

Human Rights in Sri Guru Granth Sahib**Harpreet Kaur****Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi, Mata Sundri Lane, New Delhi, 110002, India***ARTICLE INFO***Article history***RECEIVED:** 21-Feb-22**REVISED:** 05-Apr-22**ACCEPTED:** 25-Apr-22**PUBLISHED:** 15-Nov-22***Corresponding Author**

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**ABSTRACT**

Human rights, a cornerstone of democratic states, enable and protect individual freedom, dignity and choice, making it one of the most powerful concepts of the present times. Improving individual conduct and social character facilitates human rights and, in this vein, reading and comprehending religious texts of diverse religions can assist one to glean through such universal principles that improve individual and social conduct, thereby establishing the universality of morals on which human rights are based. The presence of universality in the Bani of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and theistic philosophy of Sikhism vouches for an equal and fair society where human rights flourish. Studying Bani contained in Guru Granth in context of discourse on human rights is the objective of the paper for the values like individual and political rights, social dignity, justice, equality etc. permeates the entire Granth. The Bani profusely quoted exemplifies entire gamut of rights like civil, political, social, economic etc. and engaging in Bani is a way how individual and social character can be more right-oriented creating a just societal order in which happiness prevails.

Keywords: Human Rights, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, civil rights, political rights, social rights, economic rights

Introduction

Human rights refer to the rights present in our existing societies as essential conditions of life and integral for all, enabling all to live as human beings. Laski considers rights as social for being 'socially beneficial and socially essential, while the state only recognises rights and ensures them to every citizen'. "Human rights are the basic rights that a person irrespective of race, caste, gender, creed, religion or any other background cannot be denied anywhere and or at any condition" (Alam, Khabirul & Halder, Ujjwal., 2018). Human rights granted to all entities transcend all man-made boundaries and barriers.

Human rights concern the relationship of individuals with the state and is their status or claims and duties within state's jurisdiction. The 'historical roots of human rights thinking' is not discontinuous with the concepts related to it that had emerged previously. "All societies cross-culturally and historically manifest conceptions of human rights" (Pollis, Adamantia & Schwab, Peter eds.,

1979). "There is continuity and change in the concept of human rights from the ancient Greeks to the present" (Freeman, M., 2017). The Code of Hammurabi is the most ancient text available outlining the rule of law. Ashoka, the Great, 'promoted religious toleration, provided for the health and education of his people, and appointed officials to prevent wrongful punishment' (Weeramantry, C.G., 1997). The ethics based on reciprocal principles and empathy finds expressions in Confucian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhism and Sikhism ethics, all of which vouch vociferously for values like empathy, reciprocity, love, compassion etc.

However, the human rights phenomenon has largely remained as conspicuously absent in many societies since the times immemorial and the phenomena that *Praja* (subjects) were denied rights by *Raja* (King or Emperor) was prevalent in most of the societies. "Some have argued that there could be no concept of individual rights in ancient times, because individuals were considered to be subordinate parts of the social whole" (Freeman,

Michael, 2002). There were some voices championing rights of the general masses such as the clarion call given by the Indian Bhakti saints of the medieval period that prepared the masses to rise for their rights.

The idea of human rights emerged after inhuman torture and genocidal policies perpetrated during Hitler's regime shaking the world. 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights' adopted on 10 December 1948 was the first step to translate into action human rights concerns. "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations*). The Declaration codifies the entire canvas of human rights i.e., *civil, political, economic, social and cultural* providing a common standard of achievement for all people and nations. Subsequently, national governments across the world endorsed legal instruments giving it a further sanction as integral to democratic nations.

Rights focus on freedom, protection, status, or benefit for the right holders (Beitz, C., 2009). Most human rights are claim rights imposing duties or responsibilities on duty-bearers. 'The duties associated with human rights often require actions involving respect, protection, facilitation, and provision' (Nickel, James, 2021).

These are universal, inalienable or exist independently of legal enactment as justified moral norms. "Human rights are often held to be universal in the sense that most societies and cultures have practiced human rights throughout most of their history" (Donnelly, J., 2007). For many centuries natural law, the standard against which all the other laws were to be judged, played a dominant role in Western Political Theory. 'To contest the justice of man-made law, one could appeal to the higher authority of God or natural law' (Renteln, A. D., 2013). The Western moral philosophy heavily rests on the presumption of universal moral principles. The categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant and the Original Position elucidated by John Rawls reassert this in their own ways. The Kantian notion is a vehicle for advancing human rights for he assumes a set pattern of the way of moral reasoning resulting in a single or universal result not impacted by cultural differences. Rawls's universalistic premise in the 'veil of ignorance' stipulates a condition under which individuals are subjected and choose the principles of justice under which the society must be made to operate.

Human rights discourse is associated with human dignity, individual needs and norms of a good society, and human development and human security are also connected

with it. "Whereas human needs are seen as something being located inside individual human beings, human rights are seen as something located between them (Galtung, J., & Wirak, A.H., 1977). "Increasingly, justification of human rights is coming to depend less on human nature and rationality and more on the concepts of basic human needs and human dignity" (Renteln, A.D., 1988).

