

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE TO ESTABLISH PEACE – SIKH PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Religion has always played a part in shaping human behavior and has often been a reason for conflict/war and continues to be so in the present context. Sikh philosophy promotes understanding and harmony with people of all faiths and justice for all. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Sikh philosophy forms the basis of essential ingredients for promoting harmony among people and in achieving world peace.

INTRODUCTION

The conflict and war has always been a part of human history throughout the centuries. However, in the present context the consequence of a major war can be catastrophic. Thus, the very survival of human race depends on keeping peace. However, we are constantly experiencing conflict in many parts of the world. It is important for us to understand the causes of conflict and to do everything to promote conflict resolution and create conditions that promote harmony and peace. Causes of conflict and war are many and complex. The causes include issues such as suffering from injustice or perception of injustice, fear of being annihilated or being taken over or being harmed or being controlled, attempts at controlling resources and attempts at establishing perpetual supremacy. Many societies feel threatened by globalization and thus resist such a change and often by the use of violent means. People living in extreme poverty often resort to violence.

Religions have often played a role in the conflict. Many religious preachers often promote attitudes of “they verse us” which then becomes basis for conflict. Religions often claim that theirs is the only path to salvation and thus claim superiority over other religions. Such an attitude is a constant source of conflict. Moreover many religions have a mandate to convert others into their religion and this by itself becomes a source of conflict, as other religions then feel threatened. However, such religious practices can often be contrary to true teachings of their religion.

Sikhism is uniquely placed in history. Its founder Guru Nanak (1469-1539) had mystical experience through deep meditation that then became the source for a path to propagation of higher truth by him. He traveled far and wide in the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula and had discussions with many personalities of different religious denominations of the time. His

spiritual message is universal and creates understanding and harmony among people.

DISCUSSION

Born into a Hindu family, Guru Nanak grew up in a society composed mostly of Hindus and Muslims. His childhood teacher was a Muslim, who is said to have recognized Guru Nanak’s uniqueness. Guru Nanak interacted with almost every religion and religious denomination of the time during his travels that spanned over 20 years.

Guru Nanak is said to have collected hymns of Hindu and Sufi devotees that conveyed universal truths (besides writing numerous hymns of his own). It is said that he made a special trip to the mausoleum of 12th century Sufi Sekh Farid to collect his hymns. The Sikh scripture Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) contains not only the hymns of six Sikh Gurus but also hymns of many Hindu and Muslim Sufi saints/devotees. Thus the AGGS is a very unique scripture in that regard. The Sikh theology recognizes the spiritual Sufis and enlightened Hindu devotees. Guru Nanak’s followers were of different faiths. The close associate of Guru Nanak was a Muslim (Mardana) and his followers were Hindus as well as Muslims. Many people call Guru Nanak a reformer. However, his followers became to be known as Sikhs. Guru Nanak’s message is universal and not just for a particular group.

Guru Nanak recognizes that we all are created by God and That resides in all beings:

ਘਟ ਘਟ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਲੁਕਾਇਆ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਬਾਈ ॥

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

AGGS, M 1, p 597 [1].

Guru Nanak recognizes that there are many different religious paths:

ਅਸੰਖ ਜਪ ਅਸੰਖ ਭਾਉ ॥
 ਅਸੰਖ ਪੂਜਾ ਅਸੰਖ ਤਪ ਤਾਉ ॥
 ਅਸੰਖ ਗਰੰਥ ਮੁਖਿ ਵੇਦ ਪਾਠ ॥

*Countless are meditations, countless are loves.
 Countless are worship-services, countless are austere disciplines.
 Countless are scriptures, and ritual recitations of the Vedas.*
 AGGS, Jap 17, p 3 [1].

Understanding and harmony is created by Sikh theological views, such as: ‘We all are children of God and the spirit of the Almighty pervades in all of us. In the eyes of the God all human beings are equal, some are closer to Him and others not so’. Thus there is no room left for hate or discrimination on any basis.

