Introduction

Human Rights occupy an important place in the world history because they are very fundamental in a civilized society and provide the vital protection to individuals so that they may continue their life and contribute to the society in a dignified manner. Human Rights recognize the inherent dignity and fundamental freedom of all members of human family and are the foundations for all basic freedom, justice and peace in the world. When protected by the rule of law they ensure peace in society by preventing man from turning violent.

Various philosophers have expressed their views on why and how the exercise of rights is essential for the proper functioning and development of society. The most challenging problem of our time is how to utilize the vast knowledge and resources available today for the welfare and development of mankind.

This research work is an attempt to bring before the world, Guru Nanak’s contribution in securing the basic Human Rights of the people. It is one of the important aspects of Guru Nanak’s philosophy which was ignored earlier by the scholars. No doubt that Guru Nanak was not only a spiritual leader but also a social reformer and a political thinker who gave importance to all aspects of human life. Human Rights are one of them. He was a great philosopher who applied his mind to a large number of problems of human concern. His struggle for securing basic Human Rights of the masses is very significant.

People at the time of Guru Nanak were devoid of basic Human Rights. They were being exploited politically, socially and religiously. Guru Nanak fought boldly for the preservation of Human Rights and raised his voice against social injustice, inequality, and religious repression, exploitation of women and degradation of human values. Guru Nanak realized the preciousness of human life and wished to create an ideal society free from every kind of exploitation and sufferings. Guru Nanak expected such a social
life for his followers where they must be aware of their rights and duties. Guru Nanak not only brought about a change in the thinking of slavery-ridden people of India but also asked them to give away hypocrisy and self-centeredness and infused in them spirit of sacrifice and selfless services.

The present work has been divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter ‘Human Rights: History, Nature, Western and Indian Perspectives’ an attempt has been made to go through the meaning of Human Rights and entire development of Human Rights in different ages. From Western perspectives, the landmarks in the development of Human Rights like Magna Carta (1215) in England, American Declaration of Independence (1776), the French Revolution of 1789 etc. have contributed greatly in advancing the concept of Human Rights. Ultimately, in December 1948, Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted consisting 30 Articles including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Similarly from Indian Perspectives Human Rights occupy an important place since Vedic time but the concept of Human Rights flourished in India during British rule. Several National Movement Organizations came forward to secure the basic Human Rights. Finally the Constitution was adopted by the people of India which came into force on 26th January 1950 including Fundamental Rights and Directive Principle of State Policy.

Second chapter ‘Contemporary Milieu and State of Human Rights’ explains that the need of Human Rights has been realized since the very beginning of the human civilization. But at the same time they have been violated from time to time by various dominating individuals or groups. Presently these rights are cherished at international level, but much is to be done at root level. In the above mentioned chapter, Human Rights are presented in different contexts such as Caste system and Human Rights, Religious violence and Human Rights, Role of Police and Human Rights, Woman and Human Rights, Child-Labour and Human Rights, Education and Human Rights, Environment and Human Rights, and Workers and Human
Rights. Several NGOs have been also referred in this chapter which are trying to protect and restore human dignity in all over the world.

Third chapter ‘Guru Nanak: Life and Works’ discusses about the life history of Guru Nanak and his works. Guru traveled widely in India and abroad during his course of Udasis in all the four directions to convey the message of God to the human beings. During his journeys, Guru Nanak went to the main religious centres of his time like Kurkshetra, Hardware, Gurakhmata, Achalbatala, Ayodya, Gaya Multana, Mecca Madina etc. He visited these places particularly on the occasion of religious fairs. He met with large congregations of scholars, Yogis, Jains, Faquirs, Brahmins and other people and exchanges his view with them. Guru Nanak taught them the true way of life by eradicating their false practices to attain salvation.