Elaborating on human rights tradition, Lefebvre endorses Foucault's notion of treating human rights akin to 'the care of the self' concept and considers "human rights as a means for individuals to concern themselves with, work upon, and improve themselves". He even goes to the extent of saying that human rights can be taken as a tool for 'self-help' and 'one that provides strategies for people to become more resilient, happier, fulfilled, present, loving, exuberant, and even joyful' (Lefebvre, A., 2018). Lefebvre rather extends human rights as a tool how improvement in others can be done and mainly understood 'as a tool for self-information and self-improvement for the sake of others' (Golder, B., 2019). Human rights is also opined as a 'way of life'. Henri Bergson opines that the human rights concept introduces humans with love and has more to do with emotion of love as juxtaposed with law. "Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop our intelligence, our dealings and our conscience to satisfy our spiritual and other things" (Alam, Aftab, 2000). "What it boils down to in the final analysis is that human rights grow from the respect and dignity that people accord one another in a neighbourhood, a community and a society, and that a nation upholds" (Blau, Judith & Moncada, Alberto, 2009).

If self-improvement or social norms and human rights are related, **religious texts** fostering self-improvement and social character gain a considerable significance. Religions have a profound universalistic dimension and if latent depths of religious traditions are explored, human rights concerns are discernible. All major religions of the world including, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism etc. have forward-looking vision of discerning good from evil or ethical from unethical. Human rights are of course, codified in national and international laws but a more practical source of it are the practical measures taken by humans for the same, which places prescriptions provided by religion on an exalted pedestal requiring paramount consideration and responsiveness.

Method

The provision, facilitation and creating conditions conducive for rights have gained a prominent place in the

democratic discourse. Although rights discourse is a prominent feature of modern times, the absence or prevalence of rights has been phenomena since times immemorial. Theological ethics emanating from religions and human rights largely overlap on the moral plane and hence, both cannot be separated; rather religious injunctions enable facilitating environs to improve individual conduct building a positive social character. Locating the spirit of human rights in the holy scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib to extract out moral injunctions and prescriptions is the objective. Gurbani while detailing negative injunctions, emotions and deeds prescribes a blueprint for positive thoughts, actions and deeds. Bani describes rights and elaborates socio-political conditions in which rights can be actualised stressing on individual character to remain on righteous path. *So, the paper is a document analysis of Guru Granth from the angle of human rights* elaborating positive suggestions given by Gurbani for making place for human rights in the society and enabling each one whether high or low, rich or poor, man or woman etc. to enjoy rights.

Religions as a Reflection of Universal Moral Laws and Human Rights Notion

The very notion of human rights is grounded deeply in theological ethics and preserving such ethics would necessarily serve as a bulwark against the multiple challenges at multiple levels like individual, social, sociological, religious, philosophical or psychological levels. Religions have flourished in various parts of the world since the times immemorial and varied religions had different levels of contributions in moral matters. However, not all religions have served the purpose of being a harbinger of rights. But seeking human rights in religious discourse might provide a more secure footing, for religion shapes the fabric of society in its own ways. "Every religion has something like universal moral laws that condemn murder, rape, lying, stealing, dishonouring religion and proper authority and commending truth-telling, promise-keeping and upright living" (Basu. L.M., 2007). Religious ethics also seek to find out the correct order of things and if the matters pertaining to human rights are seen with this angle, individual as well as social contexts of lives can be enriched.

The notion of rights as 'God-given' finds expression in the US Declaration of Independence, 1776 mentioning that people are 'endowed by their Creator with natural rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'. This, in a way, recognises God as 'the supreme law-maker' providing some human rights. If God's commands and human

rights are aligned, on the metaphysical level, it might grant a secure status to rights but at the practical level, there might be a lot of issues. The people residing in varied parts of the world do not believe in any religion or their belief is not in the notion of God inherent in Islam, Judaism or Christianity. 'If people do not believe in God, or in the sort of god that prescribes rights, and if you want to base human rights on theological beliefs you must persuade these people of a rights-supporting theological view. This is likely to be even harder than persuading them of human rights. Legal enactment at the national and international levels provides a far more secure status for practical purposes' (Nickel, James, 2021). Hence, national and international endorsement and enactments are imperative in a global society.

Another question related to the notion of human rights is 'Can human rights be defined as always being or "mirroring" moral rights?' (Nickel, James, 2021). Undoubtedly, human rights support the moral stance but, in this regard, it is important to note that Human Rights Declarations and various Treaties not only elaborate 'the existing moral consensus' but their objective is to change the existing norms.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Premises of Human Rights

The concern for humanity and its rights and duties, even challenging 'existing norms' are enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). Human happiness and liberation is at the core of SGGS and for achieving it, the Granth strongly opposes falsity, deceit, unfairness and other evils, and dwells upon universal principles of humanity including brotherhood of mankind and fatherhood of Almighty. The spiritual quest for Divine creates bliss in one's life and liberates one's soul. "Salvation, understood most broadly as liberation from negative attitudes of the mind, such as egoism, conceit and greed for wealth and material comfort, is achieved, according to the Granth through spiritual worship and meditation and right conduct required to overcome human propensities for wrong-doing" (Ahmad, Imtiaz, 2013).

All the concepts of modernity including human rights have been achieved through *struggle*. 'Human rights find their most reliable roots in the struggles throughout history for the values that underlie these rights' (Heyns C., 2001). Magna Carta, 1215 was signed between King John and rebel barons wherein former recognised rights of barons even to oppose the royal command if their rights were not honoured and Glorious Revolution, 1688

expanded the rights framework. French Revolution, 1789 challenged the divine powers of the Emperor and The American Declaration of Independence, 1776 reinforced that a social contract by the citizens gave powers to the government recognising people's right to change oppressive governments.

