

ETHICS AND BUSINESS

Evidence from Sikh Religion

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Abstract: Sikh religion, the youngest and most recent of the major world religions, follows a two pronged approach – on the one hand, it guides to practice discipline and positive approach in all walks of life and, on the other, explicitly mentions about various aspects of conduct and business practices. In brief, Sikhism encourages enterprise, workforce participation and economic progress. Rather, it redefines the concept of *Maya*, illustratively wealth – and preaches that not *Maya* but attachment to *Maya* that has to be avoided. One of the three pillars of Sikh religion is to work hard and earn an honest living while the other is to share with others the fruits of such labour. The third pillar, meditation, implies cultivating virtues. As the emphasis is on family life, Sikhism encourages participation in economic and social activities. As Sikh religion does not discriminate between castes, gender or religion, it encourages high work force participation. Finally, for a Sikh, human life in itself is a business, with every breath being a business period, and the highest priority of life being Truthful Living.

Key Terms: Sikhs, Investment, Ethics, Business, Labour, Sikhism, Family, Literacy, Workforce, Environment, and Management.

1. Introduction

In recent years especially after the global crisis of 2008 there has been an awakening that ethics has an important role to play in business practices. This is mainly because of the sub-prime crisis in the US where a large number of businesses failed, and along with the US economy, rest of the world also suffered a financial crisis. The US economy has not been able to recover completely after more than five years now, and the global economy continues to splutter, reflecting the seriousness of the crisis. In

addition, in Europe as well as many other countries there have been numerous cases of scandals and scams in the last few years.¹

In these periods of economic turmoil, it is obvious to consider whether religion has any guidance to provide. In this context, Sikh religion, relatively unknown and being of recent origin may have guidance to provide. Sikh religion originated during the late fifteenth century and was finally formalized in early eighteenth century.

In this article, an attempt has been made to examine the issue of ethics in business in the context of Sikh religion and their impact on economic growth. The paper presents the philosophical view based on the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Ji (SGGJ) and does not verify empirically the application of such philosophy in daily practice. However, according to a number of sociological studies undertaken in India, Sikhs, adherents of Sikh religion, have been economically successful in diverse fields of business and professions. The remaining paper is organized as follows. In section 2, a brief review of literature in the context of ethics and business is discussed. Section 3 presents the basic philosophy of Sikh religion as applicable to business environment. Section 4 discusses relevant elements that emerge from Sikh philosophy applicable to ethics and business and presents select quotations from SGGJ. Finally, broad conclusions are presented in section 5.

2. Review of Literature

In economic literature, the origins of ethics in business can be traced to Adam Smith who argued that competitive markets can lead to good economic outcomes even when people are acting in their self-interest. The concept of goodness is rather weak in economics which assumes that no one can be made better off without making someone else worse off or what is popularly called as Pareto optimum.²

Max Weber, in his work on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, emphasized the role of interconnection of religion and market

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¹In the 30's after the great depression a number of studies were undertaken, which finally led to the Glass-Steagall Act in 1933 after it was found out that the banks were following unethical practices. The Glass-Steagall Act, 1933 was repealed in 1999 and in about a decade the crisis had erupted again in the US.

²N. Singh, "Truthful Living: Sikh Thought and Practice in Economic Life," 3rd Sikh Studies Conference, Department of Sikh Studies, University of California, Riverside, USA, 2013.

place.³ Miller developed a theoretical model called The Integration Box (TIB) which argued that men and women increasingly desire to live an integrated life, where faith and work are integrated and not compartmentalized.⁴ Historically, economic progress has been through four stages, agrarian, industrial, service and the experience economy⁵ and the industrial era reflected the bifurcation between religion and workplace. The result was workers were expected to check their brain at the door – managers were responsible for the thinking required in the work place.⁶ In recent years, there is a demonstrable and growing body of evidence which clearly demonstrates that when people are permitted to bring their ‘whole self’ to market place, the output improves; and religion and spirituality are considered by many to be a component of ‘whole self.’⁷ The ‘occupy wall street’ and other anti-business movements demonstrated that there was a problem with the management paradigm.⁸ Marqus reported that a growing number of dissatisfied employees felt that they were not aware of the meaning of life in their work place.⁹

3. Basic Sikh Philosophy

In Sikh religion, business has an important place in life of an individual. In this section an introduction to basic elements of Sikh religion which have an impact on daily life, especially economic aspects, is presented.

