

## **Reviving the Essence of Peace and Harmony: An Insight of Guru Nanak's Teachings**

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### **Abstract**

Guru Nanak, a great advocate of peace and harmony of the 15<sup>th</sup> century India is considered as the model of interreligious goodwill and humanism. He devoted all his life to promote love friendship and amicability among the people of different beliefs. Born in a common merchant family of Mehta Kalu and Mata Tripta, Nanak was unlike a common boy, way ahead of his time and thinking (Macauliffe, 2004). Since his early age of five Nanak started to search for the real meaning of life and raised questions on the increasing gaps among rich and poor and the followers of different religions. Nanak is seen to be a saint, a preacher, a messenger of God, but above all he is regarded as a *Guru* (teacher). His teachings form the foundations of Sikhism and he is considered as the first Guru of the Sikh religious tradition. The teachings of Guru Nanak can be termed as the model for establishing universal peace by eliminating communal conflicts, a task which he wished to accomplish throughout his whole life. This paper is a humble attempt to explore the idea and message of peace and harmony in the teachings of Guru Nanak and to justify them as a model for interreligious harmony.

**Keywords:** Peace, Harmony, Humanity, Religion

### **Introduction**

#### **Early Years of Guru Nanak's Teachings**

The times of Nanak are identified with the inhuman caste system, which not only divided people into different castes and categories but also paved way to inhuman discrimination towards the lower castes. People of that time were sunk into the oblivion of sin, intolerance and hatred towards adherents of diverse faiths was the key element of the mid-fifteenth century. It was this time when the entire socio-political system in the northern region of the country necessitated new reforms in the entire religious and cultural sector. Nanak emerged as a spiritual leader and social reformer in the soil of India.

Ever since his initial life Nanak witnessed the atrocities committed towards the lower caste people and the ruthlessness of the Hindu Caste system. The hostility between the Muslims and the Hindus and similar social problems made him upset. From his childhood, he tried to resolve the communal conflicts along with other religious and social problems (Singh, 1999: 29). Guru Nanak described the social situation in more striking manner. He says: "Time is like a knife. Kings are butchers. Religion hath taken wings and flown... Modesty and religion have disappeared because falsehood reigns supreme. The Muslim Mullahs and the Hindu Pundits have resigned their duties" (Singh, 1999).

Even as a young kid Nanak asked teacher about the inner meaning of each and every alphabet that was taught to him. The puzzled teacher was surprised at the response of Nanak while he explained the inner meaning of each and every alphabet which was regarding the humanistic interpretation of spirituality and realizing God in terms of alphabets. This is seen

to be as the very first divine message of Guru Nanak (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990: 14).

### **Guru Nanak as a Propagator of Universal Peace**

In an incident in the year of 1499, Guru Nanak is said to have experienced his first mystic involvement while taking his day to day bath in the river. This incident is recorded in the Sikh traditions as 'communion with God' where God gave him a cup of nectar to drink and charged him with a mission with the following words:

“Nanak, I am with thee. Through thee my name will be magnified. Whosoever follows thee, him will I save. Go into the world to pray and teach mankind how to pray. Be not sullied by the ways of the world. Let your life be one of praise of the word (nam), charity (dan), ablution (isnan), service (seva), and prayer (simian). I give thee my pledge, let this be thy life's mission” (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990: 31).

And Guru Nanak recited as follows:

“There is one God. He is the supreme truth.

He the creator,

Is without fear and without hate.

He, the omnipresent pervades the universe.

He is not born

Nor does He die lo be born gain.  
By his grace shah thou worship him.  
Before time itself  
There was truth.  
When time began to run its course  
He was the truth.  
Even now, he is the truth

And evermore shall truth prevail (Sikh Missionary Center, 1990: 32).”

As an after effect of this incident Guru Nanak started wandering throughout the world to orate his teachings of peace, love and humanity. He visited many parts of India, Pakistan along with Arabia, Baghdad, Sri Lanka, Nepal even Afghanistan while spreading his philosophy of harmony. Guru Nanak is said to be accompanied by Muslim Mardana and Hindu Bhai Bala during his visits to all these places (Islam: 7). Guru Nanak never discriminated with lower caste people in fact he is said to keep along many Sudras while his visited sacred places.

Guru Nanak was propagator of monotheism. Although some of his followers believed in the incarnation of God but Guru Nanak repudiated the same. For him, God can neither be

born nor can take rebirth. Nanak was against idol worship because rather than considering it as symbol people worshiped the idol as God. He opined that a man-made idol can never be God. Guru Nanak says:

“Thou hast a million eyes, yet no eyes hast Thou.  
Thou hast a million forms, yet no form hast Thou.  
... With such charms, o Lord, hast thou bewitched me.  
Thy lights pervade everywhere (Singh, 1990).”

In a famous incident while staying at a Mosque at Mecca, Nanak fell asleep and his feet were towards the Kaba. Qazi Qutubuddin, the care-taker of the Kaba, came to him and scolded Guru Nanak for keeping his feet towards the house of Allah. Guru Nanak simply asked him to turn his feet towards another direction where there is no Allah. Surprised Qazi Qutubuddin asked him if he was a Muslim. In reply to the Qazi, Guru Nanak said: “I don’t know whether I am a Muslim but I know it is really difficult to be a Muslim (Singh, 1990)”.