The works of Guru Nanak which have been mentioned in this chapter are Japji, Siddh Gosti, Asa di Var, Majh di Var, Malar di Var and Baramah Tukhari. Japji is the most wonderful creation of Guru Nanak. Almost all the basic problems on the way to spiritual realization have been touched upon in these hymns. Siddh Gosti contains the conversion in poetry of Siddas or Yogis with Guru Nanak. Asa di Var is next important composition. Except the praise of God, social order is the main topic which has been discussed in it. Similarly Majh di Var and Malar di Var contain several important philosophical points besides the description of different aspect of contemporary life. Baramah Tukhari deals with the beauty of nature. This poem contains one stanza for each month of the year. It can be said that *Bani* of Guru Nanak touches all aspects of human life which brought a new life among the dying spirit of humanity.

In the Fourth chapter ‘Guru Nanak’s ideas of Society in relation of Human Rights’ the condition of society at Guru Nanak’s time has been described. The social setup was divided into four classes in Hindu as well as in Muslim religion. The religious leaders assumed themselves superior to the masses and indulged in superfluous ceremonies and befooled people. Guru Nanak observed keenly these malpractices and made them realize their duties.
He spoke against the caste system cherished by Brahmins. He supported the family living instead of being ascetic. He introduced the concept of Sangat and Pangat to eradicate the caste discrimination in the real sense. This chapter also reveals how Guru Nanak deified the common woman who was otherwise suffering from pitiable condition. He condemned the concept of impurity of women during the menstrual period and of sutak during the delivery of child, which was the strong but useless belief of the contemporary society. Such thinking kept women aloof and inferior in the society.

Fifth chapter ‘Guru Nanak’s Concept of Polity and Human Rights’ opens with the contribution of other Sikh Gurus in the field of politics. Further it highlights the political conditions prevalent at the time of Guru Nanak and his response towards it. The sufferings of the people during Babar’s invasion have been described by Guru Nanak with deep emotion. Guru Nanak made many indirect references to the contemporary political situation. Guru Nanak encouraged people to be aware about their political rights and to resist those kings who are unable to provide them security.

Later, this chapter also reveals the concept of Guru Nanak about the ideal state, place of Panches in ideal state and duties of a ruler. Similarly the polity of the Sikhs during 18th and 19th century has been described in detail which shows that how Sikh Gurus and other Sikhs followed the master plan in every aspect of life prepared by Guru Nanak. This period served as the chief source of inspiration and guidance for the Sikh community. With the establishment of Khalsa, the social revolution started by Guru Nanak achieved its goal of serving the society without any distinction of caste, colour and faith.

The readers will also come to know about the origin and development of Misl organization, role of Banda Singh in Sikh polity, Sikh empire under Ranjit Singh and the role of Sikhs during the invasion of Ahmad Shaw Abdali in this chapter.

Sixth chapter ‘Guru Nanak’s Religion vis a vis Freedom of Faith’ is systematic overview of Guru Nanak’s idea of religion and freedom of faith.
For the proper understanding of Guru Nanak’s view about religion a brief survey has been made of the religions that were prevalent in India before the advent of Guru because the philosophies of the earlier religions cannot be ignored. So it was necessary to compare the thought of Guru Nanak with the other six systems of the Hindu philosophy and other religions.

Further I have tried to highlight time of Guru Nanak where Muslim rulers tried to eliminate Hindu religion by converting them to Islam by demolishing their temples, prohibiting them from performing religious rites, by burning their sacred books and by hundred other acts of oppression and suppression. The religious rights of the Hindus were not safe. In such a critical time, Guru Nanak stood boldly against the rulers who took away the religious freedom of the people. At the same time hypocrisy of the religious leaders at the time of Guru Nanak has been exposed.

The reader will also notice how by following the principles of Guru Nanak other Sikh Gurus like Guru Arjan Dev ji, Guru Teg Bahadar ji and several other Sikhs scarified their life for freedom of conscience and worship.

In this chapter I have tried to show Guru Nanak’s idea about the origin of the creation, time of creation, features of God, importance of Guru and Nam, goal of human life, how to achieve this goal and correct direction to achieve the goal of life.

