earnest efforts, on the part of the individual, to improve upon his lot.

73. Ana 94:1.; p. 433.
KARMA, CASTE AND SOCIETY

Right from the Vedic civilization, the concept of Karma—especially its moral and ethical aspect—has made a great influence in shaping the nature of human behaviour and the mode of living of the people. The oldest available record and traditions of human civilization, preserved in the hymns of Rig Veda, reveal that the social set-up of the people was not affected by any religious differences, economic inequalities, caste distinctions and social discriminations. However, there were only two classes, i.e. the Aryans who settled down on Indian soil and distinguished themselves as conquerors and the non-Aryans, or the aborigines of India who were generally known as Dases or Dasyus.

During the Rig Vedic period, the caste system in the society was unknown to the people. No reference has been made in the Rig Veda, even once, to the name of word 'caste' or any allusion to it. Mr. Patt says in his 'Civilization of Ancient India', 'In a vast collection of hymns, composed during six hundred years and more, and replete with references to the habits and manners and custom of the people—replete with allusions to agriculture and pasture and manufacture, to care against aborigines, to marriage and domestic rules, and to the duties and position of women, to religious observances and to elementary astronomy as then known, we have not one single passage to show that the community was cut up into hereditary 'castes'. Is it possible to suppose that, that

74. C.H. Churey, Caste and Race in India, p. 41.
wonderful system existed, and yet there is no allusion to
t hat fundamental principle of society in the ten thousand
verses of the Rig Veda? Is it possible to find a single
religious work of later times, of one tenth the dimensions of
the Rig Veda, which is silent on that subject? And again Prof.
Max Muller remarks in this respect, 'There is no authority
whatsoever in the hymns of the Vedas, for the complicated system
of castes. There is no law to prohibit the different classes
of the people from living together, from eating and drinking
together, no law to prohibit the marriage of people belonging
to different castes, no law to brand the off-spring of such
marriages with an indelible stigma. There is no law to
sanction the blasphemous pretensions of a priesthood to divine
honours, or the degradation of any human being to a state
below the animal'.

It is clear that the society was not divided
into different castes. Each head of the family was himself the
priest, the warrior and the cultivator. It appears that persons
who gained proficiency in the composition or chanting of hymns
and other sacrificial ceremonies, became more renowned and
respectable. Otherwise they were also members of the same communit,
sharing property equally, revenues, troubles and happiness
alike with them as well as fighting for them. There was no
separate priestly class. The man who conducted prayers, was

75. cf. Khawan Singh, Philosophy of the Sikh Religion,
p. 308.
76. Max Muller, Indian Philosophy, Vol. 1, 'The Vedas',
cf. Khawan Singh, Philosophy of the Sikh Religion,
p. 308.
termed as Brahmans. And by the lapse of time, the priest who officiated over the ceremonial functions, was termed as Brahmans. No body had a right to become Brahmans by birth. It was the profession which made him a Brahmans. Everybody had an equal privilege to offer sacrifices and compose hymns or to enter into any other profession according to his bent of mind. In the IX Book of Rig Veda, we find that members of the same family follow different occupations. One Rishi says of himself:-

"Behold, I am a composer of hymns, my father is a physician, and mother grinds corn on stone. We are all engaged in different occupations. As cows wander in various directions in the pasture fields of food, so we (in various occupations) worship thee, O Sonai, for wealth". 77.

There is a positive proof that the caste system did not exist in the true Rig Vedic period. The author of "Civilization of Ancient India" remarks, "The very word 'Varna' which in later Sanskrit indicates caste, is used in the Rig Veda to distinguish Aryans and the non-Aryans and nowhere indicates separate sections in the Aryan community. The word 'Kshatriya', which in later Sanskrit means the military caste, is used in the Veda simply as an adjective which means strong, and is applied to gods.

The very word Vipra, which in later Sanskrit means the priestly caste, is used in the Rig Veda merely as an adjective, which means wise, and which is applied to gods. And the very word 'Brahmin', which in later Sanskrit means also the priestly

77. Rig Veda, IX, 112.3.
79. Rig Veda, III, 34, 9.
80. Rig Veda, VII, 62.4; VII, 62.1.
81. Rig Veda VIII, 11.6.
caste, is used in a hundred places in the Rig Veda, to imply the composers of hymns and nothing else.

