



Guru Nanak Dev

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This article is based on **“A vision for equality”, “A humanist above all”, “Legacy for a civilisation”, “Going beyond Kartarpur”** published in The Indian Express on 12/11/2019. It talks about the relevance of Guru Nanak Dev in Modern India.

Recently, the **550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev** was celebrated. He is known as a philosopher, poet, traveller, political rebel, social leveller, mass communicator and a spiritual master- on whose teachings the religion of Sikhism is founded.

About Guru Nanak Dev

- Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) was born in a village, Talwandi Rai Bhoie, near Lahore (it was renamed later as Nankana Sahib).
- Guru Nanak Dev initiated inter-faith dialogue way back in the 16th century and had conversations with most of the religious denominations of his times.
- His written compositions were included in the Adi Granth compiled by Guru Arjan (1563-1606), the fifth Sikh guru.
 - This came to be known as Guru Granth Sahib after the additions made by the 10th guru Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708).
 - In compiling the Adi Granth, Guru Arjan showed a remarkable commitment to pluralism while retaining the unity of thought initiated by Guru Nanak Dev.

Relevance of Guru Nanak Dev for modern India

Building an Egalitarian Society

Even though India is an aspiring superpower, its caste hierarchy is still engraved in the societal order.

- Guru Nanak Dev's vision of a casteless society in which there is no caste hierarchy can help to establish an egalitarian society.
- His idea of equality can be deduced by the following innovative social institutions, as given by him:
 - **Langar:** Collective cooking and sharing of food.
 - **Pangat:** Partaking food without distinctions of high and low caste.
 - **Sangat:** Collective decision making.
- These egalitarian practices had directly challenged the untouchability and the caste system and continue to do so.

Social Harmony

Increased cases of intolerance, mob lynching and right-wing vigilantism, affects the secular nature and social harmony of the Indian society.

- Guru Nanak Dev's concept of "Jeeye kaa ik daata" can address these issues.
 - According to him, the whole world is God's creation (Jeeye kaa ik daata) and all are born equal. There is only one universal creator i.e. **"Ik Omkaar Satnaam."**
 - This spirit of equality began with Guru Nanak Dev's clear recognition that there is no distinction between a Hindu and Muslim. For him, no country was foreign and no people were alien.
- This philosophy is similar to the Sanskrit saying **"Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"** that describes the whole world as one family.
- Apart from it, **forgiveness, patience, forbearance, and kindness** are the core of Guru Nanak Dev's teachings.

Creating a Just Society

Inequality is the root cause of all social evils.

- Guru Nanak Dev placed the motto of **"kirat karo, naam japo and vand chhako"** (work, worship and share) before his disciples.
- He stood for **karma as the basis of dharma**, and he transformed the idea of spiritualism into the **ideology of social responsibility and social change**.
- He suggested that we earn by honest labour and share the earnings with the needy.
- He advocated the concept of **"dasvandh"** or donating one-tenth of one's earning among needy persons.
- The selfless service to mankind known as **"Seva"** is central to the teaching of Sikhism.
- These ideals can help us in establishing a just society today.

Gender Equality

Women have been the most oppressed sections of the society.

- Guru Nanak Dev argued that **"How can women be inferior when they give birth to men?"**
- According to him, "Women as well as men share the grace of God and are equally responsible for their actions to him."
- Respect for women and gender equality is perhaps the most important lesson to be learnt from Guru Nanak Dev's life.

Bringing Peace

Relations between India and Pakistan are grim due to tensions over Kashmir and cross border terrorism.

- However, both the countries, keeping their political issues aside had inaugurated the **Kartapur corridor**.
- Kartapur corridor can become a starting point in the normalization of India-Pakistan relations, which will have an impact on the whole South-Asian region.

According to Indian Philosophy, a Guru is the one who provides illumination, dispels doubt and shows the right path. In this context, the ideas of Guru Nanak Dev can help promote peace, equality and prosperity across the globe.

Every person can learn a lot from the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. Leaders of the world can also learn from his life and teachings so that meaningful dialogues between various communities can be initiated (especially in the conflict-ridden parts of the world). This will certainly propagate the ideas of peace, stability and cooperation, and make the world a better place to live in.

Drishti Mains Question

Analyze the relevance of the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev in modern India.