



Interfaith Dialogues

A Sikh Perspective



Editor

Hardev Singh Virk

Twenty-first century will be a witness to two types of dialogues for promotion of world peace: (i) Inter-faith dialogue, and (ii) Science-Religion dialogue. It is my faith and conviction that Sikhism has the potential to play a leading role in both these dialogues. My dream of presenting the Sikh Perspective on Interfaith Dialogues at the global level has been realized with this publication.

Sikh Gurus mission was to promote harmony and interfaith dialogue between major creeds of India. The message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is universal in all respects. The same message reverberates in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh:

Recognize all mankind as one
The same Lord is the creator
and nourisher of all
Recognize no distinction
among them
The temple and mosque are the
same
So are the Hindu worship and
Muslim prayer
Men are all one.

(Akal Ustat, Dasam Granth)

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A Sikh Perspective

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A Sikh Perspective

Editor

Hardev Singh Virk



Guru Nanak Foundation
New Delhi

INTERFAITH DIALOGUES: A SIKH PERSPECTIVE

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ਏਕੋ ਪਵਣੁ ਮਾਟੀ ਸਭ ਏਕਾ ਸਭ ਏਕਾ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਬਾਈਆ ॥
ਸਭ ਇਕਾ ਜੋਤਿ ਵਰਤੈ ਭਿਨਿ ਭਿਨਿ ਨ ਰਲਈ ਕਿਸੈ ਦੀ ਰਲਾਈਆ ॥

There is only one breath;
all are made of the same clay;
the light within all is the same.
The One Light pervades all.
This Light intermingles with them,
but it is not diluted or obscured.

(SGGS, Raag Majh M. 4, p. 96)

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Foreword

This book is a new venture on the part of Guru Nanak Foundation which has a brilliant track record of 55 years behind it. It was founded by S. Ujjal Singh, the then Governor of Punjab, in 1965 to celebrate the Fifth Birth Centenary of Guru Nanak slated for 1969. I happened to attend this function held in Chandigarh. Guru Nanak Foundation was set up under the Chairmanship of Maharaja Yadavinder Singh of Patiala and Giani Zail Singh as its Secretary. Later on, S. Inderjit Singh, Chairman of Punjab & Sind Bank, took over as its President and it started flourishing to its present glory. Presently, Harpreet Singh, an icon of Inderjit Singh family is holding the reins as its worthy President.

The book covers the subject close to my heart: How to promote the message of Sikh Gurus enshrined in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), at the global level. During 550th celebrations held last year, I was among the chosen few by the ICCR, Govt. of India, who were destined to deliver lectures on Guru Nanak's life and philosophy in foreign countries. The same role was played by the Editor of this volume, Prof. Hardev Singh Virk. I am delighted that he has chosen this topic of "Interfaith Dialogues: A Sikh Perspective" as a theme for discussion in this book. It must be brought to the notice of World that Interfaith Dialogues were started by Guru Nanak, and none else, to promote harmony and peace among the different faiths in medieval times. UNO and other International Forums are simply walking in the footprints of Guru Nanak, the Founder of Sikh religion. The need for Interfaith Dialogues has been felt acutely after the 9/11 event in USA.

The Editor has taken pains to invite eleven research papers dealing with different aspects of Interfaith Dialogue. The opening Chapter "*Interfaith Dialogue in Sri Guru Granth*

Sahib and its Relevance in Present Times” sets the tone of the book. The meaning of Interfaith Dialogue and its objectives are discussed and a variety of possible dialogues based on the contents of SGGS are described. Guru Nanak’s *Siddh Goshit* is the first Interfaith Dialogue in the recorded history of World religions. SGGS with its cosmopolitan spirit may prove to be an ideal role model for initiating interfaith dialogues in the World.

Dr DP Singh elaborates the role of Sikh Gurus in promoting Interfaith Dialogue in India: “Guru Nanak’s travels to various religious centers of diverse faiths; his life long association with Bhai Mardana (a Muslim); Guru Arjan Dev’s inclusion of the verses of the saint-poets of varied faiths in SGGS; Guru Hargobind’s construction of Mosque for Muslims; and Guru Teg Bahadur’s laying down of his life for the cause of freedom of worship, are just a few shining examples from the life of Sikh Gurus in this field”.

It is to be lamented that the message of Sikh Gurus remained confined to Punjab and no concerted efforts were made to promote Interfaith dialogues after the Gurus era in Sikh history. Nirmal Singh has taken pains to explore the area of Interfaith Dialogues through the Sikh prism for the first time in his book: “*Interfaith Engagement: Understanding, Experience, Issues Viewed through Sikh Prism*”. The topic of “Sikhism and Religious Pluralism” has been discussed by Dharam Singh. He is of the view: “Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikh faith, is the best example of Religious Pluralism as it comprises the revelatory hymns, called bani or sabd, of six of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and certain holy men coming from the Bhakti and Sufi movements”.

Pashaura Singh defines Religious Pluralism as *Ek-Anek* or “Unity in Diversity” concept as propounded by the Sikh Gurus in SGGS. According to him: “The presence of the Bhagat Bani in the Sikh scripture provides an excellent example of catholicity that promotes mutual respect and understanding of diversity of belief and practice”. In keeping with this principle, diverse names of God from the Hindu and Muslim traditions have been used liberally by the Sikh Gurus.

I am aware of the historical background in which Guru Nanak appeared in India. There was internecine strife afflicting the society and rulers were acting as butchers. Prof. Habib has discussed the role of Guru Nanak in dealing with this situation with zeal and enthusiasm: "He approached to the contemporary Muslims and tried hard to rejuvenate the real spirit of Islam in India". It shows clearly that the root cause of Sikh conflict with Islam was political and not religious, as there are many common concepts between these two religions as traced by Prof. Virk in his Paper, "*Sikhism and Islam: The Need for Interfaith Dialogue*".

Bhai Harbans Lal, who is a celebrated author of the book, "*Guru Nanak's Religious Pluralism and Sri Guru Granth Sahib*" already published by Guru Nanak Foundation, makes a sterling contribution to this volume by providing antecedents to Guru Nanak's first ever Interfaith Dialogue held in Sultanpur Lodhi. Thus, Guru Nanak became the founder of the Interfaith Dialogues, a movement now promoted and spread all over the world. The details of this Dialogue are recorded vividly by Sikh chronicler, Bhai Santokh Singh, author of Suraj Parkash Granth.

I have been visiting Yogi Bhajan's Ashram in Espanola, New Mexico (USA) and interacting with American Sikhs who are now part and parcel of Sikh mainstream all over the globe. It was there, I found several young Sikh men and women engaged in the study of Guru Granth Sahib. SS Ek Ong Kaar Khalsa Michaud happened to be Program Director for *SikhNet.Com*, with its base in Espanola. She has traced the roots of "Sahaj" in Buddhist literature and studied its use by Guru Amar Das Jee in SGGS. I appreciate her approach to *Sahajdhari* issue based on SGGS and Sikh history: "Could we recalibrate the word *Sahajdhari* Sikh to welcome people of all faiths who find something in the teachings of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib that help them on their path of life"?

The Editor of this volume, Hardev Singh Virk, is exploring the subject of Interfaith Dialogue in a triad of his papers concerning interfaith engagement of Sikh Religion

with Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. The objective of his study is to build bridges between Sikhism and other religious traditions at the global level for common cause of Peace and Harmony.

I must appreciate the hard work done by the Editor to streamline the diverse contents of Papers without changing the context of Paper and objective of its author. I am fully aware of the background of Prof. Virk as a Nuclear Physicist who got his doctorate in Marie Curie university of Paris (France). His autobiography, "My Journey in Science" reveals all salient features of his academic life in India and abroad. His contributions to Science, Technology, Sikh religion and Punjabi literature have been motivating thousands of young research scholars all over the globe. Researchgate portal (www.researchgate.net/profile/Hardev_Virk/publications) has recorded two hundred thousand (2 *lakh*) readers of his Papers, a new record for any scientist in Punjab, may be in India?

I must pay my humble tribute to all the contributors of this volume, "Interfaith Dialogue: A Sikh Perspective" whose papers have been accepted after scrutiny by our reviewer. They are all eminent Scholars in their fields of specialization with dozens of research papers and books to their credit. I wish them success in their academic and professional life.

Finally, I wish this new publication, based on the teachings of Sikh Gurus recorded in Sri Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Nanak Foundation, a success. Singh Brothers, Amritsar, the printers of this volume, deserve my appreciation in anticipation of good work being done in the field of Sikh literature. I am thankful to Prof. Kehar Singh (Ex-Professor & Head of Political Science Department in Punjabi University, Patiala) for reviewing contents of this book and S. Partap Singh for his dedication to Guru Nanak Foundation and efforts to publish this book.

Tarlochan Singh

*Ex-MP & Chairman, National Commission
for Minorities, Govt. of India, New Delhi.*

Preface

Interfaith groups came into existence to counter the nefarious designs of narrow minded bigots to exploit religious differences for sectarian and personal interests even at the cost of social harmony. As rightly pointed out by Nirmal Singh, the need of interfaith dialogues was strongly felt in the West after the Second World War when the crimes against the Jews came in public knowledge. In the wake of globalisation and population migration the need for such dialogues has become more urgent. Huntington's book 'Clash of Civilisations' and the fact of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction should awaken us to the the perils of unattended religious fault lines. The present day Indian socio- political scene, marked by the triumphant majoritarianism and despondent minorities, is a sign of impending danger to the liberal ideals enshrined in the constitution.

According to the Sikh Gurus, apart from political and economic reasons, religious fanaticism is a major cause of social strife. Inter religious dialogues, as a means of mitigating community conflicts, find mention in a number of verses in SGGS. Hardev Singh Virk's, "Interfaith Dialogues: A Sikh Perspective", is a collection of scholarly articles on the theme from a variety of reading of the Sikh holy scriptures. Some of the important principles, underlying the practice of the Gurus can be enlisted here. One, dialogue should be aimed at finding mutually acceptable ethical values. These commonalities need to be highlighted while downplaying the cultural specifics of the different religious traditions. Here the presumption is that Vedas and Katebas are authentic. Only fake is the one who doesn't reflect on these . Two, conversing with knowledgeable is fruitful and waste of time with a block head. Three, greater effort need to be expended on the priestly

class to bring them out of the narrow grooves. Only then will they be able to provide enlightened leadership to their co-religionists. Four, genuine spiritual seekers are intuitively inclined to be altruistic and interested in social harmony. Such persons from different faiths can serve as the nucleus for organisations championing this cause. These and some other similar principles have been elaborated in the present volume.

The editor has selected the articles of scholars who have good standing in the area of Sikh scriptural studies. However, I thought that some observations were needed about the articles of Pashaura Singh and Ek Ong Kaar Khalsa . Pashaura Singh opines, 'the inclusion of Bhagat Bani in Adi Granth was historically linked with the experiment of religious pluralism in India in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries'. Though true, it leaves unstated the process initiated by Guru Nanak much earlier than the times of emperor Akbar. Similarly, his observation that the inclusion of Bhagat Bani was 'to fulfil the need of self definition' overshadows it's more laudable purpose of building bridges across the then diverse social and religious groups. Ek Ong Kaar Khalsa has a problem with the traditional use of the term Sahajdhari for a section of the Sikh society and seems to suggest that the issue of religious boundaries be revisited. The use of the term, however, has never been objected to in Sikh history .The issue at stake is the role of the Sahajdhari's in the administration of Sikh community institutions. The term is just not doctrinal. It is intertwined and enmeshed with social, political and juridical considerations. Nevertheless, her argument for opening up the Guru's court to all the people is acceptable. It is in line with the Sikh belief system and generally followed in practice. Adoption of *amritdhari* identity has never been insisted for anyone seeking the Guru's blessing and guidance. Conflating the doctrinal and sociological issues of a historically evolved religious society may not be a good academic proposition.

Kehar Singh

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October 22, 2020

Introduction

The tremendous progress of science and technology during the twentieth century has changed the world into a global village by means of fast communication. Despite this progress, human suffering and conflicts have increased. The growing materialism, selfishness and lust for power have shifted the focus from God to man. In multi-faith and multi-cultural scenario like India, there is a dire need for mutual understanding. Interfaith dialogue is the need of the hour for world unity and peaceful life.

Interfaith dialogue demands love and respect for others. It is also necessary to have knowledge about others religious scriptures, doctrines, rituals, ethics, customs, beliefs and social attitudes, without any feeling of prejudice. It is imperative to learn the spiritual values of other religions.

Sikh Gurus mission was to promote harmony and interfaith dialogue between major creeds of India. The message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) is universal in all respects. The same message reverberates in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh:

ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਬੋ ॥
ਕਰਤਾ ਕਰੀਮ ਸੋਈ ਰਾਜਕ ਰਹੀਮ ਓਈ ॥
ਦੂਸਰੇ ਨ ਭੇਦ ਕੋਈ ਭੂਲ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਮਾਨਬੋ ॥
ਦੇਹੁਰਾ ਮਸੀਤ ਸੋਈ ਪੂਜਾ ਔ ਨਿਵਾਜ ਓਈ ॥
ਮਾਨਸ ਸਬੈ ਏਕ ਪੈ ਅਨੇਕ ਕੇ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਉ ਹੈ ॥

Recognize all mankind as one

The same Lord is the creator and nourisher of all

Recognize no distinction among them

The temple and mosque are the same

So are the Hindu worship and Muslim prayer

Men are all one.

(Akal Ustat, Dasam Granth)

During my sojourn at Paris University (1970-72), I had the privilege of being accommodated in International campus of the university. My friends from other faiths were always interested to know about Sikhism and its holy book. Some of them were kind enough to gift me copies of Holy Bible and Quran. Thus, began my preliminary studies in interfaith understanding and encounter with other faiths in an environment of mutual understanding.

My first attempt culminated in a paper, “Guru Granth Sahib and Holy Bible: An Interfaith Dialogue”, presented at an International Conference held at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and published as part of the proceedings by the University Press in 2005. Comparative study of SGGS and Holy Quran, on one hand, and SGGS and Hindu sacred texts, on the other, resulted in the compilation of the triad of papers presented in this book.

This volume has 11 Chapters dealing with different topics justifying the theme chosen for its Title: “*Interfaith Dialogues: A Sikh Perspective*”. Shashi Bala contributed the opening Chapter “*Interfaith Dialogue in Sri Guru Granth Sahib: Relevance in the Present Times*” where she explains the role of SGGS in interfaith dialogue in present day world: “Guru Granth Sahib is well-known in the Scriptures of the World Religions for its cosmopolitan spirit and for being an ideal role model for initiating interfaith dialogue and for reflecting the contemporary religious traditions with an in-depth understanding and sagacious vision and also by incorporating the spiritual compositions of Bhagats and Saints belonging to different traditions, different regions and different castes. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the meaning, nature and objective of interfaith dialogue as revealed in Guru Granth Sahib and to study the ways and directions provided for the interfaith understanding in the present times”.

Devinder Pal Singh in his paper “*Interfaith Dialogue: A Perspective from Sikhism*” further elaborates the Sikh Perspective with a beautiful quote from SGGS: “The primary doctrines of Sikhism emphasize interfaith understanding, mutual respect,

and harmony. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, proclaimed that the sharing of views and ideas should be a continuous process throughout one's life: "As long as we are in this world, O Nanak, we must listen to others, as well as express ourselves to others".

Nirmal Singh makes a sterling contribution in his Paper "*Interfaith Engagement Through The Sikh Prism*". I believe, he has vast experience of participating in Interfaith Conferences in India and USA. He speaks from his practical experience in this paper and recounts some problems and advantages of *Sikh Interfaith Engagement*.

Dharam Singh in his Paper "*Sikhism and Religious Pluralism*" brings out clearly another aspect of SGGS, viz. *Religious Pluralism* in his well researched paper. He explains tripolar typology of religions. in his view: "Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikh faith, is the best example of Religious Pluralism as it comprises the revelatory hymns, called bani or sabd, of six of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and certain holy men coming from the Bhakti and Sufi movements".

Pashaura Singh elaborates further the concept of *Religious Pluralism* in terms of *Ek-Anek* vision of Guru Nanak. He has based his arguments on inclusion of *Bhagat Bani* in SGGS: "A distinctive feature of the Guru Granth Sahib is that it contains the compositions of fifteen non-Sikh poet-saints from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, along with the compositions of the Sikh Gurus".

Mohd. Habib presents an Islamic view of Interfaith Dialogue in the holy book of Sikh religion. He refers to the Guru Nanak's quotes in SGGS regarding Islam and Contemporary Muslims to teach them the reality of Islamic thought based on Quran. He finds an "*Echo of Spirit of Islam in Sri Guru Granth Sahib*". He claims: "The 'Bani' of Baba Nanak reveals that he was the pioneer of interfaith dialogue in true sense in his age. He remained in continuous dialogue in his whole life with various faiths and their respective practices".

Bhai Harbans Lal considers Guru Nanak as a pioneer of

Interfaith Dialogue and Guru Arjan as a compiler of global scripture in the history of world religions: “Guru Nanak began his missionary journeys by holding the first-ever *Interfaith Dialogue* at Sultanpur Lodhi (India) and by visiting major religious centers of the world where he promoted Interfaith Dialogues and understandings. Guru Arjan followed and compiled the first world scripture, the Guru Granth, where he invited multiple coauthors, from contemporary and the past centuries”.

Ek Ong Kaar Khalsa Michaud presents her well researched paper: “*The Need for Intra-Faith Dialogue: Expanding our Understanding of the Sabajdhari Sikh*”. She has traced the roots of “Sahaj” in the Buddhist literature and its use by the Sikh Gurus in SGGS. She wants to probe if the Sikh community and its leadership can broaden the definition of *Sabajdhari* based on SGGS and Sikh history: “Could we recalibrate the word *Sabajdhari* Sikh to welcome people of all faiths who find something in the teachings of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* that help them on their path of life”?

Hardev Singh Virk, the Editor of this volume, is exploring the subject of Interfaith Dialogue from a different perspective in his papers concerning interfaith engagement of Sikh Religion with Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. He has based his investigations on the study of Holy Books of three major religions of the world *vis a vis* the Holy Sikh Scripture (SGGS). His study reveals similarity of concepts as well as points of difference in the major religious traditions. His view of Interfaith Dialogue can be summed up as follows: “To achieve the objective of inter-faith dialogue in the present day world, it is imperative to study the holy books or scriptures of different religious traditions. Unless we find some common basic principles propounded in the holy books there can be no meeting point for an interfaith dialogue which can ultimately lead to world peace”.

Twenty-first century will be a witness to two types of dialogues for promotion of world peace: (i) Inter-faith dialogue, and (ii) Science-Religion dialogue. It is my faith and

conviction that Sikhism has the potential to play a leading role in both these dialogues. My dream of presenting the Sikh Perspective on Interfaith Dialogues at the global level has been realized with this publication. The efforts are afoot to prepare and publish the twin volume on Science- Religion Dialogues in near future.

It is imperative for Sikh institutions to work in tandem with international forums to realize the dream of Sikh Gurus:

ਜਗਤੁ ਜਲੰਦਾ ਰਖਿ ਲੈ ਆਪਣੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ ॥

ਜਿਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਉਬਰੈ ਤਿਤੈ ਲੈਹੁ ਉਬਾਰਿ ॥

God save this World, it is on fire,

Save it by whatever door (religion) you deem fit.

Let me end this introduction with a quote borrowed from Paper of Andrew Orton of Durham University, UK, “Interfaith Dialogue: Seven key questions for Theory, Policy and Practice”: *If religion is not part of the solution, then it will certainly be part of the problem.*

Hardev Singh Virk

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Interfaith Dialogue in Sri Guru Granth Sahib: Relevance in the Present Times

Shashi Bala

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Abstract

This paper explains the role of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) in interfaith dialogue in the present day world. It discusses the meaning and objective of interfaith dialogue. The author presents her views under sections: Dialogue of spiritual experience; dialogue of Bhagats and Saints; dialogue of ethical perceptions; dialogue of social relations; dialogue of social customs; and dialogue of religious worship. SGGS is well-known in the Scriptures of the World Religions for its cosmopolitan spirit and for being an ideal role model for initiating interfaith dialogue.

1. Introduction

Interfaith dialogue indicates to an understanding and acceptance of religious diversity and encourages not agreement but relationship; not amalgamation but acknowledgement of the authenticity of others; not a move towards one world religion but appreciation of diversity by sharing the common points as well as genuine differences. This type of interaction is not confined to religious issues only but includes the social and cultural issues also. Dialogue is an inherent aspect of human existence and expression of any authentic human activity is not possible without dialogue. Dialogue among different religious communities should not be confined to the

intellectual level only but it ought to be dialogue of concern, dialogue of deeds and dialogue of spiritual experiences.

The present scenario all over the world presents paradoxical trends of thinking with the increase in religious fundamentalism, fanaticism, dogmatism on the one hand and awakening about religious pluralism on the other hand thereby breaking the boundaries to explore the means to bring people of different faiths on one platform for interfaith understanding. Interaction of different religious traditions is due to the globalization when voluntary endeavours are made to convene meeting for interfaith understanding. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, there was not any scope for such interfaith meetings to bring different religious communities on single platform. In spite of multi-religious society, each religious tradition was exclusive, closed and isolated from the other due to geographical distances, diverse languages, cultures, profound ethnic and racial biases and prejudices. Hence no amicable interaction among diverse religious communities existed and if there was any, that was of dominance either of the ruler class or of the invaders as is explicit in Babar-Vani. Both inclusive and exclusive tendencies of humans are detrimental to harmonious living and are responsible for creating disharmony, mutual distrust and violation of human rights.

Guru Granth Sahib is well-known in the Scriptures of the World Religions for its cosmopolitan spirit and for being an ideal role model for initiating interfaith dialogue and for reflecting the contemporary religious traditions with an in-depth understanding and sagacious vision and also by incorporating the spiritual compositions of Bhagats and Saints belonging to different traditions, different regions and different castes. The present paper is an attempt to highlight the meaning, nature and objective of interfaith dialogue as revealed in Guru Granth Sahib and to study the ways and directions provided for the interfaith understanding in the present times.

2. Meaning of Interfaith Dialogue

Dialogue is a constitutive part of our nature; and is an act that defines us as human beings. The ontological basis of dialogical nature of human beings is pluralistic expression of the Ultimate Reality. The different religious preceptors communicated their spiritual experiences in accordance with their own nomenclature yet the universal aspect of their experience emphasize on divine love, divine bliss and divine goodness. Raimundo Panikkar has mentioned the possibility of three types of interfaith dialogues at the academic level namely, interpersonal dialogue, intrapersonal dialogue, and critical comparative dialogue. First, the interpersonal dialogue is conversation with the representatives of other religious traditions and is indispensable for pluralistic societies. Second, intrapersonal dialogue occurs within a person as a response to other religions and it starts 'when something stirs within us, when we feel threatened, encouraged, inspired, provoked or profoundly shaken by other religious traditions'. The foundational basis of such type of dialogue lies in an 'unavoidable human quest for meaning and truth' and this yearning for reality is the basis of other types of interfaith dialogues also. Third, the critical-comparative dialogue can be of two types, viz. dialectical and dialogical. Whereas the former takes place at the level of doctrines and treats members of the other religious communities as objects of rational inquiry, the latter involves the entire person and not just the cognitive dimension of humans [1].

Before talking about the nature and objectives of interfaith dialogue, it is essential to keep in mind three dimensions in all religions, viz., first, the conceptual vision about the Ultimate Reality; second, the aim of human life; and third, the way to achieve that purpose. Guru Granth Sahib enunciates the doctrine of One God - transcendent as well as immanent and manifestation of this oneness in pluralistic ways, thus recognizing the efficacy of other religious faiths for the attainment of human purpose. This pluralistic vision is clear in Guru Amardas' *salok* [2]:

ਜਗਤੁ ਜਲੰਦਾ ਰਖਿ ਲੈ ਆਪਣੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ ॥

ਜਿਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਉਬਰੈ ਤਿਤੈ ਲੈਹੁ ਉਬਾਰਿ ॥

*The world is burning in fire: O God, Save it out of Thy Mercy;
Through whichever door (path) it comes to Thee, Save it from there.*

This philosophy of oneness also gives sanctification to all existence leaving no doubt for any differentiation and creates a feeling of universal brotherhood. Guru Arjan states [3]:

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੂ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰ ਹਾਈ ॥

God alone is our Father and we all are His Children;

Thou, O God are alone our Teacher.

Stressing on the divine essence of man and manifestation of diversity out of One light, Bhagat Kabir invokes the people of different religious faiths to rise above doubt and to visualize the Creator in the created and the created in the Creator [4]:

ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥

ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ ॥੧॥

God created His Light first and from it created all humans;

From the One Light emerges the whole world; whom we call good, whom bad?

The aim of human life, as stated in Guru Granth Sahib, is self-realization and thereby God-realization. Guru Amardas invokes the human mind to know thy divine essence as by knowing one's essence one can know God and understand the mystery of life and death [5].

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥

ਮਨ ਹਰਿ ਜੀ ਤੇਰੈ ਨਾਲਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮਤੀ ਰੰਗੁ ਮਾਣੁ ॥

ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਤਾਂ ਸਹੁ ਜਾਣਹਿ ਮਰਣ ਜੀਵਣ ਕੀ ਸੋਝੀ ਹੋਈ॥

O my mind, you are the embodiment of the Divine Light - recognize your own origin.

O my mind, the Dear Lord is with you; through the Guru's Teachings, enjoy His Love.

Acknowledge your origin, and then you shall know your Husband Lord, and so understand death and birth.

The conceptual vision of reality and purpose of life may be the same but there are certainly major variations in different

religious faiths regarding the path to achieve the goal. As Guru Nanak puts a query, how to be truthful and how to break the wall of falsehood? And answers that it is possible by going in accordance with the Divine Will, and for this he suggested the path of *Nam-Simran*, i.e., love of God and purity of conduct [6].

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥੧॥

So how can you become truthful? And how can the veil of illusion be torn away?

O Nanak, it is written that you shall obey the Hukam of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will.

Nonetheless, these dimensions are the underlying basis of interfaith dialogue in Guru Granth Sahib. To promote harmonious relationship with different religious communities, Guru Nanak, the founder Guru of Sikh Religion, visited the different religious places of pilgrimage during his four Udasis. He met with the religious leaders of variant faiths, initiated interfaith dialogue with them and had lively interactions with the religious representatives of his times but with no intention of imposing his ideology on others or degrading the others.

3. Objectives of Interfaith Dialogue

The Holy Scripture stressed not only on attainment of knowledge of truth but also implementation of that knowledge in one's own life. The main objective of dialogue is to understand the meaningful in man and for this understanding we need to know not only the persons but also the total setting of life as well as its activities, i.e., beliefs and practices of others. For this purpose, the Gurus have initiated not only spiritual dialogue but also a dialogue of life as well as dialogue of deeds with persons of other religious traditions. Guru Nanak states, 'So long as humans live in the world, they should listen and speak to others about the Divine Name because our stay in the world is transitory, so we should die to the self while alive' [7].

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥
ਭਾਲਿ ਰਹੇ ਹਮ ਰਹਣੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ ਜੀਵਤਿਆ ਮਰਿ ਰਹੀਐ ॥

The basic structure of the scripture shows its cosmopolitan spirit which is against religious exclusivism, dogmatism, fundamentalism and egoistic individualism. To avoid the possession of religion by the priestly class and by the political dominance, the stress is laid on one religion of truth for the whole mankind, which is eternal [8]:

ਏਕੋ ਧਰਮੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜੈ ਸਚੁ ਕੋਈ ॥
ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਪੁਰਾ ਜੁਗਿ ਜੁਗਿ ਸੋਈ ॥

*There is one Religion of Truth, if one knows and realizes by the
Guru's wisdom;
God is ever the same age after age.*

Nevertheless, this stress on one religion of truth does not mean negation of other religious faiths rather it connotes awareness of inner unity amidst apparent diversity as the cornerstone of inter-religious dialogue. The recognition of separate identity of different religious communities with their different beliefs and practices is portrayed in *Raga Ramkali* where Guru Arjan Dev observes [9]:

ਕੋਈ ਬੋਲੈ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਮ ਕੋਈ ਖੁਦਾਇ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਸੇਵੈ ਗੁਸਈਆ ਕੋਈ ਅਲਾਹਿ ॥੧॥
ਕਾਰਣ ਕਰਣ ਕਰੀਮ ॥ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ ਰਹੀਮ ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥
ਕੋਈ ਨਾਵੈ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਕੋਈ ਹਜ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਕਰੈ ਪੂਜਾ ਕੋਈ ਸਿਰੁ ਨਿਵਾਇ ॥੨॥
ਕੋਈ ਪੜੈ ਬੇਦ ਕੋਈ ਕਤੇਬ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਓਵੈ ਨੀਲ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਪੇਦ ॥੩॥
ਕੋਈ ਕਹੈ ਤੁਰਕੁ ਕੋਈ ਕਹੈ ਹਿੰਦੂ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਬਾਛੈ ਭਿਸਤੁ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਰਗਿੰਦੂ ॥੪॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਨਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਪਛਾਤਾ ॥ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਾ ਤਿਨਿ ਭੇਦੁ ਜਾਤਾ ॥੫॥

*Some people call God Ram, others Khuda;
Some serve Him as Gosain, others as Allah;
But He is only One Doer and Cause and Beneficent Lord;
O, God, bless me with Thy Mercy, O Compassionate One.
Some go to bathe at Pilgrimage places; others go to perform Haj;
Some offer worship, others bow down their head;
Some read Vedas, others the Semitic texts;
Some wear white, others blue;
Some are called Turks, others Hindus;
Some seek heaven, others paradise;*

*Says Nanak: Those who realize the Divine Will;
Alone know the secret of One Powerful God.*

This recognition of other faiths' identity with emphasis on inner religiosity is the basis of any spiritual dialogue. Any spiritual discourse is futile if it is based on mere intellectual arguments, debates, dialectical methods and unless it is dialogical dialogue based on intuitive realization of the other person and the religious tradition to which he belongs. That is why the Gurus stressed on the need to realize the meaning of God's existence in human life and in the world of experience or the recognition of God's presence in one's daily experience as the source of all things. Only an insightful person can read the depth of the other and see in its inmost core, the Infinite Self in which all beings are united. This inner vision is a sort of moral command which makes man responsible towards others. It is an illumination of the soul and an intuitive realization which may be interpreted as 'a moral demand to undertake a certain course of action' as in Judaism or 'the discernment of the sacred within oneself as in the Indian tradition' [10]. The critical comparative dialogue at the academic level is not possible without knowledge of others and it necessitates understanding religious doctrines, ceremonies, rituals, beliefs and language of other religious communities. The interfaith dialogue in Guru Granth Sahib is initiated in diverse ways at the doctrinal, social, religious and cultural levels. Whereas the spiritual dialogue relates with the conceptual and mystical aspects of religious experience; dialogue at the social level shows concern, respect for human dignity and hospitality towards persons of other faiths; and stands for humanitarian attitude towards the spiritual evolution of man.

4. Dialogue of Spiritual Experience

Guru Nanak's *Siddh Goshit* in 73 stanzas is a detailed spiritual discourse and an exposition of interfaith dialogue with the motive to understand the others. The attitude of reverence for other faiths is clearly visible in the

beginning of the *Siddh Goshit*, when Guru Nanak hails the assembly of the *Siddhas* [11]: '*Siddh-sabha kari asani baithei sant-sabha jaikaro*'.

ਸਿਧ ਸਭਾ ਕਰਿ ਆਸਣਿ ਬੈਠੇ ਸੰਤ ਸਭਾ ਜੈਕਾਰੇ ॥
 ਤਿਸੁ ਆਗੈ ਰਹਰਾਸਿ ਹਮਾਰੀ ਸਾਚਾ ਅਪਰ ਅਪਾਰੇ ॥
 ਮਸਤਕੁ ਕਾਟਿ ਧਰੀ ਤਿਸੁ ਆਗੈ ਤਨੁ ਮਨੁ ਆਗੈ ਦੇਉ ॥
 ਨਾਨਕ ਸੰਤੁ ਮਿਲੈ ਸਚੁ ਪਾਈਐ ਸਹਜ ਭਾਇ ਜਸੁ ਲੇਉ ॥

The Siddhas formed an assembly; sitting in their Yogic postures, they shouted, "Salute this gathering of Saints." I offer my salutation to the One who is true, infinite and incomparably beautiful. I cut off my head, and offer it to Him; I dedicate my body and mind to Him. O Nanak, meeting with the Saints, Truth is obtained, and one is spontaneously blessed with distinction.

Here, Guru Nanak offers salutations to the assembly of holy persons, with his firm conviction that the eternal God is to be attained through the holy congregation. He (Yogi) practices the eighty-four postures of Yoga, and acquires the supernatural powers of the Siddhas, but he gets tired of practicing these. He lives a long life, but is reincarnated again and again; he has not met with the Lord. It is evident from the discussion of Guru Nanak with the yogis that he did not denounce the actual motive of *Yogic Cult*; instead he exhorted them to shed off their perversions and express their meaning from a new angle.

The yogis asked him a series of questions regarding his source of knowledge, system, Guru, disciples, teachings, cause of his wanderings and also enquired about the way to cross this worldly ocean. The yogis acquainted the Guru with their way of yoga, i.e., total negation of worldly life, life of contemplation in the forests and adoption of yogic symbols. The crux of Guru Nanak's views becomes apparent, not only in his condemnation of external symbols, austere practices and life of renunciation but also in ways he recommends for the same end in view. He uses the yogic terminology to convey his own ideas and referring to the ascetic way of life of the yogis' states ardently that without the Divine Name, mind can never remain constant, nor passions can be stilled [12].