Later on, in the Brahmanas' period, the sacrificial and ritualistic system grew very complicated. The performance of sacrifice and the chanting of Vedic Hymns accurately, were no longer, remained an ordinary affair. It was only the priest, who could organise the whole show. In course of time, as the demand for the help of priests increased and the profession became more lucrative than anything else, the priests began to devote their life to learning these rites. The priests who acquired proficiency in reciting the Vedic hymns, were considered holy and alone capable of performing these rites. Thus the priesthood developed, and they formed a separate class, considering themselves above the general level of human beings.

In the same way, out of the occupations and duties of the people, there arose two other classes in the Aryans, i.e. 'Kshatriyas' - the protectors of society, and the 'Vaishyas' - traders and cultivators. The aborigines of India were kept in complete subjection and were termed as 'Shudras'.

The origin of four groups or castes in the society on the basis of different professions adopted by the people, was given a new interpretation by the cloyer priestly class. In order to strengthen their hold on the people, they (Brahmin) invented a myth that the caste-system was divinely instituted. They said that 'Brahmin' came out of the mouth of Brahman, 'Kshatriyas' out of his arms, 'Vaishyas' out of his

88. Rig Veda, VII, 103.8.
thighs and 'Shudras' out of his feet. And this story was interpolated in the X Book of the Rig Veda. The hymn reads:

"When they divided Purusha how many portions did they make?"

"What do they call his mouth, his arms?"

"What do they call his thighs and feet?"

The Brahmin was his mouth, of both his arms was the 'Rajanya' (Kshatriya) made.

His thighs became the 'Vaisya', from his feet the 'Ushtras' was produced'.

The primary object of the institution of the four castes was almost certainly cultural and vocational. The distribution of vocations or duties was being done according to people's Karmas or inclinations born out of their own nature, so that each person's development might proceed along lines best suited to him. It is quite certain that originally the four castes were selective, i.e. each person was allotted to his proper caste after it had been determined, what his Karmas and excellences were that he had brought with him from his past. There are references in the ancient scriptures, that a person's caste was determined by his Karma. There is a reference in the Bhagavad Gita about the creation of four
differences in the ancient scriptures that a
caste was determined by his Karma. There is a

63. The authenticity of the hymns of X Book of Rig Veda has been questioned by almost every scholar, Dr. Dutt in his 'Civilisation in Ancient India' says, 'The hymns of the Rig Veda were handed down from father to son, or from teacher to pupil for centuries together, and it was in a later age, in the epic period, that they were arranged and compiled. The whole or greater portion of the tenth book, seems to have been the production of this later period, but was thrown in and preserved with the body of the older hymns'.

64. Rig Veda, X, 90.16.
castes on the basis of individual's 'Gunas' and Karmas.

Lord Krishna says:

'The four orders of the society (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) were created by Me corresponding to the different types of 'Gunas' and 'Karmas'.

The duties of each 'Varna' has also been prescribed.

1. 'Arjuna, the duties of Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas as well as of Shudras, are divided according to the qualities born of their respective natures'.

2. 'Control of mind, control of the senses, undertaking hardship for the sake of duty, purity (both internal and external), forgiveness, straightness of mind and body, belief in God, the scriptures and the other world, knowledge of the sacred lore and knowledge of God based on direct experience - these are the Brahmans duty, born of his own nature'.

3. 'Prowess, majesty, firmness, bravery, ingenuity, not minding away from battle, generosity, rulehip - these are the Kshatriya's duty, born of his own nature'.

4. 'Cultivation, protection of cow and trade are the Vaishya's duty, born of his own nature. Service of all the three castes is the Shudra's duty, born out of his own nature'.

It is again said in the Bhagavad Gita, that anybody who is devoted to his own duty can attain the highest perfection and the man who does his duty earnestly, does not incur sin.

'Better is one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than the duty of another well-estimated. He who performs the duty enjoined by his own nature, does not incur sin'.

