

THE IDEA OF MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY IN SIKHISM

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic and cultural diversity always pose a serious challenge to international peace, security and stability. Over the last 150 years, international community has experienced violent clashes on the basis of cultural multiplicity. Multiculturalism and the idea of plural society tend to solve the problems arising out of cultural assimilation and pluralism. In the present era of "clash of civilizations", the eternal and universal message of Sikh Gurus work as beacon of light to the mankind to secure peaceful, stable and promising future. Sikh vision of multicultural society is in tune with the modern liberal democratic principles. Sikh social order ushers new global society which is based on idea of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity. Sikh Gurus played an extraordinary role in protection and promotion of multicultural society. Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Sikh Scripture and Khalsa society is unique model of composite culture and peaceful coexistence in the history of mankind.

In today's multicultural global society however, there is growing unrest and disharmony. This has been due to the fact that adherents of every faith are keen, indeed over-zealous, to extol their own, under-rating the ideology and culture of others. Leaders of each religion claim for their faith a monopoly over truth. To them, only their prophet and religion can lead man on the path to God-realization and self-realization; whereas all other faith-communities are Infidels. [18] Guru Nanak, five hundred and forty four years ago, laid the foundation of Sikhi(sm) and provided a remedy for religious intolerance, racial arrogance and false pretense of cultural superiority. He ushered a new era in the history of mankind and gave the eternal message of peace, coexistence and harmony.

Sikhism is a social religion, ethnical, ecumenical, grounded in a political society, directed and committed to propagation and establishing of a plural world society, tolerant, open, progressive. and free in character. [24] Sikhism laid the ideational foundation for the erection of a pluralistic

edifice of polity and brought out country to the threshold of modern value-pattern on the eve of the framing of Constitution which in its federal provision reflects the pluralistic proclivity, based on a version of secularism that is essentially different from the Western concept. In the western world, secularism arose as an ideological tool for securing the independence of the emerging nation-states from the trans-national Roman Catholic Church. Hence secularism there was based on the dichotomy of the national state and the supranational Church which entailed the dissociation of the religious from the social. [2]

The present research paper is a humble attempt to explore the Sikh vision of multicultural and plural society. The research paper has been divided into three parts.

1. Concept of Multiculturalism.
2. Multi-cultural Society in the Sikhi(sm)
3. Relevance of the Sikh concept in Multi-cultural society.

The first part will be focused on analysis of the concept of multiculturalism. Second part is devoted to explore the idea of multi

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cultural society in Sikhism. In the Third and last part the relevance of Sikh concept of multicultural society will be discussed.

CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism is a system of socio-religious values and behavior patterns which duly recognize and respect the presence of all dissimilar ethos in a society. It envisages such socio-political order which promote the cultural diversity and protects the rights and liberties of cultural minorities. Multiculturalism is characterized as a feel-good celebration of ethno-cultural diversity, encouraging citizens to acknowledge and embrace the panoply of customs, traditions, music, and cuisine that exist in a multiethnic society. [14]

Many factors in the modern life like the developments in the means of communication and transportation, the emergence of the modern democratic and secular national states and the view ideas of human equality and individual freedom, has resulted in situations which threaten or challenge such traditional patterns of life and thought of various communities which were based on the attitude of exclusivity and self-sufficiency. [7] In the last two hundred years, mankind has witnessed far reaching changes in all walks of life including individual freedom and human equality. At present there is a general axiom that the world has changed rapidly. The scientific and technological advancement has created new challenges and prospects for humanity in socio-political spheres. In the past, the International community had experienced violent clashes on the account of forcible religious conversions and cultural assimilation. The disharmony among various cultural groups has raised the demand for multicultural societies, protection of minority's rights and peaceful coexistence. Presently multiculturalism has emerged as buzz term in political debates. The idea of multiculturalism has gained momentum in disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology and Political Science.

In modern societies, particularly the liberal democratic West, cultural diversity poses a challenge not only to the makers of government policy, but also to the philosopher looking to understand how it might be possible—in principle—for people of different ways to live together. The Western society's institutions have been challenged, as the members of different groups have demanded "recognition". They have demanded not simply recognition of their claims to a (just) share of the social pie but, more important, recognition of their distinct identities as members of particular cultural communities within society. [13]

It is widely assumed that modern societies, shaped and

reshaped by migration, contain many different cultures, associated with ethnic and religious minorities. The question arises, therefore, how the law, the state and the educational system should treat the minority cultures. Multiculturalism signifies the approach which tries to give as much representation within legal, political and educational institutions, to minority cultures as possible. [17] Many liberal defenders of multiculturalism have focused on inequalities between cultural groups, arguing that treating cultural minorities as equals requires special protections to secure liberties and opportunities that members of the majority culture already enjoy. [27]

Liberal multiculturalists view respect for cultural groups in instrumental terms that by doing so helps secure the liberal goal of individual autonomy. The conservatives by contrast, often argue that cultures deserve respect because they are intrinsically valuable. [28] Multiculturalists are against any attempt of cultural assimilation, proselytization and religious-cultural homogenization. They yearn for plural, multi lingual, multi cultural, multi religious and multi racial society.