Addressing to the contemporary two orthodox communities, Guru Nanak says it is necessary to be more than a Hindu or a Muslim. After revelation his first words ‘there is no Hindu, no Musalman’ indicate that mere possession of religion is not necessary to be religious. Guru Nanak was fully acquainted with the beliefs and practices of his religious contemporaries and he initiated dialogue to invoke them and to get response from their side and this response was in the form of inner transformation. In the words of S. Kapur Singh [13]:

“His (Guru Nanak’s) divine mission demands acceptance of genuine dialogue rather than conversion as the goal of transcending particularism—with a view to discover a universal concept, not synthesis or synthetic amalgam, but deeper penetration of one’s own religion in thought, devotion and action....”

However, the aim was to inculcate among the adherents of contemporary traditions this feeling of ‘deeper penetration of one’s own religion’ as well as ‘cultivation of moral qualities’ to bring an over-all transformation in their way of living, thinking and feeling. Guru Nanak stressed on the practical aspect of religion for full development of human being and pointed out the consequential effect of the cognitive efforts made by the contemporary religious leaders. For instance, more reading and writing creates anxiety; roaming over the pilgrimage-places makes one boastful; adoption of sectarian garbs inflict pain on the body; starvation creates loss of taste and silence makes man unable to wake from his ignorance [14].

ਲਿਖਿ ਲਿਖਿ ਪੜਿਆ ॥ ਤੇਤਾ ਕੜਿਆ ॥
 ਬਹੁ ਤੀਰਥ ਭਵਿਆ ॥ ਤੇਤੋ ਲਵਿਆ ॥
 ਬਹੁ ਭੇਖ ਕੀਆ ਦੇਹੀ ਦੁਖੁ ਦੀਆ ॥ ਸਹੁ ਵੇ ਜੀਆ ਅਪਣਾ ਕੀਆ ॥
 ਅੰਨੁ ਨ ਖਾਇਆ ਸਾਦੁ ਗਵਾਇਆ ॥ ਬਹੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਦੂਜਾ ਭਾਇਆ ॥ ਬਸਤ੍ਰੁ ਨ
 ਪਹਿਰੈ ॥ ਅਹਿਨਿਸਿ ਕਹਰੈ ॥
 ਮੋਨਿ ਵਿਗੁਤਾ ॥ ਕਿਉ ਜਾਗੈ ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਸੁਤਾ ॥
 ਪਗ ਉਪੇਤਾਣਾ ॥ ਅਪਣਾ ਕੀਆ ਕਮਾਣਾ ॥

The more one write and reads, the more one burns. The more one wanders at sacred shrines of pilgrimage, the more one talks uselessly. The more one wears religious robes, the more pain he causes his

body. O my soul, you must endure the consequences of your own actions. One who does not eat the corn, misses out on the taste. One obtains great pain, in the love of duality. One who does not wear any clothes, suffers night and day. Through silence, he is ruined. How can the sleeping one be awakened without the Guru? One who goes barefoot suffers by his own actions.

5. Dialogue of Bhagats and Saints

The incorporation of the hymns of bhagats and saints in Guru Granth Sahib, acknowledgement of their spiritual attainments by the Gurus in their own hymns and preservation of their separate identity is clear evidence and practical example of pluralistic vision of Guru Granth Sahib for initiating an interfaith understanding. For mutual understanding, dialogue should provide enough space for others by recognizing their faiths and paying due regard to their spiritual experiences. Dr. Neki in one of his articles defines dialogue as neither ‘a sort of monologue, nor a debate, nor a dialectic exercise but a genuine dialogue should provide ‘due deference to the others’ pronouncements, explanations and responses’ [15].

Dialogical attitude demands a certain sense of one’s identity and firmness in one’s own faith but this does not mean immobility or obstinacy in one’s stand. Though the main doctrinal themes are in conformity with the basic spirit of the Granth, yet the ideas and reflections of their religious background are maintained and kept in the perspective of their own thought structure. For instance, Bhagat Jaidev’s use of *Vaishnava* names of God such as *Hari*, *Chakardhar*, *Govinda* and Sheikh Farid’s adherence to *Shariat*, day of judgment, fear of *dozakh*, and *satan*, etc. The insertion of Guru Arjan Dev’s hymns in the compositions of Bhagats and a sort of dialogue among these Bhagats show their close relationship with one another [16]. This type of inter-dialogue takes place in the compositions of Bhagat Kabir, Sheikh Farid, Bhagat Dhanna and Bhagat Surdas. The emphasis on *nam-simarn* as well as performance of routine duties is explicit in the inter-dialogue of Bhagats. In Bhagat Kabir’s hymns, it appears sometimes that he left his

profession of weaving, as his mother laments and he replies that ‘so long as I pass the thread through the shuttle, so long do I forget my Loved Lord, Who is refuge of mine and my children’ [17].

ਮੁਸਿ ਮੁਸਿ ਰੋਵੈ ਕਬੀਰ ਕੀ ਮਾਈ ॥ ਏ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਕੈਸੇ ਜੀਵਹਿ ਰਘੁਰਾਈ ॥੧॥
 ਤਨਨਾ ਬੁਨਨਾ ਸਭੁ ਤਜਿਓ ਹੈ ਕਬੀਰ ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਲਿਖਿ ਲੀਓ ਸਰੀਰ ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥
 ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਤਾਗਾ ਬਾਹਉ ਬੇਹੀ ॥ ਤਬ ਲਗੁ ਬਿਸਰੈ ਰਾਮੁ ਸਨੇਹੀ ॥੨॥
 ਓਛੀ ਮਤਿ ਮੇਰੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਜੁਲਾਹਾ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਲਹਿਓ ਮੈ ਲਾਹਾ ॥੩॥
 ਕਹਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਮੇਰੀ ਮਾਈ ॥ ਹਮਰਾ ਇਨ ਕਾ ਦਾਤਾ ਏਕੁ ਰਘੁਰਾਈ ॥੪॥

Kabeer's mother sobs, cries and bewails - O Lord, how will my grandchildren live? || 1 || Kabeer has given up all his spinning and weaving, and written the Name of the Lord on his body. || 1 || Pause || As long as I pass the thread through the bobbin, I forget the Lord, my Beloved. || 2 || My intellect is lowly - I am a weaver by birth, but I have earned the profit of the Name of the Lord. || 3 || Says Kabeer, listen, O my mother - the Lord alone is the Provider, for me and my children. || 4 ||

Bhagat Trilochan's reply to Bhagat Namdev in Guru Arjan Dev's verse indicates ‘with the tongue utter the Name of the Lord and work with hands and feet but cherish thy God, detached in heart’ [18].

ਨਾਮਾ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹਿਆ ਕਹੈ ਤਿਲੋਚਨੁ ਮੀਤ ॥
 ਕਾਹੇ ਛੀਪਹੁ ਛਾਇਲੈ ਰਾਮ ਨ ਲਾਵਹੁ ਚੀਤੁ ॥੨੧੨॥
 ਨਾਮਾ ਕਹੈ ਤਿਲੋਚਨਾ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਰਾਮੁ ਸੰਮਾਲਿ ॥
 ਹਾਥ ਪਾਉ ਕਰਿ ਕਾਮੁ ਸਭੁ ਚੀਤੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨ ਨਾਲਿ ॥੨੧੩॥

Trilochan says, O Naam Dayv, Maya has enticed you, my friend. Why are you printing designs on these sheets, and not focusing your consciousness on the Lord? || 212 || Naam Dayv answers, O Trilochan, chant the Lord's Name with your mouth. With your hands and feet, do all your work, but let your consciousness remain with the Immaculate Lord. || 213 ||

6. Dialogue of Ethical Perspectives

Not only to the religious leaders but Guru Nanak addressed also to the followers of other sects and told them

to adhere to the essentials and to discard redundant and meaningless formalism. Accordingly, he pointed out the redundancy of external formalism in the performance of religious rituals and practices of followers of Islam and Hinduism, to make them realize the true way to their own religion. This type of dialogue was based on the notion of ethical equation and not manipulation of others for own advantage. Each man has meaning in life and hence he should be treated humanely, and it could have been possible if the relations are face to face encounter on the basis of equality.

Hence the aim was neither to convert others nor to impose his ideology on them but to inculcate the feeling of critical self-analysis and cultivation of moral qualities for inner transformation. Taking the case of *pundit*, he reads Vedas, performs prayers, worships idols, takes rosary, puts saffron-mark on his forehead and wears *dhoti* but performs all false practices in his daily life. If he is aware of the presence of God, he must have realized the futility of these deeds [19].

ਸੋ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਣੁ ਜੋ ਬਿੰਦੈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ॥ ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਕਰਮੁ ॥

ਸੀਲ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਕਾ ਰਖੈ ਧਰਮੁ ॥ ਬੰਧਨ ਤੋੜੈ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤੁ ॥

ਸੋਈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਣੁ ਪੂਜਣ ਜੁਗਤੁ ॥੧੬॥

He alone is a Brahmin, who knows God. He chants and meditates, and practices austerity and good deeds. He keeps to the Dharma, with faith, humility and contentment. Breaking his bonds, he is liberated. Such a Brahmin is worthy of being worshipped. || 16 ||

Similarly, the orthodox practices of Muslim community are pointed out by saying that to be a true Muslim, one should make mercy as his mosque, faith as prayer-mat, honest living as Quran, humility as circumcision and good conduct as fast [20].

ਮਿਹਰ ਮਸੀਤਿ ਸਿਦਕੁ ਮੁਸਲਾ ਹਕੁ ਹਲਾਲੁ ਕੁਰਾਣੁ ॥

ਸਰਮ ਸੁੰਨਤਿ ਸੀਲੁ ਰੋਜਾ ਹੋਹੁ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ॥

Let mercy be your mosque, faith your prayer-mat, and honest living your Koran. Make modesty your circumcision, and good conduct your fast. In this way, you shall be a true Muslim.

Guru Nanak and other holy preceptors were fully acquainted with the nomenclature of contemporary religious faiths and they observed with their sagacious vision the intricacies in the behavior of adherents of those religious traditions. Guru Nanak was conscious of the defects of conventions of contemporary society and he made use of those conventions to convey his own idea to society. He reacted strongly against the hypocrisy of the priestly class who beguiled the innocent people by their formal ways of worship and by their outward appearance. He has minutely noticed the deceit and hypocrisy in the character of the contemporary *Brahmins* and *kashtriyas* who were leading a dual life. Whatever may be the inherent cause, either to please the Muslim rulers or to gain economic benefits, they accepted the subjugation of Muslim invaders. They worship their idols within, but read Quran and observe the code of Turks [21].

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਪੂਜਾ ਪੜਹਿ ਕਤੇਬਾ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਤੁਰਕਾ ਭਾਈ ॥ ਛੋਡੀਲੇ ਪਾਖੰਡਾ ॥
ਨਾਮਿ ਲਇਐ ਜਾਹਿ ਤਰੰਦਾ ॥.....

ਮਥੈ ਟਿਕਾ ਤੇਤਿ ਧੋਤੀ ਕਖਾਈ ॥ ਹਥਿ ਛੁਰੀ ਜਗਤ ਕਾਸਾਈ ॥
ਨੀਲ ਵਸਤ੍ਰ ਪਹਿਰਿ ਹੋਵਹਿ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ॥ ਮਲੇਛ ਧਾਨੁ ਲੇ ਪੂਜਹਿ ਪੁਰਾਣੁ ॥
ਅਭਾਖਿਆ ਕਾ ਕੁਠਾ ਬਕਰਾ ਖਾਣਾ ॥ ਚਉਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਕਿਸੈ ਨ ਜਾਣਾ ॥

You perform devotional worship indoors, but read the Islamic sacred texts, and adopt the Muslim way of life. Renounce your hypocrisy! Taking the Naam, the Name of the Lord, you shall swim across.

||1||...

The sacred marks are on their foreheads, and the saffron loin-cloths are around their waists; in their hands they hold the knives - they are the butchers of the world! Wearing blue robes, they seek the approval of the Muslim rulers. Accepting bread from the Muslim rulers, they still worship the Puraanas. They eat the meat of the goats, killed after the Muslim prayers are read over them, but they do not allow anyone else to enter their kitchen areas.

Guru Nanak stressed on the truthful living as higher than all other virtues [22, 23].

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

Only if one is pure of heart, one attains truth.

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚੁ ਧਿਆਈਐ ॥ ਸੁਚਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਤਾ ਸਚੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥

Says Nanak, meditate on the True Lord. If you are pure, you will obtain the True Lord.

Guru Arjan Dev also stressed on the inner purity of mind and truthful conduct as the highest form of religion. He says [24]:

ਸਰਬ ਧਰਮ ਮਹਿ ਸ਼੍ਰੇਸਟ ਧਰਮੁ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਕਰਮੁ ॥

ਸਗਲ ਕ੍ਰਿਆ ਮਹਿ ਉਤਮ ਕਿਰਿਆ ॥ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਿ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਮਲੁ ਹਿਰਿਆ ॥

ਸਗਲ ਉਦਮ ਮਹਿ ਉਦਮੁ ਭਲਾ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਹੁ ਜੀਅ ਸਦਾ ॥

ਸਗਲ ਬਾਨੀ ਮਹਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਬਾਨੀ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਜਸੁ ਸੁਨਿ ਰਸਨ ਬਖਾਨੀ ॥

ਸਗਲ ਬਾਨ ਤੇ ਓਹੁ ਉਤਮ ਬਾਨੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਹ ਘਟਿ ਵਸੈ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

Of all religions, this one is the purest:

Meditating on the Divine Name and doing pure deeds.

Of all the activities, the best activity is ;

Washing the evil of mind by associating with the Saints.

Of all efforts, the noblest effort is;

Meditating on God in the heart for ever.

Of all speech, the purest speech is;

Listening the Lord's Praise and uttering with tongue.

Of all places, that place is blessed one;

Nanak, Where dwells the Lord's Name.

7. Dialogue of Social Relations

Man is a living being, an organism, capable of doing action; not only as a living being, but as a being-in-the-world; who does not just happen to live in this world but reaches his full personhood only in and through this world and in interaction with other persons. Each man has certain affinity, so the relation should be face to face encounter on the basis of equality. To Guru Nanak, the whole ethical life of man is an expansion and expression of this inter-personal relationship. The meaningful relationship with others is not possible without the presence of the wholly other. Nevertheless, there is a dimension of meaning in which persons encounter one

another. It is an ethical dimension that specifies or determines the religious character of man. This type of personal interaction with others is possible only in society [25].

The prevalent notion of world-negation and life of asceticism was denounced with the belief in the dynamic and creative aspect of the Absolute Being. Hence any abstract idea of God without a world would be a spiritual life with no hold on the real or in other words a life of pure escapism. Stressing on the integration of spiritual and temporal aspects for the development of human personality, philosophy of life-affirmation and world-affirmation is recommended in place of life of recluse [26].

ਸਚਿ ਸਿਮਰਿਐ ਹੋਵੈ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ ॥ ਤਾ ਤੇ ਬਿਖਿਆ ਮਹਿ ਰਹੈ ਉਦਾਸੁ ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਐਸੀ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥ ਪੁਤ੍ਰ ਕਲਤ੍ਰੁ ਵਿਚੇ ਗਤਿ ਪਾਈ ॥

Remembering the True Lord in meditation, one is enlightened. Then, in the midst of Maya, he remains detached. Such is the Glory of the True Guru; in the midst of children and spouses, they attain emancipation.

Instead of repression of mental modifications (*citta-vrttis*) by the difficult methods, the way suggested is by sublimation of urges and directing them for some higher aim through *nam-simran* [27].

ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਚਲਤਉ ਸਚ ਘਰਿ ਬੈਸੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਅਧਾਰੇ ॥
ਆਪੇ ਮੇਲਿ ਮਿਲਾਏ ਕਰਤਾ ਲਾਗੈ ਸਾਚਿ ਪਿਆਰੇ ॥

This fickle mind sits in its true home, O Nanak, through the Support of the Naam, the Name of the Lord. The Creator Himself unites us in Union, and inspires us to love the Truth.

Referring to the rigorous practices of a sect of Jainism, it is stated that they are neither *yogis* nor *jangams* nor *qazis*, nor *mullas* but persons leading an unclean life on the pretext of *ahimsa* or non-injury to the living beings. A vivid portrayal of their daily life makes it clear that such persons have no realization of the divine presence, no sense of human dignity, no consciousness of higher aim except their own stern notion of purity [28].

ਨਾ ਓਇ ਜੋਗੀ ਨਾ ਓਇ ਜੰਗਮ ਨਾ ਓਇ ਕਾਜੀ ਮੁੰਲਾ ॥
 ਦਯਿ ਵਿਗੋਏ ਫਿਰਹਿ ਵਿਗੁਤੇ ਫਿਟਾ ਵਤੈ ਗਲਾ ॥
 ਜੀਆ ਮਾਰਿ ਜੀਵਾਲੇ ਸੋਈ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ ਰਖੈ ॥
 ਦਾਨਹੁ ਤੈ ਇਸਨਾਨਹੁ ਵੰਜੇ ਭਸੁ ਪਈ ਸਿਰਿ ਖੁਥੈ ॥

They are not Yogis, and they are not Jangams, followers of Shiva. They are not Qazis or Mullabs. Ruined by the Merciful Lord, they wander around in disgrace, and their entire troop is contaminated. The Lord alone kills and restores to life; no one else can protect anyone from Him. They go without giving alms or any cleansing baths; their shaven heads become covered with dust.

On the other hand, those who eat the fruit of their toil and share with the needy alone know the right way [29].

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੋਇ॥

One who works for what he eats, and gives some of what he has - O Nanak, he knows the Path.

8. Dialogue of Social Customs

Guru Nanak not only denounces the superstitious beliefs of *sutak*, empty ceremonies of *janeu* and *shradhas* but he also offers a new interpretation to such socio-religious rites and rituals. Regarding the superstition of impurity (*sutak*), he stresses that the impurity lay in the mind due to its doubt and vision of duality and its cure is to attune oneself to the Divine Being. This impurity has been explained symbolically as the impurity of mind, tongue, eyes, ears and is to be identified as avarice, falsehood, beholding another's woman, wealth and beauty and in hearing to slander respectively [30].

ਸਭੇ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਭਰਮੁ ਹੈ ਦੂਜੈ ਲਗੈ ਜਾਇ ॥
 ਜੰਮਣੁ ਮਰਣਾ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇ ॥
 ਖਾਣਾ ਪੀਣਾ ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰੁ ਹੈ ਦਿਤੇਨੁ ਰਿਜਕੁ ਸੰਬਾਹਿ ॥
 ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਨੀ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬੁਝਿਆ ਤਿਨਾ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਨਾਹਿ ॥

All impurity comes from doubt and attachment to duality. Birth and death are subject to the Command of the Lord's Will; through His Will we come and go. Eating and drinking are pure, since the Lord gives nourishment to all. O Nanak, the Gurmukhs, who understand the Lord, are not stained by impurity.

In a similar tone, he repudiates the sanctity of traditional custom of *janeu* ceremony and stressed on the inner purity which is possible by imbibing virtues like compassion, contentment, continence and truth [31].

ਦਇਆ ਕਪਾਹ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੂਤੁ ਜਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੁ ॥

ਏਹੁ ਜਨੇਊ ਜੀਅ ਕਾ ਹਈ ਤ ਪਾਡੇ ਘਤੁ ॥

ਨਾ ਏਹੁ ਤੁਟੈ ਨਾ ਮਲੁ ਲਗੈ ਨਾ ਏਹੁ ਜਲੈ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥

Make compassion the cotton, contentment the thread, modesty the knot and truth the twist. This is the sacred thread of the soul; if you have it, then go ahead and put it on me. It does not break, it cannot be soiled by filth, it cannot be burnt, or lost.

Regarding the custom of *shradhas*, it is stated that one can receive in the hereafter only that what one earns with sincere efforts on the earth [32].

ਜੇ ਮੋਹਾਕਾ ਘਰੁ ਮੁਹੈ ਘਰੁ ਮੁਹਿ ਪਿਤਰੀ ਦੇਇ ॥

ਅਗੈ ਵਸਤੁ ਸਿਵਾਣੀਐ ਪਿਤਰੀ ਚੋਰ ਕਰੇਇ ॥

ਵਢੀਅਹਿ ਹਥ ਦਲਾਲ ਕੇ ਮੁਸਫੀ ਏਹੁ ਕਰੇਇ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਅਗੈ ਸੇ ਮਿਲੈ ਜਿ ਖਟੇ ਘਾਲੇ ਦੇਇ ॥

The thief robs a house, and offers the stolen goods to his ancestors. In the world hereafter, this is recognized, and his ancestors are considered thieves as well. The hands of the go-between are cut off; this is the Lord's justice. O Nanak, in the world hereafter, that alone is received, which one gives to the needy from his own earnings and labor.

He challenged the Varna-system of contemporary Hindu society by pointing out that a real *Brahmin* is only he who practices austerity, contemplation, self-control, righteous deeds, and is contented and cultured; a real *kbatri* is he who performs heroic deeds, who is compassionate, charitable and beneficent [33].

ਸੇ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਣੁ ਜੇ ਬਿੰਦੈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ॥ ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਕਰਮੁ ॥

ਸੀਲ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਕਾ ਰਖੈ ਧਰਮੁ ॥ ਬੰਧਨ ਤੋੜੈ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤੁ ॥

ਸੋਈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਣੁ ਪੂਜਣ ਜੁਗਤੁ ॥੧੬॥

ਖੜੀ ਸੇ ਜੁ ਕਰਮਾ ਕਾ ਸੂਰੁ ॥ ਪੁੰਨ ਦਾਨ ਕਾ ਕਰੈ ਸਰੀਰੁ ॥

ਖੇਤੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਬੀਜੈ ਦਾਨੁ ॥ ਸੇ ਖੜੀ ਦਰਗਹ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ॥

ਲਬੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਜੇ ਕੁੜੁ ਕਮਾਵੈ ॥ ਅਪਣਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਆਪੇ ਪਾਵੈ ॥੧੭॥

He alone is a Brahmin, who knows God. He chants and meditates, and practices austerity and good deeds. He keeps to the Dharma, with faith, humility and contentment. Breaking his bonds, he is liberated. Such a Brahmin is worthy of being worshipped. ||16||
He alone is a Kh'shaatriyaa, who is a hero in good deeds. He uses his body to give in charity; he understands his farm, and plants the seeds of generosity. Such a Kh'shaatriyaa is accepted in the Court of the Lord. Whoever practices greed, possessiveness and falsehood, shall receive the fruits of his own labors. ||17||

9. Dialogue of Religious Worship

The contemporary notion of devotional *bhakti* is illustrated by Guru Nanak by reference to *Rasa-Lilas* or dramatic performances of Rama and Krishna, the incarnations of Vishnu. The persons belonging to this cult of *bhakti* perform actions by mimicking the ways of the incarnations of God, interpret the Vedas, sing, dance, beg, wear precious ornaments and sing about the heroic deeds of emperors and queens. Devotional method of the Guru is in sharp contrast to the prevalent methods of devotion. Here the denunciation of these modes of worship is due to their outward formalism devoid of inner spirituality. This type of behaviour is confined to the level of mental consciousness only [34].

ਨਚਣੁ ਕੁਦਣੁ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਨ੍ ਮਨਿ ਭਉ ਤਿਨ੍ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਉ ॥

They dance and jump around on the urgings of their minds. O Nanak, those whose minds are filled with the Fear of God, have the love of God in their minds as well.

However, the real devotion includes both the fear of God and love of God and both these mental states are related to each other. Whereas fear of God makes man always conscious about his deeds and cultivates love for God. The repetition of *nam* is indeed, suggestive of voluntary development of faith in the devotee, thereby transforming him into a new being and creating in him a sense of identification with the whole cosmos. Self-control, discipline, *nam-simran*, meditation on *sabad* are means to induce faith and love; truth and service are

the ends which overflow spontaneously as man attains perfect harmony with the Supreme Reality [35].

ਨਾਨਕ ਭਗਤਾ ਭੁਖ ਸਾਲਾਹਣੁ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਆਧਾਰੁ ॥

ਸਦਾ ਅਨੰਦਿ ਰਹਹਿ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤੀ ਗੁਣਵੰਤਿਆ ਪਾ ਛਾਰੁ ॥

Nanak, the hunger of the devotees is to praise You; the True Name is their only support. They live in eternal bliss, day and night; they are the dust of the feet of the virtuous.

The devotee in this state of elevation performs acts of self-abnegation and all expression of reverence and devotion are considered as due to divine Grace. In this devotional perspective, all beings are considered equals and kindness to the poor is a manifestation of divine compassion. It can be attained by invoking divine Grace culminating in meditation and self-culture. True worship means sublimation of ego, life of detachment, practice of truth, meditating on Divine Name through firm devotion, with the help of Guru and Divine Grace [36].

ਜੇ ਜਾਣਸਿ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰ ਕਰਮੰ ॥ ਸਭਿ ਫੋਕਟ ਨਿਸਚਉ ਕਰਮੰ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਿਹਚਉ ਧਿਆਵੈ ॥ ਵਿਣੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਵਾਟ ਨ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

If you knew the nature of God, you would know that all of these beliefs and rituals are in vain. Says Nanak, meditate with deep faith; without the True Guru, no one finds the Way.

In Guru Granth Sahib, inter-religious dialogue comprises not only cognitive mental exercise at the academic level but it inspires for a dialogue of deeds and dialogue of concern which implies an attitude of love, tolerance and acceptance of others. The practical implication of this message of the Gurus is visible in the institutional set up of Sikh Religion, leaving aside all barriers of caste, creed and denominations of any kind. To the enlightened person, there appears no duality, no enmity, no alienation and this condition is depicted by Guru Arjan Dev as follows [37]:

ਬਿਸਰਿ ਗਈ ਸਭ ਤਾਤਿ ਪਰਾਈ ॥ ਜਬ ਤੇ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮੋਹਿ ਪਾਈ ॥

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥

Envy of others has gone away from my mind;

As I have attained the company of the holy.

Neither any enemy nor stranger; with all are we in accord.

10. Conclusions

The Sikh Gurus, no doubt, have offered a critical analysis of the contemporary religious thought and rejected their external paraphernalia but only to inculcate in them a spirit of deeper penetration in their own religion. The aim of interfaith dialogue in the scripture is neither subjugation, nor domination, nor conversion, nor degradation of other traditions but to make them visualize the kernel of truth and implement it in their lives for spiritual transformation. This is evident from the interpersonal, intrapersonal and critical comparative nature of dialogue which is based on ethical equation of all human beings, experiential vision of Ultimate Reality and acknowledgement of spiritual experience of other holy preceptors belonging to different traditions. Interfaith dialogue does not mean denial of the identity of individual traditions through a synthesis or assimilation of other faiths. To resolve the present crisis, we need to seek guidance from the message of Guru Granth Sahib, for self-analysis and self-appraisal to find the deep meaning of our human existence in order to develop interfaith understanding among different cultural identities and religious traditions and to promote harmonious co-existence by inter-religious dialogue.

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Interfaith Dialogue: A Perspective from Sikhism

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Abstract

Interfaith dialogue is perceived as the best mechanism to build mutual understanding and respect among people of different faiths. Despite, interfaith dialogue's recent emergence on the world stage after 9/11, it has been an active component of ancient Indian religious traditions. Sikh Gurus' compositions, and their way of life, reveal that they were among the pioneers of interfaith dialogue in their time. Guru Nanak's travels to various religious centers of diverse faiths; his life long association with Bhai Mardana (a Muslim); Guru Arjan Dev's inclusion of the verses of the saint-poets of varied faiths in Sri Guru Granth Sahib; Guru Hargobind's construction of Mosque for Muslims; and Guru Teg Bahadur's laying down of his life for the cause of Hinduism, are just a few examples of the initiatives taken by the Sikh Gurus in this field. An attempt is being made here to describe the Sikh doctrines that encourage interfaith dialogue. The practices, currently in vogue, among the Sikhs towards this cause, are also recounted.

Introduction

Even in the contemporary world, religion has a highly influential role in the lives of people. With the widely prevalent diversity of religions, ethnicities, and cultures among humans, they can live together by sharing virtuous values. It can be achieved only through dialogue. The word dialogue [1] is derived from the Greek “dia-logos” (literally “a word in-between”) which has the general meaning of “conversation”

between two or more parties. At the heart of dialogue is inter-religious dialogue, because religion is the most comprehensive of all the human “disciplines”. The “public” launching of modern interreligious dialogue can be traced back to the 1893 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago, USA. Well-known religious leaders: Hindu, Theravada Buddhist, Zen Buddhist, Confucian, Christians, Jews, and Muslims participated in the initiative. The term ‘Interfaith Dialogue’ refers to the positive and cooperative interaction between peoples of different religions, faiths, or spiritual beliefs, to promote understanding between different religions to increase acceptance and tolerance [2].

Along with politics, poverty, and culture, religion is often cited as a source of conflict throughout the world. In contemporary times, inter-community conflicts are due to the parochial and shallow understanding of faith or faiths. The dialogue aims to identify the differences and similarities among people so they can learn and understand each other. It helps to build good relations and mutual trust without sacrificing their life principles. Thus, interfaith dialogue can break down walls of division and the barriers that stand at the center of numerous wars. It is decidedly essential to sustain the cohesion and harmony in a multicultural society.

The Sikh Perspective

Sikh Gurus were the messengers of God preoccupied with Truth and the pursuit of Truth. “Truth is God” is the religious principle that ruled their life. The central concept of Sikh’s philosophy is “*Naam, Daan, Ishnaan*”. This phrase translates [3] to mean “*Mindful Awareness of Divine Presence, Live out the Culture of Altruism when Seeking Divine Benevolence, Implement Ethics of Good Deeds that Cleanse Body and Mind*”. Sikh Gurus believed that Truth is a goal that must be pursued persistently and continuously. In Sikh Guru’s era, the world of 1469-1708, there were numerous religions or religious sects (e. g. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Yoga, Siddhas, etc.)

competing with one another, each claiming to have a monopoly on Truth. But for Sikh Gurus, a sure sign that one has lost touch with Truth is the claim that one's group has an exclusive right on it.

According to the ancient religious wisdom of India, Truth is a many-sided and multi-dimensional affair. It deserves to be viewed from many different perspectives; anyone's perception of Truth is limited and partial. Sikh Gurus believed that no person, group, or religion could claim to have full or total knowledge of Truth (or God). Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, reported the plurality of religions, present in his time, in his verses as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) [4-6].

ਕੋਈ ਬੋਲੈ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਮ ਕੋਈ ਖੁਦਾਇ॥ਕੋਈ ਸੇਵੈ ਗੁਸਈਆ ਕੋਈ ਅਲਾਹਿ ॥...
 ਕੋਈ ਨਾਵੈ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਕੋਈ ਹਜ ਜਾਇ॥ ਕੋਈ ਕਰੈ ਪੂਜਾ ਕੋਈ ਸਿਰੁ ਨਿਵਾਇ॥੨॥
 ਕੋਈ ਪੜੈ ਬੇਦ ਕੋਈ ਕਤੋਬ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਓਵੈ ਨੀਲ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਪੇਦ॥੩॥
 ਕੋਈ ਕਹੈ ਤੁਰਕੁ ਕੋਈ ਕਹੈ ਹਿੰਦੂ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਬਾਛੈ ਭਿਸਤੁ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਰਗਿੰਦੂ॥

Some call Him, 'Raam, Raam', and some call Him, 'Khudaa-i'. Some serve Him as 'Gusain', others as 'Allah'..... Some bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage, and some make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Some perform devotional worship services, and some bow their heads in prayer. Some read the Vedas, and some the Koran. Some wear blue robes, and some wear white. Some call themselves Muslim, and some call themselves Hindu. Some yearn for paradise, and others long for heaven. (SGGS, M. 5, p. 885)

Sikh Gurus believed that each religion is divinely inspired because each represents one manifestation of Truth. All religions are equal, though not "the same" – as each provides a unique path to Truth. Religions are not Truth themselves, but they direct us toward Truth. Truth is ultimate, and it is a reality larger than any religion. Sikh Gurus' practical approach to Truth is evident in the way they tackled interfaith dialogue. They did not dialogue with religions or with religious systems; they dialogued rather, with people who were struggling to live out their religious values.

The primary doctrines of Sikhism emphasize interfaith

understanding, mutual respect, and harmony. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, proclaimed that the sharing of views and ideas should be a continuous process throughout one's life:

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥

As long as we are in this world, O Nanak, we must listen to others, as well as express ourselves to others. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 661)

The Sikh Gurus possessed a natural openness to other religions. They emphasized tolerance and particularly religious tolerance. To be a Sikh, one must respect all other religions. In this context, one of the Saint-poets of SGGS, Bhagat Kabir [4-6], articulates:

ਬੇਦ ਕਤੇਬ ਕਹਹੁ ਮਤ ਝੂਠੇ ਝੂਠਾ ਜੋ ਨ ਬਿਚਾਰੈ ॥

Do not say that the Vedas, the Bible, and the Koran are false. Those who do not contemplate them are false. (SGGS, Bhagat Kabir, p. 1350)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib teaches its followers to love all creation as God's manifestation. Acceptance of all faiths and interfaith tolerance and understanding are cardinal to the teachings of SGGS. The message of universal fraternity and equality is emphasized in Gurbani as:

ਸਭ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸਮਤੁ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖੈ ਸਭੁ ਆਤਮ ਰਾਮੁ ਪਛਾਨ ਜੀਉ ॥

Look upon all with equality and recognize the Supreme Soul (God), pervading among all. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 446)

During recent times, many scholars [7-28] have reported on the initiatives undertaken and contributions made by Sikh Gurus and their followers in the field of interfaith dialogue. Kazi Nurul Islam [7] reports that "Sikhism is a religion which was founded on the principles of interfaith understanding, mutual respect, and harmony. From the very beginning, the leaders and the followers of this tradition preached the principles of interfaith respect, dialogue, and understanding. To be a Sikh it is mandatory that he/she must respect and accept all other religions of the world and at the same time must protect, guard, and allow the free practice of the customs and rituals of others. The Guru Granth Sahib teaches its

followers to love all creation as God's own manifestation. Acceptance of all faiths and interfaith tolerance and understanding are basic to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib.”