If the people were allotted to their castes according to their respective Karmas, then whose business was it to do the allotment? And that means were there of determining
with certainty what caste a person really belonged to?

The principle was; those whose strong point was intellect, were allotted to the Brahmin caste. Similarly other castes were also determined according to the inherited Karmas and tendencies born out of individual's own nature. Generally the Brahmin class was considered to be a superior one among all the classes, because of their duties relating to knowledge and wisdom. They were the sole masters in fixing up the 'Varna' or caste of every person. The sooner it was determined the particular caste one belongs to, the better it was. The method used for determining the caste, was perhaps occult power of Astrology. The tradition to cast a horoscope of every Hindu child, established thus, was meant particularly, to determine the natural characteristics and the line of action, a man was to adopt in his life time.

The caste became hereditary when the priestly class i.e. the Brahmins, tempted to secure the same privilege and power to their children by making them Brahmins even if the Karma, which they had brought with them from the past, did not entitle or qualify them for it. With the increase in the numbers of pseudo-Brahmins, the tendency to make the caste hereditary became more and more general, until, in course of time, its hereditary character became absolutely fixed. Likewise other castes also became hereditary.

The Bhagavad Gita, as stated above, teaches, that it is one's Karma that makes one 'Brahmin' or 'Kshatriya' or

91. Robson Arthur; Look at your Karma, p. 9.
'Vaishya' or 'Chudra'. But the Brahmins, whose ancestors had secured their present position to them, did not hesitate to falsify the meanings of the word 'Karma' in order to hold on to that position. 'Karma', they explained, was what one had earned by one's actions in the past and one was a 'Brahmin' (or whatever else one was) because one's actions in the past had earned one that particular destiny. This meaning of the word 'Karma' was well suited to their interests and entitled them for the superiority they had by birth over the people of other castes.

Lord Buddha denounced the hereditary principle in caste. He pointed out the evils of this system and declared that it was not a man's birth, but his Karma that determined whether he was a 'Brahmin' or not.

'Adhered to for a long time are the views of the ignorant, the ignorant tells us, one is a Brahmin by birth. So by birth is one a Brahmin, nor is one by birth no Brahmin. By Karma one is Brahmin. By Karma one is no Brahmin'. 93.

And again

'A man do not become a Brahmin by his plaited hair, by his family, or by his birth - I do not call a man a Brahmin because of his origin or of his father'. 94.

The Jaina Sutras also declare that a person's caste was determined by his Karmas and not by birth.

'By one's Karmas one becomes a Brahmin, or a 'Kshatriya' or a 'Vaishya' or a 'Chudra'. 95.

93. Sutta Nipata (Vasothasutta) cf. Ibid. p. 2.
From the above discussion, it is apparent that in the Vedic period there were professions and not caste distinctions, but the conception of caste, based upon birth, was an idea of the medieval or post-Vedic period. Later on, the caste system spread up so rapidly, that by the time of Guru Nanak, the society as a whole was divided into many sects, embracing different religions and into thousands of castes and sub-castes. Even the Brahmans were divided into numerous castes.

In the ninth century, Shankara Acharya, undertook the regeneration of old Hindu religion and established the orders of 'Sannyasins'. About two centuries after him, Ramanauja began to admit all classes of people as his disciples. He declared that only a true votary would become free and liberated irrespective of caste. About a century after Ramanaud did away with the caste system. In the middle of fifteenth century A.D., Kabir attacked the worship of idols. He strongly condemned the caste system and declared all human beings equal.

"God first created light. All men have come into existence through His power. The whole world has emerged from one light, that is high and who are low? Men do not wander in superstitions. Creation is from the Creator, and the Creator pervades the creation everywhere. One clay has been moulded into different forms by the Creator, there is no defect in the vessel of clay nor in the potter". 96.

All these saints, mostly belonging to the Bhakti Movement, denounced the caste system and other inequalities in the society. But, however, they could not achieve much in

abolishing the caste and racial difference in the people.