Hymns contained in the Sikh scripture, AGGS, speak against divisions created by cast and also promote gender equality. These hymns speak of love with all humanity and ill-will against no one. Sikhs pray for the well-being of all.

As per Sikh theology, those who live by honest means, share their earning with others and meditate (lovingly remember God) are likely to get closer to Him. Human instincts of sexual lust, anger, greed, excessive attachment and arrogance are impediments on the way to being spiritual and should be controlled (and meditation helps in this regard as well). Thus Sikh theological practices and views create harmony and help subdue violent human urges.

Sikh beliefs recognize that people have the right to practice their religion. The 9th Sikh Guru, Guru Teg Bahadar, sacrificed his life to protect the rights of Hindus to practice their religion. When Aurangzeb the cruel ruler of the time was forcibly converting Hindus to Islam, the Hindu Brahmins came to Guru Teg Bahadar, the Sikh Guru of the time. Guru Teg Bahadar instructed the Hindu Brahmins to convey to the King that they will all convert to Islam if Guru Teg Bahadar converts to Islam. Hindu Brahmins followed the suggestion. Thus, the Guru sacrificed his life by refusing to convert to Islam when demanded by the king and thus Hindus were saved from forcible conversion. Sikhs are against forced conversion or coercion for conversion.

Guru Nanak’s basic spiritual message is simple, universal and creates harmony. Basic Sikh tenants are:

1. Live a family life.
2. Make an honest living and share earnings with others (who are less fortunate).
3. Lovingly Meditate on God’s name (*Naam Jap*).

The Sikh Theological Philosophy is contained in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1]. The Sikh scripture, the AGGS, is a treasure of divine knowledge and mysticism and is a guide to a spiritual living for anyone who ventures to find instruction from it and live by it.

The hymns help the adherents with unwavering belief in God. A definition/description of God is given in the very opening sentence of Aad Guru Granth Sahib, which is often called *Mool-Mantra*.

The Sikh theology promotes love, equality, understanding and equal justice. According to the hymns to be on spiritual path means love for God and his creation, humility/sweetness, empathy/compassion for others, a feeling of brotherhood with all mankind, contentment, forgiveness, devotion to selfless service of others, sharing resources with those in need, truthful and honest living, to be thankful of God’s gifts (that will count many if we attempt), staying on the right spiritual path and leaving the result to Him (accepting the result as His will).

God’s praise and loving meditation upon God’s name is emphasized as a way to spirituality. We are guided to live a family life and make a truthful living and share our earnings with the less fortunate. Hymns tell us that following human attributes take us away from the path of spirituality: anger, arrogance, self-righteousness, hate/animosity, bigotry, apathy/unconcern for others, being punitive, greed, attachment with worldly goods or beings, lust and falsehood/corruption.

Hymns give us a direction not to treat women as inferior and to shed barriers that divide human race, such as racism and cast system.

“*Haumai*” (I am-ness, arrogance /egotism /self righteousness) is considered a major impediment to understanding and for love for God and his creation. 621 hymns in Aad Guru Granth Sahib contain the word “*Haumai*” but there are many other words that deal with this subject. “*Haumai*” is considered a disease and meditation on God’s name is considered a cure for this disease.

ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਜੇ ਬੁਝੈ ਤ ਹਉਮੈ ਕਰੈ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥੨॥

O Nanak, one who understands the fact everything is according to God’s Command, does not speak in ego.
 AGGS, Jap 1, p 1.

ਹਉਮੈ ਬੁਝੈ ਤ ਦਰੁ ਸੁਝੈ ॥

God’s path is known after getting rid of ego.
 AGGS, M 1, p 466.

ਸਰਬ ਜੀਆ ਮਹਿ ਏਕੋ ਜਾਣੈ ਤਾ ਹਉਮੈ ਕਰੈ ਨ ਕੋਈ ॥੪॥

One who recognizes the One Lord among all beings does not talk of ego. ||4||
AGGS, M 1, p 432.