Human rights have been achieved through struggle and Gurbani asserts that one achieves only through struggle. Only brave-hearts who are not scared of sacrificing their own lives are true Sikhs. This is explained in the *Sabad* below:

*Jao tao parem khelan ka chao.
Sir dhar tali gali meri ao.
It marag pair dharijai.
Sir dijai kan na kijai. ||20|| (SGGS: Pg. 1412)*

If you wish to play the game of love,
Come to me with readiness to die in your heart,
For on this path, even the first step should mean that
You will not hesitate to lay down your life- for
righteousness.

This struggle in Bani not only indicates physical struggle but also controlling the mental faculties of man. Guru Arjan Dev says that Almighty and a devotee share an inseparable bond and the Divine is always watching and looking after his devotee, which makes a person realise the transient worth of the worldly deeds in one's life.

Kam krodh lobh moh nivare nivare sagal bairai. (SGGS: Pg. 1000)

I have forsaken sensual desires, anger, greed and attachment to the world play.

Individuals are endowed with *reason and conscience* that is the guiding factor for all. A major premise on which modernity is based is that individuals are rational sovereign agents who have freedom to make choices and one's conscience helps in applying the moral knowledge to any situation. Human nature is pre-moral and Kantian reflection of the transcendental self, having existence prior to the attributes attained on the earth as the main force behind human actions, is the crux giving them a meaningful existence. "Thus metaphysics for Kant concerns a priori knowledge, or knowledge whose justification does not depend on experience; and he associates a priori knowledge with reason" (Rohlf, Michael, 2020).

Article 1 of UDHR states human beings born free and equal in dignity and rights, are endowed with reason and

conscience enabling them to act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. To understand the full implication and spiritual significance of any concept in the Gurbani, stress is laid on *reasoning and logical thinking*.

Bibek budh sabh jag meh nirmal bichar bichar ras pijai. (SGGS: Pg. 1325)

One's keen intellect and precise understanding is immaculate in all this world. In thoughtful consideration, he drinks in the sublime essence.

Logical reasoning enables one to comprehend the difference between right or wrong, true or false, ethical or unethical, virtue or sin etc. and shows the path towards realizing Truth. Bani explains the way of a meaningful life and a life full of God-consciousness. Even while reading scriptures that contain esoteric knowledge, it is imperative to reflect upon it to grasp the true content. At many places, Gurbani emphasizes on application of mental faculties in all endeavours including charity and a noble cause like charity should be pursued with discerning perceptiveness for a desired effect.

*Akal eh na akhiai akal gavaiai bad.
Akli sahib seviai akli paiai man.
Akli parh kai bujhiai akli kichai dan. (SGGS: Pg. 1245)*

Intellect which leads to arguments is not called wisdom. Wisdom leads us to serve our Lord and Master; through wisdom, honor is obtained. Wisdom does not come by reading textbooks; wisdom inspires us to give in charity.

Human rights gives discerning abilities assisting to lead a fulsome social life paving way for a social understanding, despite the fact that acceptance of equality, limits one's rights.

Satsangat mil bibek budh hoi. (SGGS: Pg. 481)

Joining the society of saints, my mind was awakened and began to discriminate.

The authors of SGGS representing linguistic, religious or caste diversities and geographical territoriality of India have an intrinsic unity in their unconditional faith in the Absolute Reality as the source of the entire creation. All natural diversities in the Creation with an underlying unity are God-created.

*Suraj eko rut anek.
Nanak karte ke kete ves. ||2||2|| (SGGS: Pg. 8)*

And the various seasons originate from the one sun;
O Nanak, in just the same way, the many forms originate
from the Creator. ||2||2||

The universal reason is the basis of the claims for human rights while accepting the diversities. Universal consciousness is the source of diversities and so, preserving and respecting all living forms emanating from one source is important, dissuading humans from disregarding nature or disrespecting fellow beings. Guru Amar Das pronounces:

Ekas te sabh duja hua. (SGGS: Pg. 842)

From the One Lord, all others were formed.

Kabir says that the source of origin of the entire creation provides an essential underlying equality of humankind and none can be termed as high or low. The creator is within the creation and man-made distinctions declaring some as inferior is not in conformity with the very principle that the creator permeates all forms and all spaces.

Aval alah nur upaia kudrat ke sabh bande.

Ek nur te sabh jag upjia kaun bhale ko mande. ||1|| (SGGS: Pg. 1349)

First, Allah created the Light; then, by His Creative Power, He made all mortal beings.

From the One Light, the entire universe welled up. So who is good, and who is bad? ||1||

Another aspect of human rights is that if an individual is free to do something, it assumes an equal amount of freedom for others but it is also a fact that my rights cease the moment the rights of others start and 'my personhood depends on the absence of what is other and in principle antagonistic to my free will' (Basu, L.N., 2007). So, rights are relational making tolerance for others an essential condition for the presence of rights. "There can be no free standing, absolute right, because such a right would violate the freedom of everyone except the bearer and it would be established on a ground different from that of universal human freedom" (Basu, L.N., 2007). So, the selfish propensities of one intruding into another's rights and *Humai* (ego), a source of dissensions should be eradicated. Bhagat Kabir writes that a mortal is possessed by such conduct but when death will befall upon him, he will not take any material treasures with him.

Lalach jhuth bikar maha mad ih bidh aodh bihan. (SGGS: Pg. 1124)

You are engrossed in greed, falsehood, corruption and great arrogance. Your life is passing away.