Then appeared Guru Nanak on the scene in the second half of fifteenth century A.D. He preached the common brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God. His doctrine was that the primary duties of man were excellence of conduct and devotion of thought. He adjusted his preachings to the requirements of the time inculcating the greatest truth and the highest morality, both by precept and example. He addressed himself to all the people alike, and made no difference between man and man. He emphatically condemned not only the caste distinctions, but also the religious distinctions. According to Guru Nanak there is only one religion of all mankind. He says:-

"He who grasps the truth, realises that there is but one religion of all mankind, on God is one and has ever been the same". 97.

"There is no Hindu and there is no Mussalman" declared Guru Nanak. All men are God's own creation. He does not approve that the peoples of four 'Varnas' are meant for different duties to perform.

(‘It has been said) that the Shrama of Brahmin is Vedas, the Shrama of Kshatriya is that of a warrior, and the Shrama of the Shudra is to serve others. (But I say) that the Shrama of all is one, if one knows the secret. One God is the God of all gods. From him are all the souls". 98.

And about caste system, Guru Nanak remarks:-

'False is the caste and False is the title fame. The whole mankind is under the same shade (protection).

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If any body calls himself good, 
O Nanak, he will be recognised as such, 
if he is honoured when his accounts are taken. 99.

A person can not become high by his caste. It is only the Karmas or his actions that bring him honour or dishonour.

"God does not mind our caste or birth. So let us learn the way of truthful living for one's deeds proclaim one's caste and respect! 100.

According to Guru Nanak, the castes and other distinctions are non made only. No body's caste would be taken into account hereafter.

1. 'Know people by the light illumining them and do not ask their caste.

For in the hereafter no one is differentiated by his caste'. 101.

2. 'Neither caste nor position will be recognised hereafter. The alone will be pronounced good whose merit is reckoned worthy of honour'. 102.

3. 'All castes and garbs look like dust'. 103.

4. 'What power has caste? It is the righteousness that is tested.

Whosoever tastes poison will die, no matter what his caste is'. 104.

From Guru Nanak's point of view, only those persons are of low caste who have forgotten the Name of the Lord. He says:

"Those who forget the Lord are out of caste; 
O Nanak, those, who do not remember the Name are pernicious persons'. 105.
Supporting the views of Guru Nanak, Guru Amandas, the third Guru says:-

"One who does not repeat the Name of the Lord, is of the lowest castes; he is a filth-worm". 106.

And on the other hand, one who repeats the Name of the Lord, loses his caste and attains the highest position.

1. "A low caste man, if he repeats the Name of the Lord, attains high position". 107.

2. "The caste of Saints is the same as that of the Lord Hari". 108.

3. "A low caste man who is known by none, He, if he repeats the Name of the Lord, is honoured throughout the world. The lonely near whom no one comes, (If he repeats the Name of the Lord) the whole world shall wash his feet. One who is of no use at all, His name, if he is blessed by Saints, will be repeated by others". 109.

Guru Nanak has stressed on the point that it is not the caste but the inner qualities that make a man 'Brahmin' or 'Kshatriya'. He says:-

1. "He is a Brahmin who knows Brahman, who performs works of devotion, penance and self-restraint. And who breaking bonds attains emancipation. Such a Brahmin is worthy of worship". 110.

2. "He is a 'Kshatriya' who is brave in good actions, employs his body in charity. (And) inspects the field before sowing his gifts, Such a Kshatriya shall be acceptable in the Divine Court". 111.

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3. "Let not anybody be proud of his caste,
    Only he, who gains the divine knowledge, is
    a Brahmin.

    Don't be proud of the caste, 0 Ignorant fool,
    This pride is the source of many evils,
    Everybody says that there are four castes
    (Out) they are all created through the
    omnipotent of the Almighty.

    The whole creation is the same earth;
    The Potter (Lord) has made various vessels.

    The body is composed of five elements,
    Manak says this human being is bound by his own
    actions, Salvation cannot be obtained without
    devotion to the true Guru (Lord). 112.