Seventh chapter ‘Guru Nanak’s ideas of Human Rights and its relevance to the Modern Movements of Human Rights’ ideals with the Human Rights advocated by Guru Nanak. Human Rights were being crushed by despotic Muslim rulers at the time of Guru Nanak. The people were being demoralized and forced to embrace Islam. Guru Nanak condemned the brutalities of the rulers and administrative officials who exploited their citizens and violated Human Rights. There are number of Human Rights formulated by Guru Nanak such as Right to resist oppression, Right to work and fulfillment of essential needs, Right to freedom, Freedom of choice of occupation, Right to equality, Right to family, Right to education, Right to justice and Right to
women. Similarly the views of other political thinkers regarding Human Rights have been also mentioned in this chapter.

The remaining portion of the chapter deals with the relevance of Guru Nanak’s concept of Human Rights in the modern movements of Human Rights. If we are able to breathe the air of freedom today, it was only because of the great sacrifices of Sikh Gurus and the Sikhs who gave their blood and experienced extreme torture, sufferings and hardships for the sake of dharma and freedom.

Despite the great contributions of the Sikhs in protection and promotion of Human Rights, we are sliding down from the principles of Sikhism as the number of such true (ideal) Sikhs is very less. Many Sikhs have no faith in spirit of humanity which leads them to the distortion of values, escapism and collapse of man in despair and frustration and helplessness which nurtured the social conflict, exploitation, hatred and violence. The need of the hour is to propagate and practice the massage of Guru Nanak in order to create a democratic way of thinking in human lives.

The concluding part of the research includes the findings of the study. Observance of Human Rights means human security and dignity. These rights have been talked about by various philosophers and organizations from time to time in the world history. Guru Nanak after having traveled alot found the common people ignorant, superstitions and divided into many castes and religions. Hence, he started enlightening the society about supremacy of God and futility of empty religiousity. At the same time, he strongly propagated religious freedom and emphasized the unity of God. He spoke against barbarities of Muslim invaders. Following his teachings, ‘Khalsa Panth’ was established, a nation raising voice for betterment of masses and ultimately Sikh Raj was founded by Banda Singh and later fortified by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Guru Nanak started Sangat and Pangat system condemning discriminations. He deified women. He recognized importance to human life and advocated the right of speech, religion, culture and assembly by organizing ‘Sangat’ where people could express their feelings and thoughts.
He supported having family and spiritual growth along with worldly living. He preached honest means of livelihood.

But I opine that unfortunately, the same vices which Guru Nanak denounced are practiced even in the present time. Bribery, crime, drugs etc. are the vices which can be seen in the present society.

Regarding the research methodology, the present study is not empirical one and is purely theoretical one. Guru Nanak’s concept of Human Rights discussed in the present work is based on his writings included in the Guru Granth. While quoting from Guru Granth I have depended mainly on the English renderings of the verses by Prof. Gurbachan Singh Talib and Dr. Gopal Singh. At a few places I have used the English translation from the works of other writer like Surinder Singh Kohli, M.A. Maculliffe, J.S. Grewal, Jodh Singh, Taran Singh, A.C. Banerjee etc. I express my sincere thanks to all these learned scholars and other writers whom I have quoted in my work without their concern. The collected data has been thoroughly examined, interpreted, objectively analyzed and finally presented in the form of this work.
29. Guru Nanak's philosophy: Guru Nanak in his Bani lays out the principles of right social and spiritual conduct instead of writing rigid rules. Thus his message is timeless and adaptable to different environments. This is contrary to almost all other religions. The concept of Sehaj is probably unique to Sikhism. Although this word is translated as Intuitive ease it is difficult to translate it exactly. Sehaj may be called a state of mind that determines how one acts and deals with any situation. This state can only be achieved when one believes that in the ultimate analysis what ever happens is the will of God and one's responsibility is to take the right steps in a calm and peaceful manner in harmony with the environment. The Sikhs believe that the five successors of Guru Nanak, whose Bani is included in Guru Granth Sahib further clarified and emphasized what the first Guru had taught. Professor S. Radhakrishnan in his book, "Religion and Literature", published by Hind Pocket Books (P) Ltd., Delhi-32, has summarised the teachings of Guru Nanak on several topics in a chapter entitled, "Adi Granth and the Sikh Religion". About Gurbani he says: "The word of the Guru is the music which the Sikhs hear in their moment of ecstasy; the word of the Guru is the highest scripture."