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SIKH APPROACH TOWARDS YOGA TRADITION IN INDIA



Arvinder Singh

Head, Department of Political Science, Ramgarhia College, Phagwara (Punjab)

Short Profile

Arvinder Singh is a Head at Department of Political Science in Ramgarhia College, Phagwara (Punjab).



ABSTRACT:

In fifteenth century, Guru Nanak laid the foundation of new, dynamic and revolutionary way of life in form of Sikhism. He took the due notice of religious practises, actual behaviour and general attitude of the followers of Yog tradition of his time. He denounced the asceticism and all those religious beliefs, which motivated the masses to renounce the world and to run away from the performance of social responsibilities. Sikh Gurus criticised the outward religiosity of yogis. They emphasised on active participation in performance of socio-religious obligations and repudiated all kinds of mechanical processes of attaining the ultimate

goal of life i. e. the merger with Supreme Being. They urged the masses to live in family and due performance of social responsibilities. They advocated the path of Sahaja Yoga, which can be easily followed by performance of the righteous deeds, and continuous meditation without any kind of withdrawal from social life.

KEYWORDS

*dynamic and revolutionary, mechanical processes, commercial classes.*

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**INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND:**

The Brahmanas sought safety in tightening up the stronghold of their caste system to keep their community from the influence of the new ideas. The yogis adopted an escapist approach and preferred to lead a life of indifference towards worldly problems. A vacuum was thus created which was filled by the emergence of a new leadership arising from the commercial classes. The new leadership recognized the urgency of a new socio-religious approach. It was in these circumstances that Sikhism, a new religion, made its appearance in the Punjab. Before the advent of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, many distortions of Patanjali's Yogasutras and Hathayoga Pradipika had been in vogue. By the time of the Gurus, yoga had been reduced to a mere instrument of earning sidhis and intimidating others in order to multiply the number of the followers. The Sikh Gurus have used the terminology of yoga in their verses and recognized the utility of self-realization but the methodology prescribed by them is that of nam-simaran, remembrance and praise of God rather than self-mortification. Gurbani primarily aims at the welfare of humankind. At the time of birth of Sikhism in the 15th century, the jogis / Naths and Siddhas dominated the religious landscape in Punjab. They practiced asceticism, renunciation, celibacy and tortuous physical practices for seeking salvation. Guru Nanak preached householder's life and denounced the escapist life and other practices of the jogis, who had reduced the spiritual heights of Yoga to mainly a healthy body building exercise. He held discussions (goshties) with them throughout the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent and carried his point every time. Sikhism strongly denounces the escapist life of jogis and their tortuous practices. It preaches householder's life (Grahisti jiwan) as forum of all activities. Gurbani deprecates the yogi who gives up the world and then is not ashamed of begging at the door of the householder

The essence of his discourse with the Siddhas (Nath Yogis) at Achal-Vatala in the Punjab (or at the Sumer-Kailash-mountain, according to Puratan Janam Salehi) is expressed in his well-known composition, Sidhgoshti. While the Yogis attempted to convert the Guru into their folds through theological debate as well as by display of their supernatural, occult powers, the founder of Sikhism exhorted them to be true Yogis by realizing and practising the true spirit of their faith. Yogi Bhailgar Niith asked, 'Why have you put vinegar in milk. The spoiled milk cannot be churned into butter. How have you put off yogic garb and attired yourself in a household way.' Said Nanak, 'O, Bhailgar Niith, your mother-teacher is unmannerly. She has not cleansed the inner self of your body-pot and your clumsy thoughts have burnt your flower (of knowledge which was to become fruit). You, while distancing and repudiating household life, go again to those householders for begging. Except their offerings you don't get anything'.

**SIKH APPROACH TOWARDS YOGA TRADITION:**

Yoga holds with Samkhya that the achievement of spiritual liberation occurs when the self (purusa) is freed from the bondages of matter (prakrti) that have resulted because of ignorance and illusion. The Samkhya view of the evolution of the world through stages leads Yoga to an attempt to reverse this order, so that a person can undertake a regimen of "dephenomenalization" until the self re-enters its original state of purity and consciousness. Once the aspirant has learned to control and suppress obscuring mental activities and has succeeded in ending attachments to material objects, he or she is able to enter Samadhi, a state of deep concentration accompanied by a sense of blissful,

ecstatic union with ultimate reality.

As regards the pursuit of the ultimate end of human life, emphasis had been on formalism and ritualism, and the values of justice and righteousness in the deeds done by man in this material life were deemed irrelevant in this pursuit. In fact, in the milieu inherited by the Sikh Gurus renunciation of the world was considered a necessary prelude on the path to the spiritual ideal of man. Negation of life and the world, rather than their affirmation, made up for true religiosity because they believed in the complete divorce of spirituality from the social praxis.