³M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1930.

⁴D. Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁵B. J. Pine and G. Gilmore, “Welcome to the Experience Economy,” *Harvard Business Review* (July-August 1998), 97-105.

⁶B. Ashforth, and M. Pratt, “Institutionalized Spirituality: An Oxymoron?” in R. Giacalone and C. Jurkiewicz, *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2010.

⁷I. I. Mitroff, and E. A. Denton, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion and Values in the Workplace*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999. L. Lambert, *Spirituality Inc.*, New York: New York University Press, 2009.

⁸B. Mahadevan, “Spirituality in Business: Sparks from the Anvil, in Conversation with Suresh Hundre, Chairman and MD, Polyhydron Pvt. Ltd.,” *IIMB Management Review, Elsevier*, 25, 2 (June 2013).

⁹J. Marques, “Spirituality, Meaning, Interbeing, Leadership, and Empathy,” *SMILE Interbeing* 4, 2 (2011), 7-17.

The Sikh religion strongly believes that the universe is real but not eternal; everything that is visible has a lifespan. Additionally, Sikh philosophy believes that everything operates in the universe under principles set by God. The human mind has the potential to understand the principles set by God and the most basic principle is, ‘As you sow so shall you reap.’ This belief has been stressed repeatedly in the SGGJ: “The soul knows that as one sows, so will one reap” (SGGJ 1243).¹⁰ This rule implies that everyone makes his/her own fate and cannot blame anyone else for their situation.

In terms of philosophy of the Sikh religion, the gift of life in a human body is considered unique and precious: “Of all the living species, God gave superiority to the human being” (SGGJ 1075). “All the other species are the water-bearers of the human beings; humans have hegemony over this earth” (SGGJ 374). It is unique because only when the mind is in the human body can the joyous experience of God through the soul be realized. In fact, as observed in SGGJ, the objective of human life is to attain spiritual merger in Paramatma: *Bhaee Parapat Manukh Deyharea Gobind Milan Ki Eh Teyri Bareea* meaning that blessed with human body; this is time to merge in God (SGGJ 378).

Human beings have the tendency to digress and simply follow the dictates of the body or the misperceptions of the mind, under the influence of ego, attachment, greed, lust and anger. Sikh philosophy does not fear the impact of these influences but rather promotes harnessing their potential. For this reason, Sikhs do not renounce the world but continue to live happily with a positive and serviceful attitude.

Sikhism believes in an active and full participation in life, an amalgam of worldly strength and spiritual faith. This is symbolised in different ways in Sikh religion. First, in associating the tradition of *langar* (nutritious meal served free of cost) with a Gurudwara, a place to congregate socialise and worship in a group. Second, the tradition of *miri-piri*, symbolised in *Harmandir* (meaning Gods’ Temple, famously called as Golden Temple) and *Akal Takht* (meaning seat of the timeless) in close proximity, facing each other, in the temple complex at Amritsar. *Harmandir*, a place where only singing and recitation of hymns in praise

¹⁰The translation used in this article is based on different sources and at places, the author’s own understanding and translation. This has been done, in view of the fact that there is lack of good translation available in English. The transliterated hymns/verses have been presented along with page numbers in SGGJ for easy reference.

of God are permitted symbolises spirituality (or *piri*, in Persian) while *Akal Takht* symbolises temporal authority (or *miri*, in Persian), where generally, political and social issues pertaining to Sikhs are discussed.

In the Sikh religion a very unique definition of *maya* has been given: *Eh Maya Jit Har Visray Moh Upjay Bhau Dooja Laya* implying that *Maya* is simply anything that makes the mind forget God, due to attachment and duality (SGGJ 921). So, it is not richness, wealth, or kingdoms that are *maya* but attachment to these which are a cause of concern according to Sikh philosophy.

