

SIKHISM AS THE UNIVERSAL RELIGION

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(Abstract of Paper presented in Global Sikh Conference held in March 2017 in Malaysia)

A persona is said to be acceptable universally if he considers all being as equal and has love, equality, fraternity and brotherhood of all being in his heart. He considers all to be the creation of One and One alone and agrees that all live a life of their choosing and to ensure this he must do his bit whatever possible. Universalist doctrines consider all people as their own. In terms of religion, in a broad sense, universalism claims that religion is a universal human quality. Religion in this context is defined as "a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. ^[1] Universalism is a theological and philosophical concept with universal application or applicability.

A community that calls itself *universalist* may emphasize the universal principles of most religions and accept other religions in an inclusive manner, believing in a universal reconciliation between humanity and the divine. A belief in one fundamental truth is also another important tenet. The living truth is seen as more far-reaching than national, cultural, or religious boundaries or interpretations of that one truth.

A universal religion must be universally meaningful and applicable, soundly based and have longevity. It must apply to and connect not just humanity, but all organisms living at any time and in any galaxy, just as some existing religions intimate their ideologies apply. It must be rational, suited to our times and real and relevant issues are recognized and addressed in practical manner. It must embrace and support our emotional needs as well as our rational needs. For this it must respond to feelings and concepts of spirituality that our body's emotions generate, as well as to the logic upon which our minds operate and thrive. Various dimensions like music, art, feelings, emotions, awe and wonder must heighten and colour, and coexist with, rational truth.

It must be knowledge-based and rationally structured, it must be continuously developing; its tenets must continuously absorb and amend our knowledge base enlarges; maintaining fundamental truths as its foundation so that it lasts forever.

There should be no concept of elitism by birth. In its philosophy proximity to God should be based on merit and not on skin colour/race/gender/family lineage/social class. It must adopt the principles of social justice, freedom (except when it infringes on someone else's rights), wealth redistribution and enjoining good forbidding evil. It should not get involved in mammon worship^[2]

Sikhism originated in Punjab; Guru Nanak was the originator. It is now one of the five major world religions having the unique distinction of being the only major religion which though arose in the second millennium but is a religion for the third millennium as it is the one caring for all; for believers as well as non believers.

The Sikh faith is built on the foundation of loving all people irrespective of their faith, appearance, language, or culture. It speaks the language of love. It loves all equally; taking all being the creation of Universal God. Common fraternity of the entire universe and brotherhood is ingrained into all Sikh minds; no distinctions of caste and creed, rich and poor, male and female are accepted principally. Thinking all equal, they are for equal justice to all and stand against any injustice done to any individual.

Sikhism is practiced not by performing rituals, but by having sincere love for the people irrespective of their caste, color, country, community, belief, etc. Anybody of any community/faith, who loves God, can realize Him and achieve the purpose of his life. Of course, we can address Him by innumerable names, Allah, Ram, Gobind, God, Guru, etc., depending upon what one likes and the community in which one is raised.

Philosophy of Sikhism

Sikhism originated in the philosophy of Guru Nanak and developed in hymns of the later Gurus and emerged as a concrete guidance in the form of Sri Guru Granth Sahib where hymns of Gurus along with the hymns of various saints from important Indian saints of the period are compiled.

Basic fundamentals of Guru Nanak's teaching included (a) *Vand Chhako*: Sharing with others, helping those with less who are in need (b) *Kirat Karo*: Earning/making a living honestly, without exploitation or fraud and (c) *Naam Japo*: Meditating on God's name to control your five evils to eliminate suffering and live a happy life. He propagated Truth, Unity of God, equality, fraternity and justice.