Guru Nanak said, "O unwise man, abiding at graveyards and cremation grounds union with God is obtained not." Guru Amar Das said, "O Yogi, having lost the way of Yoga, thou wanderest about. Through hypocrisy, union with the Lord is obtained not." He believed that, "Leaving thy family, if thou wanders abroad; in this, Yog consists not, O Yogi." He pleaded the yogis to follow the righteous path. He said, "Strays thou not in doubt, serve thy True Guru and keep thy mind steady at one place. O Yogi, having lost the way of Yoga, thou wanderest about. Through hypocrisy, union with the Lord is obtained not." He also said, "He alone is a Yogi, who deliberates over the quintessence of gnosis and obliterates his self-conceit and desire."

Guru Arjan said, "Recitation, penance, wandering over the earth, attachment to austerities with body reversed, and following the path of Jogis and Jains : by such means the Lord is pleased not." By inculcating love for God, one has not to suppress the instinctual forces and annihilate other faculties, which He has endowed us, but to utilize these. Potentialities in realization of the love object. The wandering and thus comes to a halt. Further, no one can lead a truthful life simply by adoption of certain formulae as his code of conduct. Truth can come out from us only if we love Truth and imbibe Truth within ourselves. This is possible, if we love God objectively, who is the Embodiment of Truth and all Virtues.

Guru Nanak said, "The Yog of the pious person is this, that through the Guru's instruction, he searches his own -self and enshrines within his mind the One Lord, the Enemy of pride." He said, "Yoga is not in the patched coat, nor the Yoga is in staff, nor Yoga is in smearing the body with ashes. Yoga consists not ear-rings, or in shaven head and Yoga not even in the blowing of horn. Abide pure amidst the worldly impurities, Thus shalt thou find the way to Yoga. By mere words Yoga is obtained not. By mere words Yoga is obtained not. Yoga consists not in wandering to yonder tombs, or crematoriums, or sitting in trance. Yoga consists not in wandering in native and foreign lands, nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage. Abide thou pure amid the worldly impurities. Thus shalt thou find the way of Yoga."

He pleaded that, "They are thine ear-rings, the ear rings which thou hast in thy mind. Make thou the body the patched coat. Subjugate thy five disciples and make this mind thy staff, O, yogi. Like this, thou shalt find the way to true yoga." Guru Amar Das said, "Put the rings of modesty in thine ears, O Yogi and make compassion thy patched coat. Apply thou the fear of birth and death to thy body as ashes, O Yogi, then shalt thou conquer the three worlds." He also said, "Make truth thy platter and contentment thy wallet. Put the ambrosial Name therein as thy food. Make meditation thy staff, O Yogi and Divine knowledge the horn, thou blovest." He advised them to "Fix the fear and love of the Lord the two guards to thy lute, O Yogi and make this body of thine, its frame. If thou become virtuous, then shall the string play, In this way thy desire shall departs"

Bhagat Kabir said, "Make silence thine ear-rings and mercy thy wallet. The Lord's meditation, make thou thy bowl, O Yogi. Stitch this body of thine for thy patched coat and make thou the Lord's Name thy support. O Yogi, practise thou such a 'Yogi'. By Guru's grace, thus shalt thou enjoy god's

meditation, hard service and self-control. Pause. Besmear thou thy body with the ashes of wisdom and make the fixing of thy mind on God thy horn, Becoming desire less Plant thou the virtues of the five elements in thy mind, that thy trance may remain undisturbed. Roam thou in the city of thy body and play on the lyre of thy mind. Says Kabir, Hear, O ye saints, make righteousness and compassion you garden."

Guru Nanak said, "He, who practises chastity and truth and ponders over the Name is the pious Yogi, who practises the Real Yog. The Yogi, who dies through the Name and overpowers his mind, comes to realize the way of Yog." He also said, "The Yogi, who practises celibacy, chastity, sobriety and righteousness is blessed with immaculate mind and becomes the friend of the three worlds, O Nanak." Sikhism teaches a religious discipline, which is in essence a practice, which includes the technique of yoga, the psychological and spiritual integration, the technique of bhakti, the supreme training of the emotions in the service of one supreme End, and a socio-politically active life, motivated not by the little ego of the individual but by an individual self which is yoked to the universal Self.

#### ASCETICISM VERSUS HOUSEHOLDER'S LIFE:

Spirituality has no significance if it leads only to personal salvation. When yogis who had retired into the Himalayan caves in the quest of spirit, ignorant of the state of affairs in the world of men, Guru Nanak replied to them: "When perfect men like you keep hiding in the mountains, who will save the world and what do you expect the world of men to be ?" This is the ethics of creative activism that Sikhism stands for. The people's minds had to be freed, made healthy before they could comprehend the ideals of solid virtue. So the hypocrisy of renunciation, the dogmatic systems' of asceticism, the observance of fasts, vows of celibacy, meaningless penances, and mortification of the body in several ways were all denounced in Sikhism. The physical Yogic feats acquired through physical exercises and control of breath was declared to be irrelevant.

