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Contribution of Sikhism to Society

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ABSTRACT

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, society was afflicted by numerous social, religious, and political evils. Punjab, known as the gateway to India, was passing through a period of instability and disorder. The sixteenth century was marked by continuous political upheaval. The Lodhi dynasty came to an end, and the Mughal Empire was established. Babur's invasions caused widespread destruction of life and property in Punjab. At the same time, the Bhakti saints and Sufi mystics inspired people to reform their thinking and encouraged spiritual awakening

1. Introduction

According to historical context that Guru Nanak Dev Ji was born during 1469–1539. He laid the strong foundation of Sikhism and initiated a new religious movement based on equality, truth, and devotion to God. Society at that time was deeply affected by several social evils, particularly the rigid caste system, religious discrimination, and untouchability.

The Hindu social order was divided into different castes, and discrimination was common. Brahmins were regarded as superior, while people belonging to lower castes were treated with contempt. They were not permitted to enter temples or enjoy equal social rights. The condition of women was equally miserable. Women were denied education and social freedom, and practices such as Sati reflected the severe oppression they faced.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji strongly opposed these injustices. He proclaimed the equality of all human beings regardless of caste, creed, gender, or social status. He emphasized that true greatness lies not in birth but in righteous conduct. Through his teachings, he initiated a new era that emphasized universal

brotherhood, justice, and human dignity. The ideals introduced by Guru Nanak were ultimately strengthened by Guru Gobind Singh Ji through the creation of the Khalsa Panth.

Before leaving for his heavenly abode in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh Ji declared Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. This established the Guru Granth Sahib as the everlasting spiritual guide for the Sikh community.

The Sikh Gurus rejected social discrimination and established the principle of equality in practice. They advocated equal rights for women and emphasized the dignity of every human being. Sikhism emerged under the influence of the Bhakti movement but gradually developed its own unique identity.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji preached that God is One, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, who is present everywhere and loves all humanity equally. Instead of ritualism, superstition, and empty religious ceremonies, he emphasized living an honest life based on three fundamental principles:

1. Naam Japna (Remembering and meditating on God)
2. Kirat Karni (Earning an honest livelihood)
3. Vand Chhakna (Sharing one's earnings with others)

Sikhism considers the entire human race as one family. It teaches love, compassion, equality, and universal brotherhood. Guru Nanak encouraged people to abandon hatred, jealousy, and social divisions and to live together in peace and harmony. Although Sikhism initially spread within Punjab, it gradually expanded throughout India and later across many countries of the world.

Guru Angad Dev Ji made a remarkable contribution to the development and consolidation of Sikhism. He standardized and promoted the Gurmukhi script, making religious teachings accessible to ordinary people. He also strengthened the institutions of Sangat (holy congregation) and Langar (community kitchen), which had been initiated by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The Gurmukhi script enabled people to read and understand the teachings of the Gurus in a simple and accessible language, thereby promoting literacy and spiritual awareness among the masses.

Guru Amar Das Ji further strengthened Sikh society by expanding the institutions of Sangat and Pangat. He strongly opposed social evils such as the caste system and the Sati practice, while advocating equal rights and dignity for women.

To improve the administration and propagation of Sikhism, Guru Amar Das Ji introduced the Manji System. Since he was advanced in age and unable to travel extensively, he appointed dedicated representatives to preach Sikh teachings across different regions. He established 22 Manjis, which played an important role in organizing the Sikh community and spreading the message of Sikhism.

Guru Amar Das Ji also supervised the construction of the Baoli Sahib at Goindwal between 1557 and 1559. This sacred site became an important centre of pilgrimage where people from all backgrounds could gather, regardless of caste or social status, reflecting the Sikh principle of equality.

Guru Ram Das Ji, the Fourth Sikh Guru, lived during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. He made a significant contribution to the growth and organization of the Sikh community. One of his greatest achievements was the establishment of Amritsar in 1577 CE, which later became the spiritual and cultural centre of Sikhism.

Guru Ram Das Ji acquired the land for the new town and initiated the excavation of the sacred tank (Amrit Sarovar). Over time, Amritsar developed into an important religious, social, and commercial centre for the Sikh community. He also preserved and promoted the teachings and traditions inherited from Guru Amar Das Ji, many of which are recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the Fifth Sikh Guru, guided the Sikh community during the final years of Emperor Akbar's reign and the early period of Emperor Jahangir's rule. During his leadership, Sikhism flourished and gained a large number of followers. One of Guru Arjan Dev Ji's greatest achievements was the compilation of the Adi Granth in 1604 CE. He collected the hymns of the Sikh Gurus along with the compositions of various Hindu Bhakti saints and Muslim Sufi saints, thereby creating a sacred scripture that emphasized the unity of humanity and devotion to one God.

However, Emperor Jahangir viewed the growing influence of Sikhism with suspicion. As a result, Guru Arjan Dev Ji was subjected to severe torture and was martyred in 1606 CE. He was made to sit on a burning iron plate while hot sand was poured over his body. His martyrdom became a turning point in Sikh history and inspired the Sikh community to stand firmly against oppression and injustice.

Following the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji became the Sixth Sikh Guru. The tragic sacrifice of his father deeply influenced him and transformed the direction of Sikh history.

Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji realized that, alongside spiritual guidance, the Sikh community also required the strength to defend justice and protect the oppressed. To symbolize this new vision, he wore two swords:

1. Piri, representing spiritual authority.
2. Miri, representing temporal and political authority.

This became known as the Doctrine of Miri–Piri, which established the principle that¹ spiritual devotion and the responsibility to uphold justice must exist together. Under this doctrine, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji began making not only religious decisions but also political and military decisions for the welfare and protection of the Sikh community.

To further strengthen Sikh identity and self-governance, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji founded the Akal Takht opposite the Harmandir Sahib. From this institution, he guided the Sikh Panth in matters relating to justice, governance, and the defence of righteousness.

With the establishment of the Akal Takht, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji gave Sikhism not only a spiritual foundation but also a temporal and political identity. Religious matters continued to be guided through Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), while political, social, and community affairs were addressed from the Akal Takht. This unique arrangement reflected the Sikh principle that spiritual life and worldly responsibilities should remain in harmony.

The Akal Takht also became the venue where the Guru held assemblies, listened to the concerns of the Sikh community, settled disputes, and encouraged physical training and martial skills. Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji adopted royal attire and maintained a disciplined Sikh force, symbolizing that Sikhs should always be prepared to defend righteousness and protect the weak. The Doctrine of Miri–Piri transformed the Sikh community into a confident, disciplined, and self-reliant society. It inspired Sikhs to combine

devotion to God with courage, justice, and social responsibility. The doctrine later laid the ideological foundation for the creation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1699.

The principles of Miri–Piri also strengthened the ideals of equality and unity. Caste discrimination gradually weakened within the Sikh community, and people from different backgrounds began to worship, dine, and work together without distinction. Thus, the concepts of Miri–Piri and the Akal Takht became two of the most important pillars of Sikh philosophy and Sikh identity.

2.Conclusion

The Doctrine of Miri–Piri, introduced by Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, together with the establishment of the Akal Takht Sahib, transformed Sikhism into more than a purely spiritual faith. It provided a comprehensive way of life that integrates spirituality, morality, social justice, and responsible leadership.

The principle of Miri–Piri teaches that devotion to God must be accompanied by the courage to oppose injustice, protect the oppressed, uphold truth, and serve humanity. The Akal Takht continues to symbolize these ideals and remains the highest temporal institution of the Sikh Panth, providing guidance on religious and community matters.

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