Guru Nanak said, "I do not believe in Hinduism or Islam. I love the Almighty, the Lord of our bodies and souls, Who is addressed as Ram by Hindus and Allah by Muslims". There is no other worship than to love Him. Almighty has created this universe and it works under His Will. He prevails everywhere, we should sing His virtues to realize Him. The mission of this human life is to accept His Will and thus realize Him. ^[3]

The Almighty Lord can be worshipped through innumerable languages and by innumerable names – Creator, Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru and God. All names are equal; no single name is superior or inferior. We may praise Him by any name and still gain acceptance by Him. Those who love him achieve the goal of their lives. ^[4]

To preach and practice his mission, Guru Nanak founded the institutions of Sangat and Pangat. All people participate as equals, without any kind of discrimination on the basis of one's faith, caste, color or country. They sit together, pray together, and eat together as children of the same Father. They conclude their prayer with a request, "May God bless whole humanity." ^[5]

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Gurbani) proclaims that *God is the Father of all humanity and not just for any one particular community alone. God is nobody's private inheritance. No one can claim a monopoly on Him. He belongs to everyone*^[6] 'God is our Father; we all are His children, hence equal. No one of us by birth is superior or inferior to others.'^[7]

God is the Lord of the whole universe. He alone is the Father-Mother for all of us. While the universe is moving and changing according to His will, He alone is unchanged, beyond time, He is neither born and nor is he to die, He is ever self-existing. All people are His children. No one community or people of any particular religion have a franchise on Him or His blessings to claim that God is theirs alone and other communities will be sent to hell. All people will be judged by their deeds alone. Anyone who loves God achieves the mission of his life.

We find that Gurbani limits itself to the purpose of human life, which is to love God. The best method of doing so, according to Gurbani, is to love people, serve them and 'see' God living in them. Gurbani is a message, not just for Sikhs, but for all people and for all ages. While laying down its own path for human beings, Gurbani unambiguously and emphatically disagrees with old beliefs of sectarian faiths. This human life has been gifted to us to love people and realize His presence everywhere.

No person is born sinner. Rather, this life has been gifted to us by God to enjoy singing His virtues. To love Him, one is to love His children, that is, all human beings. Every person is His manifestation and every person has His reflection within him/her.

Gurbani says every day is a good day and very valuable in our life. A person is supposed to love God all the time. Every morning one should sit quietly to recite and concentrate on the virtues of God and do the same again when the day is over. Before going to bed, one is expected to tune one's mind to the blessings of God for a peaceful 'sleep' forever. ^[8]

Miss Pearl S. Buck, a noble laureate, while giving her comments on the English Translation of Guru Granth Sahib, wrote, "I have studied the scripture of great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find here in these volumes. They are compact in spite of their length and are a revelation of the vast reaches of the human heart varying from the most noble concept of God to the recognition and indeed the insistence upon the practical needs of the human body. There is something strangely modern about these scriptures and this puzzled me until I learned they are in fact comparatively modern, compiled as late as 16th century, when explorers were beginning to discover that the globe, upon which we all live, is a single entity divided only by arbitrary lines of our own making. Perhaps this sense of unity is the source of power I find in these volumes. They speak to the people of any religion or of none. They speak for the human heart and the searching mind." ^[9]

The direction of future change of civilization is towards continuous decay due to decreasing ethical values; increasing materialism and decreasing of faith in God and human welfare; widening gaps between major religions, hegemonistic interests of the rich and powerful, spreading hatred and enmity, fast spreading terrorism giving rise to occasional wars between nations. Clash of civilizations has become a fact of global political and social environment; and the basic political and moral values are falling to aggravate the situation. In this milieu Sikhism has a ray of hope due to its qualities of virtuous conduct and ingrained love for humanity. Spread of Sikhism in this light has become very important for the universal good hence must be propagated credibly for which thorough strategic planning is needed.

Sikhism has used love, service, faith and truth as the pillars of strength and total dedication and commitment to faith. Sikhism has maintained this for the last 500 years and has not used force and domination to propagate itself. The Gurus, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and Maharaja Ranjit Singh maintained these principles even when they were in power and not a single individual has been converted in to Sikhism by force; greed or trickery. Only love and faith has attracted all the Sikhs to its domain.

If it used force it was offensive defence: it was against the oppressors and offenders to protect the masses. The famous anecdote of attacking Mughals at midnight is actually related to the time (midnight) when they used to attack the Mughals to release the Indian females forcibly being taken by them to Afghanistan to be sold. After their release these girls were honorably sent to their homes under protection. Sikhs are thus known for offensive defence and never for using force for amassing wealth or to win over territories. This is what is Miri Piri concept.

It sees everyone with the same eye and makes no distinctions. It does not bind anyone to Sikhism to get its benefits; its prayer halls are open for all; its prayer ends with praying for well being of all the universe; its community kitchen is for all; all are invited to sit together and eat; it helps all the men in need; may be caught in floods, earthquakes, draught or by any calamity around the globe & goes to the aid of all.