“To be a Musclem is not easy  
Only he who is one should make the claim.  
He should first follow in the footsteps of the holy  
And accept their bitter words as sweet.  
Rid himself of worldly goods as sandpaper rids iron of dust (Singh, 1990).”

The main feature of the universal philosophy of Nanak is that God does not belong to any one particular individual, sect, or nation, rather He is for all. That is why he considered all human being as one (Islam: 05). Born in Hindu family Nanak had immense respect for the other religions and their followers. For him, humans must not be judged because of one’s difference of religion. While showcasing deep respect for the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) Nanak said:

“dikha nur muhammadi, dikha nabi rasool  
Nanak qudrat dekhke, khudighei sab bhool (Islam<sub>b</sub>: 03 ).”

“I have seen the light of Muhammad (with my mind's eye). I have seen the Prophet and the messenger of God. In other words, I have understood his message or imbibed his spirit. After contemplating the glory of God, my ego was completely eliminated.”

Guru Nanak is respected throughout the human race and many Muslims consider him as a *peer*. For example, a famous Muslim poets and philosopher Allama Iqbal called him as ‘*insan-e-kamil*’, a person who has reached perfection, this honorific term is often used for Prophet Muhamad. Guru Nanak always preached his students and followers to respect all religions and to take care of everyone as part of service to humanity by which they can be closer to God.

For eliminating the evils of caste system Guru Nanak established systems of Sangat and Pangat. Whereas the former considers everyone as equal and hence, should be treated equally irrespective of religion, caste and creed. The latter means a system of food whereby food is cooked at a common place called *Gurudawara* (God’s place) and is served to all sitting equally irrespective of their caste, class or place in society. Also it is relevant to note that the holy place of Sikhs known as *Harmandir Sahib* (Temple for all) was founded in Amritsar, which in itself was built on the land given by Muslim King Akbar. So much so that the Sikhs got the Golden Temple inaugurated by a Muslim Pir named Mir Mia (Islam<sub>b</sub>: 05).

Opining against the evils of all the religions Guru Nanak said:

“Religion lieth not in the patched coat the yogi wears,  
not in the staff he bears,  
Nor in the ashes in his body.

Religion bob not in rings in the ears,  
Not in a shaven head,  
Not in the blowing of the conch shell.  
If thou must the path of true religion see  
Among the world’s impurities, be of impurities free (Singh: 42)”.

Guru Nanak saw a dream to form a distinct religious text which would act as directions (Mayell, 2007: 189-214) to the common man irrespective of their religion, caste and creed. Such text must be endowed with the writings of the humanists and God-loving people rather than some so called pundits or maulvis. This idea was fulfilled by Guru Arjan Dev who compiled a book and named as the ‘Adi Grantha’. It was completed by the tenth Guru, Guru Govind Singh and was named as the ‘Guru Granth Sahib’ (Islam<sub>b</sub>: 09). This is the holy book of Sikhs and rather than considering it as a book, it is seen to be as a Guru guiding the path of humanity. It was compiled with the writings of 36 contributors and only nine of the contributors were the Sikh Gurus rest belonged to different religions and castes. Some were Muslim and some were Hindu. The contributors to Guru Granth Sahib included, Kabir a weaver; Sadhna a butcher, Namdev a tailor, Dhana a farmer, Sain a barber, Ravidas a cobbler, and Farid a Muslim Sufi. It shows the catholicity of Sikhism to give equal status to all men irrespective of their caste or religion. Nanak emphasized on deeds and Karma than fate and destiny. According to him, man is the sole cause for his reward or punishment. He says:

“Why blame others, blame your own deeds

For one receives the fruit of what one sows” (Singh, 1979: 137).

Similarly emphasizing the importance of righteous deeds Guru Nanak said, “Through virtue is one enlightened (Singh, 1984: 29).”

## **Conclusion**

Guru Nanak, is the preacher of a universal brotherhood and he taught the idea of religion for all and all for religion. His ideas are moral in nature prevailing beyond the orthodox and fanatic ideas of various religions. He is considered to be as a revolutionary who founded the character and idea of world to be considered as global village. And straightforwardly condemned the corrupt and evil practices and superstitions prevailing in the religious and social institutions. Today, the world is hovered by the extremist misinterpretation of various religions and the teachings of Nanak can guide the path for interreligious harmony. Although all the religion in the world promote religious harmony and peace, however, the true teachings of these religions have been misunderstood and misused by the fanatics who try to use their own religions for their personal gains and power (Islam, 2011: 5). Today, this scenario has taken a more horrendous and dreadful shape, taking away lives of numerous innocents, hence, the study of the philosophy of Guru Nanak is more relevant and necessary at present than before. The need of the hour is to relive the teachings of Guru Nanak to promote world peace by eradicating the fanatical

and orthodox religious elucidations.

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