As Sikhs believe that all things are created and inhabited by God, there is no scope for exploitation, cheating, or falsehood in the Sikh way of life.¹¹ Additionally there are no superstitions as to what are favourable hours, days, months or years within the religion. Therefore, the Sikh can work any hour or day of the week without any spiritual restrictions.

The practice of living on charity and begging, even in the guise of religion, is strictly prohibited in the Sikh religion. The Guru observes that *Is Bhaykhay Thavho Girho Bhala Jithho Ko Varsay* – Instead of wearing these beggar’s robes, it is better to be a householder and give to others (SGGJ 587). Sikhs are expected to earn their living by labour, out of which they must offer something to the needy. SGGJ states: “Only that individual knows the true way who earns with the sweat of the brow and then shares it with others. Those who go dressed like religious people begging or living on charity for their livelihood do not know the true way” (SGGJ 1245).

Finally, to conclude this section, according to Sikhism, to meditate and purify one’s action is the best religion. To quote, *Sarab Dharam Meh Sarayset Dharam. Har Ko Naam Jap Nirmal Karam* implying that of all the religions, the best one is to remember God, and be Pure in action (SGGJ 266). This principle helps the individual to perceive all human races as equal and to generate respect for all religions.

4. Elements in Sikh Philosophy that Contribute to Business Ethics

A Sikh is expected to work hard, and to firmly keep God in the heart. A Sikh is also expected to lead a disciplined life, and be always alert and aware: “Do not be lazy, do today as much as possible, nothing can be done

¹¹“In every particle of creation, God resides” (SGGJ 1427). “From one source has all the creation been created, so who can be called noble or inferior” (SGGJ 1349). “The sense of high and low and of caste and colour are illusions” (SGGJ 1243). “All creatures are noble, none are low – one maker has fashioned all of them” (SGGJ 62).

or said, after uncertain death approaches” (SGGJ 1371). Additionally, each Sikh is expected to sleep adequately to fulfil the needs of the body, to meditate regularly, and to then, devote the rest of the time in earning a livelihood and building happiness within the family, immediate community and wider society.

General: A major emphasis within Sikhism is on ‘truthful living’ and Sikhs are required to have a sincere attitude in all interactions and dealings. Guru aims to make a Sikh (meaning a student or a seeker) bloom spiritually, serene mentally and perfect morally and for this, life has to be based on righteous conduct. To attain purity in life, first and foremost requirement is truthful living. Therefore, SGGJ observes, *Sachahu Orai Sabh Ko Upar Sach Aachaar* meaning that Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living (SGGJ 62).

SGGJ guides that following a path of truthful living helps the individual to live respectfully in the world. To quote, *Sachay Marg Chaldeha Ustat Karay Jahaan* meaning that following on the true path, earns praise from all (SGGJ 136). Similarly, the individual is constantly guided to work hard and make efforts. SGGJ says *Udham Karendaya Jio Toon Kamavdeya Sukh Bhunch, Dhinandheya Toon Prabhu Mil Nanak Utri Chint*: make effort and you shall live and enjoy the fruits of earnings, meditating meet God and Oh Nanak, your anxiety will vanish (SGGJ 522).

Another important issue is the time of learning the principles of ethics. In Sikh religion, it is believed that it is the mother that plays an important role in developing ethics in a family and therefore it is interpreted that such teaching should start early in life. To quote, *Jin Har Hriday Naam Na Vasioh Teen Maat Kijhe Har Bhanja*: In those hearts where God has not been realized, their mothers should have been barren (SGGJ 697). The word God is an epitome of virtues and implies that principles of leading a virtuous life have to start early in life and mother has an important role to play in this context. Similarly, the guidance provided by SGGJ is *Mat Mata Mat Jio Nam Mukh Rama*: Make that teaching your mother that it may teach you to keep the Lord’s Name in your mouth (SGGJ 172). At another place, Guru guides that *Mat Mata Santokh Pita Sar Sahj Samaho*: Wisdom is mother, and contentment is father; be absorbed in equipoise (SGGJ 1397).