Craig Philips enunciates [8]: “One of the beauties of Sikhism, and indeed a feature relevant for interfaith work, is that it holds a clear idea of “the religious other,” something I find in common with my own Islamic faith. Just as the Qur’an speaks of Jews, Christians, Sabians, and others, the sayings of Guru Nanak and passages of the Guru Granth Sahib speak of, and to, Muslims and Hindus. From these passages, it is clear that the society was well acquainted with the religious other, probably much more so than we are with our “religious others” today. Sikh scripture encourages Hindus and Muslims to be the best that they can be.”

Devinder Singh Chahal [9, 12] has described that interfaith dialogue definitely leads humanity to understand world religions in their real perspective and enabling their followers to resolve world problems amicably. Hardev Singh Virk [10, 25, 26] has reported that Guru Nanak's aim of interfaith dialogue was neither subjugation, nor domination, nor conversion, nor degradation of other traditions but to make them visualize the kernel of truth and implement it in their life for spiritual transformation. Nirmal Singh [27] articulates “Some authors have termed SGGGS as an interfaith scripture. It is respectful of all faiths and their sacred texts.”

Guru Amrit Kaur Khalsa [28] expresses “I believe that Sikhs are uniquely positioned to play a role in interfaith efforts, because of our rich interfaith history, our strong interfaith ethic, our love of *Seva* (service) and our commitment to manifesting the common good through the concept of *Sarbat da Bhala* – blessings and prosperity for all.”

Four Levels of Interfaith Dialogue

An eminent theologian M. Thomas Thangaraj has reported [29] the four levels of Interreligious or Interfaith

dialogue as (i) 'The Dialogue of Life (ii) 'The Dialogue of Action (iii) 'The Dialogue of Theological Exchange and (iv) 'The Dialogue of Religious Experience. It is interesting to note that since the inception of Sikhism, the Sikh Gurus and the Sikhs have been actively participating and contributing at all the four levels of interfaith dialogue, as is evident from the following discussion.

1. The Dialogue of Life

According to Thomas Thangaraj [29], the dialogue of life denotes the state where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joy and sorrows, their human problems, and preoccupations. Sikh Gurus broke social ranks based on faith, caste, gender, or race. They envisioned God as a formless force running through the cosmos and beyond. The Sikh doctrines urge the adherents to follow the concept of fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individuals and the unity of the nations. Guru Nanak proclaimed;

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮੋਈ ਜੀਉ ॥

As Gurmukh (God-conscious truthful being), looks upon all with equality; in each and every heart, the Divine Light is contained. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 599)

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, articulated:

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥

None is my enemy; no one is a stranger to me. I get along with everyone. (SGGS, M. 5, p. 1299)

Guru Nanak shared this vision with humanity. He took to the road selflessly. Accompanied by Mardana [30], a Muslim, the Guru traveled from Punjab to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Baghdad and Mecca in the West. Prevalent Hindu thoughts, at his time, advocated that no dialogue was possible with Abrahamic religions. Guru Nanak turned that orthodox thinking inside out back then. Guru Nanak had very cordial relations with many Muslims, e. g. Rai Bular Bhatti [31], of Talwandi, and Bhai Mardana, etc., throughout his life. Guru Nanak, and Guru Amardas, prohibited the *sati* (a traditional

Hindu practice of a widow immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre) and *purdah* (a religious and social practice of female seclusion prevalent among some Muslim and Hindu communities) practices involving women. Guru Amardas [32] in line with Guru Nanak's egalitarian principles, made Emperor Akbar sitting on the floor with the commoners to partake in the *Langar* (the community meals). Guru Arjan chose a Muslim saint, Hazrat Mian Mir [33] of Lahore, to lay the foundation of Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar. Guru Har Rai had very good relations [34] with Muslim Prince Dara Shikoh. Guru Gobind Singh had many Hindus and Muslims in his service and also as his ally, e. g. Bhai Nand Lal [35], Pir Budhu Shah [36], Gani Khan and Nabi Khan [37], Nihang Khan [38] of Ropar, etc. He had also enlisted 500 Pathan soliders [39] in his service on the recommendation of Sayeed Budhu Shah [36], a celebrated saint of Sadhaura, District Ambala, Punjab.

2. The Dialogue of Action

The dialogue of action, denotes the state in which persons of all religions collaborate, for the integral development and liberation of people [29]. They take up various activities for the well-being of humanity such as (i) to safeguard the rights of individuals, (ii) to promote people's aspirations for happiness, (iii) to protect nature, (iv) to show solidarity with the victims of injustice, and (v) to struggle for peace and justice.

According to Sikhism, God is not a tribal patriarch but the benign and benevolent God of the entire Creation, notwithstanding the climes, terrains, and geographical or political divisions. The hymns of SGGS include the prayer for the well being of all creatures:

ਸਭੇ ਜੀਅ ਸਮਾਲਿ ਅਪਣੀ ਮਿਹਰ ਕਰੁ ॥

By Thy grace, oh God, save and sustain all creation. (SGGS, M. 5, p. 1251)

The daily *ardas* (prayer) of the Sikhs is concluded with the couplet [40]:

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜਦੀ ਕਲਾ॥ ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੈ ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ॥

Nanak Naam Chardhikala, terye bhanye Sarbat da Bhala.

Nanak implore for love of God (which provides well being and bliss), Lord! with your mercy, let everyone prosper. (Sikh Ardas)

The history of the Sikhs reports a remarkable consistency in the pursuit of this ideal. It describes a consistent struggle, on their part, in defence of the right to free worship, for peoples of all faiths. *Guru ki Maseet* [41] is a historical mosque that was constructed by Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru, at the request of local Muslims of Sri Hargobindpur. Situated in Sri Hargobindpur town on the banks of River Beas, it is recognized, as a historical site, by UNESCO. Similarly, Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, laid down his life for the protection of the right of Hindus to freely practice their religion without interference or hindrance.

Inspired by the Sikh ideology, particularly – “*Sarbat da Bhalla*” (well-being for all), and to reach out to those in need, S. Ravinder (Ravi) Singh founded Khalsa Aid International [42], in 1999, on the occasion of the 300th birth anniversary of the Khalsa. At present, Khalsa Aid International, a UK-based humanitarian relief charity, provides support around the world to the victims of natural and man-made disasters such as floods, earthquakes, famine, and war, regardless of race, religion, borders.

The Sikh doctrines exhort the adherents to earn their livelihood by honest means and share their earning with others. It emphasizes that this is the path of righteousness, and, in this way, one can make an outstanding contribution to encourage an environment of peaceful co-existence among other members of the society.

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ ॥

He, who earns his living by honest means and shares his earnings with others, has discovered the path of righteousness, says Nanak. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 1245)

SGGS urges Sikhs to share their virtues, too, with others for the benefit of all.

ਜੇ ਗੁਣ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਸਾਜਨਾ ਮਿਲਿ ਸਾਝ ਕਰੀਜੈ ॥

If my friend! one has virtues, one must share them with others.
(SGGS, M. 1, p. 765)

Sikhs are encouraged to maintain good relations with all, despite the difference of caste, color, or creed.

ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਮੀਤੁ ਹਮ ਆਪਨ ਕੀਨਾ ਹਮ ਸਭਨਾ ਕੇ ਸਾਜਨ ॥

I am a friend to all; I am everyone's friend. (SGGS, M. 5, p. 671)

Several Sikh organizations are engaged in the dialogue of action for the betterment of the contemporary world and to encourage peace in world society. A few examples may suffice. The Sikh Coalition [43], U. S. A. is an active and enthusiastic participant in interfaith dialogue. Its goals are not only to learn about other faith traditions and create Sikh awareness but also to find common ground to prevent and end hate crime, school bullying, employment discrimination, and racial profiling. It also devotes its activities towards the realization of civil and human rights for all people. World Sikh Organization of Canada [44], another non-profit organization, is also actively dedicated to foster understanding and goodwill towards all nations, creeds, persuasions, and faiths in Canada since 1984. United Sikhs [45] is yet another U. N. affiliated, international non-profit, non-governmental, humanitarian relief, human development, and advocacy organization aimed at empowering those in need, especially disadvantaged and minority communities across the world. United Sikhs, with its chapters in America, Asia, and Europe, is pursuing projects for the spiritual, social, and economic empowerment of underprivileged and minority communities since 1999.

3. The Dialogue of Theological Exchange

The dialogue of theological exchange [29] happens when specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. During one of his travels, Guru Nanak visited Mecca [46], the holiest place of the Muslims. Muslim religious

leaders in Mecca, asked him, what still is a prime question locking civilizations in perpetual conflict: “Which of them is greater or truer - the Muslims (Abrahamic) or the Hindus (Indian/non-Abrahamic)?” Guru Nanak’s response to them, in the hub of Islam, was radically egalitarian. “None,” he replied. “Both sulk, caught as they are in meaningless rituals and not in meaningful deeds.”

**ਪੁਛਣ ਖੋਲ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੂੰ ਵਡਾ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੋਈ॥
ਬਾਬਾ ਆਖੇ ਹਾਜ਼ੀਆਂ ਸੁਭ ਅਮਲਾਂ ਬਾਝੇ ਦੋਵੇਂ ਰੋਈ॥**

They asked Baba Nanak to open his book and let them know whether Hindu is virtuous or the Muslim. Baba replied to the pilgrim Hajis, that, without good deeds, both will be lost. (Varaan, Bhai Gurdas, Var 1, Pauri 33, pp. 3-4)

He urged his audience to rise above conventional beliefs and follow the true religion of Universal humanism, which unites the human race as one family. For example, he explained the true meaning of the five prayers and what is required to become a true Muslim:

**ਪੰਜਿ ਨਿਵਾਜਾ ਵਖਤ ਪੰਜਿ ਪੰਜਾ ਪੰਜੇ ਨਾਉ ॥
ਪਹਿਲਾ ਸਚੁ ਹਲਾਲ ਦੁਇ ਤੀਜਾ ਖੈਰ ਖੁਦਾਇ ॥
ਚਉਥੀ ਨੀਅਤਿ ਰਾਸਿ ਮਨੁ ਪੰਜਵੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਨਾਇ ॥
ਕਰਣੀ ਕਲਮਾ ਆਖਿ ਕੈ ਤਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ਸਦਾਇ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਜੇਤੇ ਕੂੜਿਆਰ ਕੂੜੈ ਕੂੜੀ ਪਾਇ ॥**

The five prayers for the five times of day have five different names. Make truthfulness the first prayer, honest living the second one, the practice of charity the third one, cleansing the mind of evil thoughts the fourth one, and contemplation on God’s excellence the fifth one. And let good deeds become your kalma, the foundation of your faith. If a person practices the above, only then he/she is a true Muslim. Nanak says that otherwise practicing hypocrisy, one becomes false through and through. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 141)

Guru Nanak laid immense stress on virtuous conduct in worldly affairs. He emphasized on truthful living. In his hymns, he proclaimed:

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ॥

Truth is higher than everything, but higher still is truthful living. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 62)

During his interaction with a Hindu priest, Guru Nanak articulated:

ਸਾਲ ਗ੍ਰਾਮ ਬਿਪ ਪੂਜਿ ਮਨਾਵਹੁ ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਤੁਲਸੀ ਮਾਲਾ ॥
ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਿ ਬੇੜਾ ਬਾਂਧਹੁ ਦਇਆ ਕਰਹੁ ਦਇਆਲਾ ॥

O, Brahman! why do you worship a salgram (stone idol)? Make honest work your rosary of Tulsi (an aromatic plant, Ocimum Sanctum, revered by Hindus), Make contemplation on God the boat to take you across the ocean of the corrupting influence of the world. Pray for mercy to the Merciful one. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 1170)

Guru Nanak's interaction with Yogis, Qazi (Muslim Judge), and Hindu priest, reveals that he urged them to promote universal humanistic values.

ਸੋ ਜੋਗੀ ਜੋ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਪਛਾਣੈ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਏਕੋ ਜਾਣੈ ॥
ਕਾਜੀ ਸੋ ਜੋ ਉਲਟੀ ਕਰੈ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਜੀਵਤੁ ਮਰੈ ॥
ਸੋ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਜੋ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੈ ॥ ਆਪਿ ਤਰੈ ਸਗਲੇ ਕੁਲ ਤਾਰੈ ॥

A yogi is that, who recognizes the right way (Truth) and understands God through enlightenment. A qazi (Muslim Judge) is the one who remains unaffected by the corrupting worldly temptations and carries out justice in the light of Truth. A Brahman is the one who contemplates on the excellences of God. Such a Brahman enlightens himself and all his kin. (SGGS, M. 1, p. 662)

The Sikh Gurus exemplified the best in Sikhism and felt at home with all religions. They did not merely respect the other religion, but also included writings of Muslim Sufi saints and Hindu devotees in the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib - the sacred scripture of the Sikhs [47]. The compositions included in it are not only of the six Sikh Gurus but of many other prominent medieval saints and mystics (Jaidev, Namdev, Trilochan, Parmanand, Sadna, Ramanand, Kabir, Pipa, Beni, Dhanna, Sain, Farid, Surdas, Bhikhan, and Ravidas, etc.), belonging to diverse social, religious and cultural traditions. Through this compilation the Sikh Gurus exhorted the devotees of Islam, Christianity and all the four categories (*varnas*) of Hindus, that despite the adherence to their respective religions, they must lead a virtuous life of a God-conscious truthful being (Gurmukh):

ਕੁਰਾਣੁ ਕਤੇਬ ਦਿਲ ਮਾਹਿ ਕਮਾਹੀ ॥ ਦਸ ਅਉਰਾਤ ਰਖਹੁ ਬਦ ਰਾਹੀ ॥

Practice within your heart the teachings of the Koran and the Bible; restrain the ten sensory organs from straying into evil.

(SGGS, M. 5, p. 1083)

ਬੇਦ ਕਤੇਬ ਸਿਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਸਭਿ ਸਾਸਤ ਇਨ੍ ਪੜਿਆ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥

ਏਕੁ ਅਖਰੁ ਜੋ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਜਾਪੈ ਤਿਸ ਕੀ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਸੋਈ ॥

ਖੜੀ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣ ਸੂਦ ਵੈਸ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਚਹੁ ਵਰਨਾ ਕਉ ਸਾਝਾ ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪੈ ਉਧਰੈ ਸੋ ਕਲਿ ਮਹਿ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਾਝਾ ॥

The mere reading of the holy books (e. g. Vedas, the Bible, the Simritees and the Shastras, etc.) cannot bring salvation. One who, as a God-conscious truthful being (Gurmukh), contemplate on the love of God, leads a virtuous life. This teaching is common to the people of all the four categories (varnas) i. e. Kshatriyas, Brahmins, Sudras, and Vaisyas. A person is released from the ill-effects of worldly passions if, as a Gurmukh, he/she imbibes the love of God (Naam) in one's life. Nanak says that in the present age (Kali Yuga), God is permeating the hearts of every being.

(SGGS, M. 5, pp. 447-48)

The *Sidh Gohst* (Dialogue with the Sages), as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib [4-6] (pp. 938-946), is a unique example of interfaith dialogue. It recounts a meeting of Guru Nanak with a group of Hindu ascetics (*siddhs*) who had renounced the world and were living in the caves of the Himalayas. They believed that mental and physical exercises were necessary for acquiring magical powers (known as *siddhis*) that would lead to the attainment of salvation. In this dialogue, Guru Nanak repudiates the very idea of renunciation, as generally understood, portraying the acts of going to a forest and abandoning the needs of the body as mere stunts. In a highly convincing manner, he opines that the true renunciation lies in self-less love towards God, which alone has the power to free us from the shackles of the material world.

4. The Dialogue of Religious Experience

According to Thomas Thangaraj, the dialogue of religious experience [29] denotes the state, where persons

rooted in their religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance about prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute Truth.

Sikhs believe that there is one and only one Eternal Truth or God. To fulfill our lives and rightly flourish, we need to connect to God, who is the epitome of all virtues. God loves humans and reaches out to all through Grace (*Gurprasad*) or the True Guru. By eradicating *haumai* (ego or 'me-ness'), a person can turn from being a *manmukh* (ego-centric) to a *Gurmukh* (God-conscious Truthful being). Guru Arjan Dev asserts:

ਘਰਿ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸਭਨੀ ਥਾਈ ॥

Inwardly and outwardly, God is everywhere.

(SGGS, M. 5, p. 1340)

As God reaches out to all humans, everyone is equal and religious identity is meaningless. Advocating the parenthood of God, Sikhism urges its adherents to treat everyone equally. Guru Arjan affirms such a viewpoint as;

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੂ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰ ਹਾਈ ॥

The One God is our father; we are the children of the One God.

(SGGS, M. 5, p. 611)

An exemplar for this, from Sikh history, is Bhai Kanhaiya [48], who was a disciple of Guru Tegh Bahadur and was requested to establish the *Sevapanthi* order of the Sikhs by Guru Gobind Singh. He was known for pouring water for all the wounded soldiers of the battlefield, no matter whether they were Sikhs or fighting against the Sikhs (whether Muslims or Hindus).

Religions at best can point the way to God, but from the Sikh perspective, this cannot be confused with God. *Naam Japna* (mindfulness of God's presence) is opening oneself to the way of God. In the Sikh worldview, what counts is how people live, not what they believe. Distinctive features of Sikhi include the equality of women and men, rejection of priesthood, belief in one and only one Unborn God (as in Judaism and Islam) combined with a belief in rebirth, *samsara*, the Void and the Middle Way (as in Buddhism).

As Sikhs believe that the world is to be continually improved, so the Sikh ideal is a saint-soldier, a saint allowing the love of God to shine through them and a soldier connecting with others to reduce darkness (of evil forces/passions) in the world. As a community, Sikhs have championed progressive social, political, and economic change in India and around the world, due to the teachings on equality, democratic decision-making (the Khalsa [49] institution), the dignity of labour, and the importance of sharing and social justice.

Sikhi began with the teachings of Guru Nanak which were composed in the context of but distinguished from Hinduism and Islam of his day. An example of it is that he names *Azrael* as the angel of death. Though it is a name found in the Book of Tobit, yet *Azrael* is a significant personality, both in the Old Testament and the Qur'an too. At the same time, Guru Nanak talks about *Yama*, a god of death mentioned in Hindu and Buddhist scriptures.

Though Sikhs regard their ten Gurus as the exemplar for everything spiritual, yet some Sikhs, too, act as role models to them in specific ways. Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred Sikh scripture encourages the Sikhs to do selfless service to effect the maximum social benefit and to meet together to inspire each other. Some outstanding examples, who followed/follow this guidance are Bhagat Puran Singh, the founder of All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, Amritsar [50], Sant Balbir Singh Seechawal, the Eco-Baba [51], and Ravinder (Ravi) Singh, the founder of Khalsa Aid [52].

In terms of society, Sikhs are taught that,

ਨਾ ਕੇ ਮੇਰਾ ਦੁਸਮਨੁ ਰਹਿਆ ਨ ਹਮ ਕਿਸ ਕੇ ਬੈਰਾਈ ॥

No one is my enemy, and I am no one's enemy.

(SGGS, M. 5, p. 671)

Sikhs believe that God is not limited to one person, religion, or language. Therefore, there should not be boundaries as we are all part of one humanity – there are no outsiders. It is visible in the *Langar* (community kitchen). Anyone belonging to any religion, ethnic background, social class or

gender, is welcome to eat the same food as everyone else, free and without any distinction.

Guru Tegh Bahadur [53], the ninth Sikh Guru, led a non-violent political campaign, against the tyranny of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. He sacrificed his life to protect three fundamental human rights: (i) to secure for everyone the liberty to worship, (ii) to uphold the inviolable dignity of every person's private and personal point of contact with God and their right to observe *dharma*, and (iii) to support every virtuous person's imprescriptible right to pursue their vision of happiness and self-fulfillment. It is, therefore, fair to say that Sikhs believe in individual human rights: freedom of worship, freedom of conscience, and the right to pursue happiness. Sikhs believe that progress in the world will be based on the spiritual sovereignty of the individual.

In terms of politics, there is an emphasis on persuasion and consent. Sikhs reject coercion or force as a method of government. They, therefore, reject the justification of oppression. In 1606 Guru Arjun became the first Sikh martyr [54] and was executed by the Mughal Emperor Jehangir. It followed the Guru's refusal to pay taxes in support of ordinary people who could not afford to pay taxes due to a poor harvest. The Emperor felt he had the divine authority of a ruler; the Guru would not accept this point.

Sikhs have an active obligation to disobey any law that violates these principles. For example, Guru Nanak Dev broke a ban on music in Baghdad, and Guru Hargobind commanded Sikhs to bear arms and ride horses in violation of Islamic law on dhimmitude [55], which reserved these activities for Muslims.

In terms of economics, the idea that people have the right to pursue happiness and self-fulfillment is related to the proposition that "no one shall exploit another." Until one humanity perspective is accepted, economic injustice will continue. Guru Tegh Bahadur asserted that no one should exploit anyone.

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥

One who does not frighten anyone, and who is not afraid of anyone else - says Nanak, listen, O mind! call him spiritually wise. (SGGS, M. 9, p. 1427)

Thus, in the world adorned with religious pluralism, Sikhs acknowledge, appreciate, and actively participate in interfaith dialogue, at its all level, to help enable people to coexist without sectarian strife or persecution of religious minorities.

Conclusion

There are plenty of resources within the religious realm to promote peace, good governance, and human rights around the world. When there are divisions between religious communities and there are no avenues for engagement between them, this exacerbates distrust that can lead to violence, and so there is a need for creating relationships between communities as a way to prevent violence from occurring. There are many ways through which we can approach interfaith dialogue, but it is essential that in all its forms, we must involve a certain amount of patience and humility. Dialogue should begin by focusing on things we have in common and on practical things we can do together. The power of religion can be used to unify divergent factions/diverse faith communities by establishing and maintaining constructive channels of communication and sustainable collaboration. Thus, interfaith dialogue can play a major role in the promotion of global peace.

Evidently, Sikhs welcome inter-faith dialogue and actively engage in such endeavors, as the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev did take part in it hundreds of years ago. Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains the record of his debate with the Siddhas, and the accounts of his life (*Janam Sakhis*) discuss his meetings with Hindus and Muslims. Guru Nanak's collection of the hymns of saints from a variety of traditions, his establishment of the institutions of *Sangat* (a congregation of

holy persons), *Pangat* (sitting in a row at the same level as in taking Langar) and *Langar* (provision of free vegetarian food to all), and his insistence that people of any faith could know the Truth (God), meaning that inter-faith dialogue has always been a part of the Sikh ethos. It is symbolized in the widely held belief that the foundation stone of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) was laid by a Muslim saint, Sai Mian Mir. Thus the Sikhs welcome the modern world of religious pluralism and the emergence of humanism, these values being inherent within their traditions. They acknowledge that in the present era, inter-faith dialogue and cooperation are crucial, as only this concept carries the promise for a peaceful future of the contemporary world. Currently, many Sikh organizations are consistently striving for this much-cherished goal of humanity, by actively participating in/contributing to interfaith dialogue activities throughout the world.

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Interfaith Engagement Through The Sikh Prism

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Abstract

In the changing world that we live in, one new challenge seems to be how do we live our faith together with the others? To me the message of Guru Nanak came beckoning - live truthfully by the principles of your faith and all should be well. My interfaith involvement helped me learn that this precept may indeed offer hope for us all to make our societies way better.

Introduction

The Interfaith movement as evidenced contemporaneously has developed over the last century in the Western societies. Interfaith relations received a different kind of attention when after the end of the Second World War, the enormity of Jewish persecution by the Nazis came to light and the Christian Churches were blamed for their complicity of silence. This realization led to a flurry of activity by the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church to condemn all forms of anti-Semitism and promote dialogue with the Jewish community. The 9/11 terror attacks and the ensuing Global War on Terror led by the US have demonstrated the kind of conflicts that can so easily erupt in the emerging global society with its multiplicity of unresolved religious issues as potential flash points.

The United Nations Organization and its affiliate bodies

who have been engaged in trying to help defuse conflicts and promote measures for peace and harmony seem to have realized the need for inter-religious harmony as a pre-requisite for societal peace and have over the years initiated a number of programs under their direct aegis or in collaboration with other international bodies engaged in promoting interfaith relations.

Indian Setting

India possibly is the most religiously and culturally diverse country in the world. Five faith traditions: Jaina, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Ahmediya Muslim were founded in the Indian sub- continent in addition to many traditions whose imprint can be detected in pluralistic religious practices witnessed among its people. India has the highest number of Muslims, Jains, Sikhs living in any country in the world and has been home to some of the earliest Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian populations. India has over twenty languages with their own alphabets, corpus of literature and cultural appurtenances, history as well as historical baggage.

This diversity that the country offers has been a mixed blessing. While certainly contributing to richness of its culture, the changing mix of people of diverse faith persuasions, languages, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, generated its own stresses on the society to maintain peace and harmony. The British adopted and preserved prevailing socio-cultural division along religion, caste, class, language, etc. to subserve the convenience of their administrators.

This policy had a contingent effect in that it prevented a thaw in the separatist relations between Hindus and Muslims. A measure introduced by the British, separate electorate for minorities through Morley-Minto Reform of 1909, only sharpened the divide. Creation of a legislative law-making body under the Government of India Act in 1935 did not help much because the Muslim minority could not influence decisions in the elected body. Things got worse and India and Pakistan became independent on August 15, 1947, in the midst

of raging communal strife leading to the largest forced migration in history, accompanied by terrible violence and death of around 500,000.

The divide has continued and language, religion and ethnicity have kept challenging the democratic character of a pluralistic India [1]. Hindu - Muslim relations have been marked by mistrust and communal tensions have not been confined to Hindus and Muslims. Sikhs have endured some of the most brutal violence and incidences of violence against Christians have also taken place. Hindus were also selectively attacked by militant Sikhs in Punjab during the turbulent 80's and 90's. The above perhaps is the main reason why India today, while very vibrant, presents a picture of tenuous societal peace and harmony.

Interfaith Activity in India

Interfaith dialogue isn't new to India. In the 16th century Emperor Akbar encouraged tolerance among people of various faith backgrounds by starting 'Din-i-Elahi' (Religion of God) movement [2]. There is evidence in the Sikh scriptural literature that the Gurus engaged in interfaith conversations and experienced support from the other faith groups. These encounters however seem to have been episodic and even though some of the events did serve to defuse tensions at the time, they did not induce any tradition of interfaith conversations as a means to reduce interreligious conflict or to promote understanding between groups warring over religion.

Contemporaneously there is no shortage of interfaith organizations and more are coming up by the day. In Delhi alone, apart from interfaith events organized by the Bahai Centre, Islamic Centre, Church groups, new groups have been formed primarily aimed at organizing conferences, colloquiums, seminars and similar meets. Examples include: The Interfaith Foundation supports movement of Interfaith for peace and

harmony among people of different faiths. GPF-India, Delhi is dedicated to bringing Peace and Harmony through Inter culture, Interfaith Partnership, Healthy Family and Culture of Service. Indialogue, a dialogue and peace foundation, was founded in New Delhi in 2005, by a group of Turkish and Indian people inspired by Mevlana Jalal-ad-Din Rumi, to promote and to encourage local, national, international, inter-civilizational, intercultural, and interfaith dialogue. Interfaith Coalition for Peace is involved in non-formal interfaith, academic courses and advocacy of community care.

The Temple of Understanding, an International Interfaith Organization, was founded in 1960 by Juliet Hollister, an American Interfaith activist. India Chapter of Temple of Learning has been actively led by philanthropist, scholar, politician and interfaith activist Dr. Karan Singh. The organization continues to be active in promoting interfaith amity using lectures, seminars and conferences at its active centers in various cities of India.

Commission for interreligious Dialogue of Archdiocese of Delhi is one of several Christian groups actively engaged in the interfaith actions in National Capital Region (NCR). On June 30, 2020, the Commission organized an Interfaith Prayer for the soldiers killed at Galwan Valley; victims and treating doctors, nurses, paramedics who died of Coronavirus pandemic and victims of disasters like the mass exodus of migrant laborers and the Amphan cyclone.

The Indian Government had set up National Foundation for Communal Harmony, an autonomous body under the Union Home Ministry, to promote “India free from communal and all other forms of violence, where all citizens especially children & youth live together in peace & harmony”. The Foundation has not met in the midst of so many untoward happenings in the last year or more [3] when tensions were high due to riots in Delhi and other calamities. Thankfully interventions by some faith groups brought exemplary relief to the suffering humanity.

Some of the luminaries of the global interfaith activity are India based or of Indian origin. Some names are Dalai Lama, Bawa Jain Secretary-General, The World Council of Religious Leaders, Bhai Mohinder Singh of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha, UK among others.

Sikhs & Interfaith Interface [4]

Sikh living ethics preaches all humans as part of the same fraternity, animus against none and harmonious relations with one and all [5]. The *sangat* – the community of devotees to which all are welcome and none is excluded, provide the anchor for altruistic and spiritual pursuits and if liberation comes to any of them, all associated with them will also get liberated [6] – shared human destiny.

Guru Nanak was deeply troubled by the suffering of people due to institutionalized inequities and inequality; unjust and corrupt state apparatus; oppressive and apathetic governance, et al. He was critical of apathy in common people [7]. Nor did he appreciate the people opting to survive through a display of outward conformity with a culture in which ruling elite intrude upon unsuspecting people, harass them and share the fruits of their corrupt practices [8].

The Sikh living ethics, therefore, would seem to not cause differences with other faith groups on core societal issues of peace, justice and caring for the weak and the poor. There are some Sikh practices that possibly would be an asset in interfaith setting. Some of the important ones are:

- Sikh houses of worship and worship service are open to one and all. Sikhs believe that the door to liberation is open to high and lowly alike, dependant only on their deeds.
- Sikh *Kirtan* (hymn singing) is singing of hymns in praise of the divine and has a place of centrality in Sikh worship. The Sikh scripture is written in poetry and was set to music by the Gurus. The practice of *kirtan* goes back to the time of Guru Nanak and is an inspiring and calming spiritual experience by Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.
- Sikh worship service invariably includes a fellowship meal -

langar. This is open to all and has always been popular with visitors of all faith persuasions.

- Seva or voluntary service is another feature of Sikh worship commended strongly in their scripture and visible in their praxis. It is heart-warming to see devotees of all ages and various backgrounds vying with one another to get the visitors shoes to place in a safe pigeon hole and possibly polish them before their return – a seva considered to be an expression of utter humility.
- Socially responsible behavior is associated with Sikhs. The religion teaches for Sikhs to earn honest living, support their families and share some with those in need of help. Significantly one hardly sees a Sikh beggar.
- Willing to help, even sacrifice – this characteristic is so evident from Sikh history and from the number of disproportionate Sikhs who have made sacrifices for social causes through history.

Some Inhibiting Factors

The above analysis would leave us with the impression that Sikhs would welcome interfaith events of all varieties in Gurdwaras as may have been witnessed, say in some Churches. This, however, does not happen. In practice, Sikhs tend to be fastidious about keeping the activities at Gurdwaras to be confined to worship that includes langar and would not even contemplate multi-faith prayers in the Gurdwara setting or allow interfaith events with cultural overtones at Gurdwara premises. Some Sikhs also tend to be critical of others not adhering to their mode of showing respect to Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Scripture) as Sikhs do. Similar inhibitions do constrain all traditions to varying degrees, but Sikhs a bit more!

Discrimination Based on Religion or Religious Observances

Sikh experience of problems that they have encountered on account of being Sikhs shows that the cause for the

incidents could broadly be rooted in religious provocation, different political aspirations, economic causes, cultural prejudice, conflict due to certain religious observances, misdirected hate and plain discrimination. We will look briefly at some examples of the above and try to fathom if the Sikh experience suggests any possibilities for interfaith intervention.

This is the most common form of grievance Sikhs have in all Diaspora societies. In India any religious discrimination that may happen is normally not sanctioned by the authority though it was reported in 2012 [9] that a Private School in Shimla, did not allow a Sikh boy to wear turban though there was no restriction on *patka*. Generally interfaith groups are sympathetic to the faith group being discriminated against and would extend co-operation.

From the above it can be surmised that Sikhs happen to be acutely vulnerable to random or organized prejudice, discrimination and violence against them, underscoring importance of need to leverage their abilities to debunk their negative stereotypes and to try create humane understanding about them. The reality is that Sikhs, in spite of relatively small numbers, can be found living dispersed almost all over the world inviting curious looks due to their visible identity and envy for their subdued but relatively spread-out success. A Stanford University Peace Laboratory study [2013] revealed that roughly 70% of American public cannot identify a pictured Sikh man as a Sikh; about half associate the turban with Islam and about half think Sikhs are a sect of Islam. They were dismayed to find that anti-turban bias exists even among Americans who have greater understanding of Sikhism [10].

Why Interfaith?

We want now to try and examine what is it that Sikhs can expect to gain from participating in interfaith actions or leveraging their interfaith relations. As we have seen before the purpose of interfaith activism is to try and disentangle the causes for historical hiatus among different faith groups, facilitate interfaith understanding, promote societal peace and

harmony, which if frayed, may also be quickly restored through multi-faith co-operation.

As we have said before Sikhs are a minority in all countries in the world. They try to cope with the issues that confront them as a religious minority mostly by themselves. The reader would have discerned that the character of problems that Sikhs encounter in India is different and more complex than in other countries because effects of hangover from historical factors tends to become the dominant influence.

Sikh activism should help the community to get involved in local corporate life and advance the community's causes. Interfaith activism is a part of that total package and my sense is that such conversations at multiple levels between Semitic traditions have helped and there is a certain degree of optimism at the progress, albeit slow, that has been made. While some such conversations do take place within the cloistered environment of inter faith groups, creation of specific mutual understandings between any faith groups would need direct and dedicated conversations with clear objectives.

