

A Perspective on Sikh-Muslim Relationship

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Sikhs and Muslims are ethnically, culturally and socially related to one another in the Indian sub-continent. It is the bounden duty of the scholars and historians to highlight certain historical truths and ideological affinities of the two faiths for the sake of inter-faith understanding and promoting of universal moral values. By providing clear insights into the common beliefs of the two religions, their basic dynamics and inspiration, we can enable the common people, especially the younger generation, to move in the direction of good will and unity – so dear to Prophet Mohammad and Guru Nanak. Minds of our young children should be free from ignorance, prejudice and falsehood. We have to illumine them with truth and fine sensibilities, so that they can be torch-bearers of a progressive and dynamic society, nourish and sustain communal harmony and develop into honest, integrated and upright human beings which the world needs the most at this crucial juncture in the history of mankind.

The two scriptures, the Holy Quran and the Guru Granth are replete with the love of God and concern for the entire mankind. Prophet Mohammad's monotheistic movement was a revolt against idolatry and a call for belief and faith in one universal God. Guru Nanak also preached against idol-worship and proclaimed his message of universal love and equality under One and only God. He also traveled to Islamic countries to preach this message. Guru Nanak befriended a Muslim *Mirasi* named Mardana and called him Bhai (brother) Mardana. Throughout their travels Bhai Mardana accompanied Guru Nanak during most of his odysseys and remained his devoted friend and follower till the end, when Mardana passed away in Iran, en route to Punjab.

Guru Nanak repudiated the deeply entrenched caste system by introducing the concept of *Sangat* and *Pangat* among his followers. *Sangat* means a congregation, where everyone, irrespective of caste or creed could participate in the Divine remembrance, signifies egalitarian principle while *Pangat* sharing of meals, where all irrespective of their caste or creed, could sit together in a row to partake food. Emperor Akbar, who established cordial relations with Guru Amar Das, once paid a visit to the Guru at Goindwal. He was so much impressed with the concept of *Langar* (community kitchen) that he sanctioned a handsome revenue of several villages for the maintenance of the "Guru's kitchen".

All Ten Gurus had great reverence for all those who promoted the spirit of harmony, understanding and co-operation among their fellow human beings and pursued the mission of universal love. It is note worthy that the Sikh scripture the Guru Granth compiled by the fifth Guru Arjun, embodies apart from the hymns of the Gurus, compositions of several Muslim holy men and Hindu Bhaktas. The one criterion laid down for the inclusion of hymns in the Sikh scripture was faith in the unity of God and brotherhood of man.

The foundation stone of the Darbar Sahib Amritsar, the sanctum sanctorum of the Sikhs was laid by the sixteenth century Sufi saint Mir Mohammad, popularly known as Hazrat Mian Mir of Lahore. This was an event of great historical import in building Sikh-Muslim ties. The Guru earned fame for his liberal religious outlook.

A common feature of Islam and Sikhism relates to their basic ideological affinity in their positive and life affirming world-view. Both stand for a full-blooded combination between the spiritual and empirical life of man. Both make a radical departure from the life-negating, 'other-worldly' religious systems which emphasise asceticism and withdrawal from the domestic and social responsibility. Both Islam and Sikhism guide mankind on the path of

love, service, sacrifice and martyrdom for truth and righteousness. It is a comprehensive world-view of total responsibility towards all spheres of life-religious, social, economic and political. Indeed it is a lofty world-view of hope and perennial piety Sikhism represents a dynamic vision in which the 'timeless' and the temporal blend beautifully and evolve a new and saner path for humanity. In a religious milieu, marked with negative and complacent trends, Guru Nanak's positive message of socio-political uplift assumed great significance. Sir Mohammad Iqbal, the greatest philosopher poet of the twentieth century paid the most befitting tribute to the Guru, when he said, "A man of perfection awakened Hind from its world of dreams."

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Through out history, both the Sikhs and the Muslims have had to pass through great ordeals to preserve their ideological distinctiveness. Lack of clear perception has often led to many controversies and misconceptions on the religion – political linkage in Sikhism and Islam issues can be resolved through inter-faith dialogue and cooperation. The much-trumpeted secularism of the twentieth century, bereft of spiritual and moral values has miserably failed to confront the manifold problems facing mankind. It is being realised that cultures, without spiritual and moral moorings, fail to meet challenges of destructive and aggressive forces of life. The twentieth century has seen the worst kind of bloodshed and holocaust at the hands of Hitler and Stalin, both protagonists of secularism. Sikhism has through out demonstrated that political power without moral brakes was bound to bring disaster to mankind.

Both from the stand-point of Sikhism and Islam, the inter-faith dialogue and cooperation have assumed great significance. In the context of globalisation, ideals of Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of mankind preached by Islam and Sikhism can be realised in order to establish the Kingdom of God on this earth. It is sad to note that vested interests in politics and elsewhere, - even in the field of academics – are responsible for skewed and partial interpretation of history. Those Historians who cater to partisan interests tend to create a wedge between the communities by turning and twisting many a tragic event of the past relating to communal discord, bloodshed, human misery and alleged injustices. They are unmindful of the adverse effect it has on the minds of the younger generation that fashions the future.

We have an opportunity to build bridges of understanding and cooperation and start a new chapter, not only in Muslim-Sikh relationship but also in inter-faith relationships across the sub-continent and beyond.

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