The Granth envisions a utopian society where human rights prevail and creates a societal structure that promotes civil, political and economic rights.

Mention of Civil Rights in the Granth

Civil rights (Articles 3-15) comprise the entire gamut of rights making civilized life possible bringing well-being in a civil society. These ensure that rights are not denied to common people and prescribe injunctions that political functionaries do not misuse overarching power. A society is progressive when its indispensable component, individuals are imbued with virtues while moral values decline leads to disregard of liberties and rights of others becoming a major source of societal disharmony and crime.

Every individual has their own characteristics traits which are created through individual experiences occurring in their personal and social spaces. They aim at self-realization realized through one's perception and evaluation of any particular action or event. Rationality assists to make choices arriving at logical decisions impacting personal space and social space occurrences. Virtues guide humans to discover goodness shaping the individual and social character of any particular community. Lefebvre endorses this saying that the value of human rights is in its role as 'in enabling practices of personal transformation and self-improvement' (Lefebvre, A., 2018).

Individuals as a victim of vices conduct acts reversed to laws, which leads to all sorts of human rights violations. "The sense-organs of a person try to lead one astray. Eye has a seductive touch on seeing a beautiful object. Ears are pleased to listen to one's praise. Tongue prefers unwholesome victuals. Hands steal the property of others. Feet would commit crimes. All these are to be controlled" (Gupta, Hari Ram, 1984). The societies all over the world are gripped with such acts leading to violations every second, minute and hour. Embracing humane qualities prescribed in the scriptures and avoiding deeds reversed to laws including theft, dacoity, grabbing property of others etc. that are punishable offences is the crux of teachings of the Gurus and Bhagats enshrined in the holy Granth which will solve human rights violations problem.

The importance of the presence of intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual values in human life permeates through the hymns contained in SGGS. The individual virtues and a code of morals is elaborated and the way to control vices is ordained in Japji Sahib (SGGS: Pgs. 1-8) itself. Respecting the dignity of others, reaching out to

others or compassion and caring for others' happiness results in inner tranquility of the highest degree and well-being in the society.

*Dhoul dharam daia ka put.
Santokh thap rakhia jin sut. (SGGS: Pg. 3)*

That the Bull is Dharma, the Law, born of Mercy.
Which, through Contentment, creates Harmony.

Compassion or mercy is an integral part of justice; however, it should not shield cruelty or inhumane treatment. The premise that killing is to be condemned and non-violence or *ahimsa* is to be promoted has an essential congruence. Bravery is not just in gaining victory but in securing justice for oneself while reinstating just conditions in the society. This is endorsed by many thinkers. "Both Gandhi and Girard also address the religious pre-conditions of nonviolent action by underlining the need to prefer godly over worldly pursuits, and to overcome the fear of death by God's grace" (Palaver, Wolfgang, 2021).

Gurbani states that one who is brave fights to the end, even in the face of all odds. A person's life is meaningful and honourable only when righteous and running away from the battlefield makes one a coward.

Sura so pahichaniai jo larai din ke het. (SGGS: Pg. 1105)

He alone is known as a spiritual hero, who fights in defense of religion.

We have freedom such as those of thought and expression, but people are afraid to speak the truth due to fear of opposition and its repercussions. SGGS kindled the streak of fearlessness in humanity who were motivated to their core to stand up for rights and against tyranny and injustice. One should not take injustice lying down and it is important to raise one's voice at an appropriate moment.

Sach ki bani Nanak akhai sach sunaisi sach ki bela. (SGGS: Pg. 723)

Nanak utters the speech of Truth; for, now is the time to utter the Truth.

Self-realization of an individual is possible if one understands the transcendental God who resides in all persons and the entire creation and everything around us is manifestation of the Ultimate.

Ghat ghat antar barahm lukaia ghat ghat jot sabai. (SGGS: Pg. 597)

Deep within each and every heart, God is hidden; His Light is in each and every heart.

Embracing humane qualities is the ideal way of life and such a person transcends the temporal and spiritual boundaries. The sense of humility is outlined beautifully in Sukhmani Sahib (SGGS: Pgs. 262-296) asking one to shed pride of power, riches and land and act virtuously and in humility.

For salvation, an individual need not to reach the heavens to realize the essence of the transcendental God but it is possible by living ethically in this world, loving fellow-beings and remaining absorbed in God's love.

Jo rate seh apnai tin bhavai sabh koe. (SGGS: Pg. 557)

Those who are attuned to their Lord - everyone is pleasing to them.

Pride, infatuation, greed, maliciousness, vanity, viciousness and temptations are contingent; clinging to them is futile and embracing altruistic life which grows with Truth, is life's crux. Humans are largely attached to the worldly pursuits and their lives are centered around *maya* or worldly attractions and *haumai* or ego-centrism and in this spiral, they tend to lose inward peace, outwardly leading to violation of rights of others.

Sikhism's central credence in virtuous conduct is the guide to reach the ultimate reality. A virtuous life is based on values. "Truth is higher than everything else but true conduct is higher than even truth" (SGGS: Pg. 62) and *Santokh* or contentment, akin to temperance, is one of Plato's four cardinal virtues. 'Temperance is the virtue that attests to keep us from excess, and, as such, requires the balancing of legitimate goods against our inordinate desire for them. Our legitimate use of such goods may be different at different times; temperance is the "golden mean" that helps us determine how far we can act on our desires' (Richert, Scott P., 2020). This virtue helps in containing greed, selfish propensities, self-love, self-centeredness, lust for worldly attachments, egoism etc. and inculcating values like benevolence and restraint regulating selfish propensities and desires. *Vichar* or wisdom assists one in shedding out what is malefic for oneself and society. 'On the contrary, the unwise person has a faulty conception of what is good for him' (Brown, Eric, 2017).