In Sikh religion, democratic institutions and tradition are encouraged to provide equal rights to all individuals and participate in decision making. The religion encourages group thinking and group meditation, consultations and dialogue. A Sikh is expected to lead by example, to

practice before preaching or expecting others to follow, be it a worker or a manager. SGGJ exhorts: “When the belief and actions are different, then false is the commerce, false is the capital and harmful is the sustenance derived” (SGGJ 471). A Sikh is advised to first practice and only then to preach others.¹² This has been implied to mean that a Sikh is practical in approach. On this aspect the advice is rather strict: *Avar Updesay Aap Na Karai; Aavat Jaavat Janmai Marai* – Preaching others but not practicing; will continue to come and go, born and die (SGGJ 269).

Literacy: Sikhism encourages every individual to be literate, without and discrimination as the *Shabad* (divine word) is given the status of Guru, as presented in SGGJ. The divine message of SGGJ is conveyed in simple plain language and in simple metaphors for the benefits of all of humanity.¹³ The emphasis is on understanding Gurbani and contemplating on the meaning, as mentioned in SGGJ 840, *Boojoh Giani Shabad Vichar* meaning that “Oh wise one, realize through reflecting on the divine word.” The emphasis on literacy implies developing the skills to learn and discern about various aspects of life and live with a positive attitude.

Family Life: Sikhism encourages family life and living on earned income. All the Sikh Gurus, who were in the marriageable age, as also most of the others whose compositions are included in SGGJ,¹⁴ were married and had children. Householder’s life is accepted and certainly not considered a hindrance in spiritual advancement (SGGJ 385, 496). To maintain a family, it is necessary to earn respectfully and therefore, this edict to lead a householder’s life is considered an important aspect of enforcing economic pursuit for an individual.

The Sikh gurus were particular in raising the status of women in society and prohibited wearing of a veil, or practicing female infanticide and sati, and encouraged widow remarriage and a healthy family life; a male child was not considered a must. Therefore, an attempt was made to change social norms and raise self-esteem of female population that constitute half of the work-force.

Healthy Living: The body is expected to be the temple of God, and therefore, should be kept healthy. In Sikh philosophy, for healthy living,

¹² *Prathme Man Parbodhai Aapne Paachhai Avar Reejaavai:* First, control your mind only then go to preach others (SGGJ 381).

¹³ P. Singh, *The Sikhs*, New York: Doubleday, 1999.

¹⁴ Contains compositions of many prominent spiritualists like Kabir, Farid, Parmanand, Ramanand, Sadhna, Namdev, Ravidas, etc.

restrain on consumption by both mind and body is necessary, as both are inter-related and affected by what is consumed. In terms of consumption by body, explicitly, some food items are prohibited – use of alcohol, betel leaf, tobacco and other intoxicants. They are prohibited as they make an individual senseless and devoid of reason (SGGJ 554). Similarly, some restraint on consumption by the mind through the sensory organs is also prescribed. The ears, eyes and tongue are advised to be filters and perceive only that is healthy for the mind and body. The sensory organs are expected to perceive truth and God in all things (SGGJ 921-22).

Increased Workforce: In Sikh religion there is no discrimination based on caste, colour or creed. According to SGGJ, caste and honour are determined by deeds (SGGJ 1330). In Sikhism, as there is no belief in caste system, dignity of labour is stressed. The emphasis is on truthful living. To quote from SGGJ, *Jaatee Day Kia Hath Sach Parkhiay* – What good is social class and status? Truthfulness is measured within (SGGJ 142). At another place, Guru guides that *Garabh Vaas Meh Kul Nahee Jaatee Barahm Bind Tay Sabh Utpaatee*, i.e., in the dwelling of the womb, there is no ancestry or social status. All have originated from the seed of God (SGGJ 324).

Women have played a glorious part in human history and have proven themselves as equal in service, devotion, sacrifice and bravery, many a times. According to Guru Nanak, *So Kio Manda Aakhea Jit Jameh Rajaan*, i.e., why should she be called bad, she gives birth to kings (SGGJ 473). Therefore, women are considered as equal participants in development process and eligible for active participation in workforce.