The concept of casteless and classless society, conceived by
Guru Nanak, gets full recognition and support from his
successors who preached and propagated it as the fundamental
principle of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh, in one of the
hymns of Akal Ustat (Laudation of the Immortal Lord)
delivers, that all the people are one and the same and that
the difference in appearance is due to local conditions and
ignorance.

'Come shave their head and call themselves 'Sannyasis',
Come become 'Logi' or 'Brahmachari' and some become
'Jatis'.

Whether a Hindu, a Turk, or Bafai, or Imam Shafi,
Know that they belong to the same human race.

The creator (Karta) or 'Harim' is the same,
The purveyor (Bazik) and (Rahim) merciful is one and
the same.

There is no difference, Those who make a difference
are the dupe of delusion.

All worship one, the Lord of all is the same. All have
the same shape and know that the whole light is
one'. 113.

and again the Guru says that the whole human race is composed of the same material with no difference, whatever. The religious and caste distinctions are all absurd.

'Temple or mosque is the same (Puja) worship or (Namaz) prayer is the same, all men are alike, but they are different according to circumstances.

The different terms of deities, demus, musicians, heavenly singers, Turks, Hindus, are due to the climatic effect of the different regions.

All men have similar eyes, similar ears, the same body, the same form, and are the result of the mixture of earth, air, fire, and water.

Allah (God) or 'Abbech' - one who follows no particular religion (an attribute of God) - is the same, the Quran or 'Quran' is the same, all are alike in form and constitution'. 114.

By performing meritorious deeds one becomes a saint and by committing evil deeds one becomes a demon. Guru Gobind Singh says in Gobihit Ratak:-

'One who does good works in the world, is called an angel (or god);
Those who do evil works in the world,
The people call them demons'. 115.

According to Guru Nanak, no man is born high or low.

From one light the whole world has come into being. He says:-

'I consider all men high and I acknowledge none as low.
One God hath fashioned all the vessels,
one light pervadeth the whole creation,
One findeth this truth by His grace, no one can oppose His gift. 116.'

114. Ibid. Akal Ustah.
Guru Nanak tells his disciples to consider themselves to be the lowest of the low.

'Nanak is with those who are low caste amongst the low castes, the lowest of the low.'

I do not envy the high people, where the low caste are looked after, there Thou showerest Thy blessings'. 117.

To give a practical shape to the concept of a selfless ideal society, Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus stressed upon the people to lead their lives according to the following principles.

1. Instead of renouncing the world (Sannyas), Guru Nanak recommended the renunciation, while living in the society, 'Asrehte-ray-udaas'. The true way of life is not cessation of work, or retirement, but the renunciation of evil desires. The true Sikh lives desirelessness in the midst of worldly possessions. He does the daily routine and yet keeps himself free from the attachment of the world. Like the lotus flower, he is not affected by the level of worldly things. Guru Nanak says:-

'As the lotus liveth detached in water or as the duck floweth care free in the stream, so doth one cross the sea of life, by attuning to the Word and enshrining the Lor in the heart'. 110.

Guru Nanak has disapproved the way of life led by the 'Sidhas' and 'Yogis' who in order to get spiritual enlightenment, adopted penance, austerities and renunciation of the world. In physical solitude the mind does not get peace.

117. Sri Saga 4-1, p. 18.
110. Panchali, 4-1, p. 980.
there are those who practise austerities in the
wood and ever abide at the pilgrim stations;
but these men of passion search not their self.

Thy then, they have given up home to become detached.

To Guru Nanak, this world is the abode of God. To renounce the
world is to run away from the Lord. Here in this world, one
can conquer the mind and break the bonds of Karma, He says:-

"By meditating on the True One, enlightenment cometh
and then one liveth detached in the midst of Maya.

Such is the glory of the true true that through him,
one is liberated in the midst of wife and children, 120.

Activities of the world do not impose any bond upon the 'Jiva'
if he becomes God-oriented. The house and the forest are alike
to him. Guru Nanak says:-

1. 'The house and the forest become alike for one who,
liveth spontaneously in His Love." 119

2. 'The servant of God who hath realised his self,
is a true house holder and he is a man of true
renunciation too." 122.

3. 'He alone is the house-holer who disciplines his
passions and begs from God the aim of meditation,
hard work and self control". 123.

