

SIKHISM TEACHING ON WAR AND PEACE

Dr. S. Balakrishnan

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, The Madura College, Madurai

***“No one is my enemy, No one is a foreigner, With all I am at peace,
God within us renders us, Incapable of hate and prejudice”***

- **Guru Nanak**

Abstract

Many wars have been fought with religion as their stated cause, and with peace as their hoped-for end. What follows is a very brief summary of what the world's major religions say about war and peace. Of course, religious beliefs are often complicated; individuals and groups within each religion often have different views; and religious affiliation is often closely associated with partisan emotions. A summary can only give a very limited picture. But it can open a door for understanding the links between religion and war. Put simply, there are three possible views of war that a religion might adopt. The pacifist view: all violence and killing is wrong. Belief in 'a Just War': some wars, at least, are right because they are perceived to be in the interests of justice - and should therefore be fought according to just rules. Belief in 'Holy War': the God of a religion is perceived to ask, or command, its followers to make war on those who do not believe in that religion and who pose a threat to those who do. Three major world religions have their roots in India: Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Buddhism and Sikhism both grew from Hinduism. All three share the idea of non-violence (ahimsa). The term 'non-violence' was actually coined in English (assumably in 1920) by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), as a direct translation of 'ahimsa', 'avoiding harm to others'. The idea of non-violence was very important to Mahatma Gandhi's thinking and actions as a national leader during India's approach to independence in 1947. He wrote: 'I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.'

Keywords: War, Peace, Humanism, Religion, Society, non- violence, Sikhism and Thoughts.

Introduction

Sikh teachings about war and peace are based on the Guru Granth Sahib and the teachings of the ten human Gurus. Sikhs believe that if a justifiable war should take place even if it cannot be won. Sikh scripture on peace: Sikhism does not teach total pacifism but approves of any action to promote human rights and harmony. Guru Nanak (the first Guru) wrote: *No one is my enemy, No one is a foreigner, With all I am at peace, God within us renders us Incapable of hate and prejudice.* Military action to promote justice: Sikhism became more militant from the time of the Guru Arjan (the fifth Guru who was the first Sikh martyr) because of attacks being made against Sikh religion. Guru Hargobind (the sixth Guru) taught that military action was sometimes necessary to promote justice and protect the innocent. Guru Gobind Singh (the tenth Guru) formed the Khalsa (Sikh community) and

told Sikhs that they must fight against oppression. He said that military action was the last resort and that it should not be avoided if it was necessary: *When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail. Lawful is the flash of steel. It is right to draw the sword.*

Question of War and Peace

Sikh ideology looks at the question of war and peace at individual, social, state, and global levels. Genuine peace is not possible when there is pain and suffering in society. In that sense, Sikh thought agrees that peace is not necessarily the absence of war. Sikhism is life-affirming and preaches a participative active life of service as a responsible householder. Opt-out systems are rejected. Sikh concept of “dharam nibhaona” i.e. doing one’s duty as required by different human relationships in different situations and socio-political spheres is also a benchmark for accountability at every social and political level. In any relationship and situation the concept of dharam (dharma) requires a person to act and behave in a certain way. Ultimately, the discipline of dharam provides stability in human societies; when there is no dharam, there is chaos and conflict.

In early 17th century, Bhai Gurdass wrote that Guru Nanak (1469 -1539), the founder of the Sikh religion “meditated and saw the whole world ablaze” (Vara(n) Bhai Gurdass). The world was at war at every level as a result of human greed, lust, violence, and lack of compassion. Guru Nanak’s approach to reconciliation between warring factions in religious, social and political spheres was to identify the root causes, and to show the way to a harmonious way of life, which accepted and respected diversity. He brought together the essence of the (apparently diverse) religious ideologies of his time. The Sikh Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, is the embodiment of that interfaith approach.

