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GURU NANAK'S IDEA OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY



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ABSTRACT:

Social discriminations, cultural conflicts, religious intolerance and violation of human dignity are antithetical to the spirit of social justice. Social unity, peaceful coexistence, religious harmony and a strong sense of belongingness are required to create an egalitarian society. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, played a momentous role in inculcating the spirit of social solidarity through the spirit of Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Mankind. He wanted to strengthen the socio-spiritual and emotional ties among people of various socio-cultural, religious and economic backgrounds. He taught and

motivated the masses to coexist with the socio-cultural religious diversities He repudiated the manmade social divisions, religious chauvinism, and parochial way of thinking which created obstacles in social unity and socio-spiritual development of masses. He tried to unite the Hindus and Muslims and urged them to sink their religious antagonism and mutual differences. He established several institutions to eliminate the social barriers that stand in the way of unity of humankind.

KEYWORDS

Guru Nanak's Idea , Social Solidarity , social justice , socio-spiritual .

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INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND:

Social solidarity is an essential building block and hallmark of the idea of social justice. It is of paramount value of socially just society. In just and egalitarian society, there is a prohibition of cultural homogenization and proselytization of belief system of any individual. Social solidarity implies an altruistic behaviour and sense of fellow feeling, compassion and cooperation. Social solidarity as a virtue, in a particular sense, implies a commitment to the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of society. The unity among human beings and the goal of just social order cannot be fully realized when people suffer the ill effects of poverty, discrimination, oppression, and social alienation, leading to isolation from the larger community. In a special way, social solidarity encourages to strive for social relationships based on social equality at all levels.

Guru Nanak laid the foundation of Sikhism in the fifteenth century. He took the due notice of prevailing social discriminations, religious bigotry, racial arrogance, ethnic conflicts, and socio-cultural prejudices. He strongly believed that social solidarity is an essential prerequisite to promote the sense of peaceful coexistence, mutual accommodation and tolerance among members of society and the protection of cultural heritage of people. He envisaged an egalitarian social order and raised strong voice in favour of disadvantaged and marginalized sections of society. He urged his followers sink their parochial concerns, reduces the ill effects of self-aggrandizement and false pride and persuades them to work together for common good and establishment of a free and equitable social order.

GURU NANAK'S VISION OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY:

The mission of Guru Nanak was to unite the split humanity into one brotherhood having mutual respect for each individual. The true religion according to Him is to sacrifice personal interest for the common good of society and not the other way around to sacrifice others' interests for selfish gains. He preached that the path of everlasting real peace and happiness is to love the lowly and help the needy. To Guru Nanak, social solidarity is one of the foundational bases of the social justice. Harmony among people, belonging to various sections of society lay down the foundation of egalitarian social order. Social justice cannot coexist with the social disharmony, social conflicts and social oppression. Social cohesion requires the elimination of discriminations and social injustice. Social solidarity is one of the primary concerns of Guru Nanak's religious teachings. He strived for peaceful coexistence and social cohesion in the Indian social order in 15th century. Sikhism condemns the man made, superficial socio-religious, and economic distinctions, which play divisive role in the society. To Guru Nanak, social disunity is antithetical to the spirit of equitable and just social order. His message of Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Mankind prepared bedrock of socially just society.

In terms of Guru Nanak's social teachings, in addition to rejecting caste system, Guru Nanak taught that Sikhs should respect the rights of all creatures, especially of human beings. Sikh teachings also underline egalitarianism, charity, and the sharing of resources. The universalism of Islam, so far as non-Muslims were concerned, was severely curtailed by the accepted Shariatic practices. For the Non-Muslims, the hatred and persecution reserved for the Kafir further hampered the Islamic ideal of the brotherhood of man. The great tragedy of this hatred between the Kafir and the Malecha was that the humanistic values got pushed to the background. Under such social and religious conditions, Guru Nanak took initiative to unite the people belonging to different religious traditions, value

patterns, races and cultural groups.

Sikhism teaches the followers to create a social structure on the basis of universal brotherhood, love for each other, equality, fraternity and sarbat-da-bhala (welfare of all). It believes in individual as well as collective prosperity. It preaches that the human beings are sons and daughters of the same universal father (God). All of them have the same aim of realizing the Ultimate Reality. Human race is one.

The idealistic social system of Sikhism acclaims universal brotherhood (Bhaichara). This is based on equality of all human beings. Guru Nanak, by starting the tradition of Langar (eating food together) in the Gurudawara totally eliminated all taboos related to the concept of untouchability. This universal brotherhood (Sanjihivalta) results from an underlying bond of spiritual unity. In the company of spiritually uplifted ones (Sadh Sangat) one negates jealousies and diversities (Tat-Parai). Consequently there is no enemy or stranger (Bairi-Bigana) and all are seen as brothers. At that stage one learns to seek the good of all (Paropkar).

The Sikh religion with its cosmopolitan spirit and universal principles encourages the spirit of religious pluralism. Its stress is on unity and not uniformity; it recognizes not only the co-existence but also the co-equality of different religious and ethnic groups and creates provision for interfaith dialogue among the different religious communities. The ultimate configuration of the society, which Guru Nanak envisaged was egalitarian, non-exploitative, non-discriminative allowing human spirit to have a full play, free from prejudices of caste, gender, wealth and birth et al., all its members steeped deep in full faith in the singularity and unicity of God, his fatherhood of the whole mankind.