But such an ideal society where individual conduct is high and where love guides the relationships between the familial sphere and the world at large is elusive resulting in blatant rights violations.

Political Rights in SGGS

Political rights armour individuals with rights protecting against infringement by fellow citizens, governments or social organizations. Protection against discrimination, right to participate in government or criticize if repressive, fair trials etc. are all its manifestation.

Gurbani elucidates a divine ideal order exhibiting a blueprint of its earthly aspect to be realized in the temporal world. Ruler and ruled is mentioned in temporal and abstract terms and the creator is eternal while his creation being transient will perish, sooner or later. If one lives under the spell of internal enemies, such a life is not meaningful.

Rat pine raje sirai upar rakhihi evai japai bhao. (SGGS: Pg. 142)

and if the blood-sucking kings were to hold power over me.

This comparison of temporal rule that is atrocious and spiritual forms are in Bani:

Jo rat piveh mansa tin kio nirmal chit. (SGGS: Pg. 140)

Those who suck the blood of human beings-how can their consciousness be pure?

The rule of the rulers, in temporal as well as abstract terms is transitory for 'rulers, subjects and nobles shall not last'.

*Raje rayat sikdar koe na rahsio.
Hat patan bajar hukmi dhahsio. (SGGS: Pg. 141)*

Neither the kings, nor their subjects, nor the leaders shall remain.

The shops, the cities and the streets shall eventually disintegrate, by the Hukam of the Lord's Command.

The Gurus' period witnessed tyranny, injustice, fanaticism, oppression, political chaos, high-handedness and corruption. Wielding overarching powers, kings and their functionaries worked in atrocious manner and the poor and exploited did not have courage to raise their voice against the ruling exploiting classes. This equation based on king and subjects, high or low, powerful or powerless etc. was not at all acceptable to them. The Gurus' message enthused people, giving them courage to oppose the oppressors, in a way, heralding a new democratic era.

Guru Nanak condemned Babur's attack, especially mentioning uneven battle waged.

Je sakta sakte kao mare ta man ros na hoi. ||1|| rahao. (SGGS: Pg. 360)

If some powerful man strikes out against another man, then no one feels any grief in their mind. ||1||Pause||

Gurbani denounces the exalted position of kings based on the divine origin of kingship in forceful verses. The political authority exercising absolute rights over subjects, not acting morally and legally, flouting human rights or making no efforts to fulfill their duties towards the ruled was abhorred by the Gurus and Bhagats. The common masses were suffering at the hands of atrocious rulers indulging in inhuman acts like torture and slaughter disregarding religion and humanity.

*Khurasan khasmana kia hindusatan daraia.
Apai dos na dei karta jam kar mugal charaia.
Eti mar pai karlane tain ki darad na aia. ||1|| (SGGS: Pg. 360)*

Having attacked Khurasan, Babar terrified Hindustan. The blame is on one's self, not the Creator, and so has made the Mughal the angel of death. There was so much slaughter that the people screamed. Didn't You feel compassion, Lord? ||1||

Even today despite all voices and concerns for rights, there are numerous examples of the invading countries violating people's human rights and such a situation was challenged by Guru Nanak. The power holders derive power by the trust reposed by the people in them as in the Social Contract theory that visualizes a social contract wherein people repose their trust in the rulers who are in turn, committed towards caring for the ruled ensuring that there is no mistreatment or wrongful punishment by the state granting justice.

Even in the democratic era, world witnesses political abuses unleashed by power-holders within the parameters of the nation and such political abuses are mentioned in SGGS:

*Raje sih mukdam kute.
Jae jagainih baithe sute.
Chakar nahda painih ghao.
Rat pit kutiho chat jahu.
Jithai jian hosi sar.
Nakin vadhin laitbar. ||2|| (SGGS: Pg. 1288)*

The kings are tigers, and their courtiers are dogs; For, they awaken those that sleep in God's Peace.

The King's Servants tear (the docile subjects) with their nails,
And, like curs, lick up all the blood that they spill.
But, hark, where men are to be judged (at the Lord's Court),
Their noses will be chopped off, for, God will Trust them
not. ||2||

The king and administrators should don necessary qualities of kingship and endorse democratic ideals for the well-being of the subjects. The regime of opportunists who bow before the establishment for favourable gains and positions and corrupt functionaries is challenged.

*Kaji hoe kai bahai niae.
Fere tasbi kare khudae.
vadhi lai kai hak gavae.
Je ko puchhai ta par sunae.
Turak mantar kan ridai samahi.
Lok muhaveh chari khahi.
Aisa hindu vekhhu koe. ||(SGGS: Pg. 951)*

Becoming judges, they sit and administer justice.
They chant on their malas, and call upon God.
They accept bribes, and block justice.
If someone asks them, they read quotations from their books.
The Muslim scriptures are in their ears and in their hearts.
They plunder the people, and engage in gossip and flattery.
Behold, such is the Hindu.

A just and righteous regime that flouts arbitrary rule while promoting democratic ideals including human rights, justice, mutual coexistence, happiness etc. is desired, which can be a step ahead in actualizing not only the maximum good of the maximum number but at creating a governance order where everyone is content and happy. Such contentment can be experienced when one completely surrenders to Hukum or Divine Will.