In India Sikhs need to engage with Hindus and Muslims in serious, multi dimensional, multi level and multi-disciplinary dialogue on the lines of Christian, Jewish and Muslim exchanges in the West. These conversations should cover agreed topics with both sides represented by persons who would be in a position to help the conversations move towards the objectives set. It should be helpful if such effort has the support of the apex religious institutions of the faiths involved.

Let us now turn to the simpler but often experienced situation where the purpose of interfaith engagement is to further mutual understanding in a multi-faith setting or to address any specific issue collectively by the group. My experience is that the interfaith encounters do have limitations in informing the lay public about other traditions because they do not have any mechanism to get the message of mutual

respect and reassurance developed through their conversations out to the lay public.

That need of Sikhs is likely to be answered better by proactively engaging at all the levels alongside other faiths on issues of shared concern. This may need new or restructuring of existing Sikh organizations to be able to voice community's views; protect rights and rightful positions in the larger community; showcase religious and cultural heritage; and engage with others in conversations to the extent possible. For doing this Sikhs will also have to spot and nurture those who may be able to contribute to these endeavours; encourage them to get involved and keep such initiatives going by providing sustained institutional support to those involved. Interfaith engagements are increasingly being found helpful to build and sustain peace and harmony in modern, diverse societies. Sikhs have to be part of that quest.

Sikh Interfaith Engagement

It's common to find Ph. Ds. among the Clergy and the Rabis. Even lay Christians and Jews participating in interfaith actions mostly have been through theological schools, seminaries or attended seminars, workshops, conferences and conversations on religious/theological subjects. Thus while representatives for Christian and Jewish denominations are mostly clerical staff of a faith organization; Buddhists and Bahais representatives are mostly lay persons who may be associated with their congregations and volunteering on their behalf; Muslims are often represented by Imams, Hindus, Jainas or Sikhs invariably are represented by volunteer lay persons with or without a link to the management of their house of worship or organized availability of community support.

It would therefore seem that some of the above problems could get resolved if Sikhs were represented by persons engaged in religious work as a vocation. But finding a Sikh *granthi*, *ragi* or *kathakaar*, who has the knowledge, awareness, sensitivity and facility in terms of linguistic ability and conceptual clarity to participate in these activities could turn

out to be an exercise in futility except few notable exceptions.

In this setting, while the interfaith groups were welcoming of all faith traditions, Sikhs mostly remained unrepresented till a volunteer took some interest and offered to get involved. This lacuna can and does cause many difficulties. Firstly, the person who may chose to get involved in interfaith activity may not be close to the managing team of the house of worship. Even with some links the person may find it difficult to get community involvement and support for interfaith events. Since sharing of worship experience is an important part of building interfaith understanding and is best done at the Gurdwara, interfaith activity always needs the help of Gurdwara. The volunteer representative therefore should work to develop support within the faith community.

Difficulties experienced by Sikh interfaith activist are compounded by the fact that the Sikh community is spread out. There may be occasions when an interfaith group is able to visit the Gurdwara only on a week day. Coordinating arrangements at the Gurdwara in such a situation could turn out to be an uphill task especially if there is no resident *Granthi* – a none too rare situation in the Diaspora.

Several of the problems we have discussed can be more easily addressed if interfaith engagement is made part of the programs and projects supported by the apex Sikh religious organizations like the Akal Takht and the SGPC. Fortunately, the Jathedar of Akal Takht is known to have participated in interfaith events and SGPC and DSGMC continue to be involved in a variety of initiatives to render relief assistance to the victims belonging to all faiths due to various causes and also receive many interfaith groups visiting the major Sikh shrines. As such they get involved with the adherents of other faiths on a continuing basis but their interface with the interfaith organizations can hardly be termed as active.

The irony is that the Sikh interfaith involvement that goes back to the time of Gurus, it contemporaneously is taking place in a highly fragmented manner. This makes its possible

gains more elusive. The drift is due to the total disconnect of Sikh interfaith engagement with the apex Sikh polity and religious leadership. Since Akal Takht has endorsed Sikh environmental initiatives, actions to improve interfaith understanding would be a natural and much needed extension.

Going Forward

Given the direction, in which the societies are evolving, initiatives for promoting inter-religious dialogue and understanding will arise at various levels and emerge from various directions. Our institutions, especially community organizations and the academia could take lead in this regard. However, for the movement to move beyond the elitist circles in metropolitan cities, it must enlarge and broaden the possible range of participants in these activities.

A start can be made by theme-based workshops, programs, conversations, discussion groups, retreats, etc. being organized by community organizations within and across the faith groups. Participation in these activities offers a great learning experience and those who get involved come out the richer, learning not only about other faith traditions, but also a lot more about their own.

Sikhism has had an open and tolerant tradition. The Gurus took part in and encouraged dialogue. Sikh tradition of martyrdom and the supreme sacrifices made by the Gurus and generation after generation of their followers for the ideals of basic human dignity, equality and freedom teach us that the highest aspiration of faith is the creation of universal brotherhood - *Aayi panthi sagal jamaati* [11]. Sikhs should, in keeping with faith tenets and tradition, initiate programs and projects which help bring the divided society closer to Guru's ideal of - *Ek pita, ekas ke hum barak* – us all treating one another as children of one father [12]. That would be living Sikhi, promoting *sarbat ka bhala*, well being of one and all, and interfaith engagement in action!

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Sikhism and Religious Pluralism

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Abstract

Religious Plurality is the need of the present times as the World has become a global village due to progress in Science and technology. No religion can claim to be the sole valid way of worship and no religion can claim to be the norm for other religions; still we fail to accept the plurality of religion as a divine gift. In the philosophy of religion, three different attitudes among different faith-communities have generally been accepted - exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikh faith, is the best example of Religious Pluralism as it comprises the revelatory hymns, called bani or sabd, of six of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and certain holy men coming from the Bhakti and Sufi movements.

Introduction

Religious plurality, as a fact of human existence, is as old as the religious history of humankind. However, the impact of social and theological problems arising from this plurality has begun to be experienced with much more seriousness than it was say a hundred years back. There are several reasons for it, but more important among them has been the scientific and technological advancement especially in the fields of transportation and communication which has transformed the world into a global village and 'the world-population' into one 'global community'. The cultural, religious and racial boundaries have been broken on an unprecedented scale and no part of the world is now closed within itself. People with different

religious persuasions are so placed as to live together and interact with one another on almost daily basis. In the present situation, attitude of one faith-community towards the other is sure to affect the world at large. An attitude of 'acceptance and appreciation' of the 'other' can help bring about peace and harmony among different faith-communities whereas the attitude of 'superiority' is likely to lead to mutual hatred and violence.

Even though it remains a fact that "the religious life of mankind from now on, if it is to be lived at all, will be lived in a context of religious pluralism," [1] yet people of different faith-communities remain 'a medley of peoples' trying little to understand the 'other' and appreciate their distinct 'otherness'. They are neighbours by necessity but prefer to remain aliens by choice. It is well accepted that no community can today claim itself to be the cultural, religious or historical centre of the world. No religion can claim to be the sole valid way of worship and no religion can claim to be the norm for other religions. Still we fail to accept the plurality of religion as a divine gift, as a Jewish theologian says: "It is not necessary for the entire flock to graze on one pasture or to enter and leave the master's house through just one door. It would be neither in accord with the Shepherd's wisdom nor conducive to the growth of the flock" [2].

As it happens, people generally avoid making any serious attempt at understanding a religion they do not belong to. They fail to accept that our religious commitment should not make us blind to the virtues in other faiths, to the ultimate Truth in their scriptures and to the Divine Presence in their sacred places. There were and there still are people who refuse to hear God's voice in religions other than their own. Different faith-communities prefer to hold on to their respective religions, cultures and languages, and even to their cuisines. They live side by side but separately within the same socio-cultural set-up.

All religions aim at the spiritual uplift of human beings apart from their emancipation in social life. The scriptural

literature of all major religions of the world teaches us the values of love and respect for all, truthfulness and contentment in individual personal life and a philanthropic attitude in social life. If religion has been used by persons wielding political or religious/priestly authority for creating mutual mistrust and hatred among different faith-communities, the fault does not lie at the religion's door: the political authorities want to perpetuate their power and the priestly class helps them by providing scriptural/divine sanction even to their oppressive and exploitative policies so as to retain their own elitist status in society.

Tripolar Typology of Religions

In the philosophy of religion, three different attitudes among different faith-communities have generally been accepted - exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism [3]. An exclusivist attitude is based on belief in the myth of the superiority; sometimes a faith-community begins to proclaim that their religion is the only way and their prophet is the only Savior to enable man realize the ultimate objective of life. They try to under-rate the ideology and culture of the other by comparing their scriptural truth with the practices of the other, without realizing that there is a wide gap between the two in all traditions. Such an attitude of superiority also implies converting others to 'my way' which implicitly means devaluing the religion of the other. It consigns other religions to spiritual darkness and their followers to damnation. The theologians of this school hold that "the difference between our religion and other religions, to which it is sought to liken them, is none other than like the difference between the living, sentient man and the image carved by the workman from wood" [4].

This exclusivist attitude deems other religions fake and other faith-communities pagan, thus causing mistrust and hatred among different communities. History stands witness that politically and militarily strong religious communities and nations have always used this premise to fulfill their imperialistic designs. Such absolute truth-claims as held by this school can

be - and are - easily exploited to incite inter-community hatred and violence: that is why “there is a causal link between claims of religious superiority and calls to religious violence. If peace-filled religious people, therefore, proclaim defensively that the militants (either the “terrorists” or the “imperialists”) are misusing and exploiting their religion, they must ask themselves *why* it is so easy for extremist leaders or politicians to exploit their religion. They must ask themselves whether claims of superiority – claims to have “the only Savior” or the “last revelation” or “the highest enlightenment” – are among the primary reasons why their religion is so easily used as a divine seal of approval for violence” [5].

Then a time came in human history when easy availability of authentic literature in the West about religions of the world shattered the earlier ill-informed hostile stereotypes of other faiths; changing patterns of mobility (especially during the post-War period) shattered the old conceptions of religious history; and advancements in the means of communication and transportation helped in transforming the entire humankind into a small ‘global community’. This brought about a ‘Copernicus change’ from one’s all-knowing ‘let us teach you’ attitude to ‘listening to whatever wisdom comes from the other tradition’. This inclusivist attitude is somewhat tolerant of other religions but still holds that truth is limited to ‘my’ faith only. The protagonists of this attitude favour dialogue with other religions, but understandably the result of the dialogue is pre-determined in their favour. People of other faiths are no more looked down upon as pagans but at the same time their religion is not taken as equally valid and true and the ultimate truth lay only with their own faith and that salvation was also possible only through their faith/prophet.

This inclusivist view seems a sort of bridge between the no longer acceptable exclusivism of the past and the newly emerging view of pluralism. The protagonists of this view, no doubt, conceive their religion as one among many but without sacrificing their religion’s normative significance as a universal way. They downgrade other religions as penultimate

versions of their own faith. This is akin to what a Christian theologian says about the role of Christ and Christianity in the salvation of others: "It is Christ alone who is received as light when grace visits a Brahmin, a Buddhist and a Muhammadan reading his own scriptures" [6]. They continue to believe, like the exclusivists, that the ultimate truth lies with their religion/prophet, and, thus, favour conversion to their faith.

There is another view which holds that different religions of the world are finite manifestations in different historical and cultural contexts of the infinite One. According to it, there can be no one way to the realization of God rather there are many paths and many Saviors to help people in their pursuit. No religion can boast of being the full revelation and therefore the norm for all other religions: no voice is God's last Word. This pluralist [7] attitude, now being supported by many theologians coming from almost all religious traditions, rejects the myth of religious superiority and provides validity to all faiths. It considers all religions authentic and genuine, and capable of providing salvation to man. This is quite akin to what Abraham Heschel means when he says that God's voice speaks in many languages, communicating itself in a diversity of intuitions. The word of God never comes to an end. No word is God's last word [8]. Obviously, all religions share something common among themselves but still they have genuine differences because each presents a vision of God, world and humanity from a localized, historically particular perspective. Since all great world religions with their diverse teachings and practices constitute authentic paths to the supreme good, everybody should have the freedom to practice the faith of his choice. While mutual witnessing promotes mutual respect, proselytizing, which is central to exclusivism, devalues the faith of the other. Inter-religious dialogue and engagement are accepted the way as it helps different religions to relate to one another, heal antagonisms among them and work for eco-human welfare.

God is infinite, but all historical religions are, by definition, finite and particular. Hence, differences among the

varied religions become inevitable, but this only goes to reveal the richness of the eternal and infinite truth. Different religions of the world have also been compared with the branches of a tree; these branches are different but have the same source for their sustenance. However, this in no way diminishes the significance or value of a particular religion vis-à-vis any other. It is just like the sciences, which study the natural world; they do not claim monopoly of wisdom for a particular branch of study nor do they quarrel about the superiority of one science over the other. This view recommends us to understand and appreciate the religious beliefs and practices of others but without putting our faith into parenthesis; we need to understand and examine the faith of the other, yet we must listen attentively to the faith of the other as this is unfolded by the believer himself, without pre-judging that faith and without abandoning our own commitment. This is a very delicate task, and a theologian explains it by saying that we should approach another people, another culture, another religion by taking off our shoes because the place we are going to approach is holy.

Sikhism and Pluralist View

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), the scripture of the Sikh faith, comprises the revelatory hymns, called *bani* or *sabd*, of six of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and certain holy men coming from the Bhakti and Sufi movements. No doubt, it was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606) during 1603-04, but the practice of preservation of *bani* in written form had begun with Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the faith, himself. Later in 1705, Guru Gobind Singh added to this volume the hymns of his spiritual predecessor, Guru Tegh Bahadur; there has been no other addition or alteration in the text since then. Sikhs revere the Guru Granth Sahib as their 'living Guru' but do not worship it as an idol at the altar. It is the presiding deity in all Sikh places of worship and the guiding principle for the Sikhs in all spheres of life; they have abiding faith in it or, more precisely, in the Word as contained

in it. It is also in this context that it has been taken as both the result and the foundation of the Sikh belief-system.

No doubt, the Sikh scripture (SGGS) contains only the versified hymns in praise of God, but since the Sikh ontological belief perceives Divine immanence in the material world, there is emphasis – both explicit and implicit – in various scriptural hymns on the human social and ethical concerns as well. A scriptural hymn states that ‘the best of all religions is the one which favours remembrance of Name Divine alongside performance of noble, righteous deeds in this life’: ਸਰਬ ਧਰਮ ਮਹਿ ਸ਼੍ਰੇਸਟ ਧਰਮੁ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਕਰਮੁ ॥ [9].

Thus, endeavours to better human spiritual as well as social life need to be made simultaneously. Service to humanity is deemed service rendered unto God, and feeding a hungry is deemed as good as making an offering in the name of the Guru – *garib da munh, guru ki golak*. In other words, we can say that Sikhism does not limit itself to the articulation or propagation of certain theoretical spiritual assumptions rather it exhorts beings to live those precepts and also actively strive against the powers that be which try to suppress these fundamental human values.

The first intimations of the cosmic vision of the Sikh faith can be seen in the first words the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, uttered after coming out of the trance of a mystical encounter with Nirankar, the formless God. The words were ‘*na ko hindu na musalman*’ (there is no Hindu and there is no Muslim). Obviously, these words were not aimed at denigrating any faith or faith-community rather they symbolized the Guru’s cosmic vision of humankind. Through these words the Guru tried to convey that all human beings belonging to whichever faith they are, in essence, one; he proclaimed them, at many places in his hymns, spiritually one with God and ethnically equal amongst themselves. The entire humankind appears noble and no one appears lowly to him: ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਚਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਨੀਚੁ ਨ ਦੀਸੈ ਕੋਇ ॥ [10].

Guru Arjun, the compiler of Guru Granth Sahib, reiterates the same when he says that he 'deems no one as his enemy and no one as 'other' as he gets along with everyone:

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥ [11].

Guru Gobind Singh [12], the tenth Guru of the Sikh faith, makes a beautiful statement as he says:

*Some have shaved their heads, and
Some others have become sanayasis and yogis;
Some have become celibates and other Yatis;
Some are Hindus and some are Turks,
Some among the latter are Hafizi, Imams and Safis;
Acknowledge the entire humankind as one.
Benevolent Creator and compassionate Sustainer is one;
An idea of the other is only a delusion.
It becomes all to serve the one Divine Lord;
Entire humankind is the manifestation of One,
And the same Divine Light pervades all.*

ਕੋਊ ਭਇਓ ਮੁੰਡੀਆ ਸੰਨਿਆਸੀ ਕੋਊ ਜੋਗੀ ਭਇਓ ਕੋਊ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਚਾਰੀ ਕੋਊ ਜਤੀ ਅਨੁਮਾਨਬੋ॥ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕ ਕੋਊ ਰਾਫਿਜੀ ਇਮਾਮ ਸਾਫੀ ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਚਾਨਬੋ॥ ਕਰਤਾ ਕਰੀਮ ਸੋਈ ਰਾਜਿਕ ਰਹੀਮ ਓਈ ਦੂਸਰੇ ਨ ਭੇਦ ਕੋਈ ਭੂਲਿ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਮਾਨਬੋ॥ ਏਕ ਹੀ ਕੀ ਸੇਵ ਸਭ ਹੀ ਕੋ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਏਕ ਏਕ ਹੀ ਸਰੂਪ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਜੋਤਿ ਜਾਨਬੋ॥

The Sikh institutions of *sangat*, in which anybody with whatever religious background can participate, and of *panгат* or *langar* where everybody – high or low, Hindu or Muslim, prince and pauper – is welcome to have his food alongside others are living examples of this idea.

Sikhism does not take any religion as inauthentic or invalid, any scripture as false and any faith-community as 'pagan' or 'kafir'. Implicit in this has been the idea that no faith or faith-community is better or worse than the other. A scriptural hymn prays to God to 'save humankind the way He deems it possible': ਜਗਤੁ ਜਲੰਦਾ ਰਖਿ ਲੈ ਆਪਣੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ ॥ ਜਿਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਉਬਰੈ ਤਿਤੈ ਲੈਹੁ ਉਬਾਰਿ ॥ [13] and another explicitly states that 'no scripture, either of the Semitic or Indian religions, is to be called false rather false are the persons who do not reflect on them':

ਬੇਦ ਕਤੇਬ ਕਹਹੁ ਮਤ ਝੁਠੇ ਝੁਠਾ ਜੋ ਨ ਬਿਚਾਰੈ ॥ [14].

Unlike some missionary faiths, Sikhism is against converting people belonging to other faiths either through coercion or allurements because 'proselytizing implies devaluing and denigrating the faith of the other. Guru Nanak explicitly asks everybody to be true to the faith he/she belongs to; he wants a Hindu to be a true Hindu and a Muslim to be a true Muslim. Of course, this acceptance and appreciation of other faiths has been critical. Guru Nanak has strongly criticized certain practices which, he felt, made the followers forget the true spirit of religion and taken only forms and symbols as the mark of their religiosity. For example, his refusal to wear the *janeu* is not his rejection of the *janeu* as such, but, according to him, wearing of *janeu* is worthwhile only if the wearer imbibes the values the sacred thread externalizes:

**ਦਇਆ ਕਪਾਹ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੁਤੁ ਜਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੁ ॥
ਏਹੁ ਜਨੇਉ ਜੀਅ ਕਾ ਹਈ ਤ ਪਾਡੇ ਘਤੁ॥ [15].**

Similarly, saying of Namaz five times a day becomes just a ritual if the person saying Namaz does not cultivate the values expected of such a devotee. The Guru says that the Namaz is to be said five times a day and each Namaz has a different name and time. The first Namaz of the day becomes acceptable only if the devotee implies the value of truthfulness, the second stands for earning livelihood through honest means, the third for seeking welfare of all, the fourth for having noble intentions for all and the fifth for singing eulogies of the Divine:

**ਪੰਜਿ ਨਿਵਾਜਾ ਵਖਤ ਪੰਜਿ ਪੰਜਾ ਪੰਜੇ ਨਾਉ ॥
ਪਹਿਲਾ ਸਚੁ ਹਲਾਲ ਦੁਇ ਤੀਜਾ ਖੈਰ ਖੁਦਾਇ॥
ਚਉਥੀ ਨੀਅਤਿ ਰਾਸਿ ਮਨੁ ਪੰਜਵੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਨਾਇ ॥
ਕਰਣੀ ਕਲਮਾ ਆਖਿ ਕੈ ਤਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ਸਦਾਇ॥ [16].**

Without imbibing these values, it becomes just a ritual. The martyrdoms of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur also emphasize the Sikh stress on the freedom of faith for all. A brief reference to an event from early twentieth century history of India would also be appropriate here to illustrate

how Sikhism has since remained true to the teachings of the Gurus as regards the acceptance of other faiths and rejection of the idea of conversion. It is about the Vaikom movement in Kerala [17] which certain low caste people launched in 1924 against the ban of their entry on to the roads approaching the Sri Mahadeva temple in the town. Interestingly, there were no such restrictions applicable on the Muslim or Christian converts from these low castes. The news of this first anti-caste movement in Kerala received nation-wide attention. Sardar K.M. Panikkar, the minister of the Maharaja of Patiala, discussed the Vaikom Movement with Sardar Mangal Singh and also with the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandak Committee (SGPC). The latter sent a group of twelve Sikhs to help the agitators by providing them free food (*langar*). Though the Sikh help to these agitators was frowned upon by some Indian leaders but these low caste people felt attracted to Sikhism for its social philosophy of spiritual unity and ethnic equality of all human beings. When many of these people expressed their desire to embrace Sikhism and become part of the casteless Sikh society, Master Tara Singh, a tall Sikh leader from the Punjab, visited the State in 1936. In a public lecture he said that the “Sikhs are offering their services to you...our aim is to help you in this critical situation. If you convert to Sikhism, we will render all help to free you from this slavery. If you do not convert, even then we will help you as we did in the Vaikom movement” [18]. No doubt, some Keralites embraced the Sikh faith and they became known as Ezva Sikhs, but the Sikh response was quite obvious; the help rendered unto them was no inducement to conversion.

Sikhism is not against any particular way of worship nor does it consider any place unholy or less holy. For instance there is an incident from the life of Guru Arjan which conveys to humankind a message highly relevant even today - not to look down upon those who have different beliefs and who have a different form of worship. Once some Sikhs (Bhai Gopi and his companions Bhai Vesa, Bhai Tulsia, Bhai Bhiara and others called upon the Guru and told him that they felt

confused finding people worshipping God and His various incarnations and remembering Him by various names. They wanted to know by which Name they should remember God and remembrance of which Name was more efficacious. The Guru advised them: "All names of God lead to liberation. For Sikhs the name revealed by Guru Nanak is '*Vahiguru*' [19]." The Guru further advised them that all forms and attributes are God's, yet He transcends them, and that they should worship only the Absolute One. At the same time, they must abjure all dislike of those who have a different way of worship. This has been an affirmation of the advice Guru Nanak had given asking Hindus to be true Hindus and Muslims to be true Muslims.

Also, God being all-pervasive, all places of worship irrespective of the tradition they belong to are taken as the abode of Divine. Thus, a Sikh must not revile or desecrate another community's place of worship because reviling or desecrating it would mean reviling or desecrating the Divine Presence itself. God is believed to be present not only in the temple and the mosque but at all other places also. The Hindu temple and the Muslim mosque, Hindu worship and the Muslim Namaz are called the same by Guru Gobind Singh in one of his compositions:

**ਦੇਹੁਰਾ ਮਸੀਤ ਸੋਈ ਪੂਜਾ ਔ ਨਿਵਾਜ ਓਈ
ਮਾਨਸ ਸਬੈ ਏਕ ਪੈ ਅਨੇਕ ਕੇ ਭੁਮਾਉ ਹੈ ॥ [20].**

Sikh history stands witness that the Sikhs did not desecrate or demolish any Muslim religious place even in Sirhind when they conquered the town and killed the governor of the province, Wazir Khan; for the Sikhs, Wazir Khan was the most hated person being responsible for waging several wars against Guru Gobind Singh and also for bricking alive his younger sons, aged nine and seven. Even the town itself was considered 'accursed' by the Sikhs. All the old tombs and mosques in Sirhind still stand intact.

Sikhism not only accepts and appreciates other faiths it also wants them to co-exist in an atmosphere of mutual

understanding and harmony. Sikhism has been very explicit in asserting the value of mutual co-existence of different religious traditions ever since the early days of its evolution. Reference to an incident from the life of Guru Nanak here would be apt to illustrate his response to religious plurality. Guru Nanak once happened to visit Multan which was then an important religious centre. As he reached Multan (now in Pakistan), various holy persons belonging to different religious traditions came to the outskirts of the town to meet him with a bowl filled to the brim with milk. This implied that the place was already full of many religious traditions and there was no place for any new one. The Guru placed a jasmine petal on the milk signifying that his tradition would co-exist with others and he did not want to replace any. Such co-existence among all religions and religious communities is the need of the day, and teachings of Guru Nanak are highly relevant in this regard.

ਬਾਬੇ ਕਢਿ ਕਰਿ ਬਗਲ ਤੇ ਚੰਬੇਲੀ ਦੁਧ ਵਿਚਿ ਮਿਲਾਈ ॥ [21].

Similarly, Sikhism also rejects the idea of only one Saviour. The idea that 'my prophet' or 'my spiritual preceptor' is the only savior to lead humanity on the road to salvation is alien to Sikhism. It takes different religions as divine revelations made known by the prophets or spiritual preceptors at different times in different spatio-cultural contexts. It accepts each one of the preceptors and the traditions founded by them as equally valid to help man attain God-realization/self-realization. Thus, all religions remain different but still authentic ways. To overcome any differences and reach the truth, Guru Nanak has emphasized the value of dialogue. 'First listening to the other and then putting forth your own viewpoint' is the only way to reach the truth, says a scriptural hymn':

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥ [22]

Sikhism recognizes the possible truth-claims in all religions and makes it the basis of inter-religious dialogue. According to it, the 'truth' of the other is not fake or incomplete nor does it need to conform to its own truth. This

implies that both the participants in dialogue must be open to the truth of the religious experience of the other. Since both the participating parties are open to the possible truth of the other and do not presume that the other has only 'incomplete truth', it certainly helps changing our mind-set from 'let us teach you' attitude to 'let us share' our spiritual experiences, from 'the rejection of others' cherished beliefs' to 'a respectful acceptance of them as alternative ways of belief and practice'.

Sometimes it so happens that a community identifies certain other religions or groups within them with whom it may refuse to have any dialogue. A religion or sect not willing to have dialogue implies that it is afraid of testing its convictions against those of others. It means unilateral rejection of the convictions of the other, of perceiving them to have gone astray from the true doctrines and practices of their faith. There is every reason for us to presume that we avoid having dialogue with the other only when we are not sure of the correctness of our own stand. In that situation we use avoidance only as a stratagem to put off whatever objections/questions might come from the other. Either way, the situation needs to be rectified and can be rectified only by having dialogue with such 'heterodox' groups within a religion also.

Sikhism recommends dialogue to overcome whatever differences between different religious traditions and faith-communities. Dialogue is said to be the only way to arrive at the truth. Guru Nanak terms conflict and acrimony as evil because they bring about ruin:

ਕਲਹਿ ਬੁਰੀ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ਵਾਦੇ ਖਪੀਐ ॥ [23].

The Guru advises the Brahmin who acted as religious teacher those days to reflect on the Vedas and not to indulge in polemical discussion on differences in practices because the latter will drown one in the world-ocean. How can a person who is himself drowning save any other? Polemic is rejected because such disputations cause, and are also caused by ego

which in the Sikh scripture is referred to as a “serious malady”. On the other hand, humility, which is a necessary pre-requisite for listening to the other’s point of view, is called the essence of all virtues. Search for truth begins only when polemic comes to an end:

ਖੇਜੀ ਉਪਜੈ ਬਾਦੀ ਬਿਨਮੈ ਹਉ ਬਲਿ ਬਲਿ ਗੁਰ ਕਰਤਾਰਾ ॥ [24].

On the other hand, Sikhism testifies to the importance of dialogue in inter-faith and inter-community relations. Humans are advised to continue to maintain dialogue throughout their worldly existence because that is the only way of reaching the truth. Guru Nanak’s *Sidha Gosti*, as we find it included in the scripture (SGGS), is a sort of spiritual dialogue between the Guru and the *Siddhas* on the Guru’s philosophy of life vis-à-vis the philosophy of the yogis. Both the parties engaged in dialogue are deeply rooted in their beliefs and the discourse is a genuine exercise to know the other’s perspective and the objective is to reach the truth. Throughout this long-drawn dialogue, the serenity and sobriety is retained and the aim is to realize the truth. As various Sikh sources such as *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and various versions of *Janamsakhis* relate, the dialogue led to the transformation of the *Siddhas* who accepted the Guru’s perspective. We must realize that it is also this sort of attitude which can help resolve most of the socio-political and interfaith and intra-community problems humankind faces today.

The history of interfaith dialogue in Sikhism can be traced back to the founder of the faith, Guru Nanak, who visited, during his preaching odysseys, places of pilgrimage belonging to different religious traditions and met many holy men there. He had discourses/dialogues with them, listening to their viewpoint and putting forth his own. He talked to many seekers of truth, to the crowds that gathered at several places of pilgrimage he visited and to holy men residing in different monasteries or pilgrimage-centres. His dialogue with the Qazi who, having misunderstood the Guru’s utterance ‘*na*

ko hindu na musalman' had complained to the Nawab of Sultanpur Lodhi, resulted in the latter's transformation and he realized that it was futile to make mere mechanical repetition of a scriptural text without concentrating mind on the Divine. His dialogue on two different occasions with Malik Bhago and Sajjan Thug had a transformative impact on them and they realized the value of honest earning and righteous living. Similarly, he had a dialogue at Kurukshetra with some Brahmins and others who disapproved of the Guru cooking meat on a day of solar eclipse; they believed in the superstition that it was inauspicious to cook anything especially non-vegetarian food during the period of solar eclipse. Guru Nanak says that there is no use in trying to convince or persuade a blind (i.e. ignorant or foolish) person. Even if one tries to teach him, he will neither utter sensible words nor follow what is said to him:

ਨਾਨਕ ਅੰਧੇ ਸਿਉ ਕਿਆ ਕਹੀਐ ਕਹੈ ਨ ਕਹਿਆ ਬੁਝੈ ॥ [25].

Dialogue among different religions of the world is of paramount importance for peace to prevail amongst individuals, communities and nations. Implicitly, it also means that relationship as of now among these different religions and the sects and sub-sects within them is not amiable and peaceful - as it should be. Since the destiny of man today is linked with the social reality of religious plurality, peace among religions becomes necessary for man to live a life of peaceful co-existence. Hans Kung's statement that "there will be "no peace among nations without peace among religions; and there will be no peace among religions without greater dialogue among them" [26]. And there can be dialogue if we accept and appreciate the truth-claims of other religions. It is only by abandoning our belief in the myth of religious superiority and instead accepting and appreciating all religions as different but valid ways of realizing God that the world can move from conflict and hatred to tolerance, understanding, mutual trust and collaborative action. The teachings of Guru Nanak are highly relevant and help in helping us realize this objective.

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Guru Nanak's Vision of *Ek-Anek* in the Context of Religious Pluralism

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Abstract

This brief essay explores Guru Nanak's vision of Ek-Anek ("One-Many") with respect to the inclusion of Bhagat Bani ("Utterances of the Devotees", works of 15 medieval poet-saints of North India) in the Guru Granth Sahib, the foundational text of the Sikh tradition. In the 'one world' of today the various religious traditions are consciously interacting with each other in mutual observations and dialogue. Religious pluralism reflects the situation of the simultaneous existence in a single social arena of a number of different worldviews that are considered incompatible with one another. It has always been a fact of life but its awareness has become more evident in recent times than before as a result of the process of globalization. In the early decades of sixteenth century Guru Nanak encountered diverse religious traditions of Hindu, Muslim and Nath origins. He was strongly opposed to an exclusive claim that a particular tradition might make to possess the sole religious truth. Indeed, the spirit of accommodation had always been an integral part of his attitude towards other traditions. He acknowledged the usage of different names of God across religious boundaries.

Introduction

Religious pluralism refers to the co-existence of many

religions in the society where we live and our reaction to that fact. It may be defined as the simultaneous existence in a single social arena of a number of different worldviews that are considered incompatible with one another. It has always been a fact of life but its awareness has become more evident in recent times than before as a result of the process of globalization. Globalization is not only about homogenization and the destruction of cultural and geographical boundaries; on the contrary it generates a proliferation of new and reformulated boundaries in the spheres of culture, ethnicity, language and religion – and religion plays a prominent role in this process. Indeed, religious pluralism is brought about by the classical processes of modernization like urbanization, migration, mass education and the mass media of communication, all of which gain additional potency under democratic conditions where the state refrains from trying to impose a monopolistic world view.

A distinctive feature of the Guru Granth Sahib is that it contains the compositions of fifteen non-Sikh poet-saints from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, along with the compositions of the Sikh Gurus [1]. Most of these compositions were collected by Guru Nanak and introduced in the early Sikh scriptural tradition during the period of Guru Amar Das. Later on, Guru Arjan compiled these collections and made the Bhagat Bani part and parcel of the first canonical text in 1604. This was done in the historical context of Mughal emperor Akbar's rule (1556-1605). In a certain sense, Akbar was a true pluralist who was born a Muslim but who married a Hindu wife. His curiosity about other religions led him to build the "House of Worship" (*Ibadat-khana*) at Fatehpur Sikri where inter-religious discussions were held among the scholars of all the major religions. He used to preside over these debates, which resulted in the formation of his own syncretistic religion, the *Din-i-Ilahi* or the "Divine Religion," aimed at the unification of Hindu and Muslim thought. As Wendy Doniger remarks: "He [Akbar] flirted with Christianity to such a degree that missionaries congratulated themselves that he was on the

brink of converting – until they realized that he still continued to worship at mosques (and, indeed, Hindu temples)” [2]. However, Akbar’s pluralism must be understood as part of the large process of state formation in Mughal India. It is no wonder that his liberal approach was much despised by his more aggressive co-religionists.