In Sikh tradition, all males have last name as Singh and all females, Kaur, implying that there is no caste system and therefore anyone can work in any vocational area, given the need and specialization. As Sikhism does not believe in renunciation of householder’s life, each individual has to work hard for a dignified and honest living on earned income. The Sikh Gurus themselves led a professional life – farmer, shop-keeper and trader. Sikhism believes that one can meditate in heart and work physically to earn a respectful living (SGGJ 1376).

Attitude towards Investment, Work, Trade, and Business: A Sikh is expected to be enterprising and pursue progress in all walks of life. The guiding principle has to be sincerity and sharing with others the fruit of hard work. The Sikh has been explicitly advised not to practice falsehood and hoard wealth but to have a long term vision and build a reputation of a truthful merchant (SGGJ 418).

As the emphasis is on house-holders life, Sikhism encourages active participation in economic and social activities without exploiting others, including natural resources. The general principle to be followed in trade and business is that in some ways everyone is in business and undertakes trade¹⁵ but a trader should meditate too while trading.¹⁶ An individual is advised to be careful while trading and not gather bad feelings while in the conduct of business and daily life.¹⁷

Sikhism has a positive outlook towards life. The attitude towards richness, wealth and success is that everything is considered good if the individual is meditating and contemplating on God. To quote from SGGJ:

Tin Ka Khadha Paidhaa Maya Sabh Pavit Hai Jo Naam Har Ratay

The food, clothes and worldly possessions of those who are attuned to God are sacred.

Tin Kay Ghar Mandar Mahal Sareh Sabh Pavit Heh Jinee Gurmukh Sayvak Sikh AbhiagatJaay Varsatay

At the homes, temples, palaces and rest stops are sacred, where the *gurmukhs*, the selfless servants, the Sikhs, the holy ones, go to rest.

Tin Kay Turay Jeen Khurgeer Sabh Pavit Heh Jinee Gurmukh Sikh Saadh Sant Charh Jaatay

All the horses, saddles and horse blankets are sacred, upon which the *Gurmukhs*, the Sikhs, the holy ones, mount and ride.

Tin Kay Karam Dharam Kaaraj Sabh Pavit Heh Jo Boleh Har Har Ram Nam Har Saatay

All the deeds and moral actions are sacred, for those who utter the True Divine Name. (SGGJ 648)

General Attitude: The emphasis in Sikh religion is generally on soft speech.¹⁸ The Guru also guides that the intentions while pursuing any activity should be pious otherwise the noose gets tightened around one's

¹⁵ *Sabh Ko Vanaj Karay Vapara:* Everyone is in business and undertakes trade (SGGJ 1064).

¹⁶ *Vanj Karo Vanjareo Vakhar Leho Sambhal:* Traders, undertake trade and carefully meditate too (SGGJ 22-23).

¹⁷ *Laida Bad Duaae Too Maya Karay Ikat:* Oh, why do you gather bad feelings from others, just for accumulating wealth (SGGJ 42).

¹⁸ *Mith Bolaada Je Har Sajjan Soami Mora, Honh Sambhal Takhee Ji O Kadhe Na Bole Kodha:* Sweet spoken is my noble-hearted master – never within my recall has Master uttered a harsh word (SGGJ 784).

own neck itself.¹⁹ The general advice for a Sikh is to look forward and plan ahead.²⁰ Also, laziness is abhorred and an individual is expected to be alert.²¹ An individual is advised to develop an attitude of hard work and sharing with others. As advised, *Ghaal Khaay Kichh Hathu Dey Nanak Raah Pachhaneh Say*, i.e., one who works for what he eats, and gives some of what he has – O Nanak, he knows the Path (SGGJ 1245).

To attain spiritual bliss, an individual is advised by the Guru to serve others in this world in the following words: *Vich Dunia Sev Kamaiai Ta Dargeh Baisan Paiai:* Serve in this world, and you shall be given a place of honour in Lord's presence (SGGJ 26). At other places, a similar viewpoint is stressed.²² Similarly, a person is advised that if he/she is yearning for goodness, then serve others. To quote, *Jay Lorheh Changa Aapnaa Kar Punnhu Neech Sadaeay:* If you yearn for goodness, then perform good deeds and be humble (SGGJ 465).

