

**(Synopsis)**  
**Philosophy of Life- A study**  
***In the light of***  
**Bani (Hymns) Of Guru Nanak & Upanishads**

**Introductory**

The seed of my love for the hymns of Guru Nanak was sown in my childhood when I was merely ten years of age. An old lady in my neighborhood used to frequently utter “Satnam-Waheguru” and to my childish question as to why these words are uttered by the Sikhs, she explained with extreme love by reciting first two lines of Japji called Mool Mantra and quipped after the word || JAP|| and advised me to attend to my school work first and try to know further when time comes. Her simple explanation to the word ‘Waheguru’ was that she is appreciating her guru and any one may use this word for saying Wah- Wah for his /her guru and there is only one God and His name is ‘Sat’ He is the only Truth. People who tell that Sat Nam –Waheguru words are only for believers in Sikhism are ignorant of the truth taught by Guru Nanak. Her simple explanation to my childish question remained fresh till I myself had a chance and ability to enjoy the universal contents of Japji and other hymns of Guru Nanak in the later years with a strengthened belief in the Rig Vedic statement;

***“Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti”***

At the first opportunity as a student of Theology, I opted for “A religious Study Of Japji” ,followed by “Guru Nanak And World Religions” and “Continuity In The Teachings Of Sikh Gurus” as my topics for dissertation at different qualification levels. My present endeavor is to study the philosophy of life in the light of hymns of Guru Nanak and Principal Upnishads. I personally consider, believe and call the hymns of Guru Nanak a “**A unique Song Of Life**”. These describe vividly many aspects of physical and metaphysical life of human beings on earth in a most simple and practical way for the common man. Man has to face and experience the misery of *Rog, Sog, Maut and Adhuri Kamna* meaning Disease, distress, death and un fulfillment of strong desires. At the same time he experiences wonderful moments of beauty, love and bliss amongst all the bright and beautiful things of the world. Man spends his life time in acquiring knowledge, professional training and accumulating assets and vows to find the answer to the questions-

- (1). Who am I?
- ( 2). Where from have I come?
- ( 3). Who is my master or creator?
- ( 4). How Should I conduct myself here to be happy in this life and face death peacefully?

(5). How to achieve my principal goal of human form to liberate myself from the cycle of birth and death?

## **Guru Nanak**

Guru Nanak lived a life of versatility and left behind a rich spiritual heritage for the succeeding generations of man kind. He was born on 15 April 1469. He was the lineal descendant of Kush, one of the sons of lord Rama. His father Kalyan Chand was a village patwari and was known as Mehta Kalu. As a child he was often seen absorbed in deep meditation. He learnt Sanskrit and Persian. The thoughts expressed in his composition Patti, which is considered to be written in a very tender age, are excellent depiction of his ability to describe nature of God, need for a guru, law of karma & transmigration and the way to escape from the cycle of birth and death. Glimpses of his life's journey from the refusal to wear the sacred thread saying , **'Out of the cotton of compassion, spin the thread of tranquility, let the continence be the knot and virtue the twist for the sacred thread'**(Asa.m.1.p/471) to his last uttering while departing from this world, **'Hail the creator, who hath put each one in this world to his task and when the span is run out and the measure is full, the soul departs the body'**,(Vadhans m.1.p,578) is beautifully replete with his philosophy of life

He did not tell the fairy tales or promises for the heavens. His message was not for the selected few or chosen ones but for all humanity at large. He himself lived a practical life of ascetic and a peasant and undertook long journeys in the most difficult conditions to fulfill his mission.

Bhai Gurdas, who scribed the Adi Granth, said in his Var Pehli that Guru Nanak led a life of ascetic at least for a short period. His food was sand and pod of Ak, And his bed was spread on stones, He performed great austerities to the supreme satisfaction of God .J.R. Puri in his book, 'Guru Nanak, His Mystic Teachings' quoting Dabistan says that Guru Nanak underwent severe austerities. At first he reduced his food, and after sometime, he depended upon drinking a little cow's milk. After that he lived on ghee and then on water. Lastly he lived on air like those who, in Hindustan are called Pawnaharis or consumers of air alone.Bhai Gurdas further says that the master visited many places of pilgrimage, especially on festival days to see the people performing the rituals related to their orthodox religions without any loving adoration. During these visits he met ascetics, yogis, Siddhas, Naths, gurus and their disciples and searched for the true devotees or believers. He also visited Puri and met Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The two together led the congregation in devotional music or Kirtan and divine dance. This meeting left a deep impression on Vashavanite scholars and memory lingered for years as is clear from the following invocation:

“ Salutation to Guru Nanak, who is enlightened and learned in all scriptures and is the Guru of Gurus” ( Ram Narayan Mishra, Invocation in Bangali commentary on Dasam Sikandha)

Guru Nanak traveled throughout the length and breadth of India and visited religious centers and holy places of Hindus and also visited Arabian countries, Afganistan, Tibet and Cylone. His journeys are known as Udasis because he traveled like a person who has

renounced the world. It can be concluded that he identified himself with the people whom he visited in different places and adopted their garb signifying that change of outer costumes and look are immaterial for a man who lives in pure consciousness and remains tuned to the ultimate truth.