The pluralistic discourse of Akbar’s times reached its culmination in the days of Mughal prince Dara Shikoh (1615-59) who was responsible for the translation of the Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Yoga Vashishtha* and the *Upanishads* into Persian. Dara Shikoh was a Sufi of Qadiri order, and in his translations, he attempted to “place Hindu ideas into the framework of Sufism so as to create a bridge between Hindu and Islamic metaphysics” [3]. However, Dara Shikoh’s liberal attitude suffered a setback when his more orthodox younger brother, Aurangzeb, took advantage of Shah Jahan’s illness to imprison his father and to fight a series of battles against his elder brother in the war of succession. Eventually, Dara Shikoh was betrayed to Aurangzeb, who had him executed in 1659 after condemning him as a heretic, to become himself the last ruler of the Mughal Empire (1659-1707) [4]. It is no wonder that Aurangzeb imposed increasingly restrictive policies of Sunni orthodoxy that included enforcement of Islamic laws and taxes and sometimes the replacement of local Hindu temples by mosques. Nevertheless, the liberal attitude became part of the complex history of pluralistic discourse in which individuals like Akbar and Dara Shikoh transcended the cultural and political agendas that had bred much violence in Mughal India.

The inclusion of the Bhagat Bani in the Guru Granth Sahib is, therefore, historically linked with a genuine experiment of religious pluralism in India in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Although the effect of this experiment did not last long after Akbar’s death, perhaps we can draw some inferences from this original impulse and develop a theory of pluralism that may be useful in the present-day interfaith dialogues. The evidence of the Bhagat Bani [5]

certainly highlights the point that some forms of religious expression from outside the tradition were meaningful enough that they should be preserved along with the compositions of the Gurus themselves. The case of the Bhagat Bani may thus offer the following four-point theory of pluralism in the context of inter-religious dialogues.

1. The Quest for Self-identity

The presence of the Bhagat Bani in the *Adi Granth* has been variously interpreted throughout Sikh history. The original emphasis was on the process of self-definition that is traceable to the writings of the Sikh Gurus, particularly their comments on the works of the Bhagats. These comments illuminate the historical context of dialogues and debates between different religious groups in the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Punjab. They provide the answer to the all-important question of what it means to be a Sikh in relation to the commonly held Sant, Sufi or Bhagat ideals. In his comments on the verses of Shaikh Farid, for instance, Guru Nanak made the assertion that life of spirituality is a matter of divine grace, which occupies the position of primacy over personal effort. Guru Nanak was quite explicit in stating his own belief in the doctrine of rebirth over against the Sufi belief in the bodily resurrection on the Day of Judgment. Similarly, Guru Amar Das provided a contrast to Kabir's view of self-withdrawal by defining the Sikh view of action-oriented life in the world. Thus, the Sikh Gurus were deeply concerned about cultivating a particular Sikh life-world by way of commenting on and editing the received tradition of the Bhagat Bani.

In a religious dialogue, one must acknowledge that all religious traditions have gone through the process of self-definition in response to changing historical context. Therefore, the exclusive claims made by an emerging religious community must be contextualized as part of the process of building of self-esteem in the early experience. It is an inevitable part of life and must be taken into account in inter-religious

encounters. Thus, the dignity of individual participants must be maintained in a dialogue since no one would like to lose his/her identity. That is, one must be able to honour one's commitment as absolute for oneself and at the same time respect the different absolute commitments of others.

2. Respect for Differences

In the first place, the process of the integration of the Bhagat Bani in the Adi Granth was based upon the recognition of two major points: first, its harmonization with Gurus' thought in broad outlines; and second, highlighting of its differences with the Gurus' thought at essential points. Let us take the case of the Sufi poet, Shaikh Farid, who remained an orthodox Muslim in his lifetime. He is allowed to express his Muslim beliefs and practices freely in the Adi Granth. Notably, his works containing such beliefs as the resurrection, the flaming hell, the *pulsirat* ("Bridge of hell"), and the terrible retribution for the unbelievers have not received any direct comment from the Gurus. When Sikhs read these passages, they immediately accept them as part of Muslim beliefs and practices, although their own belief system is based on the notion of reincarnation. The presence of Shaikh Farid's *bani* in the Adi Granth actually promotes the sense of mutual respect and tolerance for diversity of belief and practice. Only those aspects of the Farid-bani have received direct comments from the Gurus that concern general attitudes towards life, divine grace versus human effort, asceticism and the mystical dimensions of spiritual life.

Secondly, the basic idea of revelation in the Sikh tradition is based upon the rich concept of *shabad* ("sacred sound") in Indian thought. Accordingly, the Bhagats had the experience of the divine truth that they proclaimed in verbal form (*shabad*) in their compositions. Their inclusion in the Sikh scriptural tradition follows naturally from the Sikh doctrine of pluriversal *bani* that appears perpetually in all ages in the works of the Bhagats. Although the idea of universal/pluriversal *bani* has a

wider application, each case of revelation is a partial manifestation of the divine intention in a specific cultural context.

Thirdly, the titles at the beginning of Bhagat Bani section in each *raga* of the Adi Granth employ the honorific particles *jiu* and *ji* with the names of the poet-saints (*raga aasa bani bhagatan ki: Kabir jiu, Namdev jiu, Ravidas jiu*). These titles show that all the Bhagats shared a common status because they were all adjudged to have spoken the divine Word and confirmed as such by the Sikh Gurus. This convention of honorific particles is not used anywhere else in the Adi Granth with the names of any Sikh bards or even with the Gurus themselves. This convention shows the utmost regard with which the hymns of the Bhagats were included in the Sikh scripture.

Finally, doctrinal standpoints of different religious traditions must be maintained in mutual respect and dignity. In a family, the acceptance of differences in the context of mutual respect and appreciation can be a powerful catalyst for good. Thus any attempt to play down differences or to obliterate them completely through some intellectual exercise for the sake of creating a superficial unity in the form of some world religion will not help in the process of building a tolerant society. Durable peace comes only if we acknowledge that the plurality of religious expressions add to the beauty and wonder of this world in much the same way as different colors of flowers of different plants add to the beauty of a garden.

3. Openness in a Dialogue

An “open attitude” means a willingness to co-exist, to learn from other traditions, and yet to retain the integrity of one’s own tradition. In this context, there is a danger lurking behind this attitude, however, for one’s urge to be open to all may cause one to lose one’s cultural bearings, and openness can degenerate into religious synthesis, or to a wishy-washy lowest-common denominator sort of religious experience. Therefore, an open attitude must allow not only true understanding of other traditions but also disagreement on

crucial doctrinal points. The presence of the writings of non-Sikh poet-saints in the Adi Granth is thus an eloquent testimony to the open attitude of the early Sikh tradition. Although the early Sikhs were open towards others, they were open selectively, and with caution. They expressed their caution through the process of engaging in dialogue with the texts of the poet-saints to highlight the points where the Gurus and the Bhagats differed.

For instance, let us look at the Guru Nanak's comment on Shaikh Farid's verse that stresses extreme self-torture [6]:

ਤਨੁ ਤਪੈ ਤਨੂਰ ਜਿਉ ਬਾਲਣੁ ਹਡ ਬਲੰਨਹਿ ॥
ਪੈਰੀ ਥਕਾਂ ਸਿਰਿ ਜੁਲਾਂ ਜੇ ਮੁੰ ਪਿਰੀ ਮਿਲੰਨਹਿ ॥

My body is oven-hot; my bones burn like firewood. If my feet fail me, I will walk on my head to meet my Beloved.

Shaikh Farid's ascetic discipline seems to have taken the extreme form of self-torture. The ideals of self-torturing and asceticism which find expression in Farid are diametrically opposed to Guru Nanak's emphatically stated beliefs of moderate living and disciplined worldliness. He severely condemns those wandering ascetics who "harm themselves by burning their limbs in the fire." His commentary verse rejects the ascetic streak of Farid and emphasizes self-realization instead of self-torture [7]:

ਤਨੁ ਨ ਤਪਾਇ ਤਨੂਰ ਜਿਉ ਬਾਲਣੁ ਹਡ ਨ ਬਾਲਿ ॥
ਸਿਰਿ ਪੈਰੀ ਕਿਆ ਫੇੜਿਆ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਪਿਰੀ ਨਿਹਾਲਿ ॥

Do not heat your body oven-hot, burn not your bones like firewood. What harm have your head and feet done? (So, why do you torture them through such austerities?) Rather behold the Beloved within your soul, Farid!

The Guru clearly provides a contrast to Shaikh Farid's view by asserting that one must seek the divine Beloved within one's own heart without torturing the body through ascetic discipline. The Guru thus places a positive value on the human body that should be used as an instrument of spiritual realization and service to humankind. In his comment on Farid's verse, Guru Nanak shows himself concerned to define

for his own followers a path that excludes asceticism as described by the Sufi poet. Thus, all participants must enter into a dialogue with an “open attitude” which allows not only true understanding of other traditions but also disagreements on crucial doctrinal points. This would mean to agree to disagree without being disagreeable.

4. Mutual Transformation

In the give and take of inter-religious dialogue, as Diana Eck argues, understanding one another leads to mutual self-understanding and finally to mutual transformation [8]. Religious pluralism acknowledges that “various religions offer rather different solutions to human problems and, indeed, that they also recognize different problems” [9]. In this context, Wendy Doniger aptly remarks: “When we live in a world where others exist, we become better. We can reflect on what is other and use the other as a catalyst to our own creativity” [10]. Not surprisingly, the case of the Bhagat Bani has proved the validity of this point how certain verses of the poet-saints that received direct responses from the Gurus sharpened the process of Sikh self-definition. In fact, the Bhagat Bani has had a tremendous impact upon the people of Punjab for the last four centuries. Indeed, the “other” must somehow become one’s “self” in a dialogue so that one’s life is enriched with that spiritual experience. This assumption may be justified from the fact that the Bhagat Bani is already an integral part of the Sikh tradition.

Conclusion

The Guru Granth Sahib, rather than being a monochromatic hymnal containing a set of ideologically compatible compositions, becomes something much more dynamic: a text in which Sikh Gurus not only espouse particular doctrines, but they also engage in active exchange with their precursors. Here, we have offered a four-point theory of religious pluralism based upon the examination of

the presence of the Bhagat Bani in the Adi Granth. First, one must acknowledge that all religious traditions have gone through the process of self-definition in response to changing historical context. Thus, the dignity of the various religious identities of individual participants must be maintained in a dialogue. In other words, one must be able to honor one's commitment as absolute for oneself while respecting the different absolute commitments of others. Therefore, the quest for a universal religion and likewise the attempt to place one religious tradition over and above others must be abandoned. Second, the doctrinal standpoints of different religious traditions must be maintained in mutual respect and dignity. Third, all participants must enter into a dialogue with an "open attitude" which allows not only true understanding of other traditions but also disagreements on crucial doctrinal points. Finally, the 'other' must somehow become one's 'self' in a dialogue so that one's life is enriched with that spiritual experience.

In sum, the presence of the Bhagat Bani in the Sikh scripture provides an excellent example of catholicity that promotes mutual respect and understanding of diversity of belief and practice. For instance, Shaikh Farid is allowed to have his Muslim voice in terms of doctrine and practice. Unsurprisingly, modern-day Sikhs stress this ideal frequently in interfaith dialogues. The Bhagat Bani illuminates fascinating instances of inter-textual dialogues that may be useful to the study of cross-cultural encounters. It can also offer its distinctive contribution to the study of human interaction in a rapidly growing era of globalization.

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Guru Nanak's Approach to Interfaith Dialogue: Reflections on Islam and the Contemporary Muslims

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Abstract

The 'Bani' of Baba Nanak reveals that he was the pioneer of interfaith dialogue in true sense in his age. He remained in continuous dialogue in his whole life with various faiths and their respective practices. His real purpose of dialogue seems to uphold the true spirit of faith in almighty Creator and makes it relevant as well as meaningful to the contemporary society. With this zeal and enthusiasm he approached to the contemporary Muslims and tried hard to rejuvenate the real spirit of Islam. In the present religious and political scenario the inter-community conflicts, in fact, are not due to the religious beliefs and practices as such but they are because of the parochial and shallow understanding of a faith or faiths.

1. Introduction

The Bani means spiritual poetic expressions of Baba Nanak reveals that he was the pioneer of interfaith dialogue in true sense in his age. He remains in continuous dialogue in his whole life time with various faiths and their respective practices. His real purpose of dialogue seems to uphold the true spirit of faith in almighty Creator and makes it relevant as well as meaningful to the contemporary society. With this zeal and enthusiasm he approached to the contemporary

Muslims [1] and tried hard to rejuvenate the real spirit of Islam. As for as, Islam itself is concerned it has always been Monotheistic regarding its faith and practices. It has always been a great source of unity among Muslims as an *Ummah*. In the present religio-political scenario the inter-community conflicts, in fact, are not due to the religious beliefs and practices as such but they are because of the parochial and shallow understanding of a faith or faiths. In this context, Islam is particularly projected as intolerant faith in today's world media (electronic as well as print media) without having proper understanding of its basic sources and real causes of current happenings. If one analyses these conflicts in holistic perspective, it is clear that the Western media and sometimes a few literary works of orientalists are also playing a major role in shaping the image of Islam as an intolerant faith. It is a well-known fact that the Qur'an was revealed in two cities of Arabia, namely Makkah and Madinah, during the period of twenty three years. The revelation began in Makkah and ended in Madinah. He bears all kinds of persecution with a remarkable perseverance and instead to confront by any kind of force he presents before the opponents a formula of mutual understanding to cope with the situation. The same is quite apparent from the following English version of the Qur'anic verse revealed in Makkah, "*For you is your faith and for me is mine*" (109:6). Thus from the very beginning the Qur'anic teachings were not to be imposed upon any one. The Prophet adopted the same formula in Madinah, the first Islamic state, where prophet Muhammed was at the helm of affairs of the state [2].

There is no compulsion in religion: the right way clearly stands out from error, so whoever rejects 'Tagut or devil and believes in Allah, he indeed grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks (2:256).

These verses could be taken as the fundamental principles of the Qur'anic perspective on inter-religious understanding which emphasize that there is no compulsion in the matter of faith. However, the Qur'anic revelation motivates men to

adopt right path instead of treading upon wrong path and to be free from blemishes. Those who accept right path are grasping the most trustworthy hand-hold that will never break. Thus, the revelations of both Makkah and Madinah clarify that the Qur'anic teachings do not impose any type of injunction in the matter of faith. The revelation helps one to see the right path and not to follow the wrong path. It further warns about the consequences of pursuing the wrong path. Then leave it up to the choice of the people. Thus, from the very beginning the conscience of an individual was given the prime importance in the decision making whether to accept or reject Islam.

There is a need to highlight the concept of interfaith dialogue in the holy Qur'an [3]. The Qur'anic perception of interfaith understanding and interaction underlines that human being as a whole could not believe in any single faith. People will certainly differ in the matter of faith as per their own understanding of the world - physical and metaphysical. With regard to this point Allah in the Qur'an even poses questions to the prophet Muhammed:

If it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed,
- All

Who are on earth! Will thou then force them till they are believers? (10:99)

2. An Echo of Spirit of Islam in Guru Granth Sahib

Baba Nanak expressed in his Bani about the real spirit of Islam [4] when he came into the dialogue with contemporary Muslims. He begins from the very concept of Almighty in Islam and the Arabic word of Allah. He writes [5]:

ਬਾਬਾ ਅਲਹੁ ਅਗਮ ਅਪਾਰੁ॥ਪਾਕੀ ਨਾਈ ਪਾਕ ਥਾਇ ਸਚਾ ਪਰਵਦਿਗਾਰੁ॥੧॥

O Baba, the Lord Allah is Inaccessible and Infinite.

Sacred is His Name, and Sacred is His Place. He is the True Cherisher. || 1 |

In 'Gurbani' itself the word of Allah is generously used nearly about seventeen times for the Almighty Creator. The

meanings of the word are the most suited to express the pure identical concept of Almighty Creator in SGGS. This word for the Creator is particularly used in the holy Qur'an as it has no number and no gender. It appropriately reflects the Idea of oneness and uniqueness of the Creator.

Islam in its true sense as expressed by Baba Nanak also is not a part of any tradition, culture and ideology propounded by anyone. In fact, it is the acknowledgement of the Almighty and in Nanak's words acknowledgement of his '*Hukum razai*'. By accepting Him one gets solace and peace. By surrendering to His will know as 'Hukam' one gets his blessings and feels his warmth and closeness. It is also mentioned in the Qur'an as a '*Deen-e-Qayyam*' the eternal faith because from the very beginning 'Hukam' prevails. It is also known as '*Deen-e-Fitrat*' the way of Nature. Laws of the Nature are also 'Hukam' of the Creator. Therefore, men are required to lead their life as per eternal 'Hukam' and 'Fitrat' by realizing the Creator and surrendering his own will (granted by the Creator to make choice of right or wrong) to the will of the Almighty. The Almighty besides showing His presence in the signs of eternity and nature expressed His will or 'Hukam' through prophets as a sign to realize him and guidance towards righteousness or the way how to surrender to his will in their activities of life. It was expressed in the very beginning of existence of mankind to first man Adam. Then time and again it was reminded in human history. At last the guidance reminded through prophet Muhammad and preserved in the Qur'an. On the bases of this guidance prophet Muhammad developed a righteous society and government. Later on with the expansion of this society and its polity and state, other rules and regulations also were required. Therefore, to understand the 'Hukam' of Almighty in other matters also, Muslims reflected on the basic sources of the Qur'an and the way of prophet Muhammad, known as 'Hadith', to develop new rules and regulations which is known as 'Shara' or 'Shariat'. However, with the passage of time old feudal political system which was transformed by divine guidance of Islam again taken over righteous Islamic society

in the disguise of dynastic Muslim 'Khilafat'. As a result, Shara or Shariat was also impacted or adopted as per feudalistic way of life with the change of time. This is the reason why Muslim society began losing Islamic spirit and becoming ritualistic and customary. Now, because of that more importance had been given to dry Shariat laws instead of realization of the Almighty and acknowledging His 'Hukam' in life. In this back drop Sufi movement also took place in Muslim society which emphasized the divine realization than Sharia, which was also earnestly required rethinking as per change of society and polity.

In the context of Punjab and India this was the time period of Baba Nanak. Though he represents the composite society of India but gives the prime importance to the realization of the Almighty and associate himself with no conventional religious community of the time. He had indoctrinated the realization of the Almighty with the new terms of 'Naam' and 'Hukam'. It seems that to Baba Nanak 'Hukam' means to understand the will of the Creator in yourself, in cosmic order as well as God's communication in human history through selected ones as he did not reject in his Bani the idea of the Divine revelation to prophets. Similarly, 'Naam' has been taken identical to notify the Creator or His attributes by focusing on which any one can develop a bond of his being with Supreme Being. These doctrines seem quite similar with the meanings of Islam as mentioned earlier. To further elaborate, Islam means peace acquired by submitting your will to the will or 'Hukam' of the Almighty. It is *'Deen-e-Qayyam'*, as it is in eternity. It is *'Deen-e-Fitrat'*, as it is the way of the Nature, as it is in the cosmic order. The Qur'an mentions this fact that everything that is in existence submits to the Creator. Now you O people! Who deny the Creator will seek any other way than that (3:83). That seems the reason why to Baba Nanak realization of the Creator and universal human values were more important than customs and rituals of society. So he advocated the values which are required to humanity forever and condemned the contemporary system and society vehemently.

3. A Dialogue with Contemporary Muslims and the Presentation of the Way of Nature

In this background it seems fit to mention some of the hymns of Baba Nanak which were expressed during his dialogue with the contemporary Muslims. These hymns show that Baba Nanak's teachings bear imprints of universal human values which guided the contemporary society in general as well as quite relevant to the current situations also. He addressed the Muslims [6, 7]:

ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ਕਹਾਵਣੁ ਮੁਸਕਲੁ ਜਾ ਹੋਇ ਤਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ॥
 ਅਵਲਿ ਅਉਲਿ ਦੀਨੁ ਕਰਿ ਮਿਠਾ ਮਸਕਲ ਮਾਨਾ ਮਾਲੁ ਮੁਸਾਵੈ॥
 ਹੋਇ ਮੁਸਲਿਮ ਦੀਨ ਮੁਹਾਣੈ ਮਰਣ ਜੀਵਣ ਕਾ ਭਰਮੁ ਚੁਕਾਵੈ॥
 ਰਬ ਕੀ ਰਜਾਇ ਮੰਨੇ ਸਿਰ ਉਪਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਮੰਨੇ ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਵੈ॥
 ਤਉ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਰਬ ਜੀਆਂ ਮਿਹਰੰਮਤਿ ਹੋਇ ਤ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ॥

Baba Nanak said it is difficult to be called a Muslim; one has to be so, to get himself called a Muslim. First he ought to accept the Deen (Religion as presented by Prophet Muhammad) as sweet (good), and then with this scraper, let him scrub his ego clean and let his pride of possession be scraped away. To becoming the true follower of the Islamic faith, let him break the illusion of his life and death. And heartily submit to the Will of Rab (God), worship the Creator and efface self-conceit. Says Nanak, if he is merciful to all creatures; then he is truly acclaimed as a Muslim.

Guru Amardas, the third Guru in Baba Nanak's succession, has also expressed in similar tone towards the mechanical following of *Sharia* rules without proper understanding of the ways of God known as 'Deen' in the Quranic terms [8]:

ਸਰੈ ਸਰੀਅਤਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਬੁਝੇ ਕੈਸੇ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਪਾਰੁ॥
 ਸਿਦਕੁ ਕਰਿ ਸਿਜਦਾ ਮਨੁ ਕਰਿ ਮਖਸੂਦੁ॥ ਜਿਹ ਧਿਰਿ ਦੇਖਾ ਤਿਹ ਧਿਰਿ ਮਉਜੁਦੁ॥
People think of religious laws and regulations (Sharab and Shariyat). But without understanding of God, how can they swim across the world to their Almighty? Make Islamic faith and the truth your bowing and let the knowledge of mind and understanding of self be your object of life. Then, whatever direction you see, you will find God's Presence.

Baba Nanak during the dialogue with Muslims suggested that *Shariat* or any kind of social order must come out from the realization of the Creator. To the same direction, Qur'an called the people, which is the very purpose of Islam itself. Thus Qur'an confirms truth presented by these prophets in different periods as the truth brought by the messengers of Allah. Moreover, it relates to previous revelations with its own and safeguards it.

And to you we have revealed the scripture with the truth, confirming whatever scripture was before it, and to safeguard it. So Judge between them by that which Allah has revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth, which has come to you. For each we have given you a code of law and a traced out way. Had Allah wished he could have made you one community? But that he may try you by that which he has given you (He has made you as you are). So vie one with another in good deeds. To Allah you will all return, and he will then inform you of that wherein you differ. (5:48)

Here Qur'an accepts that it is not possible for whole humanity to become a single religious community. The differences of opinion in religious matters are part and parcel of the nature of the human mind. But one should try to find out the truth instead of following his own desires. The main purpose of religions is to create a society in which ethical conduct of a person prevails. So men should vie with one another in good deeds. It is also suggested in the foregoing verse (5:48) that divergent religious groups should postpone their differences regarding faiths up to the final decision of God on the return to him and live peacefully.

Moreover, Baba Nanak presented in the context of universal proven values to the Muslim religious phenomenon when he declared [9]:

ਪੰਜਿ ਨਿਵਾਜਾ ਵਖਤ ਪੰਜਿ ਪੰਜਾ ਪੰਜੇ ਨਾਉ॥
 ਪਹਿਲਾ ਸਚੁ ਹਲਾਲ ਦੁਇ ਤੀਜਾ ਧੈਰ ਖੁਦਾਇ॥
 ਚਉਥੀ ਨੀਅਤਿ ਰਾਸਿ ਮਨੁ ਪੰਜਵੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਨਾਇ॥
 ਕਰਣੀ ਕਲਮਾ ਆਖਿ ਕੈ ਤਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ਸਦਾਇ॥
 ਨਾਨਕ ਜੇਤੇ ਕੂੜਿਆਰ ਕੂੜੈ ਕੂੜੀ ਪਾਇ॥

Baba Nanak invites the contemporary Muslims towards the essence of their religious practices. He said that these are five prayers, five times for prayers and their five names. The first is truthfulness; second the honest earning (Halal Rozzi) and third Charity in the name of Khuda (self-existed God). The fourth is honest mind and fifth is Praise of God. Utter the Kalma of good deeds and then call yourself a Muslim. Says Nanak, without the good deeds, all the liars shall obtain what is altogether false.

Guru Nanak further elaborates the characteristics of a true Muslim as follows [10]:

ਮਿਹਰ ਮਸੀਤਿ ਸਿਦਕੁ ਮੁਸਲਾ ਹਕੁ ਹਲਾਲੁ ਕੁਰਾਣੁ॥

ਸਰਮ ਸੁੰਨਤਿ ਸੀਲੁ ਰੋਜਾ ਹੋਹੁ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ॥

ਕਰਣੀ ਕਾਬਾ ਸਚੁ ਪੀਰੁ ਕਲਮਾ ਕਰਮ ਨਿਵਾਜੁ॥

ਤਸਬੀ ਸਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਵਸੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਖੈ ਲਾਜੁ॥

Make mercy your mosque, faith your prayer-mat and just and honest living your Qur'an. Honest labor your circumcision, good conduct your Rozza (fast) and become a Muslim. Make pious works your Kaba, truth your Pir (spiritual guide) and good deeds your Kalma and Namaaz. Says Nanak, His(God) Will shall become your rosary, and then He will protect your honor.

Baba Nanak directly makes the conduct of contemporary Muslims a point of dialogue in his Bani [11]:

ਜੇ ਰਤੁ ਲਗੈ ਕਪੜੈ ਜਾਮਾ ਹੋਇ ਪਲੀਤੁ॥

ਜੇ ਰਤੁ ਪੀਵਹਿ ਮਾਣਸਾ ਤਿਨ ਕਿਉ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਚੀਤੁ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਉ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਕਾ ਦਿਲਿ ਹਛੈ ਮੁਖਿ ਲੇਹੁ॥

ਅਵਰਿ ਦਿਵਾਜੇ ਦੁਨੀ ਕੇ ਝੂਠੇ ਅਮਲ ਕਰੇਹੁ॥

Baba Nanak states that if garments gets polluted with blood stains, how can their mind be pure those who suck the blood of human beings? By that hymn he emphasizes to the purity of the conscience and the character as the core of the religion.

Baba Nanak extends his dialogue to diagnose other sections of society as well. He was highly critical of religious leaders of his time including Muslim Qazi, Brahman and Yogi [12]:

ਕਾਦੀ ਕੂੜੁ ਬੋਲਿ ਮਲੁ ਖਾਇ॥ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਜੀਆ ਘਾਇ॥

ਜੋਗੀ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਅੰਧੁ॥ ਤੀਨੇ ਓਜਾੜੇ ਕਾ ਬੰਧੁ॥

ਸੇ ਜੋਗੀ ਜੋ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਪਛਾਣੈ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਏਕੋ ਜਾਣੈ॥
 ਕਾਜੀ ਸੇ ਜੋ ਉਲਟੀ ਕਰੈ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਜੀਵਤੁ ਮਰੈ॥
 ਸੇ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਜੋ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਬੀਚਾਰੈ॥ ਆਪਿ ਤਰੈ ਸਗਲੇ ਕੁਲ ਤਾਰੈ॥
 ਦਾਨਸਬੰਦੁ ਸੋਈ ਦਿਲਿ ਧੋਵੈ॥ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ ਸੋਈ ਮਲੁ ਖੋਵੈ॥

Baba Nanak states that society depends for guidance on Qazi, Brahmin and Jogi but they themselves are following corrupt practices. Moreover, the three of them devised their own destruction by their evil practices. Nanak advised them how they should be in their act. But it is not possible without the Grace of Guru, he who knows the One Lord. He saves himself, and saves all his generations as well. That person is wise who cleanses his heart and that person is Muslim who removes his impurities.

In fact Baba Nanak's contemporary India was going under turmoil due to certain socio-political reasons. The society was degenerated as a whole from the Kings to the commoners. The Kings were cruel. In the words of Guru Nanak they were Butchers in real sense. They were mostly power crazy invaders. Human values were trampled underfoot. Priestly class was mainly fanatic and interpreting religion as suits to their own vested interests. The masses were timid and were accepting tyranny as their fate. Guru Nanak gave voice to their agony. His description of the contemporary situation presented a vivid picture of the overall milieu of the medieval India. This was the picture of feudal medieval India. If one has a cursory look of present democratic India, the situation is not different from that time. The difference is only of the characters. In fact cruelty, corruption, fanaticism, and communalism had reached at the height of the limits. Human Values still are ruthlessly trampled under the feet of the power politics. Guru Nanak as a torch bearer of the universal values became the light house to guide the humanity. His guidance would always remain relevant to the society as every social fabric is always in need of the natural universal values. When humanity deserts the natural values, it results in the misfortune for the society as the Divine wrath. Thus, Guru Nanak guided the society to the way of nature.

4. Universal Human Values and Baba Nanak

Baba Nanak was such a kind of personality who had impacted a large segment of society and influenced the people across the religious traditions and cultures of the world. If one studies Guru Nanak's life and his poetic spiritual expressions known as 'Bani' without any bias, it will be a surprised revelation that he was an ideal and pioneer of universal values and interfaith dialogue. The hymns of his Bani are loaded with high moral and spiritual practical teachings. To him humanity and human values were more important than any faith, religion, culture, sect, community, language and region. He appeared on universal portal with universal ideas and values. Therefore, his ideas are cross culture and cross religion. To him religious and ethical values are meaningless unless they are not reflected in your character. Guru Nanak when asked always identifies his faith, caste and community as submission to divine and a person who is associated with '*Sachh Naavo*'- the truth [13]:

ਹਮਰੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਪਤਿ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਉ॥ ਕਰਮ ਧਰਮ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਸਤ ਭਾਉ॥

The True Name is my social status and honor. The love of the Truth is my karma and Dharma - my faith and my actions, and my self-control.

From the above hymn it is very much clear that he taught the lesson of a specific religiosity to whole humanity without any discrimination. The lesson which he taught is that there is no caste, no creed, no religion until anyone does not submit to the ultimate truth with true heart. The true submission means the true thought and righteous character. That righteous character must become your religion and your identity of which one may feel proud. Without connectivity with nature and the Creator, all kinds of identities of caste and creed are hollow and meaningless. The concerning hymn is of universal value. It was not only relevant to the contemporary society but also to the present society. If the people of Indian subcontinent to whom Baba Nanak addressed as the first recipient of his teachings, applied only this single hymn in their lives in true

spirit, it will not be an exaggeration to say that all socio-political confrontations which degenerated the society will become a thing of the past. The peace and the prosperity will prevail in this region rather than border conflicts, communal feuds, merciless bloodshed and massacres in the name of valueless hollow identities, struggle for communal power and jingoism on nationalities. That caste and communal struggle is what Baba Nanak mentioned as poison which seems the root cause of current and old age socio-political unrest. He expressed this fact in his hymns [14]:

ਜਾਤੀ ਦੈ ਕਿਆ ਹਥਿ ਸਚੁ ਪਰਖੀਐ॥ ਮਹੁਰਾ ਹੋਵੈ ਹਥਿ ਮਰੀਐ ਚਖੀਐ॥

What good is social class and status? Truthfulness is measured within. Pride in one's status is like poison-holding it in your hand and eating it, you shall die.

In the above hymn, poison is a beautiful simile to illustrate the meaningless religiosity based on caste and community but devoid of divine attachment. That it is poisonous to the whole fabric of society, Baba Nanak put it as a challenge also to lick the poison to prove your superiority of caste and community. In another part of the same hymn, he further elaborates that *'The sovereignty of the True Lord is known throughout the ages'*. The person, who obeys and surrenders at His will, becomes noble in His court. It means the ultimate source of sovereignty and freedom from all kinds of evils is to surrender before the Almighty who is unique and all pervasive. This fundamental source of Universal values was advocated by Baba Nanak in these words [15]:

ਸਚੇ ਕੀ ਸਿਰਕਾਰ ਜੁਗੁ ਜੁਗੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ॥ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਮੰਨੇ ਸਿਰਦਾਰੁ ਦਰਿ ਦੀਬਾਣੀਐ॥

The True Lord's Sovereign Rule is known throughout the ages. One who respects the Hukam of the Lord's Command is honoured and respected in the Court of the Lord.

It is universal truth and eternal fact that when human mind and soul submit to the universal order of all prevailing supreme power with full devotion, the blessings of enlightenment showered upon them, which resulted in the establishment of just society. Thus, universal values became

the part of social life. Therefore, Baba Nanak repeatedly mentions this golden rule in his 'Bani' or hymns. In another hymn he further mentions that 'Sach aachar', means truthful living, is above everything, even the truth itself, which is known as the highest moral virtue in society [16]:

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ॥

Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living.

Baba Nanak warned the people that there is no heaven, 'Bhist', no emancipation 'Mukti', without righteous deeds. He says, grabbing rights of others is like eating the meat of swine for Muslims and meat of cow for the Hindus. He further repeats that if a person becomes the source of falsehood then he will certainly obtain falsehood [17].

ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸ ਸੁਅਰ ਉਸ ਗਾਇ॥

ਗੁਰ ਪੀਰੁ ਹਾਮਾ ਤਾ ਭਰੇ ਜਾ ਮੁਰਦਾਰੁ ਨ ਖਾਇ॥

ਗਲੀ ਭਿਸਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਈਐ ਫੁਟੈ ਸਚੁ ਕਮਾਇ॥

ਮਾਰਣ ਪਾਹਿ ਹਰਾਮ ਮਹਿ ਹੋਇ ਹਲਾਲੁ ਨ ਜਾਇ॥

To take what rightfully belongs to another, is like Muslim eating pork, or a Hindu eating beef. Our Guru, our Spiritual Guide, stands by us, if we do not eat those carcasses. By mere talk, people do not earn passage to Heaven. Salvation comes only from the practice of Truth. By adding spices to forbidden foods, they are not made acceptable. O Nanak, from false talk, only falsehood is obtained.

5. Conclusion

The above discussion shows that Baba Nanak adopted the holistic approach when he did dialogue with the people of various faiths and their practices. He was neither exclusive nor inclusive but pluralistic and realistic in his approach. He sets the pattern of the interfaith dialogue. He never associated himself with any caste and religious community but always identified himself as one among the devotees of the Creator. He was in real sense the pioneer of interfaith dialogue in his period. His teachings are still the source of inspiration to the people of various faiths. *His approach and perception is quite similar to Islam.* As per the Quran in Islam there is no conversion, no

baptism and no coercion but invitation to the truth and admonition of not following the path of the truth as designed by the Creator. Therefore, dialogue finds a good use in the understanding and dealing with the people of other faiths and civilizations. It helps to form universal ethics in diversities and pluralities. The Quran suggests to the Prophet Muhammad to call the people of divergent faiths to be united on the common principle and ethical points. It further says to compete with each other in the righteous deeds instead disputing in the matter of faith. (*Istabiqul Khairat*- means to excel in good deeds, 5:48) The Quran also laid down some principles to be adopted during the dialogue. Some of these are kindness (2:83), speak gently (16:125), *al-Ihsan* means act gently (29:46), *al-hikmawal al-mauizāt al-Hasan* means wisdom and good advice (16:125), rationality (16:125), *Ta'awn* means cooperation (5:2), unity on common points (3:64), *Mujadalah* means to avoid dispute and useless debate (29:46), *Istabiqul Khairat* means to excel in good deeds (5:48), *al-Islah* means reconciliation or creating bridge and tolerance (4:114). Baba Nanak's dialogue also seems to be adorned with these beautiful principles. About the differences, the Quran accepts the differences to recognize each other but not to dispute or fight. You are basically one and your goal is also one; the Quran mentions:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (49:13).

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Guru Nanak Pioneered Interfaith Dialogues, Associations, and Global Scriptures

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Abstract

Guru Nanak began his missionary journeys by holding the first-ever Interfaith Dialogue at Sultanpur Lodhi (India) and by visiting major religious centers of the world where he promoted Interfaith Dialogues and understandings. Guru Arjan followed and compiled the first world scripture, the Guru Granth, where he invited multiple coauthors, from contemporary and the past centuries. Further, he employed a language that allowed for interfaith diversity, and which enjoyed wide currency in the whole of Southeast Asia and the Mid-East. He employed metaphors to encourage continual interpretation of the Sikh scripture in the new world cultures. Guru Granth compilation created a philosophical system based on “unity in diversity” that celebrates the unique merits of each particular approach to the Divine energy, yet it also provides a way to weld each into a cohesive common agenda. The multiple coauthors of the Granth promoted the appreciation of diversity and enunciated the spiritual philosophy of the One Spirit One World where each long for divine attributes within each person with gratitude. The Guru Granth teaches a vision of the healing light of spirituality to overcome the social and ideological issues that underlie much of the conflict between and among religions and the continual exploitations by illusionary materialism. Guru Gobind Singh began his ministry by making a public

pronouncement of his teachings being for all religions independently even not associated with any particular language considered sacred.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to review the evidence that establishes that Guru Nanak was the founder of the Interfaith Dialogue. It was Guru Nanak who saw the need for these dialogues to establish peace among and between the world's faiths in the coming centuries. Further, that the nine successors of Guru Nanak established and promoted scriptures and institutions that would promote beliefs and practices that would be universal and that would strengthen interfaith appreciation and customs.

Guru Nanak at Sultanpur Lodhi

Guru Nanak (15 April 1469 – 22 September 1539) began his prophetic ministry at the town of Sultanpur in Northern India when he was 27-year old. Sultanpur was a trade center and a seat of higher education for Muslims. He was employed as a business manager of the store and properties of one Daulat Khan Lodhi, a devout Muslim, who was also the head of the town (Nawab) of Sultanpur Lodhi [1-3].

Through the town passed a river known as Kali Bein. The 160-kilometer long river sprang from river Beas at Dhanao village and merged in the confluence of the Beas and Sutlej rivers. The spring of the river base was considered holy by local people of Turk civilization. Mogul Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) ordered it brick-lining for preservation and pilgrimage. In 2005, India's President, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, a devoted Muslim, visited the city and designated it a holy city to promote religious tourism and preserve it as a seat of learning.

Guru Nanak experienced the environment of religious animosities while living in Sultanpur Lodhi. Guru Nanak also anticipated that the new ecological age would consist of a worldwide community where many cultures and religions will live as close neighbors, where science and technology will

season the faith practices of all. There the conflicts and fights between the world's religions would be very dangerous. To prevent those, Guru Nanak made interfaith dialogue as a part of his mission. Thus, as we recognize it now, it was Guru Nanak who gave birth to the hitherto unknown tradition of the intellectual and ceremonial dialogues among the people and leaders of the world's religions. He undertook to promote what we now recognize as interfaith dialogues.

Guru Nanak held the first interfaith dialogue in Sultanpur Lodhi [1]. The first one was followed by many others in the same town and elsewhere in the world. Sultanpur Lodhi built a memorial to celebrate the event. A gurdwara, the Sikhi place of worship, and deliberations in the town still celebrate that event. That gurdwara commemorates Guru Nanak's first dialogue. Several other monuments in the town memorialize the Guru's many dialogues with the community of scholars and religious leaders.

Antecedents to First-Ever Interfaith Dialogue at Sultanpur Lodhi

Guru Nanak visited the Bein river daily for his bath and meditation in the early hours of the morning. Thereafter, while on his way to work in town, he often visited with a Muslim holy man for a chat. It is during one of these meditations on the riverbank that he is believed to have experienced the revelation (i.e. to have been divinely inspired) and become enlightened. It is described as below:

It was the night of full moon in November 1496 (some historians report the year to be 1499) that Guru Nanak went for his daily bath at the river but failed to return as usual. He spent three days in meditation. When he emerged, he was in a divine trance. As soon as he came out of that trance, he said to the waiting crowd that he had a vision, an inspiration, a revelation. The vision inspired him to assume the role of a prophet/teacher to teach the world that the Divine Presence permeates the universe and that the religions were only man-

made. Religions should not be engaged to profile and divide humanity.

On this day Guru Nanak began to claim in more than one way that the Creator had summoned him and assigned him the mission of the divine message to all humanity. He claimed to have received the message directly from the ONE in a state of heightened consciousness, and he then began to share it with people by singing it in inspired hymns.

The Guru said that he would transcribe the divine message for people of all times. The formal pronouncement of his mission startled the town's people, even though they had known Nanak as a spiritually enlightened person. Those vested in the old beliefs went to the city administration and the religious authorities to complain that Nanak was claiming to be a new prophet.

When the town authorities heard complaints against Nanak, the town's head, Nawab Daulat Khan, summoned Nanak for a high-level dialogue/conference. Nawab also invited his chief religious advisor, a Muslim Imam, leading a group of imams and other Muslim scholars, to interrogate Nanak about his prophetic experience. The Hindu scholars were invited too even though they had already accepted Nanak as an enlightened soul projected to lead humanity. An interfaith dialogue resulted.

Nanak's First Interfaith Dialogue

The Sultanpur Dialogue was the first public **Interfaith Dialogue** in the history of religions [4]. Thus, Guru Nanak became the founder of the Interfaith Dialogues, a movement now promoted and spread all over the world.

The public dialogue of this unique character took place in Sultanpur Lodhi, and it took almost a week to conclude. Many questions were asked, many issues were raised among the participants and between them and Nanak. Guru Nanak answered them all and also concluded the discussions with several pronouncements during the dialogue.

At the end of the dialogue meeting, much to the Imam's befuddlement, the dialogue sponsor, Daulat Khan Lodhi, declared that Nanak had indeed received a divine revelation and had the responsibility to lay the foundation of a new religious order. The religious order was to be worldwide and is now known as Gurmat, Sikh Dharm, or Sikhism.

The following excerpt taken from the oldest written record available describes Dault Khan's judgment of the dialogue [5]:

... ਤਬ ਕਾਜੀ ਹੈਰਾਨ ਹੋਇ ਰਹਿਆ । ਤਬ ਖਾਨੁ ਕਹਿਆ ਕਾਜੀ ਇਸ ਕਉ ਪੁਛਣਾ
ਤਕਸੀਰ ਹੈ, ਏਹੁ ਖਦਾਇ ਕਾ ਕੋਈ ਅਉਲੀਆ ਹੈ ॥

... *The Imam, the chief interrogator, was wonderstruck. Then, Khan, the head of the town, told the Imam that further questioning would be arrogant, and declared that this person is a prophet of Khudaa (Islamic term for God).*

Further, Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636), the scribe for the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) and an early exegete of gurbani, recorded Daulat Khan's transformation resulting from Guru Nanak's dialogues [6-7]. Bhai Gurdas affirmed that he attained the fullness of the understanding from Guru Nanak. Thereafter, he became practitioner of Gurmat, and he asked of Guru Nanak to bestow upon him his teachings manifested in Nanak's hymns.

ਦਰੁਲਤ ਖਾਂ ਲੋਦੀ ਭਲਾ ਹੋਆ ਜਿੰਦ ਪੀਰ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ॥

Daulat Khan Lodhi was a nice person who later came to be known as a living pir, the spiritualist.

This public acknowledgment of Nanak as God's messenger earned him the title of the prophet in the Muslim tradition and the title of the Guru in the Dharmic traditions of India. Thereafter, Guru Nanak began to attract masses of followers. The Hindu followers of the Guru became known as Sikhs, the term derived from Hindu tradition *shishya* and the equal number of Muslim followers of Guru Nanak came to be known as *Mureeds*, the term derived from Sufi Muslim tradition. Sikhs and Mureeds continued to flock to Guru

Nanak throughout his travels and the place of his final abode, Kartarpur, the Creator's Villa.

Guru Nanak's Interfaith Dialogues Continued

Once Nanak had been accepted as God's messenger by the clergy and the elite of Sultanpur Lodhi, the town was not the same anymore. Clergy and scholars were transformed as were their followers in all religions. The town was transformed into a center of pilgrimage for people of faith. It became, too, a center for serious spiritual dialogues among all faiths and between Guru Nanak's followers and those of traditional religions, a tradition still observed in this town.

After inhabitants of the town had transformed and people of surrounding areas had received the message, Nanak saw the need to take his message to every corner of the world accessible to him at that time. He left Sultanpur Lodhi to undertake long journeys to faraway lands. Nanak undertook pilgrimages to visit Religious Centers and held Interfaith Dialogues. He established the record of traveling nearly 38 thousand kms. only to promote interfaith dialogues. Accompanied by a Hindu and a Muslim as his companions, he visited holy places of major religions, particularly Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, and Buddhism, to share his divine message. He imparted his teachings through dialogues with people of faith and leaders of civic and intellectual institutions as well as rulers and politicians of all stripes.

Guru Nanak traveled towards East, West, North, and South to covered that was humanly possible to reach. He visited various centers of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Sufis, Yogis, and Siddhas. *He wore 13 different styles of clothing and was known by 12 different titles.* Wherever he visited he promoted interfaith dialogues among leaders and people of different religions, tribes, cultures, and races. He urged them to examine their beliefs, to cherish and realize the divine message within their religions, and to discard superstitions and fanaticism that had crept in their time-worn religious practices.

Nanak-Panthis

Guru Nanak was the founder of a new thought, a new community known as Nanak Panthis. His followers, Nanak Panthis, flocked to him everywhere he visited. That led to the formation of a community of Sikhs, people formerly originated from Sindhu (Hindu) civilization East of the Sindh River Valley, and a community of Mureeds, people that formerly originated from Turk(Judo-Christian) civilization, West of the Sindh River Valley. The followers of Guru Nanak from these civilizations are referenced in the Sikh scriptures as follows [8].

The Guru Granth described them through the verse as:

ਕਹਤ ਕਬੀਰ ਰਾਮ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਵਉ ॥ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕ ਦੋਉ ਸਮਝਾਵਉ ॥

Guru's teachings attracted people of both, Sindhu civilization (later known as Hindus) and Turkish civilization (Turks, Abrahamitic).

Subsequently, the Sikh historian Bhai Santokh Singh while describing the congregations of Guru Nanak in Kartarpur [9], wrote as:

ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕ ਅਦਕ ਚਲ ਆਵਹਿ ॥ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੇ ਚਰਨ ਮਨਾਵਹਿ ॥

ਏਕ ਮੁਰੀਦ, ਸਿੱਖ ਇਕ ਹੋਵਹਿ ॥ ਦਰਸਨ ਪਰਸਨ ਕਲਮਲ ਖੋਵਹਿ ॥

Hindus (Sindhu civilization) and Turks (Abrahamitic religions), both, were flocking to the feet (teachings) of Sri Guru Nanak. The formers became Guru's shishya (pupil) or Sikhs, and the others became Guru's Mureeds, ones who seek.

The Perpetuation of Guru Nanak's Interfaith Message

Guru Nanak's prophetic theme of universality in religion was perpetuated and continually emphasized by his nine successors.

Guru Arjun Compiled Universal Scripture

The Guru Granth Sahib was compiled by Guru Arjun in 1604. It contains 5894 hymns. The interfaith nature of this scripture is evident from the fact that Guru Arjun contributed

only one-third of the hymns (2216). There are hymns from other Gurus composed over two centuries and also the hymns of nineteen other religious leaders of several centuries plus eleven poet laureates of the Guru's court totaling in all 36 authors. A record of this many authors for a scripture of a world's major religion is still to be matched by anyone. Here the Hindus, the Muslims, the scholars, and the untouchable peasants, met in the same congregation of holy souls.

The selection of a language for principal use is the language of the holy men evolved during the medieval period. This language allowed for diversity, and still enjoyed wide currency in the whole of Southeast Asia and the Mid-East. Based upon the local dialects, it was leavened with expressions from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, Arabic, Bengali, and Marathi, etc. Guru Granth's language policy was meant to demolish the claim of any human language to be the language of the gods. The spiritual language of the Granth is meant to communicate with every segment of the society at its turf and in its mother tongue. Therefore at least ten linguistic systems of Indian sub-continent, South East Asia, China, and the Middle East were employed. To meet the need to inscribing the multi-linguistic scripture the Guru had to design the *Gurmukhi* font especially for this purpose.

Guru Arjun also prescribed an interfaith a prayer that every Sikh recites every day alone at home and as a part of the congregation.

Interfaith Ardas – Prayer [10]

ਤੂ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਤੁਮ ਪਹਿ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ॥ਜੀਉ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਸਭੁ ਤੇਰੀ ਰਾਸਿ॥
 ਤੁਮ ਮਾਤ ਪਿਤਾ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੇਰੇ॥ਤੁਮਰੀ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਮਹਿ ਸੁਖ ਘਨੇਰੇ॥
 ਕੋਇ ਨ ਜਾਨੈ ਤੁਮਰਾ ਅੰਤੁ॥ਉਚੇ ਤੇ ਉਚਾ ਭਗਵੰਤਾ॥
 ਸਗਲ ਸਮਗ੍ਰੀ ਤੁਮਰੈ ਸੂਤ੍ਰਿ ਧਾਰੀ॥ਤੁਮ ਤੇ ਹੋਇ ਸੁ ਆਗਿਆਕਾਰੀ॥
 ਤੁਮਰੀ ਗਤਿ ਮਿਤਿ ਤੁਮ ਹੀ ਜਾਨੀ॥ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸ ਸਦਾ ਕੁਰਬਾਨੀ॥੮॥੪॥

*You are our Lord and Master; to You, I offer this prayer.
 This body and soul are all Your property.*

You are my Mother; You are my Father; I am your Child.

With your Blessing, I have received abundant Peace and Comfort!

*No one can comprehend your Beginning or your Ending.
You are highest of the High, the most giving, my Creator.
All Creation is like a beauteous Necklace,
Jewels on your heavenly Thread.
All is created by You and You sustain it All.
You alone know the breadth and depth and stature of Your Being.
Prays Nanak, May I be blessed with vision to realize your blessings
and Your Order.*

Guru Gobind Singh Begins With Interfaith Sermon

From childhood, young Gobind engaged in inter-religious dialogue. According to our history books [9], the recognition of the Guru's divinity was first acknowledged publicly at an important inter-religious event. It all began with the installation of infant Gobind to his prophetic rank. Contrary to the established practice of initiating a child prophet by the clergy of his forefather's faith, a renowned Muslim saint, Syed Bhikhan Shah, was instead given this honour. Mind you that the Guru was not born to Muslim parents. The story goes as follows: One day, followers of Muslim Pir Bhikhan Shah observed their leader bow towards the East during his morning prayers. Certainly, it was contrary to the established Islamic practice of bowing in the direction of Kiblah.

When his followers looked astonished, the Pir responded and explained his unusual act. He said that a special child, the savior chosen by Allah, was taking birth in Patna, which is located in Eastern India. He further disclosed that he was inspired by Allah to make his way to the child's birthplace, to bless the newly born Gobind, and to pronounce him a prophet.

The Pir gathered his followers and led them on a pilgrimage to Patna to view the newborn. In Patna, although unusual for mothers of a newborn to do so, the Guru's mother accepted the Pir's request and brought the child out for public viewing.

The Pir presented a riddle. He placed two bowls of candy before the child; one bowl was purchased from a Hindu's shop,

and the other from a Muslim's shop, thus signifying the two major religions of India. The riddle sought answers to an unspoken question of seeking guidance as to which religion this divine prophet would belong to. The proper response would permit the Pir to pronounce the Guru's divinity and his prophetic authority to lead the people of one of the two major religions of India.

To everyone's admiration and deep gratification, the infant Gobind Rai placed his hands in both bowls, thus indicating that he would not profile people based on religious divides. Further, it signified that all religions would be dear to him. He would also pick a holy man of a different religion to communicate his new message. The Muslim Pir and his Muslim companions as well as Hindu neighbours who had gathered there were thrilled and fulfilled.

The point is that in his very first public message Guru Gobind Singh laid the path to inter-religious engagement that sanctioned inter-religious appreciation and accommodation. Further, he chose the symbolic language of a public demonstration to communicate his first public sermon.

Although minimizing the religious divide was Guru Gobind Singh's first sermon, it was neither a one-time event nor the first time in the Sikh tradition that such a sermon was aired. The divinity of Guru Nanak was first recognized by a Muslim holy man, Rai Bullar, and not his parents.

The Sikh historian Bhai Santokh Singh, a great historian of India, rightly observed as he wrote in *Suraj Parkas Granth* [9]:

ਛਾਇ ਜਾਤੀ ਏਕੇਤਾ ਅਨੇਕਤਾ ਬਿਲਾਏ ਜਾਤੀ, ਹੋਵਤੀ ਕੁਚੀਲਤਾ ਕਤਬੇਨ ਕੁਰਾਨਕੀ ॥
ਪਾਪ ਪਰਪਕ ਜਾਤੇ, ਧਰਮ ਧਸਕ ਜਾਤੇ, ਬਰਨ ਗਰਕ ਜਾਤੇ ਸਾਹਿਤ ਬਿਧਾਨਕੀ ॥ ਦੇਵੀ
ਦੇਵ ਦਿਹੁਰੇ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੂਰ ਹੋਤੇ, ਰੀਤ ਮਿਟ ਜਾਤੀ ਸਭ ਬੇਦਨ ਪੁਰਾਨਕੀ ॥ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ
ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਪਾਵਨ ਪਰਮਸੂਰ, ਮੂਰਤ ਨ ਹੋਤੀ ਜੋ ਪਹਿ, ਕਰੁਣਾ ਨਿਧਾਨਕੀ ॥

Were Guru Gobind Singh not there at the critical junction of Indian history, there would have been only uniformity; diversity in religious spheres, diverse scriptures, and diverse modes of worship would not have survived. In favor of one religion, the others would have been

destroyed and their holy places smashed. Sin would have replaced virtue.

Conclusion

Several events from the lives of Guru Nanak and his successors are discussed with the sole purpose of illustrating how the worldwide movement of the Interfaith Dialogues came into existence some five centuries ago. At the time, the major religions were engaged in divisions, discards, and human hatred based upon one's religious identity. Guru Nanak, first in history, succeeded in establishing the institution of "Interfaith Dialogues". By doing so he succeeded in breaking the discard and promoted the vision of the Creator's presence in all. In his congregation in Kartarpur, he welcomed both the Sikhs and the *Mureeds* in the same congregation. Both of these groups prayed together and lived together.

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The Need for Intra-Faith Dialogue: Expanding our Understanding of the Sahajdhari Sikh

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Abstract

What would it look like for the Sikh community to uncouple itself from the definition of the Amritdhari Sikh as the real Sikh? And embrace a more diverse approach, based in Gurbani and affirmed by Sikh history? Where any person, from any denomination, who finds something useful in the Guru's teachings, would be welcome? Could we recalibrate the word Sahajdhari Sikh to welcome people of all faiths who find something in the teachings of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) that help them on their path of life? This paper will examine the origin of the term Sahaj in Buddhism and its implications in Sikhism. If we accept the word Sahaj based on its mystical meaning, then Sahajdhari Sikhs have a sovereign place in the Sikh community, and their own unique path to awakening through the Guru.

Introduction

Words are like perennial plants. They sprout from a seed of thought, a need to define something, to give it a distinct form and identity. And like a long-lived plant, a word will grow over time. It will branch in new directions. It will expand its roots into new territory. That word will continue to be propagated as long as each generation finds it useful. The meaning may shift, yet through time, words often stay true to their seed.

In the Sikh community today, there are discussions about who is a Sikh and who is not a Sikh. The main internal groupings are the *Amritdhari* Sikhs, who have gone through the *Amrit* ceremony as initiated by the 10th Sikh Master, Guru Gobind Singh. The other main grouping is the *Sabajdhari* Sikhs. Here in the first part of the 21st century, all Sikhs who have not taken *Amrit* are placed in the general category of the *Sabajdhari* Sikh.

How and when this primary distinction of *Amritdhari* Sikhs and *Sabajdhari* Sikhs first arose is a research topic in itself. Dr. (Bhai) Harbans Lal spoke to this issue in a paper he presented at the Fourth International Conference on Sikh Studies on Sikh Identity held at the University of Michigan in August of 1996. In his paper, titled *Sehaj-Dhari Sikhs: Their Origin and Current Status within the Panth*, Dr. Lal explained the background of this distinction:

“The term *Sehaj-dhari* is a compound of two Punjabi words, *Sehaj* and *dhari*. During the period of the Sikh Gurus, the term *Sehaj* was used in a theological context, to connote a state of mystical consciousness. The term *dhari* means the one who takes upon, assumes or adapts to something. Thus all Sikhs could be *Sehaj-dhari*. A distinction between *Sehaj-dhari* and *Amrit-dhari* began during the time of the tenth Guru when a section of the Sikhs elected to become *Amrit-dhari*. During the *Singh Sabha* period, the word *Sehaj-dhari* took on an ethnic meaning since baptism of *kbanda* was emphasized to become an identifiable member of the Khalsa. Total commitment to a prescribed life style was required of all Sikhs who were required to adhere to the *Rehatmaryada*, a code of conduct evolved by *Singh Sabha* leaders and promulgated by *Shromni Gurdwara Parbandhic Committee*. Those who fulfilled the requirements were accepted for the baptism while others were considered as an aspirant and were asked to wait and prepare. Those in waiting or others who on their own considered themselves not yet prepared for baptism were then called *Sehaj-dhari* (moderate-in-adopting)” [1].

According to Dr. Lal, the main classifications that exist in the Sikh community today of *Amrit-dhari* and *Sehaj-dhari* came as a result of the *Singh Sabha* movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By the post-Partition era, the term *Sehaj-dhari* Sikh indicated a person who was not ready, yet who believed in and aspired to participate in the *Amrit* ceremony.

Prior to the 20th century, it appears that the concept of the *Sehajdhari* Sikh existed, although it may not have been as clearly defined. In his paper, Dr. Lal discussed some historical references relating to this issue:

“Kesar Singh Chibber wrote his account of the Sikh life in the Guru’s time through mostly a first- hand knowledge. In *Bansawalinama Dasan Patshabian Da* completed in 1769, he wrote: “Guru said there would be many types of Sikhs: (1) *Didari Sikhs* were handsome, healthy bodied, Guru’s body guards, will remain with the Guru in this world and thereafter, and recite Naam. (2) *Mukte Sikhs* are those who will sustain Sikhi after I leave. They will fight the enemy and make sacrifices everywhere and those who will give their lives but will remain as Sikh and will make many efforts to retain Sikh religion. Because of the meditation done by both of these Sikh groups, there will be established a Sikh rule. (3) *Maiki Sikhs* are those Sikhs who are succumbed to political power and let their religious practices decline, those who fall off their goal. (4) *Mureed Sikhs* are those Sikhs who in spite of acquiring power and wealth will follow Guru’s path and who will stay above the worldly temptations of wealth and power. These were the *Sehaj-dhari Sikhs*”.

Dr. Man Singh Nirankari cited *Rehitmala* claimed by some to contain narration of many conversations of Guru Gobind Singh as below:

ੜੇ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਮਮ ਸਿਖ ਹੈ ਸਹਜੀ, ਚਰਣੀ, ਖੰਡ

Dr. Nirankari translated this verse to say *the Guru described his having three categories of Sikhs; Sehaj-dhari, charan-dhari, meaning those initiated by touch of the holy water by the Guru’s feet, and khande de amritdhari.*

In the *Gurmat Martand*, Bhai Kahan Singh cites the “*Sikhan Di Bhagat-Mala*” of Bhai Mani Singh to indicate that there were many *Sehaj-dhari* Sikhs during the times of Bhai Mani Singh (1644-1738), a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh. Even at that time, the term *Sehaj-dhari* was commonly used to indicate those Sikhs who neither took the baptism of *khanda di pahul* nor they were strict about wearing five *kaakars* [2].

This paper will seek to build on the work done by Dr. Lal [1] and examine the term *Sahajdhari*, not as it is commonly understood today, but in the context of its origin in Buddhist philosophy and its elucidation in a particular shabad composed by Guru Amar Das. It will also examine that the definition of *Sahajdhari* as “moderate-in-adopting” is not true to the roots of the word, nor to the intra-faith culture that existed during the lives of the Sikh Gurus. It is because of ‘*Sahaj*’ consciousness, understood in its mystical sense, that the Sikh Gurus could create a social-spiritual space that not only welcomed people of every faith tradition, but forged common bonds among them.

Origin of the term Sahaj: Sahajayâna Buddhists

The *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (SGGS) includes writers that span 400 years and multiple faiths. The first author, Kabir, predates Guru Nanak by a generation. Many key terms used by the authors within SGGS have a linguistic history hundreds (if not thousands) of years old. How, then, do we examine these ancient words that point to deep and complex mystical meanings in light of their inclusion within SGGS?

I would propose that we have to begin by recognizing that *Ek Ong Kaar* does not only refer to the Divine Consciousness Itself, but also to the Oneness of the human experience. Over the centuries, each culture and tradition invented unique symbols and words to describe the Divine. Yet all of these symbols and words point to the One Essential Ultimate Reality, and to the common experience that humans have in their

connection with that Ultimate Reality. Throughout history, confusion happens when societies use their individual symbols and words to compete with each other for dominance in theological discourse.

In *Japji Sahib*, Guru Nanak asserts:

ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ॥

ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ॥੧॥

From the start, this Truth was True. All through Time and Space is True. Even now, this Truth is True. Naanak says, ever shall be True.

This line indicates that the Ultimate Reality has never changed. Time does not change the experience of truth. From the beginning, through every age, today and into the future – *Sach* has remained constant. Our human expressions change. Yet the Divine, Itself, does not change.

In that regard, I would like to propose the idea that SGGS uses ancient terminology because it recognizes *Aad sach, jugaad sach, hai bhee sach, Naanak hose bhee sach*. The Guru takes the root meaning of these traditional terms, and re-energizes these words, refining the traditional understanding in the context of the unique path of Gurbani. With this approach in mind, I would like to spend some time examining the origin of the term *Sahaj*.

The term *Sahaj* originates with the Sahajayâna Buddhists, a school of Tantric Buddhism that formed in the eighth century AD. Much of this research comes from the work of Ramprasad Mishra from the 1990's. Mishra described the origin of *Sahaj* as a Buddhist philosophical concept:

“Sahajayâna is a Tantric school of Anuitara Yoga in which conventional rituals are discouraged philosophically. It is the vehicle of Sahaja which in consonance with the view of the teachers of Sahajayâna defies all possible definitions, transcending the reach of all textual knowledge. From its literary sense, it is explained as that which originates at birth and manifests as the primal and natural instinct of the man. The path which helps its adherents to realize the Ultimate

Truth through the propitiation of the inborn and natural propensities of man is the natural and easiest one of all paths and is thus called the path of Sahaja or Sahajayâna” [3].

Tantric Buddhism at its heart sees every human being as being endowed with Buddha nature. The question is how to realize that Buddha nature. The method for realization comes by cultivating a sense of compassion towards the suffering of all beings (Upâya); and by developing an understanding of Sûnya, or Emptiness (Prajña).

“Buddhahood is a state of perfect enlightenment which enables the adherent to realize the absolute, supreme and non-dual truth that everything-in-Universe and Universe-in-everything are one and the same and are the manifestations of Sahajasûnya or Sahajakâya which transcends all theories of origination, annihilation and all illusive mentations” [4].

The Sahajayânists’ observed that if the Buddha existed within the human body, then the path to realization was also in-born. Enlightenment arises from a person allowing a natural, authentic unfolding to occur from within his or her being.

In consonance with the view of Sahajyanists, *Sahaja* is indefinable, incognisable, and inexpressible, being the ultimate nature of all animate beings. In coherence with the opinion of Kânhupâda, a prominent Siddho of Orissa, *Sahaja* is inexpressible as it transcends all speeches. He asserts that one who will attempt to explain it will certainly misconceive, for it is such an Ultimate Truth where the Teacher is dumb and the pupil is deaf. In the Song of Tâdakapâda, *Sahaja* is depicted to have defied all scope of expression. According to Santipâda, *Sahaja* transcends both cause and effect and it is not a subject of logical analysis. It is the absolute truth which is realized but never put to the test of reason. As Tilopâda advocates, with the realization of *Sahaja*, all illusive concepts of the world disappear. This *Sahaja* cannot be explained as the secrecy of this truth is only realizable through intuition” [5].

Sahaja springs from an internal, intuitive process that

cannot be explained and may not necessarily align with social, cultural or religious expectations.

According to Misra [3], the concept of *Sahaja* makes its appearance in an earlier text of Tantric Buddhism called the Hevajra Tantra. However, it does not mature into a distinct philosophical school of Tantric Buddhism until later. One seminal scholar who contributed to the formation of Sahajayâna is the Mahasiddha Laxmînkara, also known as the Crazy Princess of Oddiyana. Laxmînkara became a tantric scholar of great renown during the latter half of the eighth century AD. Laxmînkara composed one of the foundational works of the Sahajayânists, titled the *Advaya Siddhi*. It is a brief text of 34-35 couplets (depending on the source material) that deconstructs ritualism, convention and social norms.

A couple of the instructions:

“He should not bow down to Gods made of wood, stone or clay. He should always worship his own body with concentrated mind.” (14)

“He should not feel disgust for a woman born in any caste as she is Bhagawatî Prajñā (Blessed Gnosis) who has assumed a physical body in this conventional world” (21) [6].

Laxmînkara’s *Advaya Siddhi* articulates a non-conformist pathway that rebels against religious convention as a way to genuine realization. Every spiritual path and every society has its rules. Yet it is exactly those rules that can prevent a person from attaining the Ultimate Realization. This inherent contradiction of Essence versus Form, of authentically acting in ways that go against “the norm” in order to realize the Essence, rests at the heart of *Sahaj*.

“...the *Siddhas* of this school...call it Sahajayâna because of their basic credence on the indispensability of the innate and inherent nature of man and the realization of the supreme truth through the usual living in the midst of the natural function of the spontaneous proclivities of man. From the standpoint of its connotation, Sahaja is explained as that which is inborn, innate and inherent and thus originates with the birth and manifests as the natural instincts in the course of living.

Sahajayâna hence denotes a tantric vehicle or path which helps its adherents to realize the ultimate truth through the natural propitiation of the inborn, innate inherent and natural propensities of man and thus a natural, original and easiest path towards this realization” [7].

In summary, what then can we say are the elements included in the origin of the term *Sahaj*? It emerges as a rejection against rituals and formalities. It defies social convention, including the taboos against women. It asserts that the path of realization is inborn, naturally unfolding. It ultimately cannot be described, or inferred from reason. It acknowledges that just as the Buddha Nature is in-born, the path of awakening is also in-born and dwells within the human body and its existence. The Sahajayâna school flourished for over 300 years beginning in the mid 8th century, with its teachers writing in the common vernacular, and had influence for centuries beyond its heyday.

Guru Amar Das’s Shabad Illuminating *Sahaj*

By the time of Guru Nanak, the spiritual term *Sahaj* had existed for over 800 years. It makes its way across the centuries to find a home in the poetry of such *bhakti* saints and SGGS contributors as Namdev and Kabir. *Sahaj*’s fundamental meaning of a non-ritualistic, innate, naturally spontaneous path of awakening remained consistent throughout this time.