SIKH CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The religio-political views of the Sikh Gurus could be inferred from *Gurbani* and the biographies of the Gurus. In the vision of the Sikh Gurus, a sane human society was essentially a plural one in which each community was afforded the opportunity to work out its genius to the fullest possibilities and potentialities. The Sikh Gurus who suffered martyrdoms to uphold the religious liberties of the people, laid repeated emphasis in their *Bani* on the equality of mankind. [6] Guru Nanak was the first to acknowledge the rights of plurality of cultures and civilizations, all of which, in his opinion, were guided by Divine providence. He was the first to present the concept of Truth, Justice, Beauty, and Goodness in a form which transcended the narrow bounds of regional cultures and civilizations. [12]

According to Guru Nanak, I-ness and my-ness is the creation of narcissistic mind which does not let the person experience real reality. Mind can be purified when ego is banished from the psyche of *Manmukh* (Self-oriented) as *Sakat* (mammon worshiper). In *Sidhgoshti*, Guru Nanak compares the *Manmukh* to a spider who weaves a web of delusions and get entangles in it and is killed his own narcissistic libidinal desires. [26] Guru Nanak tried to bind together all humanity in the golden chains of spiritual understanding, in which all were to recognize the leadership of the Word, the Truth. In this free state of spiritual brotherhood, all differences were dissolved; all barriers fell, and all passions which divided people changed and transfigured into the blessed of peace and unity. [25]

Sikh Gurus gave message for ushering in a new value pattern a new dispensation based on the fundamental principles of equality, justice, and compassion, Liberty, and fraternity that was a divine manifesto for a new civilization. With the concept of humanism, liberalism, universalism, pluralism, ontological dualism of mind and matter, and epistemic dichotomy of the subject and the object that have characterized the Western civilization of the past few centuries, are both sublimed into the unifying life of the spiritual understanding in history; a concept, that provides a new normative basis for the emergence of the post modern civilization, the first intimations of which appearing in the Sikh thought over 500 years ago; became phenomenally manifest in and through the creation of the Khalsa about 300 years ago at Sri Anandpur Sahib. [4]

Guru Gobind Singh gave to the world a unique model of composite culture and plural society to the world which has potential to remove the geographical barriers, caste prejudices and cultural pride. At the time of creation of Khalsa, all Five Beloved ones (*Panj Piyare*) belonged to different castes (high and low) in India, and hailed from different regions of the Indian sub-continent. Daya Ram, a Khatri from Lahore in the North; Dharam Das, a Jat from Delhi; Mohkam Chand, a washer man from Dwarka in the West; Himmat Rai, a cook from Jagannath in the East; and Sahib Chand, was a barber from Bidar in the South. [10],

The Sikh doctrines preached by Guru Nanak fully blossomed into the concept of the order of the Khalsa which was to be a closely-knit society of voluntary members. They are selected on the basis of special qualifications disposition and characters, pledged to make the Sikh way of life prevail with the ultimate objective of establishing a plural, free, global society grounded in a universal culture. The order of the Khalsa is the first human society in the world-history, organized with the deliberate object of and pledge to bring about an ecumenical human society, grounded in a world-culture, which represents a free and organic fusion of the various strands of the spiritual heritage of Man. [23]

The Gurus wanted to create a classless, casteless society, where each individual enjoyed freedom of expression; observance and adherence to religion, religious tolerance, and social equality; where duties and rights were accorded equal importance. In such a multi-culture society, adherence to one's religion and faith is no crime but disrespect and intolerance to other religious faiths was certainly a sin. [20] Guru Gobind Singh, said, "Some call themselves Hindu, some Turk (Muslim) some *Hafzi* and others *Imamsafi*. But the entire

humanity should be recognized as one. The same one (God) is the creator, compassionate provider of bread, and generous. The God has no co-eternal, no dualism: we must never accept any duality. To serve the only one is our duty he alone is the Guru of all. All mankind be taken as one manifestation from the same light". [21]