In Sikhism, to build and cultivate trust is considered important because if trust is lost then business suffers. To illustrate, Guru observes that *Manmukha No Ko Na Vishee Chuk Gaiya Vaysas:* No one places any reliance in the self-willed; trust in them is lost (SGGJ 643). Similarly, the advice is not to be greedy because greed can lead an individual to do things which can betray the trust of others. To quote, *Lobhee Kaa Vaysaaho Na Keejai Jay Kaa Paar Vasaay Ant Kaal Tithai Dhuhai Jithai Hath Na Paay:* Do not trust greedy people, if you can avoid doing so. At the very last moment, they will deceive you there, where no one will be able to lend a helping hand (SGGJ 1417). The Guru also cautions that greed for wealth is not a good thing as wealth does not accompany a person after death. Therefore, an individual is advised to earn through hard work and ethical means.

¹⁹ *Nar chahaṭ kachh aor aurai ki aurai bhāi. Chitvaṭ rahio thagaur Nanak fasi gal pari:* Man wishes for something, but something different happens. Plotting to deceive others, O Nanak, instead finds noose around own neck (SGGJ 1428).

²⁰ *Aagha Koo Thraag Pishaa Faer Na Muhaddarra, Nanak Sijh Eivah Var Bahur Na Hovi Janamadaha:* Look ahead and don't turn backwards. Oh Nanak, be successful this time, not to be born again (SGGJ 1096).

²¹ *Kabir Kaal Karanta Abeh Kar Ab Karta Sohe Taal:* Kabir, that which you have to do tomorrow, do it today itself, rather do it immediately (SGGJ 1371).

²² *Sewa Karat Hoay Nihkaami Tis Kao Haut Parapat Suamee:* One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, shall attain Master (SGGJ 286).

A Sikh is advised to stay steadfast in faith and approach, and not succumb to temptations or follow friends, even the best, on a path which is not spiritual. To quote, *Ati Piara Paway Khooh Kih Sanjam Karna; Gurmukh Hoe So Kare Veechaar Os Alipto Rahna*: If a friend jumps in a well, you should practice restrain. Guru’s followers should think and stay indifferent (SGGJ 953). This implies that an individual should not follow a wrong example, under any circumstances but learn from mistakes committed by others.

In Sikhism, to release tension which can build because of the modern way of life, the advice is constant meditation and introspection. The Guru advises that contemplation of God, an ocean of divine qualities, helps to relieve tension.²³ The prescribed formula to achieve this is also discussed in SGGJ and that is to work with your body but deep in mind continue to do meditation.²⁴ The Guru also mentions that regular introspection will help as well as the realization that in this world nobody will hold your hand or be your guide.²⁵ Therefore, the advice is to carefully plan your steps accordingly move ahead in life.

Accountability: In Sikh religion, accountability is an essential ingredient of everyday life and helps to build an ethical behaviour. In general, Sikh philosophy insists that each one is reaping the fruits of their own deeds.²⁶ Therefore, an individual is advised to plan long term as advised by SGGJ, *Dekh Lambhi Nadar Nilhalyah* (SGGJ 474).

The creator, given the rules of creation dispenses unbiased justice as mentioned in SGGJ, *Pura niao kare kartar* (SGGJ 199). Any violation of the practices is punished and adherences rewarded, as conveyed in the following words, *Jaikar Kio Dharmia Ka Papi Ko Dand Dioi*: God honours the righteous and punishes the sinners (SGGJ 624).

²³ *Saas Saas Simru Gobind. Mann Antar Ki Utray Chind*: Remember God by every breath. And your mind will be relieved of tension (SGGJ 295).