ਜਿਨੀ ਸਚੁ ਪਛਾਣਿਆ ਸੇ ਸੁਖੀਏ ਜੁਗ ਚਾਰਿ ॥
ਹਉਮੈ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਮਾਰਿ ਕੈ ਸਚੁ ਰਖਿਆ ਉਰ ਧਾਰਿ ॥
Those who have realized the Truth are always at peace and by subduing their egotism and desires, they keep the True Name (God) enshrined in their hearts.
AGGS, M 1, p 55.

Humility is the opposite of “*Haumai*” and is a major tool for harmony and understanding. As per Sikh teachings ‘humility’ is a virtue:
ਮਿਠਤੁ ਨੀਵੀ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਗੁਣ ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ ਤਤੁ ॥
Nanak says:
Sweetness and humility are the essence of virtue and goodness.
AGGS, M 1, p 470.

ਸਹਜਿ ਸੰਤੋਖਿ ਸੀਗਾਰੀਆ ਮਿਠਾ ਬੋਲਣੀ ॥
We are adorned with intuitive ease, contentment and sweetness.
AGGS, M 1, p 17.

Oneness: Sikh teachings emphasize oneness of mankind. Once this attitude is inculcated in one’s psyche, no room is left for hate and prejudice against anyone:
ਆਈ ਪੰਥੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਜੀਤੈ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤੁ ॥
Consider all mankind as one, and thus win yourself and the world.
AGGS, Jap, p 6.

ਮੰਨੈ ਮਗੁ ਨ ਚਲੈ ਪੰਥੁ ॥
Those who accept the true path do not follow sects.
AGGS, Jap, p 3.

Looking Down Upon Others: Sikh theology has a viewpoint that no one should be labelled as ‘bad’. The idea is not to look down upon others or to pass judgment on others.

ਹਮ ਨਹੀ ਚੰਗੇ ਬੁਰਾ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥
I am not good and no one is bad.
AGGS, M 1, p 728.

ਨਾ ਹਮ ਚੰਗੇ ਆਖੀਅਹ ਬੁਰਾ ਨ ਦਿਸੈ ਕੋਇ ॥
I don’t call myself good & I don’t see the bad in others.
AGGS, M 1, p 1015.

As per **Sikh theology**, it is not easy to be spiritual. Perhaps that is the reason we are required to meditate everyday so that we be reminded to stay on the right path.

ਸੁਣਿ ਸੁਣਿ ਗੰਢਣੁ ਗੰਢੀਐ ਲਿਖਿ ਪੜਿ ਬੁਝਹਿ ਭਾਰੁ ॥
ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਅਹਿਨਿਸਿ ਅਗਲੀ ਹਉਮੈ ਰੋਗੁ ਵਿਕਾਰੁ ॥
Again and again, we hear and tell stories; we read and write and understand loads of knowledge, but still, desires increase day and night, and the disease of egotism distorts our mind.
AGGS, M 1, p 20.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it is evident that the Sikh theology promotes a spiritual living that encompasses making honest livelihood, truthful conduct, family life, humility, love for all human beings (and living beings), practice of sharing resources with those who are less fortunate, meditation and praying for the welfare for all.

These basic tenants of Sikhism promote understanding, harmony and love with all. These are the basic ingredients for promoting peace in the world. However, this may be just a starting point that may help us, so that, we do not contribute to conflict and rather help create an environment for understanding and peace.

However, the issues of conflict and war cannot be tackled by just by being spiritual. We must also actively use our creative powers to find ways to solve the tenacious problems that cause such conflicts. Inter-religious dialogue is a good start in this regard.

REFERENCES

1. AGGS = Aad Guru Granth Sahib. 1983 (reprint). Publishers: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. (M = Mahla, i.e., succession number of the Sikh Gurus to the House of Nanak, M is replaced with the name of Bhagat/ Bhatt for their Bani, p = Page of the AGGS).