Here is a brief description, by Guru Gobind Singh, as
to how a true Sikh should lead a balanced life.

'0 my mind, practice renunciation in this way -
Consider thy whole house itself as the forest and
be thou an anchoret at heart.

Make continence thy matted hair, union with the
Supreme thy ablutions, a disciplined life thy
growing of thy nails.

Let Divine knowledge be thy Guru to enlighten
thy soul and apply God's Name as ashes to thy body.
But and sleep moderately and cherish love, compassion and forgiveness in thy life.

'Veer entertain cool temperance and patience and rise thou above the three qualities.

Attach not thy heart to lust, wrath, covetousness, obstinacy and attachment.

Thou shalt then behold the Supreme Essence and realise the Lord'. 124.

2. The practical Sikhism is based upon one of the fundamental teachings of Guru Nanak, i.e. 'Nam Japna', 'Kirt Karna' and 'Sang Chhakna'. This three fold path signifies the remembrance of the Name of the Lord, doing honest labour for a living and sharing one's earnings with others. Guru Nanak says:

1. 'They who toil to earn their living and then share the earnings with others are the people who find the true way'. 125.

2. 'There are the house holders who serve others, practise self discipline and are attuned to the Guru's wisdom.

They firmly hold to the Name, practise charity and keep their bodies clean, and remain awake through the worship of the Lord.

They know that it is from the Guru that the True Door and True Abode is known and whoever seeketh the Guru's shelter will recognise it.

Then he forgetth not the Lord's Name and, in this way, his mind is satiated, through the True One, 126.

A true Sikh, who is a vital part of an ideal society, conceived by Guru Nanak, becomes great, ethically and spiritually, when he follows the pragmatic concept of 'Nam Japna', 'Kirt Karna'.

126. Aka K. 1, p. 419.
and ‘Nam’ Chahana’. Guru Nanak says:

‘The God-oriented (Gurmukh) recites the Name of the Lord, gives charity to the deserving and takes bath (In the tank of nectar).

The God-oriented attains full concentration in Sahaj. The God-oriented receives respect in the Court of the Lord.

The God-oriented destroys all fear and is (really) great.

The God-oriented acts supremely and makes others act like that.

The God-oriented meets the Lord and helps others to meet Him’. 187.

3. Women, the most significant part of the society, was neglected and was given an inferior position, almost by all the sages and religious reformers, before Guru Nanak appeared on the scene. The Hindu woman was subjected to the tyranny of caste. She (a widow) had to burn herself on her husband’s funeral pyre to become ‘Sati’. The position of Muslim women was also far from satisfactory. She was kept within ‘currah’ and her education and movements were restricted.

Guru Nanak spoke highly of women. She was given equal status and utmost reverence in the society. According to Guru Nanak, there should not be an ideal society unless woman was given her due place. She was given equal right to grow spiritually, equal right to attend religious congregations and recite divine hymns in the temples. Guru Nanak

187. see 4.4-472, Ramakali 31, 1982.
"It is from women, the condemned one, that we are conceived and it is from that we are born.

It is to woman that we are engaged and married.

It is the woman who is our life-long friend and it is she who keep our race going.

It is woman again who is sought when one loses one's previous life.

It is woman through whom we establish our social ties.

Then why connance her from even even kings and great men are born?". 129.

4. To remove all the barriers of caste and creed, high and low, superior and inferior, Guru Ramb set up the institution of Sat Sangat (Holy Congregation). The main function of Sat Sangat (or Satn Sangat) is the remembrance of the Name of the Lord. The Guru says:

1. "The holy congregation is a meeting where nothing but the Name of One alone is recited". 129.

2. "The Lord's Presence is obtained in the congregation of the holy". 130.

The association of holy men acts as a deterrent against evil thoughts and evil deeds. In good company one becomes good and sheds off all one's evil tendencies. By joining the congregational prayers and following the Word of the Guru, the devotee gets divine knowledge and crosses the ocean of "Samsāra".

129. Asa 4.1, p. 479.
130. Surah 14.4, p. 599.