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HUMANISTIC CONCERNS OF SIKHISM

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Abstract:

Prior to the emergence of Sikhism, in Medieval Indian society religious traditions did not take much care of humanistic concerns. The religions were confined to mere performance of empty rituals and outward religiosity. Under the tyrannical foreign rule, there was no scope for modern notion of liberty, equality and justice. Sikhism in 15th century had emerged as the youngest liberal and humanistic religion to protect the human dignity, individual freedom and human rights of masses. Sikh history have ample proofs which clearly show that how the Sikh Gurus raised strong voice against socio-economic and political exploitation, transgression of human rights, infringement of individual liberties and disregard for human dignity. The institution of the Khalsa was created as vanguard and supporter of humanistic concerns of an individual. Sikh Gurus call for free, fair, equitable and democratic socio-political order which ensure the social equality, individual liberty and self-esteem of an individual.

KEYWORDS:

Sikh Gurus, Khalsa, Miri-Piri, Panj Piyaras.

INTRODUCTION:

A religion that believes in humanitarian values neither favors a life of poverty (which creates frustration, tension and worries in the minds of the people and render them incapable of spiritual and moral thinking) nor advocates a life of sensual pleasures and extreme worldly comforts, with no interest in or thought of spiritual and moral values and pursuits. Sikh thought affirms the above view point and provides a 'balanced approach' between the extreme ends of poverty on the one hand and affluence on the other. It may be stressed here that though a life of poverty does not find favor with Sikhism, yet it is preferred when the alternative life is that of unfair and immoral means.

Sikhism is distinct in stressing the virtue of selfless service to humanity and contribution to its welfare. It arose as a new mode of humanitarian thought heralding a new conception of Ultimate reality and a new vision of the universal man which opened to a new outlook of human spirituality and a whole life religious system. This system is based on the dual aspects of temporal and spiritual concepts called Miri and Piri in the Sikh parlance. It integrates the spiritual values with the worldly for an ideal life rather than considering the world Mithia (unreal) and entanglement, a place of suffering, and condemning worldly life as a false snare, or renouncing it to become a recluse shunning social duties and household responsibilities. Its teaching include. The Sikh Pattern is not only non-differential but is also non-individualistic; the stress is not on self-seeking, individual liberation but on altruistic concern for the humanity as a whole.

Implicit in the moral idealism or what has been called moral reason is the attitude known as Humanism. The essence of this is to give primacy to human well being, spiritual and temporal, above ritual, ceremony, shibboleth and other arbitrary abstractions which encrusted social and religious tradition usually

invents to continue over succeeding times the dominance of the past. Guru Nanak's word was a great liberating influence for the people. By exposing the hollowness of ceremonial and ritual, he made a plea for exalting human well being above hollow. Sikhism is a humanistic religion. The first prophetic message of Guru Nanak there is no Hindu, no Muslim emphasized the primacy of the innate human spirit partaking of the divine essence with the implication that man's identity acquired from the variables of time and place though important is of secondary significance.

Sikhism contains many dissimilar beliefs than other faiths. At its conception it was unique due to the abolishment of any caste system the denunciation of empty ritualistic practices the prohibition of any persecution of individuals, and the promotion of equality and rights. Sikhism is based on humanistic and universal values of the purest form. Human freedom and dignity, self realization and self confidence, service and sacrifice have been the essential elements of its ethos.

Humanism is the interest and love for humanity at heart. Philosophically, humanism means a belief in human effort and ingenuity rather than religion But Sikhism in itself consists of both spiritualism and humanity. A Sikh must have love for humanity and he should be ever ready to serve the human beings without any distinction of any kind. The Sikh prayer includes the national manifesto Sarbat da Bhalaa (welfare of the whole of the humanity).

The humanism of Guru Nanak regards all human beings of the world as a part of the great universal fraternity. It brings all the humanity in its purview. Guru Nanak declared that for the social welfare it was essential to introduce social equality. First of all he challenged caste ridden discriminations. The protagonists of Varna Dharma had issued from the four limbs of Parjapati-god. In order to contradict this so called divine origin of Varna, Guru Nanak declared that in the court of God merit of caste shall not be recognized. On the other hand righteous deeds of the man shall get credit.

He was the worshipper of humanity. At the time of Babar's invasion when he saw murdering slaughtering and plundering. Guru Nanak's heart wept for those people who became the victims in the hands of tyrant Mughal forces. Guru Nanak saw the critical condition of the people. Men women and children were being murdered mercilessly in cold blood. Respectable and beautiful women were being dragged by the hair in the streets and Bazaars. The soldiers of Mughal forces, intoxicated with power and position were spreading fire and rape. Guru Nanak could not tolerate this miserable plight. Condition of the country women was all the more pessimistic and sad. Women were being treated like animals.

Humanism properly assimilated does not remain at the level of a therapy or ideology, it becomes a matter of faith and praxis, and it recognizes the entire humanity as one single race, free from racial barrier, free from caste and gender bias. Humanistic vision of the future presents the picture of a multi faith society blessed with fraternal feelings and harmonious relations. Religious communities will remain, but communalism will vanish.

In the modern world, many organizations are working for the welfare of mankind, such as, human rights, social justice, civil liberties, women's rights, untouchability, communal harmony, secularism and National Integration, and so on. 500 years ago Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji started a combined movement for all these issues in the form of Sikhism under Divine benevolence. In succession to him, nine Gurus worked, preached and practiced the same goal for 239 years from 1469 to 1708. Finally the Guruship has been bestowed upon the Holy Scripture of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which is a living light of knowledge, wisdom and experience of universal traditions. Thus Sikhism has emerged as a religion of Humanity for the generations to come.