The Yogis of India too had accepted that for the life of the spirit one must turn away from society. If the happiness of the highest kind was desired, there was no choice but to accept the path of complete withdrawal i.e. complete retirement from all worldly activities, including the earnings of one's livelihood. In this mental condition of religious preceptors, married life came to be regarded as a great evil. Running away from the daily activities and responsibilities of family life is of no avail either. He did not spare yogis for deserting their family responsibilities and hiding in the Mountain caves, passing their days on the earnings of the others. Instead, he explained the spiritual discourse to Yogis how to practise yoga in true sense. Guru Nanak debated with the siddha yogis, questioned them for keeping themselves beyond the boundaries of everyday life. He declared his philosophy of miri-piri, by which he united the dichotomized existences of religiosity and secularity. Life is one, it is united, religiosity is to be practised at every moment of gross earthly life. Guru Nanak's thesis of the reality of the world as it has been created by God has many very deep implications. These implications have elaborate relevance to the problem we are discussing, namely the issue of modern global living. Guru Nanak says that the earthly life is meaningful and it is the place for righteous deeds.

The Sikh Gurus preferred the life of a householder to that of a wandering sadhu. They were of the opinion that man has to live in this world and be useful to society, rather than run away from life's problems. The Gurus themselves led married lives and had children. They were of the opinion that the household was a school in which man learns how to sacrifice his narrow self for the family. It also

teaches that to earn an honest living is a prerequisite of godliness.

Guru Nanak rejected the idea of wandering in forests hills and deserts in search of salvation or god, as a meaningless pursuit. He said troubling one's body (penance) or performing ritualistic meditation was of no avail. One can become a spiritual being while living his life as a householder. He said that married life is not an obstacle, but it is helpful on the path to liberation rather, Guru Nanak asserted that a householder's life was the best path towards a spiritual journey. Every living being has some physical needs too, hence one cannot (and must not) run from the realities of the world Even after renouncing the world, one again turns to householders for assistance to fulfil unready needs moreover, renunciation (escapism) is running from the field, it is in fact accepting one defeat. He asserted that one can active liberation while living as an ordinary human being (laughing and playing i.e. entertaining and fulfilling ones daily needs. It appeared to him that Yoga as such had outlived its usefulness. It provided an easy exit from facing the difficulties of the world and supplied the justification to negate obligations. Yet with all this, Guru Nanak was not against Yoga. He wanted to assimilate it and utilise it as a means and not an end in itself. The Yoga for this purpose had to be refined and modified to suit the needs of the man who does not renounce the world. Yoga had, therefore to be reconditioned. It has to be pressed to the service of householders. So far, the practice of Yoga required the immobility of posture, which was incompatible with the avocation of a householder. Yoga therefore, had to become a mobile companion. A new version of it was found in Sahaja Yoga. The implication of it was that the technique of concentration by rigid enforcement of posture was to be avoided On the contrary a habit of relaxed mood was to be cultivated free from the wrinkles of anxiety. Whereas the Yogas of Patanjali and Gorakhnath laid emphasis on Aasanas (Postures) and Pranayama (regulation of breath), the Sikh Gurus and radical saints of the Sikh Scripture have totally discarded them. The Yoga for Sikh is Naam Yoga or Gur Shabad Yoga. Through them, he crosses the world-ocean and attains the State of 'equipoise' (Sahaj Avastha). Guru Granth Sahib is the pivot for him and through its hymns; he comes to know about the Guru's discipline, which drag him out of the physical and mental arenas. The Gurus rejected Hath Yoga in favour of Raj-Yoga or Sahaj-Yoga, which implies a householder's life, social commitment and remembrance of the 'Holy Name' and surrender to God's Will (GGS, p. 76). The Gurus and bhagats like Kabir used yogic terms but have given them new meanings. So also the hearing of inner music is not through the Kingri, or conch but through Guru's sabad: "Raja Riimianhad Kingri bajai; Jaki Drisht Nad liv lage" (GGS, p. 92). The Guru's Shabad heard within and gives bliss.

## CONCLUSION:

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that Sikh Gurus raised the strong voice against asceticism, escapism and religious hypocrisy of followers of Yog tradition. They redefined the symbols of yogis and urged them to discard the rigorous and mechanical path of physical exercises to attain the goal of spiritual salvation. They urged them to live in society and to use their knowledge and religious experiences for the welfare of masses. They advocated the householder life. Sikhism is, in fact, a householder's religion. Guru Nanak laid the foundation of harmonious fusion of temporal and spiritual spheres of life. Sikh Gurus wanted to create a society of those devoted and righteous people who could perform their social and religious duties in the balanced form.

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