A gentle governance order (*Halemi Raj*) was elucidated by Guru Arjan:

Sabh sukhali vuthia ih hoa halemi raj jio. ||13|| (SGGS: Pg. 74)
Let all abide in peace, under this Benevolent Rule. ||13||

The martyrdom of the Gurus is a manifestation of what we call human rights abuses. Guru Arjan had to face imprisonment in the Lahore Fort and brutal excesses were meted out against him. Guru Tegh Bahadur were subjected to utmost torture before being martyred. His maxim, 'Do not frighten anybody, nor fear yourself' or '*Bhai Kahun ko det nahi, Nahin bhai manat an*' (SGGS: Pg. 1427) gives a guarantee to the subjects against repression of the rulers and their functionaries. His

martyrdom is a precedent of aspiring for a state where religious diversities flourish, upholding the rights of people professing an altogether different faith and standing up as a bulwark against religious persecution of Kashmiri Pandits.

The Sikh history is replete with instances wherein the Gurus and their ardent followers have borne excesses and torture in captivity bravely and sacrificed themselves for others rights like Guru Arjun, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das, Bhai Dayal Das, Sahibzada Fateh Singh, Sahibzada Zorawar Singh, Banda Singh Bahadur and his companions etc. Inhuman torture is punishable offence as per International Laws codified after Nuremberg trials. International jurisprudence declares such abuses like war crimes, genocide etc. as crimes against humanity, severe offences liable for punishment.

The *International Humanitarian Law (IHL)* endorsing the concept of just war advocates humanitarianism in war. Bhai Kanhaiya who comprehended the true intent of the message contained in priceless Gurbani served water to wounded soldiers of the Sikhs as well as the Mughal camps. Bhai Kanhaiya can be hailed as Forerunner of Red Cross Movement for he supported humanitarian treatment for wounded and sick soldiers. He reiterated what is inscribed in SGGS:

Na ko bairi nahi bigana sagal sang ham kao ban ai. ||1|| (SGGS: Pg. 1299)

No one is my enemy, and no one is a stranger. I get along with everyone. ||1||

So, political rights are important in a just order and Gurbani manifests all these facets.

Economic Rights and attached Duties in Bani

Economic rights are considered the 'second generation rights' covering the gamut of rights of sustenance, work, health, education, leisure etc. Economic dealings in trade or occupation are predominant in present times. The lust for power, position or material greed and disagreement in personal and social goals leads to inordinate clashes and social disharmony. A balanced life is that which is led with temperance. Guru Nanak's prescription for ideal life is that all should labour with hands and none should grab the rightful earning of others. Gurbani gives injunctions for checking rivalries and divergences.

'Hak Paraya nanka uss suar uss gaye.' (SGGS: Pg. 141)

To take what rightfully belongs to another, is like a Muslim eating pork, or a Hindu eating beef.

A prescription for maintaining equilibrium in life is to lead truthful life, earn honest labour and share from one's hard earnings with others.

Pahila sach halal due tija khair khudae. (SGGS: Pg. 141)

Let the first be truthfulness, the second honest living, and the third charity in the Name of God.

It is the duty of all to earn for subsistence of family, which should be rightfully done without intruding into the rights of others, doing unlawful activities and avoiding clashes. Bhagat Kabir condemns such vagaries of individual choices and deeds saying:

*Baho parpanch kar par dhan liavai.
Sut dara peh an lutavai. ||1||* (SGGS: Pg. 656)

Practicing great hypocrisy, he acquires the wealth of others.
Returning home, he squanders it on his wife and children.
||1||

True God should permeate in all undertakings for one can be emancipated by good deeds.

*Kheti vanaj navai ki ot.
Pap punn bij ki pot.* (SGGS: Pg. 152)

My farming and my trading are by the Support of the Name.
The seeds of sin and virtue are bound together.

The excess or absence of materialism is bad and balance in life is imperative, which would shun accumulation, a source of evil in the society.

*Jis garihi bahut tisai garihi chinta.
Jis garihi thori so firai bharmanta.
Duhu bivastha te jo mukta soi suhela bhaliyai. ||1||* (SGGS: Pg.1019)

The household which is filled with abundance - that household suffers anxiety.
One whose household has little, wanders around searching for more.
He alone is happy and at peace, who is liberated from both conditions. ||1||

Today we see a wave of excessive materialism and consumption resulting in discord, sharing and caring in a world dominated by self-centeredness is elusive. Global

public goods meant for all are getting concentrated in the hands of a few. Rather in the social development stage provision of resources should be equally for all. SGGS stresses on sharing nature's bounties created by God with all, which do not wane, rather increase if shared with prudence.

*Khaveh kharcheh ral mil bhai.
Tot na avai vadh do jai. ||3||* (SGGS: Pg. 186)

Expend thou as thou wildest with all thy company.
(But) it diminishes not and is on ever increase.

The life necessities for all is in God's Home and Gurbani elaborating mundane necessities mentions that the 'blesser of worldly joy' is transcendental Lord who is the ultimate 'treasure of all Good' for the devotees. Guru Arjan Dev writes:

Man mangao tan mangao dhan lakhmi sut deh. ||1|| (1307)

Thou blestest me with Glory, Power, Riches, sons, the human body. ||1||

The worshippers of Almighty lead a fulfilled life and Bhagat Dhana implores to Almighty even for the basic necessities in very apt words.