²⁴ *Haath Paavn Se Kaam Kar Cheet Niranjana Naal*: Work with your hands and feet while in your heart meditate on God (SGGJ 1375)

²⁵ *Bandey Khoj Dil Har Roj Na Fir Paraysani Mahey. Ih Jo Dunea Sihar Meyla Dastgiri Nahey*: Oh man, search your mind every day, then you will not be in trouble. This world is simply like a magic play and will be of no help (SGGJ 727)

²⁶ *Jaisa Bijeh Soh Lunay Karama Sandhara Khet*: As you sow, so shall you reap, this farm depends on deeds (SGGJ 134). *Dadaa Dos Na Deoo Kisai Dos Karamaa Apnea; Jo Mai Keeaa So Mai Paiaa Dos Na Deejai Avar Janaa*: Don’t blame others, it is your own deeds, As I sowed so I reaped, do not blame others (SGGJ 433).

An individual is advised to avoid those activities which are not useful. To quote, *Fareeda Jini Kami Naahi Gun Te Kamre Visar. Mat Sarminda Theevaee Saain De Darbar*: Hey Fareed, forget those activities which are not useful. Then you will not be ashamed in God’s court (SGGJ 1381).

On economic offences like corruption and bribe, SGGJ is very strict and observes that resorting to these is like consuming carcasses.²⁷ The Guru makes an observation about the psychological phenomena that generally a human mind waivers for the sake of *maya* which is not a good trait.²⁸ And in Sikhism, it is clarified that charity offered from money collected through unfair means yields negative results. To quote, *Je Mohaka Ghar Muhai Ghar Muhi Pitri De, Agay Vaast Sinjahaniay Pitri Chor Karey*: Giving money earned by unfair means in charity; such money is recognized in court of God and the dead person in whose name this charity is offered is also dubbed as a thief (SGGJ 472).

Concern for Environment: SGGJ mentions that though natural resources like water, earth, and air are free, they are precious and therefore, should be used wisely. In *Gurbani* water is categorized as the father, earth the mother and air the guru. To quote, *Pavan Guroo Paanee Pitaa Maataa Dharat Mahat* meaning that Air is Guru, Water is father, and vast earth is mother (SGGJ 8). SGGJ also guides that the air is from the True, and from air comes water.²⁹ Therefore, an individual is guided to respect the environment.

Management / Firm/ Industry: In Sikhism, the advice on labour relations is clear and the guidance is that labour should not be exploited. To quote, *Je Rat Lagey Kapre Jama Hoe Paleet, Jo Rat Peevay Mansa Tinkio Nirmal Cheet*: If blood touches the clothes, it becomes unclean. One who drink blood of others, why their minds will be clean? (SGGJ 140). The general instructions are that all seem to be partners in the enterprise and therefore there should be no exploitation of anyone. To quote, *Sabhay Sajheevaal Sadain ToonKisai Na Diseh Baahraa Jio*: All

²⁷ *Haak Paryaha Nanaka Uas Suar Uas Ghaye. Gur Peer Hama Tah Bhare Ja Murdhar Na Khaye*: Saith Nanak, to grab what is another’s is evil. As pig’s flesh is to them and cow’s flesh is to them. Spiritual Guide will stand by only when carcasses are not eaten (SGGJ 141)

²⁸ *Nis Din Maya Karne Prani Dolat Neet. Kotan Mah Nanak Koho Narain Jeh Cheet*: Every day, just because of maya, human waivers regularly. In million, Oh Nanak, there is a rare one who has God in the heart (SGGJ 1427).

²⁹ *Saachay Tay Pavnaa Bhaia Pavnai Tay Jal Hoy* (SGGJ 19).

are known partners; you are not seen Outside of anyone, O! Lovable (SGGJ 97). Similarly, *Naa Ko Bairee Nahe Bigana Sagal Sung Ham Ko Ban Aae*: Neither there is a foe, nor an alien, we are friendly with everyone (SGGJ 1288). Again, *Aval Alah Noor Upaia Kudrat Kay Sabh Banday. Aik Noor Tay Sabh Jag Upjia Kaun Bhalay Ko Manda*: First God created light, all creation is product of nature. The whole world is product of the same light, who can be good or bad? (SGGJ 1349). The point to be noted here is that the words used are ‘*sabay, sabh and sagal*’ implying all, and the Sikh interpretation of these usage of words is inclusive of labour, clients and even other inputs, including environment. The instructions are to treat everyone like a family.³⁰