Sikhism unites the people of various religious traditions into a broader unity. The Sikh Gurus transcended all the barriers and boundaries to symbolize a universal humanity. By their hymns as well as by their actions they demonstrated how interfaith understanding can be archived. The Sikh Guru's envisaged an ideal social structure wherein love and equality prevailed, human dignity respected and oppression replaced by justice mingled with compassion. It is paramount now that all men come together to try and put into practice this ideal. [9]

Sikhism seeks to establish a social pattern and eventually a global society in which the socialist ideas of individual welfare, equality and freedom shall have full application. It is opposed to any development which in practice and reality seeks to curtail and destroy the worth and inner autonomy of the individual. It is for this reason that Sikhism conceives of the religious evolution of man as a necessary and integral pre-requisite of its march towards the ideal society. [22]

The Guru establishes that the one and the multi-centres are in harmony, there is no clash. The multi-centres are under his kind glance. They are not to be folded, except when the folding occurs according to the will, or in the cosmic system as our scientists would say. In simple words, no centre can be abolished according to the pleasure of a human being, howsoever powerful he or she is. Each centre is radiating the divine command, manifesting a dimension of higher life .without the resonance of this command, the music of life is incomplete. [19]

Sikh architecture, institutions and values are designed with a motive to carry out the Divine mission of Sikh Gurus. For example, the vision and structure of the *Darbar Sahib* are conscious of a multi mediated semiosis. It indeed is a radical intervention against the Islamic and Brahminical ways of seeing and practicing totality. This multi semiotic interaction is accentuated by its four open doors and the tradition of Langar (free kitchen) signifying equality and co-existence of all cultures, genders and people. The design continues to locate the Sikh people in a multi-componential way of remembering past traumas and distress. [15]

According to Gurbani, in the physiographic of cosmos reveals that everybody is co-partner and none is outsider none is enemy not is any unrelated being. All are constituents of each other even all are dependent on one and other in one pretext or the other. Hence our root is one and seed is one. No doubt geographical environments change the color, culture and ethnology of mankind still basic element remains the same. Unfortunately differences are there in the multi faith society created by the vested interest forces to establish their own superiority to gain power. In fact any system whether designed by god or man always depends largely upon the integrity of such forces charged with implementing its precepts. [16]

RELEVANCE OF SIKH CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURALISM

The message of the *Gurbani* providing equal recognition and respect to all cultures is relevant, and significant. While discouraging hatred, discrimination and violence, it encourages social and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding which are vital ingredients for multiculturalism. It teaches us to accept and value the other in his or her otherness. [11]

Religious, cultural and political pluralism is the message of Sikhism for the contemporary world afflicted by the growing trends of State totalitarianism, political Unitarianism and religious-cultural homogenization. Aad Guru Granth Sahib is one of the greatest living example of pluralism. It can therefore be said that the Holy Granth was precursor to the inter-faith movement. [1]

The multi faith environment, in which the Sikh tradition emerged and developed, provided unique opportunities for understanding the true meaning of belonging to one human family. This pluralistic environment endowed the Sikh community with tolerance and a desire to learn from other religious traditions. It also generated a new climate for translating the message of diversity in God's kingdom into reality, and resulted in the creation of some unique Sikh institutions. [8]

The concept of social order as envisaged in Sikhism is essentially pluralistic, egalitarian society. The variety of cultural milieus of the peoples in various parts of the world necessitates a pluralistic world society in which the positive, creative individualities of the constituent social units could co-exist and co-develop into an organic wholeness. Religious pluralism is to be an essential feature of such a pluralistic world society envisioned by Sikhism. [5] The concept of religious pluralism envisaged in Sikhism provides a positive

basis not only for co-validity and co-existence of different faiths in dynamic interaction with each other, but also for co-equality and co-existence of different religious and ethno-religious communities and their co-participation in the national body politic of their respective countries. [3]

Sikhism disapproves the prevalent idea of clash of civilizations. Sikh Gurus provided a platform for dialogue among people belonging to various creeds, colors, castes, races, etc. Sikhism is against any attempt to restrict the individual freedom and fundamental rights. Sikh Gurus played a heroic role against violent imposition of foreign religion and culture on poor and helpless masses. Khalsa is an epitome of teachings of Sikh Gurus, in fact, a vanguard of multicultural society.

CONCLUSIONS

In the Dark Period in history of mankind Sikh Gurus gave the message of peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Sikh Gurus regard the socio-religious diversities as the manifestation of the human creativity. The Sikh concept of multicultural society is a Divine gift to the conflict ridden humankind in the 21st century. International community, to resolve the present day problems of ethnic violence, mutual distrust and religious fundamentalism is requested to learn from the eternal teachings of Sikh Gurus. The Sikh concept of multicultural society envisages new civilization based on spirit of fellow feeling, mutual respect and tolerance.

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