*Dal sidha magao ghio. Hamra khusi karai nit jio.
Panhia chhadan nika. Anaj magao sat sika. ||1||
Gau bhais magao laveri. Ik tajan turi changeri.
Ghar ki gihan changi. Jan dhanna levai mangi. ||2||4||* (SGGS: Pg. 695)

Lentils, flour and ghee - these things, I beg of You. My mind shall ever be pleased.
Shoes, fine clothes, and grain of seven kinds - I beg of You.
||1||
A milk cow, and a water buffalo, I beg of You, and a fine Turkestani horse.
A good wife to care for my home - Your humble servant Dhanna begs for these things, Lord. ||2||4||

Bhagat Kabir endorses this same spirit in his own practical words.

*Due ser mangao chuna. Pao ghio sang luna.
Adh ser mangao dale. Mo kao dono vakhat jivale. ||2||
Khat mangao chaupai. Sirhana avar tulai.
Upar kao mangao khindha. Teri bhagat karai jan thindha. ||3||* (SGGS: Pg. 656)

I ask for two kilos of flour, and half a pound of ghee, and salt.
I ask for a pound of beans, which I shall eat twice a day.
||2||

I ask for a cot, with four legs, and a pillow and mattress.
I ask for a quilt to cover myself. Your humble servant shall
perform Your devotional worship service with love. ||3||

So, material basic needs including food, clothing and shelter are recognised in SGGS; yet excess of them is bad and whatever one has, should be shared. An individual should make a right living, take only rightful earning and not encroach upon the earnings of others. The provision of all these needs are possible in a just state looking into citizens well-being. 'May everyone prosper' (*Sarbat da bhallā*) teaches the world to be more harmonious.

Social Rights in Gurbani

Societies all over the world witness glaring violation of social rights. Differences and discrimination based on religion, caste, gender, colour, race, ethnicity, etc. make the societies multi-structured and fragmented in which the marginalized and vulnerable are denied their 'personhood'. The religious and caste affiliations, high or low class, regional disparities, gender biases etc. are quintessential groups on which societal *stratification* is based in the Indian scenario. Even in the present-day times, nearly all Indians are associated and ranked creating a pervasive social hierarchy. However, the impeccable and exemplary contribution of SGGS is shedding all notions emanating from this complex web of purity and pollution triggering rights violation. Gurbani says:

A true Muslim is one who is away from impurities and evils.

Musalman soi mal khovai. (SGGS: Pg. 662)

One who cleanses himself of impurity is a Muslim.

Guru Arjan pronounces that all humans despite differentiations created by the society attain emancipation by dwelling upon the Name of the Almighty.

Khatri barahman sud vais sabh ekai nam taranath. (SGGS: Pg. 1001)

Whether one is a Kshatriya, a Brahmin, a Sudra, or a Vaisyas; all these but swim across through Lord's Name.

During those times, community's three pillars guiding people to lead their lives were *Qazi* or Muslim judge, Brahmin and Yogi but corrosion had set in all of them. *Qazis* were indulging in falsehood, Brahmins were engrossed in demeaning rituals and Yogis were devoid of

praxis; so were misleading masses ruining them in their own ways.

Kadi kur bol mal khae.

Barahman navai jia ghae.

Jogi jugat na janai andh.

Tine ojare ka bandh. (SGGS: Pg. 662)

The Qazi tells lies and eats filth;

The Brahmin kills and then takes cleansing baths.

The Yogi is blind, and does not know the Way.

The three of them devise their own destruction.

Gender-based inequalities and impurities are futile; his light is everywhere in the creation.

Dharan gagan nah dekhaue doe.

Nari purakh sabai loe. (SGGS: Pg. 223)

In the earth and in the sky, I do not see any second.

Among all the women and the men, His Light is shining

Article 16 of the UDHR gives equal rights to men and women to marry and form a family and provides entitlement of equal rights 'as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution'. Family is the basic unit of the society and the human rights regime gives freedom and equality in the familial space. The oppressive privacy in the families and inequalities in familial relations is condemned, even punishable by law.

The Gurus consider the marriage between man and women very pure if based on virtues. In fact there is only one person i.e., God and the rest of the creation are women whose efforts are directed towards pleasing the husband or Almighty. Gurbani employs the metaphor of a bride explaining women's character and God is a groom and the seeker is depicted as a bride yearning to meet her Beloved or God. One who sanctifies God as her spouse is in a perpetual state of bliss.

The Guru bestowed a dignified status to women, bearers of even the mightiest of kings, emperors, seers and social reformers. "Infact, the context of attaching negativity to women is utterly disturbing, for the kind of reproductive strength the women's bodies offer is rather the sign of heavenly supremacy in itself. The Guru did not favour such pessimistic ideas to evolve in the society" (*Aurora, Sumeet D., 2017*).

So kyon mandaaa khiay jit jamme rajaana. (SGGS: Pg. 473)

O, why call woman evil who giveth birth to kings.