In Sikhism, resolution of any crisis is care-based and once forgiveness is sought, normal relationship should resume. Forgiveness is considered divine. The guidance is as follows: *Sut Apradh Karat Hain Jetay, Janni Cheet Na Avas Thethe* – Son commits many mistakes, Mother does not remember any (SGGJ 478). Again, at another place the importance of forgiveness is stressed as follows: *Khimaa Gahee Barat Seel Santokhan* – To practice forgiveness is the true fast, good conduct and contentment (SGGJ 223). Similarly, the Guru guides that *Dhaul Dharam Daya ka Pooth, Santokh ThaaP Rakheay Jeen Sooth* implying that superstructure of religion is son of compassion, and contentment binds everything (SGGJ 4). Therefore, the interpretation is that compassion is an important component of daily life. It would imply that an entrepreneur and the businessman are especially guided to be kind to the weak and poor, employees and differently disabled people. In general, compassion should be the guiding principle in interaction with all.³¹

The advice offered to an employee is to be cooperative and not behave under the influence of ego with the bosses.³² The stress is on communication between the employers and employees as well as with

³⁰ *Naa Ko Doot Nahee Bairaee Gal Mil Chaalay Aikai Bhaee*: I have no enemies, no adversaries. I walk arm in arm, like brothers, with all (SGGJ 887).

³¹ *Gareeba Upar Je Khinjai Darri; Parbrahm Sa Agan May Sarri*: Getting annoyed with weak and poor. God will burn such people in fire (SGGJ 199).

³² *Chaakar Lage Chaakri Naale Gaarab Vaad. Chaakar Lagai Chhakri Je Chalai Khasmai Bhae*: An employee should work as desired by the employer and not show ego or indulge in argument (SGGJ 474).

peers.³³ Similarly, Guru guides that a cooperative attitude leads to prosperity.³⁴

Sikhism seeks welfare of entire humanity in its daily prayer and every prayer ends with the utterance of a term – *sarbatda Bhalla* – implying prosperity to all. A Sikh recites regularly that *Sabh Ko Meet Ham Aapan Keenaa Ham Sabhnaa Kay Saajan*: I have made everyone my dear friend, and I am everyone’s friend (SGGJ 671).

5. Conclusion

In the last few years the role of ethics in work environment has gained importance. In Sikh religion the emphasis is on family life, active participation in social and cultural life and on honest earning. In terms of work force, by providing equal opportunities to all, including women, and insisting on no discrimination on the basis of caste, culture, religion or color, Sikh religion ensures an upward sloping curve of labour. The emphasis is on education, rational thinking, long term planning, modest consumption, high investment, self-employment, employment generation and regular contribution to charity.

Of the three main pillars of Sikh religion which are meditation, honest earning and sharing with others, last two are directly related to ethics in business while the third influences the thinking of the worker leading to cultivation of virtues. As is empirically verified, people who regularly practice meditation, generally perform better, are more disciplined and don’t resort to absenteeism.

In view of the religious teaching that all human races come from one single God, therefore, universal brotherhood is strongly recommended and practiced. This leads to harmonious relationships at work place as well as in social life. The philosophy that human birth is a transitory phase in the long journey of the soul ensures that Sikhs plan with a longer horizon and are not intimidated by the immediate work culture. This ensures that Sikhs are detached from the immediate pressures of work and are able to speak the truth to their bosses as well as their peers. This also implies that Sikh workers are expected to perform without fear and malice for the progress of their enterprise. Thus, in general, Sikh philosophy helps in contributing to economic growth.

³³ *Jab Lag Duneea Raheea Nanak Kichh Suneea Kichh Kaheea*: Till the time we live in this world, Oh Nanak: let us listen something, say something (SGGJ 661).

³⁴ *Khavé Kharche Raal Mil Bhai, Toat Na Ave Vaddho Jae*: Brother, consume and spend together, Decrease it shall not, ever increase it would (SGGJ 186.)