The Evolutionary Thoughts

From the time of the fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan Dev, Sikhs became increasingly revolutionary, but only in response to oppression and attempts to suppress minority communities living within India. The sixth Nanak, Guru Har Gobind, thought that military action would sometimes be needed to promote the cause of justice and protect the innocent from attack. The tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, gave the Sikhs the mission of fighting against oppression and formed the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh made it clear that military action was to be the last resort, but emphasized that it should not be avoided if proved necessary. If all other means fail, recourse to violence and war as the last resort is fair and just. *Zafarnama-Guru Gobind Singh (Tenth Nanak)* clearly insisted, violence is not just a physical thing, and there are three ways of responding to violence.

Firstly, we could witness acts of violence and become a silent spectator or become depressed at our inability to cope with the situation. The second scenario is to observe the

act of injustice but run away, pretending nothing happened or denying the truth. The third option is considered the Sikh way, which is to acknowledge the state of affairs, stand up to the truth and do something about it.

Goodwill and Peace

Guru Nanak preached his message of goodwill and peace on earth in the early 16th Century. The Guru knew that it takes much courage, sacrifice and effort to make genuine peace on earth a reality. His was the path of love for God and fellow human being. He said, "Those who wish to follow the path of love [in the service of God and their fellow beings], should be prepared to make great sacrifices." So, the succeeding Sikh Gurus spoke out against discrimination and injustice in society, while preaching a responsible family life based on moral values and truthful living. They preached kinship of all creation before One Primal Being. Sikh thought stresses, "Where God exists there is no selfishness, where self exists there is no God." In this life, there must be balance between material ambition and spiritual well-being. Sikh approach to war and peace starts at individual level and would agree with the following quotations.

"Men are at war with one another because each man is at war with himself." (Francis Meehan). "War has its roots in human nature." and "War stems from the baser human motivations such as hate, fear, greed and revenge." (Albert G Huegeli) Freedom from insecurity and fear is important. High ideals alone are insufficient. It is important to constantly strive for inner freedom from death, attachment and insecurity by meditating on the Name of The Fearless, "All fear is destroyed through the worship of the Fearless". "Only that life is good in which the inner battle is fought with determination - through patience (dhiraj) and wisdom" (Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, "Krishnavtar")

The Genuine Peace Discussion

It is towards genuine and lasting peace that human regimes should aspire. Labels for regimes such as democracies or dictatorships, or systems such as communism or capitalism have little meaning in Sikh ideology. Unless obstacles to genuine peace discussed above, are removed, then any political system becomes a breeding ground for conflict and terror and threatens peace in the ever shrinking global village. It creates the socio-political environment of dissatisfaction and disaffection leading to conditions of war. Human greed and quest for power, whether by ego-centric individuals or empire building states, lie at the roots of conflict and war. In the Sikh view, unjust regimes lose their right to rule.

Conclusion

Today we see the results of selfish pursuit of power and wealth. There is much human poverty and suffering while the rich countries get richer. Guru Nanak's universal

message to humankind is highly relevant: to live a life of service, a life of sharing with others, and belief in equality of humankind before one, Creator of all. Peace requires even greater effort than waging wars. So, the Sikh Gurus preached practical religion, making social activism an essential part of religion. The Sikh ideology, of which Guru Granth Sahib is the embodiment, invites all good people of all beliefs to do something about world peace, and to work together for a tolerant and just world order.

He too emphasized the importance of non-violence and the equality of all humans whatever their religion (he was particularly concerned to reconcile Hinduism and Islam). But this pacifist emphasis changed as persecution against the Sikhs developed. The sixth Guru (Guru Hargobind) said: In the Guru's house, religion and worldly enjoyment should be combined - the cooking pot to feed the poor and needy and the sword to hit oppressors. The tenth and last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) was a general as well as a Guru. In order to strengthen the courage and military discipline of the Sikhs at a time of great persecution, he organized the Khalsa - the Sikh brotherhood. Guru Gobind Singh expressed the idea of 'Just War' as follows: 'When all efforts to restore peace prove, useless and no words avail, lawful is the flash of steel, it is right to draw the sword.' But the idea of 'Holy War' is not found in Sikhism. A central teaching of Sikhism is respect for people of all faiths.

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