The 'man-made notion' in a patriarchal society attaching an inferior status to women, impurities especially after childbirth, polygamy, Sati, Purdah etc. is vociferously denounced in SGGS for the laws of nature and God's laws do not conform to such futile practices. Emphatic assertion resonates in Bani from *Asa di Var*:

*Je kar sutak mannai sabh tai sutak hoe.
Gohe atai lakri andar kira hoe.
Jete dane ann ke jia bajh na koe.
Pahila pani jio hai jit haria sabh koe.
Sutak kio kar rakhiat sutak pavai rasoe.
Nanak sutak ev na utrai gian utare dhoe. ||1|| (SGGS: Pg. 472)*

If one accepts the concept of impurity, then there is impurity everywhere.
In cow-dung and wood there are worms.
As many as are the grains of corn, none is without life.
First, there is life in the water, by which everything else is made green.
How can it be protected from impurity? It touches our own kitchen.
O Nanak, impurity cannot be removed in this way; it is washed away only by spiritual wisdom. ||1||

Sati or burning oneself in the funeral pyre of one's husband was disparaged; a new connotation of the term with temporal essence given was that *Sati* is one who cherishes the company of one's husband every moment and feels the pangs of separation with beloved like death.

*Satia ehi na akhian jo mariq lag jalannih.
Nanak satia janianih je birhe chot marannih. ||1|| (787)*

Yea, the *Sati* is one who lives contented and embellishes herself with good conduct.
And cherishes her Lord ever and Calls upon Him each mourn.

The society devoid of brotherhood, dignity and love is repudiated in SGGS and the ideals of welfarism and egalitarianism are echoed.

Conclusion

Human rights not only arm individuals against rights abuse but also aim at creating amicable living conditions. Overall growth and happiness is possible when human rights are facilitated and ensured for all. *O'Brien* (2008) defined happiness as 'that contributes to individual, community or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment or future generations.' Such a society which promotes collective happiness of people is

envisaged in SGGS wherein practical measures for such a envisioned society are revealed. Bhagat Puran Singh says, 'Guru Granth presents the most authentic account of social reconstruction of human society'.

Happiness is possible in an idyllic society and such an ideal space where human dignity is the essence is enshrined in the Bani of Ravidas. Spirituality is the basis of such a boundaryless society that is free from exploitation of man by man and where there is no grief, fear, injustice and excess taxes are not imposed on the residents. He says:

*Begam pura sahar ko nao.
Dukh andohu nahi tithi thao.
Nan tasvis khiraj na mal.
Khauf na khata na taras javal. ||1||
Ab mohi khub vatan gah pai.
Uhan khair sada mere bhai. ||1|| rahao. (345)*

Baygumpura, 'the city without sorrow', is the name of the town.
There is no suffering or anxiety there.
There are no troubles or taxes on commodities there.
There is no fear, blemish or downfall there. ||1||
Now, I have found this most excellent city.
There is lasting peace and safety there, O Siblings of Destiny. ||1||Pause||

Begumpura is marked by the characteristic of happiness of its residents, "completely satisfied, spiritually satiated and large-hearted mystics are already living here" (*Singhal, Dharam Pal, 2007*). The realm of Begumpura akin to 'Sachkhand' in Japji can be attained if dualities of mind and vagaries of thoughts and deeds are ended. "Begumpura is the highest spiritual stage that a seeker attains through continual practice of meditation" (*Singhal, Dharam Pal, 2007*). Bhagat Ravidas stipulates that entering into such a realm of truth, one becomes free from the cycle of birth and death, and sovereignty of God prevails eternally in such a blissful place.

SGGS recognises this fundamental underlying unity derived from God in humans and gives practical measures to realize it in one's feelings and actions, and love in relationship with others. Harmony in feelings is a part of happiness and the scripture emphasizes this harmony in body, mind and soul. The search for self as asserted by Foucault and Lefebvre is vital for 'No relationship is dearer than the one we forge with ourselves'. "Similarly, the love expressed between a husband and wife, between a man and woman, between parents and children, between two humans, is part of a search for that love which alone will make us complete and impart us a permanent state of

happiness" (TOI, 2021). The practical measures to handle miseries build an essential bridge of mutual co-existence in multi-cultural global family putting an end to parochial acts and mutual mistrust.

The rights perspectives including civil, political, economic and social are enshrined in the Granth concerning human dignity, individual needs and social norms. The need of the hour is to reiterate human rights, which is possible after shedding selfish propensities and shunning conflicts. Resorting to traditional knowledge will definitely be instrumental in opening the closed mindset and herein lies the significance of understanding Bani contained in the scriptures like Guru Granth. The mysticism and spiritualism contained in SGGS is a pathway towards a world which is more sustainable and endorses fairer practices. An exploitative governance order based on exploitation, corruption, consumerism etc. is shunned in favour of a holistic order based on humanism securing mankind's future.

The Granth's eternal relevance for the Sikhs is expressed by Cole (Cole, W. Owen, 1982) when he says, "The Sikhs (became) a people of the book to an extent and in a manner which is not found in any other religion". What is required is that the humanist import of the Granth should be an indispensable part of the lives and the Living Guru is there to shape the destinies of multitude of people who endorse humanist traditions. Flaws and ills in the society and weaknesses and errors in individuals can be corrected if Bani is read and imbibed by the individuals and transmitted in the larger society.

Religions elaborating a normative ethical system and human rights enforcing individual values and social norms share a paradoxical relationship but support each other strongly. Religious ethical norms might serve as an indispensable source of human rights with prescriptions to abide by them but merely religious motivation to uphold rights has constraints, for the religious precepts are based on voluntary compliance and some kind of sanction is indispensable for implementing rights, acknowledging and reiterating the growing significance of the UDHR. However, the seekers of true religions are also ardent supporters of human rights for there is no system of rights that excludes religion. If the theological ethics suggested by religions is followed, human rights would best be articulated and fulfilled.

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