In the concluding part of his last udasi, he returned to Kartarpur and according to Bhai Gurdas, put aside his garments of renunciation. He spent his entire period ( 1520-1539) at Kartarpur on the banks of Ravi and lead a life of a teacher of truth in the garb of a devoted householder. The most important features of this phase are Institution Of *Langar* or community kitchen and Seva or voluntary physical labour. The *langar* symbolized equality and brotherhood.

We generally see facts and fictions interwoven in the life history of the saints and prophets which cannot be easily separated. The sources about the life of Guru Nanak are either Janamsakhis (biographies) or the places built in his memory. According to Dr. S. S. Kohli some people have made the Janamsakhis unauthentic by deliberately twisting the existing material or adding some false and objectionable incidents. However the true personality of the guru is reflected in his compositions.

### **Works of Guru Nanak:**

Guru Nanak began to compose poetry at a very early age. His maturity of spiritual development is reflected in his poetry. He called himself “Nanak Shair” or Nanak the poet. He composed and sang his own verses wherever he went. The fifth guru, Arjan Dev collected these verses from the people from the connected areas for compilation of the Adi- Granth. There is no doubt about the authenticity of compositions of Guru Nanak included in the Adi- Granth. Major Works of Guru Nanak are:

(1) Japji (2) Sidh Goshta (3) Asa –Ki-War

(4) Majh-Ki-War (5) Malar –Ki-War

(6) Dakhani Omkar

These major works contain important aspects of human life. **‘The Philosophy Of Life’ of Guru Nanak discussed in the present work is based on these major works.**

Guru Nanak has mentioned all the four Vedas in Asa- Ki-War. He says:

“All the four Vedas are truthful, Those who study and ruminates can discriminate between good and bad. Those who are humble with love and devotion , obtain the final emancipation”  
(Asa-Ki-War, Pauri13, shalok2)

A great similarity is noted between the Asa-Ki-war and Kathopanishad, which indicates that Guru Nanak had studied the Upanishads minutely. He was deeply steeped in the Upanishadic lore. Vallabha Acharya and Maha Prabhu Chaitanya were contemporaries of Guru Nanak and Guru Nanak met them in his journey towards the East at Jagannath Puri. But he had his own way of expression. The similarity of thought at some places in his works and his comments somewhere else shows his vast knowledge of the old

scriptures. It may also be the result of his discussions with the Pundits and other luminaries of his times.

According to Dr. S. S. Kohli, **His longer poems may be called Modern Upanishads.** Dr. D. S. Chahal in his works, 'The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy' maintains that **Guru Nanak talks about ancient philosophy or concepts usually accepted or held true by the concept of universe, then, he explains his own philosophy.**

**Thus philosophy of life of Guru Nanak can be traced back to Upanishads.**

It is a common belief that prophets/Saints /Great Poets experience sudden insights and express their experiences in most simple way as such there should be no hair splitting exercise for interpretations of their works. They may not care to build the systems but report insight of thoughts and vision. In ordinary human psychology there are four principal levels of consciousness, i.e. Primary level where in the immediate experience is in the present moment of the stream of consciousness and is the pure phenomena before judgment or any concept but is pure sensation. In the Secondary level, process of perceiving, thinking, judging and concept utilizing comes into operation and language and memory occurs. In the third level, I-ness and emotional reactions occur and identity with the personal thoughts or emotions is established. In the fourth stage, advanced concepts, cultural, social and ethical considerations affect the stream of consciousness. Sometimes the experiences of pure consciousness are brought down to the lowest levels by the followers, during their interpretations, to suit their own personal whims or fancies to acquire name and fame or supremacy in the world.

## **Upanishads**

According to Dr. Radhakrishnan, in his book, *The Principal Upanishads*, "Upanishads represent a great chapter in the history of spirit..... They have survived many changes, religious and secular and helped many generations of men to formulate their views on chief problems of life existence."