As John Noyce writes in his paper, *Origins of Sahaja*: As John Noyce writes in his paper, *Origins of Sahaja*:”The Nath yogis, who emerge in the caves of northern India in the 11th century, had some knowledge of Sahaja, though when this concept was added to their knowledge base is unclear...The householder, or *bhakti*, saints with connections to the Nath yogis, also used the concept of Sahaja in their songs”[8].

After Guru Nanak’s enlightenment experience, he also included the term *Sahaj* in his instructional songs, as did the succeeding Sikh Gurus. Including the term *Sahaj* indicates that

Guru Nanak found the word useful to describe an aspect of Universal, Timeless truth. At the same time, the Sikh Gurus offered a new path by which to experience this sublime mystical consciousness of *Sabaj*. Even into the 20th century, *Sabaj* as understood from the perspective of Gurbani is conveyed as being both innate and the highest spiritual state.

In the *Dictionary of Guru Granth Sahib* by Surindar Singh Kohli, published in 1996, the term *Sabaj* is defined:

ਸਹਜ (*Sabaj*): natural state, inborn nature, effortless, the highest spiritual state [9].

A deep exploration of the term *Sabaj* in SGGS would be a book unto itself. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to focus on a particular *shabad* by the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amar Das, which takes *Sabaj* as its theme. This *shabad* comes from Sri raag [10].

In this *shabad*, Guru Amar Das celebrates the state of *Sabaj*. (For our purposes, the word *Sabaj* is poetically interpreted into English by the phrase “Spontaneous-Originality”)

ਸਹਜੇ ਗਾਵਿਆ ਥਾਇ ਪਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਹਜੈ ਕਥਨੀ ਬਾਦਿ॥

Singing with Spontaneous-Originality, everything falls into place. Without Spontaneous-Originality, all explanations are pointless.

ਸਹਜੇ ਹੀ ਭਗਤਿ ਉਪਜੈ ਸਹਜਿ ਪਿਆਰਿ ਬੈਰਾਗਿ॥

Through Spontaneous-Originality, devotion wells up. In the state of Spontaneous-Originality, love is balanced and detached.

ਸਹਜੈ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਸੁਖ ਸਾਤਿ ਹੋਇ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਹਜੈ ਜੀਵਣੁ ਬਾਦਿ ॥੨॥

Spontaneous-Originality brings happiness and tranquility. Without Spontaneous-Originality, life becomes pointless.

ਸਹਜਿ ਸਾਲਾਹੀ ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਧਿ ਲਗਾਇ॥

With Spontaneous-Originality, appreciate the One forever and ever. With Spontaneous-Originality, cling to Samaadhi

And : ਸਹਜੇ ਕਾਲੁ ਵਿਡਾਰਿਆ ਸਚ ਸਰਣਾਈ ਪਾਇ॥

Spontaneous-Originality drives away death and gives one the protection of the Ultimate Reality.

And : ਨਿਰਗੁਣ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਹੈ ਸਹਜੇ ਸੋਝੀ ਹੋਇ॥

The Formless Identity is the treasure. Spontaneous-Originality brings sanity.

(SGGS, M. 3, p. 68)

In the *shabad* quoted above, Guru Amar Das celebrates the state of *Sabaj* as necessary to spiritual insight. *Sabaj* provides the pathway to transcending death and entering *Samaadhi*. *Sabaj* relates to *Nirgun Naam* – the Formless Identity – beyond association with any particular description or rituals of a deity. Guru Amar Das affirms that spiritual activity requires the innate authenticity of *Sabaj* in order to have impact. Through *Sabaj*, spiritual practice has power. Otherwise, the effort may be there, but it does not lead anywhere.

Guru Amar Das also speaks to the fruitlessness of social convention and mental machinations.

ਮਾਇਆ ਵਿਚਿ ਸਹਜੁ ਨ ਉਪਜੈ ਮਾਇਆ ਦੂਜੈ ਭਾਇ॥

In illusion, Spontaneous-Originality isn't born. Illusion creates an inclination towards separateness and duality.

ਮਨਮੁਖ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਵਣੇ ਹਉਮੈ ਜਲੈ ਜਲਾਇ॥

Those who chase after their own minds get the results of their actions. Through self-will, everything burns to destruction.

And : ਪੜੀਐ ਗੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਆ ਕਥੀਐ ਜਾ ਮੁੰਢਹੁ ਘੁਥਾ ਜਾਇ॥

Why explain all you have studied and read, when you have gone astray from the very beginning?

And : ਬਿਨੁ ਸਹਜੈ ਸਭੁ ਅੰਧੁ ਹੈ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹੁ ਗੁਬਾਰੁ॥

Without Spontaneous-Originality, everyone is blind, attached to the darkness of Illusion.

(SGGS, M. 3, p. 68)

These passages highlight the idea that ritual effort and pursuing spiritual practice through self-will is pointless. What comes naturally, authentically, from within has value. Otherwise, our spirituality can become another form of illusion and entrapment. Without *Sabaj*, no matter how we act or what we do, we can become trapped in doubt and duality.

The key difference in Guru Amar Das's explanation of

this mystical term is the method through which one can experience *Sahaj*. By chanting the Guru's *shabad*, the state of *Sahaj* awakens, even in those who have lost their way.

ਸਹਜੈ ਨੋ ਸਭ ਲੋਚਦੀ ਬਿਨੁ ਗੁਰ ਪਾਇਆ ਨ ਜਾਇ॥

Everyone yearns to be Spontaneously-Original. Without the Guide, no one will experience it.

ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਜੋਤਕੀ ਥਕੇ ਭੇਖੀ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਏ॥

Constantly studying, the scholars and astrologers are exhausted. The misguided ascetics have lost their way in doubt.

ਗੁਰ ਭੋਟੇ ਸਹਜੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਆਪਣੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰੇ ਰਜਾਇ॥੧॥

In Divine alignment, and through His kindness, the Guide grants this gift of Spontaneous-Originality.

ਭਾਈ ਰੇ ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਹਜੁ ਨ ਹੋਇ॥

Oh kindred ones, without the Guide, Spontaneous-Originality will never happen.

ਸਬਦੈ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਸਹਜੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਸਚੁ ਸੋਇ॥੧॥

The Shabad (the Sound Current that cuts the ego) truly gives birth to Spontaneous-Originality. It bestows the experience of the Divine Essence and the Ultimate Reality.

And : ਭੁਲਿਆ ਸਹਜਿ ਮਿਲਾਇਸੀ ਸਬਦਿ ਮਿਲਾਵਾ ਹੋਇ॥੨॥

Through the consciousness of Spontaneous-Originality, the lost ones return. The Shabad causes the Union.

(SGGS, M. 3, p. 68)

Guru Amar Das articulates the qualities of *Sahaj* in this *shabad* and re-affirms the word as relating to a Universal experience that cannot be contrived. Yet even if the experience of *Sahaj* is universal and timeless, Guru Amar Das ascribes a *shabad*-based approach to cultivating *Sahaj*. Rather than trying to enter into the state of *Sahaj* through ascetic practices, astrology or scholarship, it is through chanting and meditating on the *shabad* that one can realize the state of *Sahaj*.

The Sahajdhari Sikh and the Intra-faith Practitioner

If we consider the origin of the word *Sahaj* and understand how Guru Amar Das explains the term in the

previously cited *shabad*, it offers us a new perspective on the term “*Sabajdhari*.” Rather than “slowly” becoming *Amritdhari*, the *Sabajdhari* has his or her own sovereign spiritual journey and relates to the Guru from the authenticity of that journey.

According to one’s spontaneous inner guidance, a seeker finds his or her way to the Guru. There is no need to leave anything behind or to adopt something new. Something inborn and intuitive within the person has led them to Gurbani, where they find useful spiritual guidance. The Hindu remains a Hindu. The Muslim remains a Muslim. The Yogi remains a Yogi. The Jain remains a Jain. The court of the Guru becomes an intra-faith realm. It becomes a place for intra-faith practitioners to grow together through their understanding of Gurbani, in the spirit of *Sabaj*.

The path of Nanak, known as the Nanakpanthi, existed for over two centuries before the Amrit ceremony took place. For two centuries and beyond, those who related to Nanak did not necessarily have to leave their religion of origin. Sikh history has many stories illustrating this. One such story shows the deep love and connection between the ninth Sikh Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and a Muslim Nawab named Saifuddin.

Their story is recounted in the book *Guru Tegh Bahadur* written by Trilochan Singh and published in 1967. Here is a brief excerpt:

“Guru Tegh Bahadur passed through Rupar and camped in a large garden at Saifabad, a city founded by Nawab Saifuddin...Both the Nawab and his Begum were known to be religious, devout, liberal and extremely charitable. As soon as they came to know that Guru Hargobind’s son, Guru Tegh Bahadur, had camped in their garden, their joy knew no bounds. The Nawab came to the Guru with gifts, dry fruit and other offerings and bowing reverentially said: ‘Blessed is my garden, Master, blessed is the city and blessed am I that thou hast been gracious enough to come here and sanctify the place with thy presence.’ ‘We have come here friend, Saifuddin, because your pure and noble soul attracted us. It is a joy to rest

in the garden of a pure-souled man of God. You entertain the love and fear of God in your heart. God's grace shall be on thy descendants,' said Guru Tegh Bahadur.

(Saifuddin invited the Guru to stay with him)...When Guru Tegh Bahadur entered the gate, a peace shedding mansion attracted his attention, and he moved towards it. 'That is the House of God (*mosque*) Guruji,' said Saifuddin. 'This House of God,' said Guru Tegh Bahadur, 'is as beautiful and enchanting as the Man of God who built it.'...Such was the devotion of Saifuddin that Guru Tegh Bahadur stayed with him for nearly a fortnight..." [11].

This story depicts the true nature of the *Sahajdhari* Sikh. Saifuddin's meeting with Guru Tegh Bahadur was spontaneous and illuminating. The love between them dawned naturally. Guru Tegh Bahadur had no distaste of Saifuddin's mosque. He did not tell him to tear it down and build a Gurdwara. The Guru saw the mosque as a manifestation of Saifuddin's devotion. The power of that devotion created the bond between them. And that bond lasted throughout Saifuddin's life.

Conclusions

Just as no man is an island, no spiritual tradition is an island, either. Human history is a continual process of discovery, handing down of traditions, re-evaluation, revision and evolution. When I began the research for this paper, I had no idea where it would lead. It has opened a door to an area that I think merits more research. The Sahajayâna Buddhist yogis originated over 1000 years ago. And yet the concept of *Sahaj* was important enough in the eyes of the Sikh Gurus, they made a home for it in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. One key difference for the Gurus was to provide the methodology of Gurbani. Anyone could access the state of *Sahaj* through chanting the Guru's *shabad*.

The *Sahajdhari* Sikh, then, chants the *shabad* to access the highest spiritual state of *Sahaj*. The *Sahajdhari* Sikh is a person

who comes as they are to the Guru - naturally, easefully and intuitively; neither needing to reject their already-existing identity nor adopt a new one. Hindus, Muslims, and others mix together to listen to *shabad* and understand Gurbani. Each person spiritually grows according to his or her own spontaneously-original path.

In my work as a minister in the western Sikh community, I see a lot of *Sabajdhari* Sikhs, although they would never call themselves that. They absolutely love Guru Nanak. They love *Japji Sahib*. They love Guru Gobind Singh and *Jaap Sahib*. Yet they are uninterested in organized religion and have no affinity for religious rituals. They may come to Gurdwara and enjoy *kirtan* (*shabad* singing), eat *langar*, and learn to recite *Japji Sahib*. But they would never call themselves Sikhs because the image of the Sikh is associated to the identity of the *Amritdhari* and they do not see themselves as an *Amritdhari*. What if we re-envisioned the *Sabajdhari* Sikh, not as someone “slow to adopt” *Amrit*, but rather as someone who simply has an in-born purpose to connect to the Guru? No matter where they come from? In times past, there were Hindu-Sikhs, Muslim-Sikhs and Buddhist-Sikhs. So why not Christian-Sikhs, Jewish-Sikhs and Agnostic-Sikhs? Can we embrace a view that the Guru’s court really is truly open to all people? The *Sabajdhari* Sikhs have a connection to the Guru through their own intuitive knowing that will serve their spiritual awakening, independent of the formalities of adopting a particular form.

Guru Nanak in his time created an intra-faith space. A place where people from various religious traditions could gather and pursue spiritual realization together. It was in the act of practicing together that Hindus and Muslims found common ground. While each group may have held onto their particular terminology relating to the Divine, we can only assume the Guru helped them transcend their imagined differences. Humans have always been creating unique Names for the Same Truth. But by recognizing Oneness, people have an opportunity to live together in peace, harmony and prosperity.

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Sikh Religion and Christianity: Prospects of an Interfaith Dialogue

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Abstract

To achieve the objective of inter-faith dialogue in the present day world, it is imperative to study the holy books or scriptures of different religious traditions. Unless we find some common basic principles propounded in the holy books there can be no meeting point for an interfaith dialogue which can ultimately lead to world peace. During the twenty first century, unification ideas in science, globalization in world economy, holistic vision of reality and science – religion dialogue are expected to bring about a paradigm shift in the human behaviour. An attempt has been made to compare and contrast some of the doctrinal principles of Sikh religion and Christianity based on their holy books, viz., Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) and the Bible (Old and New Testament).

Introduction

Sikhism and Christianity belong to two different religious traditions, commonly known as Oriental and Occidental or Semitic, respectively. Both are also separated historically by a gap of fifteen centuries. Guru Nanak was founder of Sikh religion in India while Jesus Christ founded the Christianity in Palestine. Both the prophets have been considered as crusaders against the established religious traditions of their country of origin. While Guru Nanak started his campaign against the

established social, religious and political system in India, Jesus did the same in Palestine. Guru Nanak was fighting against the Brahmanical traditions of Hindu society in India during the 15th century. Jesus Christ had to fight against the Jewish traditions of Palestine and Christians earned the wrath of Roman empire for more than three hundred years. Sikh Gurus and their followers had to suffer at the hands of Mughal emperors for more than two hundred years.

Both Sikhism and Christianity have another common feature: they are religions of the book. The religious book of the Christians is called "The Bible". It consists of two parts: (a) The Old Testament – a covenant between man and the God of the Jews (Jehovah), and (b) the New Testament – a collection of biographical sketches of Jesus and an interpretation of his philosophy as understood by his disciples. The sixty six books of the present Bible were written by no less than forty writers over a period of two centuries. Jesus himself did not leave even a single line in writing nor did he instruct anyone to do so. The holy book of Sikh religion (SGGS) was compiled by Guru Arjun, the fifth Nanak, in 1604. It has compositions of Sikh Gurus and the sacred writings of various Hindu and Muslim saints of India. The authentic version of SGGS compiled by Guru Arjun was enshrined and declared as 'Sabd Guru' of the Sikhs in 1708 by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Nanak. SGGS does not contain history or biographies of the Sikh Gurus except for some indirect references here and there. It is written in verse and is meant for singing following the rich tradition of Indian *ragas*.

The Sikh tradition of Inter-faith dialogue originated with Guru Nanak, the first prophet of Sikh religion, who made it a mission of his life to visit holy places of other religious sects in India and abroad. Guru Nanak traveled far and wide in all four directions and held discourses with Hindu saints, Muslim *peers* and *Nath-yogis*. The essence of these discourses is recorded in SGGS and the famous composition known as *Sidh-Gosht* refers to one such remarkable debate with Nath-Yogis.

However, there is no evidence of any discourse with followers of Christianity in SGGS.

Inter- Comparison of Sikh Scripture and the Holy Bible

It is quite but natural that the two belief systems, Sikhism and Christianity, which were separated in both time and space, may have some common doctrines as well as widely different approaches to epistemological concepts, viz., origin of the universe, nature of reality, the relation between soul of man and his body and concept of liberation. For sake of comparison, we discuss some basic concepts in both Sikhism and Christianity to appreciate the viewpoints about such fundamental questions : What is God? How the Universe was created? What are the Ideal Man and his role in Society? What are Heaven, Hell and Grace of God?

Concept of God

The Sikh concept of ultimate Reality or God is more akin to the Judaic notion of an Almighty person than to the Aryan concept of an immanent neutral principle [1]. In the opening stanza of SGGS, Ultimate Reality is defined as: One (Being – Becoming), Truth and Existence, Creator Person, without Fear or Hatred, Beyond Time and Space, Self-Existent, Transcendental Cosmic Spirit made manifest by the Grace of the Guru.

The basic Sikh thought is strictly monistic [2] and there is no room for demi-gods and goddesses as in Hinduism :

ਇਕਸੁ ਤੇ ਹੋਇਅ ਅਨੰਤਾ, ਨਾਨਕ ਏਕਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਏ ਜੀਉ॥

*“From One the many emanate and finally,
O, Nanak into the One the many submerge”.*

The main doctrines of Sikh theology are based on this view of Ultimate Reality. Reality or God was in existence before the creation of Universe. The Sikh philosophy dialectically unites the ideas of God and the world. Transcendence shows that God is prior to and distinct from

the world. Immanence of God represents God's connection with the world. In a manner of speaking, God is one but has dual nature, Transcendental and Immanent. Guru Nanak has identified the manifest reality with Nature [3]:

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਸਿਨਾਖਤੁ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ॥

*"Nanak, the beneficent Lord alone is True,
and He is revealed through his Nature".*

Concept of God is central to Christianity but Christians sometimes call Jesus God but at other times call him Son of God. "God so loved the world that he sacrificed his only begotten son for it". The Bible uses similar epithet for others also, e.g., David and Adam. The Bible even calls common people 'sons and daughters' of God [4]. We find an echo of this concept in SGGS. According to Sikh belief all human beings are sons and daughters of God [5]:

ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਪਿਤਾ ਤੂੰ ਹੈਂ ਮੇਰਾ ਮਾਤਾ ॥

"O God, you are my Father and you are my Mother".

Bhagat Kabir also calls himself son of God in SGGS [6]:

ਹਉ ਪੂਤੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਤੂੰ ਬਾਪੁ ਮੇਰਾ॥ ਏਕੈ ਠਾਹਰ ਦੁਹਾ ਬਸੇਰਾ॥

"I am your son and you are my Father, We both live together"

A similar sentiment is expressed by Jesus to establish his relationship with God [7]: "I came down from heaven. I and my Father are one. I will come again to receive you unto myself".

Christians believe that Christ will be their saviour on Doomsday. Sikhs do not believe in any such dogma. In contrast, Sikhism believes in the salvation of all through God's grace irrespective of their religious affiliations [8]:

ਜਗਤੁ ਜਲੰਦਾ ਰਖਿ ਲੈ ਆਪਣੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ॥

ਜਿਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਉਬਰੈ ਤਿਤੈ ਲੈਹੁ ਉਬਾਰਿ॥

*"O God this world is burning in its own sins,
Save it in Thy Mercy. It matters not
Which way (religious path) they approach You".*

Creation of the Universe (Genesis)

The holy Bible states [9] “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.... Let there be light Let there be a firmament... Let the waters bring forth life. And the evening and morning were created the sixth day. He rested on the seventh day and blessed and sanctified it”.

The Genesis story of the Bible has been challenged by physicists, biologists and geologists on the basis of scientific findings which contradict this hypothesis. For example, according to this scheme, the earth existed before the sun and the stars. The days existed before the sun came into existence. In fact, the whole scheme looks topsy – turvy in modern scientific terms.

According to Sikh Cosmology, God existed before creation in *sunya* (void) phase. Then He willed the creation of the universe and the process began as follows [10]:

ਸਾਚੇ ਤੇ ਪਵਨਾ ਭਇਆ ਪਵਨੈ ਤੇ ਜਲੁ ਹੋਇ ॥

ਜਲ ਤੇ ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਣ ਸਾਜਿਆ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮੋਇਏ॥

“The Lord created air (gases) which combined to form water.

The water brought forth the creation with the

Lord Himself as the spark of life in it.”

The Sikh scripture (SGGS) unfolds the Genesis story in a most scientific manner. As for the time of creation, it is known to God alone. There are countless suns, moons, and earths in the Universe. Man can never know the extent of God’s creation [11]:

ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਖਾਣੀ ਅਰੁ ਖੰਡ ॥ ਕਈ ਕੋਟਿ ਅਕਾਸ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੰਡ॥

ਕਈ ਬਾਰ ਪਸਰਿਅ ਪਾਸਾਰ ॥ ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਇਕੁ ਏਕੰਕਾਰ॥

“There are millions and millions of galaxies and

solar systems in the Universe. The creation has

occurred so many times. But the one Lord

remains for ever and ever.”

One of the most beautiful hymns in SGGS is the ‘Hymn of the Genesis’ which runs as follows [12]:

ਅਰਬਦ ਨਰਬਦ ਧੁੰਧੁਕਾਰਾ ॥ ਧਰਣਿ ਨ ਗਗਨਾ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਅਪਾਰਾ॥
ਨਾ ਦਿਨੁ ਰੈਨਿ ਨ ਚੰਦੁ ਨ ਸੂਰਜੁ ਸੁੰਨ ਸਮਾਧਿ ਲਗਾਇਦਾ ॥....

“For billions of years, there was nothing but utter darkness. There was neither day nor night, nor moon, nor sun but the Lord alone sat in profound trance...”

When He so willed, He created the world and supported the firmament without support. He founded the continents, solar systems and underworlds, and from the Absolute self, He became manifest.”

Concept of Salvation, Heaven and Hell

According to Christian belief, salvation is possible only through Christ [13]. His spirit will escort all Christians to God’s presence. “There is only one intermediary among God’s men who has paid the price for everybody’s salvation”. “There is no salvation through anyone else, in all the world no other name has been granted to mankind by which we can be saved”.

Sikhism does not claim monopoly of salvation nor does it believe in salvation that supposedly comes after death. SGGS advocates salvation during this life itself. By following the Sikh way of life, one can attain to the state of *jivan-mukta* (liberated while living) [14].

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਭੇਟਿਐ ਪੂਰੀ ਹੋਵੈ ਜੁਗਤਿ।
ਹਸੰਦਿਆ, ਖੇਲੰਦਿਆ, ਧੈਨੰਦਿਆ, ਖਾਵੰਦਿਆ ਵਿਚੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ।

O Nanak, meeting the True Guru, one comes to know the Perfect Way. While laughing, playing, dressing and eating, he is liberated.

Christianity does not look for the immortality of a soul but the resurrection of the complete person in a new and wonderful body. Those who are saved by Christ will go to heaven and those not saved will suffer punishment in hell. Christians are already saved because they already have forgiveness and new life promised by Jesus Christ [15].

Sikhism believes that man’s soul is immortal because it is part and parcel of God but is separated from Him due to ego. Guru-oriented Sikhs (*gurmukhs*) are liberated during this life before physical death while *manmukhs* (ego-oriented) suffer

during this life and life hereafter. Heaven and Hell have different connotations in Sikh vocabulary. The idea of a Heaven in the skies and Hell in the bowels of earth is not recognized in Sikhism. This world can become a heaven for a *gurmukh* and a hell for *manmukh*. Heaven and hell refer to the state of mind of an individual and not some physical spaces [16].

ਕਬੀਰ ਸੁਰਗ ਨਰਕ ਤੇ ਮੈ ਰਹਿਓ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਪਰਸਾਦਿ।
ਚਰਨ ਕਮਲ ਕੀ ਮਉਜ ਮਹਿ ਰਹਉ ਅੰਤਿ ਅਰੁ ਆਦਿ।

Kabeer, I have been spared from heaven and hell, by the Grace of the True Guru.

From beginning to end, I abide in the joy of the Lord's Lotus Feet.

Ethics and Morality

The Sikhs pay great respect to their holy book (SGGS), wash their bodies, cover their heads and take off their shoes when they pray to God. It is interesting to note that in the past the Christians also conducted their religious services [17] like the Sikhs do today.

Jesus says [18], "Thy will be done." In SGGS [19], it is called *hukam* or divine Will which cannot, however, be explained: "By His Will, creation takes place but His Will is indescribable"

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਅਕਾਰ, ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਕਹਿਆ ਜਾਈ ॥

Jesus says that there are two commands [20]: "Love God with all heart, mind and body, and love neighbour as self". Guru Gobind Singh puts it as a pre-condition for God-realisation [21]:

ਸਾਚੁ ਕਹੋਂ ਸੁਨ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਭੈ ਜਿਨ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਕੀਅ ਤਿਨ ਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਪਾਇਆ॥

"I proclaim the Truth, listen ye all.

Only those who Love have realized God".

Sikh Gurus realized the power of Love and the price has to be paid by total submission to God or Guru, the preceptor. In SGGS, Guru Nanak lays down the stringent condition for the dedicated disciple [22]:

ਜਉ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥

ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥

*“If you want to play the game of Love,
Come into my street with your head on thy palm”.*

The Bible lays stress on purity of heart [23]: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see god.” Cleanliness of body is of no avail but purity of heart. In SGGS, the same sentiment is expressed as follows [24]:

ਤੀਰਥ ਨਾਤਾ ਕਿਆ ਕਰੇ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਮੈਲੁ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥

*“What is the use of bathing at places of pilgrimage?
When your mind is full of filth due to stubborn pride”.*

Idolatry was condemned by Jesus in strongest terms and the Bible supports this view-point [25]: “Man is a living temple of God, why then need to go for idols.”

All the Sikh Gurus condemned idolatry in their sermons, a clear divergence from the Hindu religion. Sikh Gurus advocated the efficacy of meditation, congregational prayers, chorus singing of hymns for God realization and rejected the rituals and idol worship. In fact, Guru Nanak very clearly stated in SGGS [26] that the physical body is not the Guru.

ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ॥

“The Word (sabad) is my Guru and consciousness is the disciple”.

It is interesting to remark that manifestation of spiritual acts is commended in the Bible while works of flesh, viz., adultery, lasciviousness, hatred, drunkenness and vain glory are condemned in no uncertain terms. SGGS speaks in identical tones and forbids coming under the influence of five evils, namely, lust, anger, greed, attachment, and pride (*kam, karodh, lobb, moh* and *abankar*).

I was amused to read message of the Bible regarding meat eating and drinking of wine [27]: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost”. “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended,

or is made weak". Intoxicants are forbidden in Sikh religion but meat eating is part of Sikh code of conduct. Ideas about meat eating and drinking are almost identical in Bible and SGGS.

Jesus said [28]: "Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's and unto God the things which be God's". Thus, the spiritual and the political life were separated into two different domains. The Sikh Gurus, on the other hand, recognized God as the True ruler. In Sikhism, both spiritual and political activity is sanctioned and the concept of *miri* and *piri* forms the basis of Sikh ethics. However, Guru Gobind Singh [29] has also recognized the two domains as distinct as in Bible. He states: "Both Guru Nanak and Emperor Babur were created by the same God. The House of Nanak is recognized as spiritual and the House of Babur as political for all intents and purposes".

**ਬਾਬੇ ਕੇ ਬਾਬਰ ਕੇ ਦੋਊ, ਆਪ ਕਰੇ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਸੋਊ ॥
ਦੀਨ ਸਾਹ ਇਨ ਕੇ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੇ, ਦੁਨੀ ਪ੍ਰਤਿ ਉਨ ਕੋ ਓਨੁਮਾਨੇ ॥**

The concepts of Word in the Bible and *Sabad* in the SGGS are almost compatible and have a far reaching import in the Creation process. According to Bible [30]: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things were made." The explicit functions of the Word are Creation, Revelation and Salvation [31]. SGGS also implies that *Sabad* (Word) is the vehicle for all creative activity of God [32], promotes understanding of God and union with God is possible by meditation on *Sabad*:

ਉਤਪਤਿ ਪਰਲਉ ਸਬਦੇ ਹੋਵੈ ॥ ਸਬਦੈ ਹੀ ਫਿਰਿ ਅਪਤਿ ਹੋਵੈ ॥

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Sikh Religion and Islam: The Need for Interfaith Dialogue

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Abstract

The advent of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, coincides with the advent of Babur, the founder of Mughal empire in India. The encounter between the two traditions starts with Guru Nanak and continued for nearly three centuries till the advent of Sikh rule in Punjab. Despite many common features between Sikh religion and Islam, e.g., concept of God and Social equality, there has been a strong antagonism between the two due to political reasons. This paper aims to promote interfaith dialogue between the two faiths based on the study of Sikh scripture and holy Quran.

Introduction

Sikhism, as one of the youngest religions in the world, was born in Punjab (India) and Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikh religion. Islam was born as a new faith in Arabia during the 7th Century and Prophet Muhammad was its founder. Guru Nanak realised the suffering of Indian people under the yoke of dual oppression by Brahmanic and Islamic priestly classes on the one hand and the contemporary rulers, on the other. Guru Nanak refers to the state of affairs in his compositions recorded in Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) as follows [1]: “Rajas were ruthless like tigers and the priestly judges were like dogs, and their officials swooped down on

people regardless of whether they were sitting or sleeping (i.e., at any time of the day).

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ॥ ਜਾਇ ਜਗਾਇਨਿ ਬੈਠੇ ਸੁਤੇ॥

Prophet Muhammad found the Arabian people divided into hundreds of tribes engaged in internecine warfare. The people were superstitious and believed in idol worship, magic, astrology and cult practices. Gambling and drinking were very common and taking revenge was considered a religious duty. Slavery was common and female child was killed or buried alive. There was hardly any literacy among the Arabs.

Sikhism and Islam, though separated widely in both time and space, have many common features and similarities [2]. A comparison of texts of SGGGS and the holy Quran will reveal many points of similarity and some other issues on which both religions also differ. The aim of this essay is not to establish the superiority of one over the other but to provide a common platform for an inter-faith dialogue between Sikh religion and Islam. For example, both religions believe in the Oneness of God and are against idol worship in any form. Belief in the will of God, meditation on the Name of the God and congregational prayer are central to both religions. The caste system in the society is rejected by both and all human beings are considered equal in the eyes of God and Prophet. Spiritual and temporal attainments are considered as sacred goals for upliftment of society in both the religions.

Inter – faith dialogue [3] does not mean encounter among variant religious traditions but is a sort of interaction confined not only to religious issues but also pertaining to social and cultural problems. This type of dialogue issues forth in a spirit of fellowship and recognizes the whole in each part. Inter-faith dialogue does not mean denial of the identity of individual traditions through a synthesis of different approaches. The cosmopolitan vision of Guru Nanak is also evident in his inter-faith dialogues with the different religious traditions of his time. Guru Nanak, no doubt, offered a critical analysis of the contemporary religious thought and rejected their external

paraphernalia but only to inculcate in them a spirit of deeper penetration in their own religion. The aim of interfaith dialogue in his hymns in SGGS is neither subjugation, nor domination, nor conversion, nor degradation of other traditions but to make them visualize the kernel of truth and implement it in their lives for spiritual transformation [4-5]:

ਸੋ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਜੋ ਬਿੰਦੈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ॥ ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਕਰਮੁ॥

ਸੀਲ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਕਾ ਰਖੈ ਧਰਮੁ॥ ਬੰਧਨ ਤੋੜੈ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤੁ॥

ਸੋਈ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਪੂਜਣ ਜੁਗਤੁ॥

ਖੜੀ ਸੋ ਜੁ ਕਰਮਾ ਕਾ ਸੂਰੁ॥ ਪੁੰਨ ਦਾਨ ਕਾ ਕਰੇ ਸਰੀਰੁ॥

ਖੇਤੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਬੀਜੈ ਦਾਨੁ॥ ਸੋ ਖੜੀ ਦਰਗਹ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ॥

The real Brahman is only he who practices austerity, contemplation, self control, righteous deeds and is contented and cultured. A real Khatri is he who performs heroic deeds, who is compassionate, charitable and beneficent.

ਮਿਹਰ ਮਸੀਤਿ ਸਿਦਕੁ ਮੁਸਲਾ ਹਕੁ ਹਲਾਲੁ ਕੁਰਾਣੁ॥

ਸਰਮ ਸੁੰਨਤਿ ਸੀਲੁ ਰੋਜਾ ਹੋਹੁ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ॥

A true Muslim is he who makes mercy as his mosque, faith as prayer mat, honest living as Quran, humility as circumcision and good conduct as fast.

Concept of God

The concept of God has much in common in both Sikhism and Islam. God is considered omnipotent, omniscient, creator of universe and unborn in both religions. Guru Nanak defined God in the opening verse (*mulmantar*) of SGGS [6] as follows:

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ
ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

Ik Onkar (God is One), Sat Nam (His name is True), Karta Purkh (He is the Creator), Nirbhau (He is without fear), Nirvair (He is without enmity), Akal Murat (He is timeless Being), Ajoni (He is beyond births and deaths), Saibhang (He is self created), Gurprasad (He is realized by the grace of the Guru).

The oneness of God is repeatedly stressed in SGGS by all the Sikh Gurus [7-9]:

ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਮੇਰਾ ਏਕੋ ਹੈ॥ ਏਕੋ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਏਕੋ ਹੈ॥

My Lord is One, One and the only One O Brother.

ਤੂੰ ਜੁਗੁ ਜੁਗੁ ਏਕੋ ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਤੂੰ ਏਕੋ ਜੀ ਤੂੰ ਨਿਰਚਲੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਸੋਈ॥

Age after age, you are the One.

Forever and ever, You are the One.

You never change, O creator Lord.

ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਇਕੁ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਏਕੋ ਰਹਿਆ ਸਮਾਇ॥

The One Lord permeates all.

The One Lord is pervading everywhere.

Sikh religion is very liberal in calling God by various names selected both from Hindu and Muslim traditions; for example, Hari, Ram, Allah and Khuda. Guru Gobind Singh [10] refers to naming of God in one of his verses:

ਤਵ ਸਰਬ ਨਾਮ ਕਥੈ ਕਵਨ

ਕਰਮ ਨਾਮ ਬਰਨਤ ਸੁਮਤ॥

Who can say all His Names?

He is described only by those of His qualities,

Which are manifest through His creation.