The Sikh Gurus analyzed the socio-political situation incisively and came to the conclusion that without political power, a community could not practice its religion. However, a divided society could not hope to acquire political power. Therefore, the first task that the Gurus regarded, as of prime importance, was to remove social evils from the Hindu society and recognize it on the basis of equality among its members and equality between the men-folk and the women-folk. This meant uprooting of the caste system and the emancipation of women and removal of their disabilities.

Sikhism endeavored for a new dispensation characterized by the values of liberty equality, justice, tolerance and non violence discarding discriminations of all kinds on grounds of creed caste class race region sex etc. God is realizable by man in his very earthly household life through spiritual enlightenment moral responsibility intellectual catholicity and social commitment.

Apart from religion, the revulsion which Guru Nanak felt on the violation of basic human rights of the people is well recorded in his writings, which all are part of Guru Granth Sahib. The corrupt rulers and the dishonest people, who violate the rights of the other people, have been condemned in very harsh words. They have been called dogs, butchers, mischief-monger, hypocrite and ungrateful. When the Western scholars had not fully comprehended the expanse and scope of human rights, and their social effect, Guru Nanak enunciated the role of respecting the basic human rights of the people for the whole society.

Sikh view of life includes a concern for the freedom of the individuals and peoples. Guru Nanak's

paecans of blood at the plunder and carnage by men of Babar do convey a message. The victory of Babar has no doubt been explained in meta-physical and meta-historical terms as the operative will of God but the incident has also been characterized as a sinful venture.

The dictum of Guru Nanak regarding the respect for the rights of others is basically a command to safeguard one's right and if necessary fight for the rights of others. The history of Sikhism is the portrayal of such a struggle for the rights of others. Sikhism, however, is not merely a sort of social reform corps which only fights for the protection of other faiths? It also envisages the fight of the individual for his own freedom. These two are inseparable parts of his own rights. A person who cannot defend his own rights will not be able to defend the rights of others after some time. This fight, however, is not to feed his sense of separate individuality but to sustain a just social order. A continual vigilance and struggle for the rights of others as well as of one's own are a necessary exercise for the maintenance of proper social health and culture.

Guru Nanak stood for equality of all human beings. He proclaimed that all human beings were children of the same God. As such they were all equal irrespective of their caste, belief, faith, way of worship and sex. All humans are equal before God—no discrimination is allowed on the basis of caste, race, sex, creed, origin, color, education, status, wealth, etc. The principles of universal equality and brotherhood are important pillars of Sikhism.

Guru Nanak Dev never saw a man as higher or lower. He wanted the development of everybody in every possible way. Individual man being the fundamental unit of society, Guru Nanak conceived of an ideal individual. He named him Gurmukh whereas Guru Arjan Dev called him the 'Brahman-Jnant', Guru Gobind Singh 'Khalsa'. Guru Nanak wished to create a society where Surati, Mati, Mana and Buddhi co-ordinate to make man a beautiful piece of work. He wanted to procure a balance among the emotions, desires and thoughts of man. He never conceived of a society, in which on the one side there were only the elite, and on the other, the superstitious, the mentally backward and the down-trodden people.

Sikh concept of 'social equality' finds an echo in the much-cherished ideal of 'universal equality' or universal brotherhood, wherein equality of man as man is recognized. To puncture the pride of the so-called upper caste Hindus, Guru Nanak associated himself with the so-called lowest persons, and preached that the worth of a person did not lie in belonging to an upper caste. In fact, it depended upon his deeds and actions. He further preached that 'the pride' of caste and glory of status are futile, for each of us lives under one and the same God. Guru Gobind Singh attached great importance to the 'common people' whom he treated as his 'friends and comrades' in every sphere of life.

He not only taught but also practiced equality. At the time of the creation of the Khalsa, the Guru first baptized the five beloveds (Panj Piyaras). Later he himself took baptism from them—an example rare in the history of mankind where a Guru and disciples treat themselves at par. The Khalsa which he created represented a true specimen of equality. He admitted people of all castes to it. He thus raised the status of the low people and brought them at par with the other members of the society. He denounced unsociability and preached equality.

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The Guru gave the Khalsa the social ideal of equality and close brotherhood. There was to be no distinction of birth, caste, class or color. All were equal in social status, and had the same rights and privileges. He thus enunciated ninety years earlier the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity which formed the bedrock of French Revolution. Their words must be *Kritnash Khlnash Dharmnash Karmnash*, the forsaking of occupation and family of belief and ceremonies. Do thus said Gobind and the world is yours. Many Brahman and Kashatriyas followers murmured, but the contemned races rejoiced, they reminded Gobind of their devotion and services, and asked that they also should be allowed to bathe in the sacred pool, and offer up prayers in the temple of Amritsar. The murmurings of the twice-born increased, and many took their departure, but Gobind exclaimed that the lowly should be raised and that hereafter the despised should dwell next to him.

From the above discussion, we can draw a conclusion that in Sikhism there is no conflict between humanistic and spiritual concerns of an individual. To Sikh Gurus, social and spiritual development is needed to be pursuing simultaneously. Sikh Gurus repudiated those socio-religious practices, traditions and institutions which create stumbling blocks in the way of socio-spiritual development of individual and curtail his self-respect and freedom. The paramount contribution of Sikhism to mankind is that it teaches and trains the mankind to resist energetically against any kind of exploitation of humankind and to pave the way for socio-spiritual development. Sikhism condemns the pessimism, inactiveness, mental slavery,

negative instinct to lie down in front of political brutality. In 21st century, the Sikhism is torchbearer for humanity confronted with challenges of violation of human rights, growing crimes against women, children and old age people. Political leaders of the world, policy makers, human right activists etc. needed to understand the eternal message of Sikh Gurus in depth to pursue their noble cause to protect the human race in times to come.

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