According to Swami Ranganathananda in his book *The Charm & Power Of Upanishads*, 'Swami Vivekananda presented Vedanta as a **fearless philosophy of life** which helps man to frame ideologies for himself combing the intensity of the fanatic with the extensity of materialist'. Constant summons to man is to wake up and march on. Adapting the powerful words of Katha Upanishad, "Jagrata, Prapya Varan Ni Bodhata" he said, 'Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached'

Vedas mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Vedas envisage a life period of hundred years with four stages namely Brahmacharya, Grahastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa and according to Swami Nikhilnanda advise "to cultivate a warm love for life. One must enjoy on earth a long life, marriage is compulsory except few specified. One must heighten the powers of senses so that through the enjoyment of material pleasures one may relieve the drabness of every day existence. However absorption of individuality in the Brahman is the highest goal". Vedanta teachers formulated qualifications for the pupils entitled to study Vedanta and seekers were subject to severe tests. One of the cardinal discipline for the knowledge of

Atma is practical ethical virtues. Self knowledge is denied to him 'who has not first turned away from wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued'. They teach regarding Jivas, Jagat and Ishwara or Living beings, the universe and God, nature and attributes of Brahaman and its powers of creation, preservation and ultimate destruction. Vedic rituals are observed at the time of birth, marriage death and other important occasions of life. Liberation through knowledge of Atma is to be attained now and here & not elsewhere after death.

We come across strong women like Maitreyi, a type of spiritual woman fit to be consort of philosopher Yajnavalkya and Gargi who is fully equipped in the art of intellectual warfare and dare to make her presence felt where a number of great philosophers are assembled in the court of king Janaka. What is the thread by which this world and the other world and all the things therein are held together and God as the soul of the souls is described in Brihadaranyka. The parable of the blindfolded man, in Chhandogya Upanishad, signifies the importance of initiation by a spiritual teacher from step to step on the path of realization. Mundakopnishad prescribes meditation by means of 'OM' as a way to realization. By continuous meditation by the symbol "OM" man is relieved of his sins by the power of chants, just as snake is relieved of its slough. The ultimate goal of the Upanishads is to show the way to liberation through jnana, or unitive knowledge of Brahmn.

By what faculty a mystic is able to realize God? Kathopnishad tells that it is only when the whole moral being is purged of evil that one is able to realize the greatness of God. We have to extract Ataman courageously from our body as one extracts a blade of grass from the sheath. Types of mystical experiences of forms and hearing of various sounds on the way to realization are also illustrated with a suggestion that Atma cannot be realized except by one whom it itself chooses. With the self realization the knots of the heart are broken, all the doubts are cleared and solved and effects of all his actions are annihilated. The sage in Mundakopnishad, when he comes to realize the Brahman, falls into mystic ruptures and finds Brahman, before and behind, right and left, above and below him. Such is the ecstasy of self realization by personal experience of divinity.

**It is true that these scriptures have dominated the Indian philosophy, religion and life.**

### **Principal Upanishads**

Principal Upanishads are accepted to be those which Sankaracharya chose to comment upon, they are ten in number and enumerated in the Indian tradition as follows; Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chandogya, and Brihadaranyaka. **The present study includes following Principal Upanishads only:**

**The Isa Upanishad;** It embodies in its opening Verse the central theme of all the upnishads, namely the spiritual unity and solidarity of all existence. It says that the 'Door of the truth is veiled with a golden disc. This veil must be removed so that seeker may behold the truth.

**The Kena;** It illuminates the nature of knowledge by pointing out the eternal knower behind all acts of knowing and purifies man's concept of ultimate reality revealing its character as the eternal self of man and the self of the universe.

**The Katha;** It holds special fascination for all the students of Upanishads for a blend of poetry, deep mysticism and philosophy expressed. It contains the unified exposition of Vedanta and its charm is heightened by the dialogue between old Yama, the teacher, and young Nachiketa.

**The Prasna;** It is an upnishad of questions by a group of six students on various aspects of Vedanta, and answers given by their teacher, the sage Pippalada.

**The Mundaka;** It classifies knowledge into Para higher, Apara lower and describes all science, art, literature, politics and economics including holy Vedas and sacred books as positive knowledge as Apara. It proclaims that one knowledge, as Para, 'by which the imperishable changeless reality of the one behind the many is realized'.

**The Mandukya;** It surveys the whole experience through the study of three states of waking, dream and dreamless and the Atma, the true self of man. It contains one of the four mahavakyas of Upanishads, "Ayam atma Brahma". "This Atma (self) of man is Brahman."

**The Taittiriya** It provides a scientific definition of Brahman as, "that from which all these beings are born, by which, after being born, they live, and into which they merge when they cease to be.

**The Aitareya;** It proclaims the truth of one of the other four mahavakyas, "Prajnanam Brahma" meaning, Brahman is pure consciousness.

**The Chandogya;** In a brief utterance of deep spiritual and philosophical import, treated as another one of the four mahavakyas, it sings in refrain the divinity of man "Tat – Twam Asi' That Thou Art. It prescribes knowledge of this divinity of man as the one remedy for the deeper ills of life: 'Tarati Sokam Atmavit', the knower of Atma crosses all sorrow.