Guru Nanak's principles of Sikhism may be reduced to a single formula: The Unity and Fatherhood of God and the Equality, Fraternity, and Brotherhood of Man as the foundation of All Truth. His religion does not believe in social segregations in society. Consequently, no group or class has been assigned any particular profession and no one has been debarred from following any profession. He asked people to accept the existence of others gracefully and recognize them equal as they are also the creation of the same One Creator and thus, for Guru Nanak, successful life and peaceful, harmonious society is to be based on equality, social justice and mutual solidarity but not on uniformity as forced uniformity leads to forced conversion, subjugation and authoritarianism, which is to be resisted and routed. Thus, one is to actively participate to emancipate oneself and others suffering from inequality, suppression denial of social justice.

Guru Nanak brought forward a revolutionary concept and said: 'Na koi Hindu na Musalman, Ram ke pind paran'. By propagating this ideal, He tried to determine the people that none is born as a Hindu or as a Musalman, rather all are children of the same Creator. Some call Him 'Ram' while others call Him 'Rahim'. To break the barriers 'caste and class divisions' of Hindu religion and 'shrah' and 'shariat' of Islam, Guru Nanak's propagation of this revolutionary concept was a marvelous effort in the right direction. Elaborating His new idea He said; 'Sabh meh jot, jot hai so-e'. In a way, He tried to minimize gulf among people belonging to Semitic and Aryan traditions, races, colours and creeds, which were fighting with each other in name of religion. Guru Nanak gave them message of unity of God, love, peace and harmony to promote the sense of fraternity in order to achieve the goal of social justice in the society. He taught that all religions were only different exposition of the same one reality, that there was only one God, the Father of all humanity, all human beings were children of the same God and, therefore, equal and brothers, that the castes and social divisions were unjust. He said, "The pious person Know the Pure One alone. Stilling his worldly attachment, he realizes the Lord. Lord's Will

alone is prevalent in all the worlds. From the One Lord all are born. The routes are two, but know that their Master is One. Under Guru's instruction recognize His order.”

Guru Nanak gave a message of unity of God. He calls God simply *ikk* (One), without a second. Yet God is not abstract or impersonal. He has personal attributes. He is Himself conscious and the source of all consciousness. The unity of God implies the equality of men. Guru Nanak overruled divisions among men on the grounds of birth, caste or country. Guru Nanak preached the equality of men more than two centuries before the birth of Rousseau and rationalized religion long before Europe heard of a Descartes or a Spinoza. His voice against the predominance of priestly classes preceded Voltaire's crusade against 'ecclesiastical despotism' of the French clergy, and His opposition to obscurantist beliefs, superstitions and rituals may be said to have formed a prelude to modern progressive thought. Guru Nanak tried to bind together all humanity in the golden chains of spiritual understanding, in which all were to recognize the leadership of the Word, the Truth. In this free state of spiritual brotherhood, all differences were dissolved; all barriers fell, and all passions which divided man from man changed and transfigured into the blessedness of peace and unity. Guru Nanak commenced the task of interfaith dialogue to create peaceful, just and egalitarian social order wherein an individual can hope to live in dignified manner. Interfaith dialogue implies dialogue between members of different religions for the goal of reducing conflicts between their religions. Interfaith dialogue is difficult if the partners adopt a position of caring only about the concerns of their own group, but is favoured by the Universalists, who care for the concerns of others. In the process of inter-faith dialogue, one basic principle, one has to follow is that one has to pre-suppose that the Ultimate Truth is part of every one's faith, and no one can claim a monopoly over the Ultimate Truth. So in the process of dialogue, one can learn about the Ultimate Truth from others, and also one can offer constructive criticism about the views of others. But mutual respect towards one another is a prerequisite for the process of dialogue.

In Guru Nanak's views, it is tantamount to committing sins if one looks down upon those persons who adopt the professions of sweepers and scavengers. To Guru Nanak, there is no intrinsic merit in professions. All are alike. Parasitism in any form or shape is anti-social and anti-religious as well. This precept also ensures that there shall be no exploitation of man by man with capital, that is, the accumulated wealth shall not be employed as an instrument of exploitation. It may be added that one who is kind to the kind ones and unkind to the unkind ones may be acting according to the principle of justice. But brotherly love rises above justice in a manner that it includes justice but so transforms it that it becomes consistent with the spiritual unity of mankind.

Guru Nanak's vision of society does not stop at discerning and preaching the equality and fraternity of humankind. He advocates a society where everyone can have a decent living. He suggests honest earning through one's own hard labour and a system to ensure the fulfilment of the basic needs of every individual. He decries parasitism in every form because parasitism contributes to exploitation and inequalities. Guru Nanak in His socio-religious philosophy had emphasized on sharing with other to strengthen the social ties. To Him, sharing with others some of whatever one has spared, is a sacred duty of everyone. This is first of all an acknowledgement of the gifts that one has received from God. It is also an affirmation of the fellow feeling one has for other human beings. Sharing with the others has also been institutionalized in the form of the Guru's free kitchen (*Langar*) run by the Sikh community as a function of the *Gurdwaras* where thousands get food every day without let or hindrance and without any discrimination of colour, creed, class, caste etc. His vision of egalitarian and just society is based on spirit of mutual respect, unity, love and peaceful coexistence. Any attempt to proselytization,

domination, coercion and homogenization is bound to infringe the spirit of social justice.

CONCLUSION:

Social solidarity is the foundational principle of Guru Nanak's vision of social justice. Guru Nanak tried to integrate the people belonging to different caste groups, religions and cultures on one platform. He was out rightly against idea of homogenization. He was supporter of composite culture and in favor of multicultural society. He wanted that no one is allowed to erode or dilute the individualistic or self identities of any group. His conception of unity in diversity is an essential component of just social order. In order to transform the dehumanized majority of masses, who were torn by sectarian considerations, He envisioned a new kind of socio-political order in which there will be no place for obscurantism, cynicism and antagonism. Undoubtedly, He was an apostle of righteousness, peace, compassion and harmony.

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