Sikhism is thus a universal religion which became completely free from all narrow sectarianism, dogma and prejudice.....Sikhs believe that 'All paths lead to the same God', ...The path of a Sikh is however superior since Sikhism has combined all good points of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhism, making it a universal faith. ... Sikhism does not have the sectarian boundaries emphasized by Christianity and other narrow religions. ^[10]

Though it is 24.29 million (2011 census) in number; Sikhism stands to play a very important role in ushering a new and higher civilization in the third millennium. Its importance increases further in the times of clash of civilizations. Islam and Christianity also, in their prime times, had brought about their respective civilizations; but these were uni-centric, religiously, socially and politically. Islam used force to spread force to spread and Christians lured the innocent through material benefits; Sikhs however used love and service to the people to wind over their hearts. Sikhism is thus truly developed on the principals of love, faith in God, liberty, equality and fraternity.

Apart from being a distinct monotheistic faith, Sikhism is also a social and fraternal religion, standing equally for the common Fatherhood of God and Universal Brotherhood of Man, guaranteeing equal status to all human beings and asserting that normal family life, loved with virtuous conduct and firm faith in God, surely leads to the path of salvation. It is thus a religion of our time, modern in outlook, scientific in analysis, rational in approach and practical in adaptability; suited to the needs, aspirations and conditions of the modern man and his social set up. It is a religion which is concerned with the creation of a just social order, and is committed to social equality and peaceful coexistence. It enjoins on its followers social responsibility involving both service and social action. It is based on humanistic and universal values of purest form. Human freedom and dignity, self-realization and self-confidence, service and sacrifice have been the essential elements of the ethos.

Sikhism is life asserting, world-affirming, progressive, active and egalitarian religion with a system of metaphysics and practice. Sikh way of life stresses on active participation of life, on merit, on equality of opportunity, upon honest and truthful conduct and upon selfless service and dedication and commitment. These virtues made Sikh diaspora dynamic and innovative filled them with daring spirit and adventure, will power and determination. This psyche made them explore new horizons and settle in all parts of world and attracted known philosophers and historians.^[10]

Statement of Rev. H.L. Bradshaw is very relevant in this regards: "*Sikhism is a Universal world Faith...a message for all men [and women]. This is amply illustrated in the writings of the Gurus. Sikhs must cease to think of their faith as just another good religion and must begin to think of Sikhism being the religion for this New Age*".^[11] His observations are very clear and emphatic. He further stated: "The religion preached by Guru Nanak is the faith of New Age. It completely supplants and fulfills all the former dispensations of older religions. Books must be written proving this. The other religions also contain the truth, but Sikhism contains the fullness of truth.....The Sikh religion is truly the answer to the problems of modern man".

Archer very rightly commented that, "The religion of the Adi Granth is a universal and practical religion..... The world today needs its message of peace and love."^[12] Dorothy Field observed in 1914: "Sikhism is capable of a distinct position as a world religion, so long as the Sikhs maintain their distinctiveness."^[13] Sikhs have to maintain the qualities for which it is known and this human qualitative behaviour and character will only help it to maintain their distinctiveness. Toyanbee observed in 1960 that "Sikh religion has the potential of ushering in a new and higher civilization in the third millennium which would be qualitatively different in its fundamental postulates from earlier civilizations including the modern western civilizations"^[14]

Sikhism has a ray of hope

Sikhism is essentially a religion of spirit with a holistic vision on epistemic level. For ushering in a new holistic world view for the post-modern global society of the 21st century, Sikhism can play a vital role both on metaphysical and sociological levels. Sikhism believes in One God of all and all individuals are the creation of Him alone hence all are brothers and sisters and equal in status and wish the entire globe to live in peace and liberty. In this milieu of clash of civilizations Sikhism stands to play a very important role in ushering a new and higher civilization in the third millennium. Due to its qualities of virtuous conduct and ingrained love for humanity Sikhism has a ray of hope for all. It can help in holding a dialogue between the two civilizations and can help usher an era of peace without future conflicts. Sikhism thus suits the requirements of the future specially the third millennium. Its spread in this light has become very important for the universal good.

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