God is considered 'Nirvair' in Sikh religion, which means He is inimical to none. In Islam, God is merciful to the believers only and cruel to the infidels (*Kafirs*). However, Oneness of God is the cardinal principle in Islam [11]:

La Ilaha, ill-Allah. There is no God but God.

Sikhism believes in One God who is both Transcendent and Immanent. He is manifested in this universe through His creation. Oneness of God is common aspect of both Sikhism and Islam.

God is not involved in cycle of birth and death and is beyond the confines of space and time. He is a self-created Being. This idea is common to both Sikhism and Islam. Holy Quran [12] records this quality as follows:

Lam yalid wa Lam yoolad.

He is neither the begetter nor the begotten.

All things are mortal except Him.

In SGGS, this aspect is highlighted in many verses [13-15] as follows:

ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਤੇ ਰਹਤ ਨਾਰਾਇਣ ॥

God is devoid of birth and death.

ਨਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਮਾਤ ਪਿਤਾ ਸੁਤ ਬੰਧ ਨਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਕਾਮ ਨ ਨਾਰੀ॥

God is without parents, progeny and wife.

ਤੂੰ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਪਰਮੇਸਰੁ ਜੋਨਿ ਨ ਆਵਹੀ॥

You are Lord of all and need not enter the womb.

God is Omniscient and this similarity is found in the verses of Holy Quran [16] and SGGS [17]:

Quran: “*Even if thou speakest aloud, He knows the secret thought and that which is yet more hidden*”.

SGGS: **ਆਪੇ ਜਾਣੈ ਕਰੇ ਆਪਿ ਆਪੇ ਆਣੈ ਰਾਸਿ॥**

He himself knows, He Himself acts and sets things right.

Creation of the Universe

A comparison of cosmological ideas in SGGS and Quran has been given in the Chapter, “Cosmological Ideas in Science and Religion” in my book [18]. We need not repeat all those ideas here. Islamic theory of creation is almost identical to the one given as Genesis in the holy Bible. The Sikh cosmology is more scientific in its approach but leaves the act of creation in the hands of God as the Creator (*Karta Purakh*). Islam also accepts the ideas and role of God as the creator. The Holy Quran speaks of creation as a big bang. When Allah spoke the word ‘*Kun*’ there was creation all around. In a similar vein, Guru Nanak also sums up the creation process by God uttering a word [19]:

ਕੀਤਾ ਪਸਾਉ ਏਕੋ ਕਵਾਉ ॥ ਤਿਸ ਤੇ ਹੋਏ ਲਖ ਦਰੀਆਉ ॥

God created the Universe by uttering a word.

Concept of Salvation, Heaven and Hell

Life and death are two concrete realities and both Sikhism and Islam deal with salvation, a riddance from the cycle of birth and death, in their own way following the Oriental and

Occidental traditions, respectively. Sikhism is a life-affirming religion and advances the hypothesis of liberation during this life itself (*Jeevan Mukti*). Death need not be a painful experience for a Guru-oriented (*gurmukh*) person, rather a blessing in disguise. The ego-oriented (*manmukh*) suffers the pangs of death. Bhagat Kabir [20] illustrates the Sikh view-point in SGGS as follows:

ਕਬੀਰ ਜਿਸੁ ਮਰਨੇ ਤੇ ਜਗੁ ਡਰੈ ਮੈਰੈ ਮਨਿ ਆਨੰਦੁ॥
ਮਰਨੇ ਹੀਤੇ ਪਾਈਐ ਪੂਰਨੁ ਪਰਮਾਨੰਦੁ॥

*Kabir, death, which frightens the world,
is the harbinger of bliss for me.*

Because it is after death, I will meet my God.

Heaven and hell do find a mention in SGGS but the concept of Doomsday is ignored. Sikh religion does not attach too much importance to the disposal of a dead body. It can be cremated or disposed of in a running stream of water. However, the Muslims bury their dead and consider the act of cremation as a sacrilege. Like Christianity, Islam believes in Doomsday, when the dead will rise again from the graves [21]:

“And because the hour will come, there is no doubt thereof, and because Allah will raise those who are in the graves.”

Muslims believe that there is eternal life or eternal damnation after death. On the Doomsday, the day of the last Judgement, Prophet Muhammad will intercede on behalf of the Muslims. He will deliver the God-fearing into heaven (*jannat*) and the wrong – doers into hell (*dozakh*). Those who enter heaven will live in beautiful gardens surrounded by rivers of milk and honey. They will enjoy company of women of exquisite beauty (*hooran*). The depiction of hell is like an inferno, horrible to describe here in greater detail.

Ethics and Morality

Perhaps, Islam is the only religion where moral laws are part and parcel of its holy book, the Quran. Islamic code consists of *sharia* and *fiqah*; *sharia* deals with moral code of conduct and *fiqah* is the science of jurisprudence (Islamic law).

Some of the Islamic nations follow the moral code of conduct in letter and spirit in running the affairs of their government but the others follow it partially. Prophet Muhammad wanted to implement the moral code of conduct in Muslim society to keep it on right track. Some of the clauses of *fiqah* look quite harsh in face of modern jurisprudence. For example, adultery is punishable by death and theft¹⁸ by cutting of hands [22]:

“As for the thief, both male and female cut off their hands. It is the reward of their own deeds and exemplary punishment from Allah.”

There is no such rigid code of conduct prescribed in the SGGS. However, to regulate the religious affairs of the Sikh society, SGPC (the Sikh religious body) adopted *rebat maryada* (code of conduct), which is quite flexible compared to the *sharia* of Islam. Jurisprudence and administration of justice is left to the local courts and not to the religious authority in Sikhism. The reason for this approach may be attributed to the concept of evil and sin in Sikh religion and Islam. Evil is personified by *Satan* in Islam [23]: “We assign unto him a devil who would be his mate”, while Sikhism does not accept the existence of any anti-God entity.

In Sikhism, evil results from the imbalance between worldly and spiritual pursuits. SGGS advocates a truthful conduct [24], a balanced approach in life and prayer to God to avoid falling a prey to the evil:

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ॥

Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living.

The division into saints and sinners is justified by their actions during the life. “To error is human” is the acceptable norm in Sikh religion. Only God is perfect; all human beings are liable to commit mistakes [25-26]:

ਭੁਲਣ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਅਭੁਲੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਰਤਾਰੁ॥

All are apt to make mistakes only

God (the Creator) is infallible.

ਭੁਲਣ ਵਿਚ ਕੀਆ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਈ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਨ ਭੁਲੈ॥

*All things created are susceptible to error,
Only the Creator errors not.*

Sikhism and Islam both support the family life of its adherents; with due respect for parents and elders. However, there is a wide gap in both religions so far as respect of women is concerned. In Sikh religion, the status of women is equal to men in all respects and numerous verses in SGGS glorify the role of women in society [27]:

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ॥

So why call her bad? From her, kings are born.

Islam assigns different roles and responsibilities for men and women. Polygamy is permissible and allows up to four women in Islam. Muslim women are required to keep their bodies fully covered wearing a *Burqa* or *Hijab*. They are not allowed to join their men folk in prayers conducted in the mosque. Their status is almost equal to slaves [28]: “*Men are in charge of women because Allah hath made the one to excel the other*”.

Charity is highly recommended in both religions. Sikh Gurus commended the contribution of tith (*daswandh*, equal to 10 percent of the income) for the promotion of social and spiritual upliftment of the society. SGGS lays stress on honest earning and sharing the fruits of labour even for spiritual emancipation of the individual [29]:

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ॥

*He who earns his livelihood by honest means,
and shares it with others, has found the true path.*

Prophet Muhammad recommends charity as a great virtue in Islam: “*Even half a date-fruit given in charity can save a person from hell-fire*”. Charity is collected in the form of *Zakat* by the government and it is responsible for its distribution among deserving poor people of the country.

After discussion of common aspects of both religions, we may refer to some minor points of difference in their creeds. Slavery is permitted in Islam but it is not condoned

in any form in Sikh religion. Islam does not approve of music and dancing and considers both as *haram* (forbidden). However, the Sikh scripture is written in poetry and *ragas* and its congregational singing (*Keertan*) is considered the best form of worship in Sikh religion [30]:

ਕਲਜੁਗ ਮਹਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਪਰਧਾਨਾ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਜਪੀਐ ਲਾਇ ਧਿਆਨਾ॥

In this Dark Age of Kali Yuga,

Singing of Lord's praises (Keertan) is the

Most sublime and exalted mode of meditation.

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Sikh Religion and Hinduism: Compatibility for Interfaith Dialogue

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Abstract

Among Indian religious traditions, Sikh religion is the youngest of all and most compatible with the Hindu religion as both have common features of Philosophy and Mythology. However, the originality of Sikh religion has been challenged both by oriental and occidental scholars based on wrong notions. This paper attempts to establish the unique character of Sikh religion vis-a'-vis Hindu religion. It also traces the common ground between the two for interfaith dialogue at academic and social levels.

Introduction

It is believed that Inter-faith dialogue will help the whole world to live in peace and harmony. There were conflicts and wars due to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of scriptures of other religions. The pioneer assembly to bring the religious leaders of the world together in a spirit of reconciliation was held in Chicago during 1893 under the banner of World Parliament of Religions. Swami Vivekananda participated in this assembly to represent Hindu religion.

Interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism are more relevant in the Indian context due to diversity of religions, languages and cultures. The first prophetic message of Guru Nanak after communion with God: *“There is no Hindu no*

Musalman”, emphasized the universal human spirit revealed for the first time in the history of world religions. Guru Gobind Singh repeated the message of Guru Nanak when he proclaimed that all humanity is one in spirit [1]:

ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੋ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਬੋ ॥

Recognize the human race as one and equal.

Sikh religion is universal in its approach as reflected in the teachings of SGGS. Acceptance of religious pluralism and tolerance is the hallmark in the lives of Sikh Gurus and Sikh tradition in general. Guru Nanak was revered by the people of all Indian creeds as is evident from the phrase: “*Guru Nanak Shab faqir, Hindu ka Guru, Musalman ka Pir*”. It is recorded in Janamsakhi that both Hindus and Muslims laid claim to the body of Guru on his death in Kartarpur. Guru Granth Sahib’s essential concerns are for the whole humanity and Gurbani proclaims [2]:

ਬਾਣੀ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੀ ਸਭ ਕੇ ਬੋਲੈ ॥

The Bani of God’s word is spoken by everyone.

According to Teja Singh [3]: “The holy Granth (SGGS) is the only inter-communal holy book in India, if not in the world.” SGGS contains the verses of 36 contributors belonging to different parts of India and representing almost all cross-sections of medieval Indian society. Bhai Mardana, a Muslim, was a life-long companion of Guru Nanak. He never distinguished between Hindus and Muslims. When Guru Nanak was questioned in Baghdad about the superiority of Hindus or Muslims, his emphatic reply [4] was:

ਸੁਭ ਅਮਲਾਂ ਬਾਝਹੂੰ ਦੋਵੇਂ ਰੋਈ ॥

Without good deeds both will suffer.

It is unfortunate that the message of Sikh Gurus has been unconsciously or deliberately misinterpreted by both Indian and foreign scholars due to the theological language of the Hindus used in SGGS. When Sikhism came to Punjab, Brahminism interpreted it as its off-spring with a view to holding it in its tentacles [5]. According to Puran Singh [6]:

“Hinduism was once intolerant to Buddhism; it is now intolerant to Sikhism because it threatens to change Hinduism vitally.”

Contemporary Sikhism is becoming intensely aware of its ethno-religious, ethno-social, ethno-cultural, and ethno-political identity and corporate personality. Sikhism has to re-define its relatedness to Hinduism, as distinct from the earlier stress on rootedness in Hinduism. Sikh religion, despite its doctrinal newness and distinct identity, shares with the Indian commonwealth of religions certain recurring ideational archetypes that have shaped different cultures and civilizations arising in the Indian sub-continent [7].

In my view, we have four categories of scholars commenting on the contribution of Sikh Gurus to Indian society. In the first category, one can include scholars who treat Sikhism as a Hindu reformist movement. In the second category, we can include scholars who treat Sikhism as a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. There is a third category which considers Sikhism as a branch of *Bhakti* movement only. A new breed of Sikh scholars considers Sikhism as a unique religion with no link to Hinduism or Islam. There is lot of confusion in Sikh Studies due to these different approaches.

Our approach in this essay will be to establish the unique identity of Sikh religion and to explore its relationship with the mainstream Hinduism on the basis of some essential elements common to both the traditions. The unique character of Sikh religion is confirmed by the observation made by Prof. M. Mujeeb [8], an eminent scholar of Aligarh Muslim University: “Guru Nanak was not a mere reformer. We know he was not a Hindu who appealed to the Hindu scriptures in order to reform Hindu society. We know he was not a Muslim trying to eradicate evils in Muslim society by appealing to the *Quran*. I do not find in his teachings any attempt at a reconciliation of Hinduism and Islam. In fact, he set both Hinduism and Islam aside to get to the source of religion itself. He was an originator, a founder.”

The reason for misunderstanding Guru Nanak’s message

lies in the use of terms and concepts in his *bani* according to Grewal [9]: “The impression that Guru Nanak’s religious ideas present a good deal of similarity to the ideas which one can easily discover in contemporary Islam and Hinduism has a strong basis in the terms and concepts used by Guru Nanak in his compositions; but this impression is quite misleading. In the context of his theological thought, current terms and concepts undergo a significant change, so significant indeed that they acquire a new meaning.”

For example, the term *Rama* has been mostly used by the Sikh Gurus for God in SGGS and whenever they use it for Rama, the king of Ayodhya, the distinction is made crystal clear to remove any confusion. However, many Hindu scholars and journalists like Kuldip Nayar try to misinterpret this term, without understanding its implications, either out of ignorance or with a hidden purpose in their mind to denigrate the message of the Sikh Gurus. Blaming the present Akali leadership, Kuldip Nayar reports in the Tribune [10]: “Efforts have been made to argue that Lord Rama mentioned in Guru Granth Sahib is different from the one whom the Hindus worship. The intention is to draw a cleavage between the Hindus and the Sikhs for political ends”.

G.S. Talib has resolved this contradiction. According to Talib [11], Sikh Gurus adopted the names like Rama and Krishna derived from Indian mythology for God as these were current among the Indian people and had become synonymous with God in common speech. Thus, *Rama*, the name of hero-prince in *Ramayana*, had become the most popular term for God. In SGGS, *Ram-Nam* means literally God’s name and implies devotion, prayer, meditation. *Rama* is used to designate God by Guru Nanak in Japuji [12]:

ਨਾ ਓਹਿ ਮਰਹਿ ਨ ਠਾਗੇ ਜਾਹਿ॥

ਜਿਨਕੈ ਰਾਮੁ ਵਸੈ ਮਨ ਮਾਹਿ॥

They neither die nor fall into illusion,

In whose soul Rama (God) abides.

Concept of God

Some Indian and foreign scholars have misunderstood that the idea of Oneness of God preached by Guru Nanak was the result of the influence of Islamic teachings on him. But this appears to be a wrong notion. The idea of Oneness of God [13] was evolved by Indian seers and philosophers even before the migration of Aryans, but it appears that religious leaders previous to Guru Nanak neglected to preach the spiritual realities to the Indian masses, who remained sunk in superstitions. They continued to worship not only gods and goddesses but animals, serpents, trees, etc. Guru Nanak realized that it was this weakness of Indian society that made them helpless in face of foreign invaders. Guru Nanak differed from Jains, Buddhists and most of the Hindu brand of philosophers by re-defining the Oneness of God by putting the numeral 1 before the open *Oora* (E) in the opening verse (*mulmantra*) of SGGS. I believe this was a great revolutionary and a scientific innovation of Guru Nanak. The placing of numeral 1 before *Oankar* (E), pronounced as *Ik-Oankar*, expressed the unity and Oneness of God eternally. The unity of Godhead was the first article of his faith.

No school of Hindu philosophy believes that God is *Karta Purkh* in the sense implied by Guru Nanak. The Sankhya school of Hindu philosophy denies His existence and teaches that *Prakriti* creates the universe and *Purusha* has no role to play. The *Nayaya* and *Vaiseska* schools consider God as the efficient cause of the world but not its material cause. A different sequence is proposed by Sankra in his world famous *advaita* system of philosophy. Concept of God as *Nirguna* – *Saguna Brahman* is there, as in SGGS, but *Saguna Brahman* is represented by *Iswara*, the totality of all things that are created through the agency of *Maya*. Guru Nanak rejects the *advaita* school of thought in Japuji [14] :

ਏਕਾ ਮਾਈ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਵਿਆਈ ਤਿਨਿ ਚੇਲੇ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ॥

ਇਕੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੀ ਇਕੁ ਭੰਡਾਰੀ ਇਕੁ ਲਾਏ ਦੀਬਾਣੁ॥

Hail to Thee from whom sprang Maya,

The world and Brahma Vishnu and Shiva.

Guru Nanak discarded the worship of the whole pantheon of gods and goddesses of Hindu religion. He gave no importance to principal Vedic gods like Pusan, Indra, Rudra, Visnu and Agni, who were replaced later by the Trinity of Hindu gods: Brahma (the creator), Visnu (the preserver) and Siva (the destroyer). How can they liberate the Indian masses? They are all servants of the Supreme God and are crying to Him for His grace [15]:

ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਮਹੇਸੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ॥ ਉਭੇ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਅਲਖ ਅਪਾਰੈ॥
ਹੋਰ ਕੋਤੀ ਦਰਿ ਦੀਸੈ ਬਿਲਲਾਦੀ ਮੈ ਗਣਤ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਕਾਈ ਹੇ॥

*Brahma, Visnu and Siva stand at His door,
To serve the unfathomable and infinite Lord.
And many others who are beyond count,
Are seen crying at His door.*

Guru Nanak's God is absolute, eternally unchanging Formless one, *Nirankar*. He is inscrutable, boundless, self-existent, ineffable and beyond time. God is the sole creator, the sustainer and the destroyer of the universe. Guru Nanak's God is both transcendent and immanent, pervading the microcosm as well as macrocosm. It is this God who is the object of Guru Nanak's worship.

The idea of divine self-expression [16] is another revolutionary theological thought of Guru Nanak. The concepts of Truth (*sach*), the Name (*nam*), the Word (*sabda*), the Divine Preceptor (*guru*) and the Divine Order (*hukam*) form the key-concepts of divine self-expression. The Truth represents the eternal aspect of God, the Name refers to the object of communication, the Word to the medium of communication, the Divine Preceptor represents the voice of God in man himself and the Divine Order is an all – embracing principle, comprehending the working of the physical as well as the moral world.

All these concepts are inter-linked in the *bani* of Sikh Gurus and these form the basis of Sikh view point of *Bhakti*. In Sikh religion, *bhakti* is addressed directly to God and not to any *avatar*. In fact, the very idea of incarnation of God is rejected in very strong terms in SGGS [17]:

ਮੇ ਮੁਖੁ ਜਲਉ ਜਿਤੁ ਕਹਹਿ ਠਾਕਰੁ ਜੇਨੀ ॥

Let that mouth be burnt, which says that our Lord (God) is subject to birth.

Creation of the Universe

A detailed discussion on this topic is given in the Chapter “Cosmological Ideas in Science and Religion” in my book [18]. However, some elaboration of Hindu view of Cosmology is being made on the basis of a recent paper by RC Verma [19]: “Evolution of the Universe and Concepts of Matter: Some Ancient Indian Views.”

Rigveda describes the universe as infinite and made up of Earth, the atmosphere and the sky. It also mentions about the Sun as light giver of the universe. In observational astronomy, Indian *rishis* studied the phenomena of eclipses and prepared calendars so much needed for their rituals. We find a plenty of theories of universe in the Indian literature. Pundit Madhusudan Ojha of Jaipur has recognized ten different schools of cosmology in India on the basis of *Nasadya Sukta* of Rigveda, the famous hymn of creation. In Vedic literature, one finds many creation myths relating to Indra, the chief of Vedic gods.

Upanishads put forward diverse theories of creation of the universe. *Chhandogya Upanishad* states: “Brahman desiring to be many, created *taijas*, *ap* and *kshiti*, and entered into these three.” Surprisingly, in these theories of creation, no creator is postulated for the purpose of creation. For instance, the creation process in *Brihadarnyak Upanishad* is described as follows: “In the beginning, water (primeval) alone existed, from water was born *Satya* (truth), *Satya* produced *Brahman* and so on.” *Katha Upanishad* gives priority to Fire: “Fire having entered the universe, assumed all forms. Fire was the First to evolve from the primal reality that from Fire came water, from water the earth.”

Vaisesika school of Indian philosophy proposed *parmanuvada* (atomic theory) for creation of the universe: “(i)

There is an external universe independent of mind. (ii) This universe exists eternally, it was never created. (iii) Material things must be made up of *parmanus* of various elements, which are the permanent substance. (iv) Once the *mahabbutas* are produced one after the other, through the divine will (*sankalpa*) a big cosmic egg is produced out of the *parmanus* of five elements, (v) Destruction occurs when union of primary parmanus is broken. Creation and destruction of universe continues ad-infinitum. This process has got neither any beginning nor any end.”

There is a lot of confusion and diversification in the ideas about creation of the universe in Vedic, Upanishdic, Nayaya, Visesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimansa and Vedanta schools of Indian philosophy. Guru Nanak’s ideas about creation of the universe have been summed up in my book [18]. We do find some common ground between these two Indian traditions represented by SGGGS and Rig Veda’s *Nasdaya Sukat*.

Concept of Transmigration, Salvation, Heaven and Hell

The doctrine of transmigration of the soul or eschatology is common to both the religious traditions. Every religion has tried to explore the basic question: What becomes of human being after death? Sankra, the great Hindu philosopher, compares mankind to a plant. Like plant, it springs up, develops and returns finally to the earth. But as the seed of the plant survives, so also at death the works of a man remain as a seed which sown afresh in the realm of ignorance, gives rise to a new existence in exact correspondence with his character. This is the foundation of famous *karma* theory of transmigration. “What becomes of us after death?” can be answered in three ways: (i) annihilation, (ii) eternal retribution in heaven or hell, and (iii) transmigration. Most of the scientists believe in the first answer. Second answer appeals to the Semitic religious traditions. And for empirical solution of the problem, the third answer satisfies the Indian mind. The

doctrine of soul's migration forms the basis of moral law in this world.

The hymns of Rig Veda know nothing of migration of the soul. Idea of immortal life exists in many hymns of Rig Veda. The idea of heaven and hell is introduced in the Atharvaveda. The good are rewarded in heaven and the wicked are punished in the hell. Those who annoy the Brahmans are also condemned to hellish existence [20]:

Those who spit at Brahmans,
Or cast on them the mucus of the nose,
They sit there in pools of blood,
Chewing their hair as food.

The concept of salvation or emancipation of soul (*atma*) has been a hallmark of Hindu philosophy. A man who is free from desires, his soul (*atma*) merges with God (*Brahman*). There is no transmigration for such an emancipated soul. He attains immortality [21]:

When every passion vanishes
That finds a home in the human heart,
Then he who is mortal becomes immortal,
here already he has attained to Brahman.

The soul (*atma*) of man is assigned four states in the Upanishads: (i) waking, (ii) dream sleep, (iii) deep sleep, i.e., dreamless sleep, in which the soul becomes one with Brahman and enjoys unsurpassable bliss, and (iv) the fourth state, usually called *turiya*, in which union with Brahman is continuous and perfect. The aim of the *Yoga* is to attain *turiya*, a state of the supreme bliss [22]:

The dreamer's knowledge is false,
The sleeper knows nothing at all,
Both go astray, where all this vanishes
There the fourth state is reached.

In Sikh religion, the use of common terms and concepts of Indian origin, borrowed from Vedic, Upanishdic and Yogic systems, has created a lot of confusion in interpreting the message of SGGS. For example, Guru Nanak [23-24] has

employed *turiya* term for the state of supreme bliss, but its attainment is through the medium of the Guru or *sadhsangat* and not by *Yoga*:

ਤੁਰੀਆਵਸਥਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਹਰਿ ਜਾਨੁ॥

*But the fourth state of supreme bliss,
Turiya, is known only through the True Guru.*

ਤੁਰੀਆਵਸਥਾ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪਾਈਐ ਸੰਤ ਸਭਾ ਕੀ ਓਟ ਲਗੀ॥

*The Gurumukh attains the state of turiya,
Taking to the shelter of the Saint's congregation.*

The concepts of transmigration, salvation (*mukti* or *jeevan mukti*), heaven and hell do find a mention in the compositions of Sikh Gurus in SGGS. While there is too much stress on performing rituals, sacrifices, pilgrimage, purification, penance and all sorts of *karamkand* in Hindu religion to attain salvation or emancipation of the soul, the Sikh Gurus reject *karamkand* and advocate service to society, humility and meditation as the means to attain salvation. In Sikh religion, salvation is possible while living in this world and enjoying all pleasures of this worldly life [25]:

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਭੇਟਿਐ ਪੂਰੀ ਹੋਵੈ ਜੁਗਤਿ॥

ਹਸਦਿਆ ਖੇਲੰਦਿਆ ਪੈਨੰਦਿਆ ਖਾਵੰਦਿਆ ਵਿਚੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ॥

O Nanak, meeting the True Guru,

One comes to know the Perfect way.

While laughing, playing, dressing and eating,

One is liberated.

Guru Nanak's conception of God's grace repudiates all presumption to salvation by mere human effort. What decides the issue of salvation (*mukti*) is God's grace (*nadar*). It is obvious that the idea of grace is meant to inculcate humility in one's approach to salvation. The salvation is not 'achieved' by man; it is 'bestowed' by God. Salvation is not 'other worldly' concept in Sikh religion, it has to be attained during this life. The idea of heaven and hell is there in SGGS but they do not look as charming or dreadful as in Hindu sacred texts (*Puranas*).

Ethics and Morality

There are several religions which preach that God alone exists (*sat*). But if you examine their ethical system, you will find a lurking fear of some force which is other than God. Christianity and Islam have accepted this anti-God element of life, as *Satan* or the devil. A basic dualism has thus crept in those systems. Hinduism propagated the idea of *Ekam Satya*, that God alone is *Sat* (existent) but introduced the idea of *Maya* philosophically later on. *Maya* has thus become for the Hindus what evil or devil is for Christians and Muslims; a force anti – God. As a result of *Maya* concept, the Hindu code of conduct or ethical system is very much based on an avowed dualism. A dichotomy persists in their faith and action. It was left for the Sikh Gurus to remove this dualism from the active life [26].

Guru Nanak is the first prophet of God in the history of world religions who removed the dualism and dichotomy between the spiritual life and empirical life of man. In fact, in Sikh religion, the spiritual salvation of man is linked to his social salvation [27]. It was Guru Nanak who laid and led the path of universal love and the emancipation of man without distinction of caste and creed. The objective of Guru Nanak's mission of love was to establish equality and fraternity among all human beings and to resist oppression by safeguarding the human rights and values. In unambiguous terms, he issued forth a call for his mission of love [28]:

ਜਦੁ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ॥
ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ॥

*If you want to tread the path of love,
Come forward with your head on your palm.*

Sikh Gurus gave to love the importance that they gave to nothing else. It is the direct manifestation of God in us. In fact, the intensity of love in a person shows the level of his spiritual attainment. Guru Gobind Singh epitomized 'Love' as the primary condition for meeting the God [29]:

ਸਾਚ ਕਹੂੰ ਸੁਨ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਭੈ,
ਜਿਨ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਕੀਓ ਤਿਨ ਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਪਾਇਓ॥

*Listen ye all, I am going to tell the Truth,
Those who love shall meet the Lord (God).*

Guru Nanak brought a complete reversal of the socio-religious life and values of his time [30]. Against life negation and withdrawal from life, he recommended life-affirmation and complete social participation. He accepted a householder's life against monasticism and asceticism. He gave religious sanctity to married life and equality to women. Guru Nanak accepted and practiced social equality and the brotherhood of man against the rigidity of Hindu *varan ashram dharma*. Asceticism and *Ahimsa*, the fundamental doctrines of all Indian religions, were both rejected by Guru Nanak. Hence, a new moral and social order was established in Sikh society. According to Grewal [31]: "The socio-political order of his day had lost legitimacy in the eyes of Guru Nanak, because it had lost its religious roots. By implication, a new social order was needed, based on a new religious dispensation."

The Sikh Gurus have given a new moral code of conduct to their disciples which must awaken the soul in them. The saint in Sikhism should be more human than the ordinary man. The Sikh militarism is a part and parcel of the Sikh creed and the saint should play the role of a soldier, in response to the exigency of the situation.

In Sikh religion, the status of women is equal to men in all respects and there are numerous verses in SGGS to glorify the role of women in society. We need not elaborate the status of women in Hindu society. In the caste order of the Brahmans, a woman had been classed with the *Shudras*. For Sankra, woman is the gateway to hell. In the Upanishads, woman and *Sudra* are forbidden to recite Vedic *mantras* [32]:

If a woman or a Sudra learns the Savitiri formula,
The Lakshmi formula, the Pranava,
One and all go downwards after death.

Therefore, let these never be communicated to such!

If anyone communicates these to them,
They and the teacher alike go downwards after death.

Hinduism is like a great pyramid of Indian religions and cultures. Despite revolutionary changes introduced by Sikh religion in Indian pyramid, it remains a part and parcel of Indian civilization and culture. Sikh religion must play its destined role in inter-faith dialogues to promote world peace during the new millennium.

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4. **Dharam Singh** (sikhencypbi@yahoo.com) retired from Punjabi University, Patiala, as Professor of Sikh Studies and Editor-in-Chief of the Encyclopaedia of Sikhism. He has published several books and research papers in the fields of Sikh philosophy, religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. He has also made an English adaptation of various scriptural texts, including translation of the Nitnem Banis.

5. **Pashaura Singh** (psingh@ucr.edu) is Distinguished

Professor and Dr. J.S. Saini Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of California, Riverside. His research is located in early Sikh history and scriptural studies. He has several publications to his credit, including his recent monograph, *A Dictionary of Sikh Studies*, launched on Oxford Quick Reference in 2019.

6. Mohd Habib (drmohdhabib@yahoo.com) is a Professor in Islamic & Religious Studies, GGS Department of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala. He is a product of Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. His field of teaching and research is Islam, Sufism, and Interfaith Understanding. He is author of thirteen books.

7. Harbans Lal (japji2050@gmail.com) is Emeritus Professor/Chairman, Pharmacology and Neuroscience, University of North Texas Health Science Center; Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; President of Academy of Guru Granth Studies; Council Member of World Centre for Thanks Giving; Ambassador Parliament World's Religions; Advisor of United Nations Association.

8. SS Ek Ong Kaar Khalsa Michaud (ikjotfoundation@gmail.com) is a long-time researcher of Gurbani and Sikh history. She previously served as Program Director for SikhNet.Com, and currently serves as the Director of Spiritual Studies for a new organization called Ik Jot Foundation. She has written numerous articles and published three volumes of Siri Guru Granth Sahib English translations.

9. Hardev Singh Virk (hardevsingh.virk@gmail.com) retired as Professor and Director, Earthquake Research Centre, GND University, Amritsar in 2002. He was re-employed as Director Research in DAVIET, Jalandhar (2008-11); Visiting Professor, SGGS WU Fatehgarh Sahib (2013-17); Professor of Eminence, PU Patiala (2017-19). Prof. Virk has published 425 research papers and 42 books in Science, Technology, Punjabi literature and Sikh religion.



Prof. Hardev Singh Virk was born in Kamoke, District Gujranwala (now in Pakistan) in 1942. He received his Masters in Physics from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (1963) and Doctorate in Nuclear Physics from Marie Curie University, Paris (France) in 1972. He served in Punjabi University, Patiala (1965-79) and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (1979-2002). Presently, he is serving SGGS World University, Fatehgarh Sahib as Professor of Eminence (Physics).

Professor Virk has worked in many interdisciplinary areas of research: Nuclear & Radiation Physics; Earthquakes & Environment; Ion Track & Nanotechnology; History & Philosophy of Science; Sikh Religion and Punjabi Literature. He is recipient of Shiromani Award by Punjab State Languages Department (1993) and Honourable Mention Award of Templeton Foundation, USA (2005). He has authored 425 research papers and 42 books. He hopes that "Interfaith Dialogues: A Sikh Perspective" will spread the universal message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib at global level.

The Guru Granth Sahib brings together the voice of Sikh Gurus, Hindu Bhagats, and Muslim Sufis with all their different and distinctive richness. This paradigmatic inter-religious archive upholds genuine and profound respect for the plurality of identities, imaginaries, ideologies, and practices. Guru Arjan offers the sacred text as a platter (*thal*) with three dishes: knowledge, contentment and reflection. Professor H.S. Virk's timely volume presents some of its essential dialogical ingredients which we desperately need to feed our empathetically famished and dangerously divided world. This new book is a welcome contribution indeed.

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh

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In my opinion, "*Interfaith Dialogues: A Sikh Perspective*" is a trailblazing book which will open many new vistas and visions and revolutionize the fields of world religions, literature, economics, and politics to name a few. I hope it will promote mutual understanding of other religions to create peace and harmony in the world. I believe the most important Doctrine of Interfaith Dialogues is the very quintessence of Sikhism, for which Guru Nanak travelled 25,000 miles in 28 years on foot.

Daya Singh Sandhu

*Professor: Doctor's Degree Program in Counsellor Education
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Senior Fulbright Research Scholar (2002, 2010, and 2017)*

3. Guru Nanak was the founder of Interfaith Dialogues as there is no Hindu or Musalman, Jew or gentile, no slave or master, but one divine grace of God in his sermons. In Eastern religions, it was the first time Guru Nanak related God as our Father and preached about the multiracial, multi-faith and multicultural spiritual life. If humanism is the faith of the day, Sikhism gives us a pedestal to erect upon, the citadel of the future World order.

Dr. Solomon Naz

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