**The Brihadaranyaka :** It is the longest Upanishad. Through fascinating dialogues, it expounds the central theme of all the Upanishads, namely the divinity of man and spiritual solidarity of the whole universe in Brahman. It contains another one of the four mahavakyas namely, "Aham-Brahmasmi" – I am Brahman besides the 'Ayam Atma brahma' of the Mandukya. It dares to characterize Brahman as the fearless and presents, its realization by man as attainment, here and now of the state of absolute fearlessness and fullness of delight.

#### **Aims & Objectives of the study are:**

(1) To Study Hymns of Guru Nanak included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib and interpret his philosophy of life.

(2) To analyze the extent and nature of his philosophy of life, which can be traced back to the Upanishads.

(3) To search for common elements between the two advocating unity of all life existence in pure consciousness and idea of universal brotherhood beyond the four walls of institutionalization of religions.

(4) Findings shall reiterate the belief that perceptions and revelations of philosophy of life in the hymns of Guru Nanak are universal in nature for the whole humanity like Upanishadic philosophy. Guru Nanak was protagonist of Bhakti tradition of religion of saints and advocated universal brotherhood and better worldliness.

### **Hypothesis**

- (1) Philosophy of life in the hymns of Guru Nanak is Upanishdic in origination sans religious rituals and dogmas.
- (2) Guru Nanak brought the wisdom of Upanishadic philosophy of life from the clutches of highly learned brahmins, sages and seers down for the common man through simplicity of expression, thought and action.
- (3) Guru Nanak's exuberance of love for God, man and Godly life is beyond institutional boundaries of any religion, division of mankind on the basis of caste and creed or sex and advocated spiritual **unity of all existence in pure consciousness** like Upanishads.

### **Limitations of study:**

- (a). In the absence of knowledge of Sanskrit Language, study is based on the English translation of the Principal Upanishads by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan..
- (b). Ten Number of Upanishads which Sankaracharya chose to comment upon are taken as principal Upanishads.
- (c). The study is based on the major works of Guru Nanak included in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib as explained.

## **Tentative Chapter Division**

Chapter 1: Bani (hymns) of Guru Nanak & Principal Upanishads

Chapter 2: Cosmogony or origin of creation

- (a) Universal Soul and Individual Soul
- (b) Nature of individual Soul and Body

Chapter 3: God, Man & the World

- (a) Mutual Relationship between God, Man & the world
- (b) Divine Will (*Hukam-Dharman*), Fear of God (*Rit*), Free Will
- (c) Stages of life, *Haume* ( I-ness)
- (d) The world, Struggle and suffering in the world

Chapter 4: God's Love and Grace in Life

- (a) Role of Guru (b)God's Love for Man
- (c)Man's love for God (d) Grace (*Nadar*)

Chapter 5: Aim of Mans life & Path Of Liberation

- (a) Aim Of Life
- (b) Path Of Liberation
- (c) Personal Experience Of Divinity

Chapter 6: Conclusion



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1. Bani (Hymns) of Guru Nanak and Upanisads. 2. Cosmogony or origin of creation. 3. God, man and the world. 4. God's love and grace in life. 5. Aim of man's life and path of liberation. 6. Conclusion. Bibliography. Both hymns of Guru Nanak and Upanishads explain that the real aim of human life is to attain liberation from the repeated coming and going in incarnations, which can be attained by adequate karma, knowledge and disciplined meditation. Guru Nanak did not advocate ascetic life as a way to salvation. He himself led a normal life, amidst society, in touch with people of his time, though he was completely God centered and detached from the world and its ways. He preached that asceticism was not the way and the way to salvation was not incompatible with good life, laughing, eating, playing and dressing well. Humility. Nanak was humility personified. He often described himself as servant of God or slave to God. His faith in the universal harmony of various religions was in total agreement with his inviolable faith in God as the supreme lord and the goal of all our endeavors. He declared, "For me there no Hindu and no Muslim. With all I am at peace. The God residing in us renders us incapable of hate and prejudice." Indian Philosophical Tradition and Guru Nanak: A Study Based on the Conceptual Terminology Used in Guru Nanak Bani. Ravinder G. B. Singh. Punjab Pub. The Religious Philosophy of Guru Nanak: A Comparative Study with Special Reference to Siddha Goá'ti. Jodh Singh - 1983 - Exclusive Distributors, Motilal Banarsidass. Aspects of Guru Nanak's Philosophy. Wazir Singh - 1969 - Ludhiana, Lahore Book Shop. A Study of the Moral Core of Guru Nanak's Teaching. Gurbachan Singh Talib - 1970 - Chandigarh, Guru Nanak Dept. Of Sikh Studies, Panjab University. Guru Nanak: Religion and Ethics. Balwant Singh Anand - 1968 - Patiala, Punjabi University. The Philosophy of Guru Nanak: A Comparative Study. Ishar Singh - 1984 - Atlantic Publishers & Dis