

Concept of Universal Brotherhood in Gurbani

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In this era of multiculturalism and globalization when the consumerist culture has turned the whole world into one economic village, the message of universal brotherhood, the basis of all Sikh thought and philosophy as propagated in Sri Guru Granth Sahib has become all the more relevant. Gone are the days when each religious or social group could live in isolation from the rest of the world, restricted to its own geographical space without being affected by what is happening in the world around. Today anything happening in one corner of the world has its impact all over. Revolution in the Internet Technology has broken all geographical barriers and the whole world is knitted together like never before. Though wars still rage and rivalry and hatred still separate man from man, the spirit of fraternal reconciliation is already in the air. The world is sick of war and destruction. Man is desperately in search of peace on this earth, the sweet home of man, and all great bent of thought is towards internationalism.

United Nations Organizations formed on 24th October 1945 after the WW II, was an expression of the will of humanity to promote international cooperation and to prevent future wars. The pain of atrocities committed during the Second World War and massive human rights abuse spurred the development of an organization which could be helpful in the preservation of human rights of all individuals and also become an instrument of the prevention of wars that become the cause of devastation at such a massive scale as was witnessed during the second world war. The result was the Universal Declaration of human rights by United Nations Organization. The preamble of this declaration recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. It aims at promoting the development of friendly relations between nations. It clearly states that disregard for human rights has resulted in barbarous acts that have outraged the conscience of mankind. Advent of a world in which all humans shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief, freedom from fear and want, has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of common people. The statement recognizes the inherent dignity and the desire to have brotherly relations amongst all members of human family. It

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swears by the protection of human rights at all costs and if need be by enacting laws so as to ensure “the dignity and worth of the human person.”

After the preamble, article one of the declaration states “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”¹

This declaration of the general assembly of United Nations appears to be an echo of the declaration proclaimed by Guru Nanak, after he came out of the river *Bein*:

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For Guru Nanak there was no Hindu and no Muslim, thereby meaning that there are no divisions between Hindus and Muslims for any other religious or social group of people or between man and man. A line in gurbani says:

*I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, I belong to and am of God,
Who may be called either by the name of Allah or Ram.*²

However, there is one fundamental difference in Guru Nanak’s idea of equality and the dignity and brotherhood of all human beings, and the contents of the declaration of human rights by the UNO. While the United Nations declaration of universal human rights focuses on equal rights of the whole humanity, the focus of the declaration made by Guru Nanak was on the duties.

According equal status to the whole humanity without any distinction on the basis of color, caste, creed, gender or the geographical location was made a religious practice and religious duty. And it was not a mere empty statement the idea of the brotherhood of the whole humanity was vigorously enforced in the everyday practices of the Sikh community. When the love of the whole humanity took Guru Nanak to the four corners of the world to propagate the idea of universal brotherhood of man, he made sure that he himself too accorded a respectable and honorable place to the downtrodden and the people belonging to the so called lower castes. He preferred to stay with Bhai Lalo a poor carpenter, rather than staying with Malik Bhago, the feudal lord of the area, and he had the courage to expose him, telling him to his face that his food contained the blood of the poor whom he had exploited to accumulate wealth. One of the foremost practical steps taken by the Guru was practice of eating together sitting in a row without any distinction of caste or creed. At *Kartarpur*, a city established by the Guru himself where he settled down after completing his mission of the spreading his message in the four

corners of the world, the whole populace would pray together, work together and dine together. It was the most practical example of corporate living. The whole humanity is one and every man has the same human rights and it was each person's religious duty to carry out his duties towards humanity. As one person's right is another person's duty, so one must perform one's duty to safeguard the rights of others. No distinction on the basis of caste, creed, color, gender or either of East or West has been recognized. Man is man, a human being and nothing else. So long as he carries a label distinguishing the one from the other, he has not risen above the narrow thinking which causes all the conflict in society.

According to Guru Nanak, a truly spiritual one is one whose genuine feelings, brilliant mind and whose godlike manners bring him in spontaneous kinship with all human beings wherever he may go, so that he becomes a man of all countries and cultures. Guru Sahib envisages a world view where all barriers and walls of narrow nationalism are broken and a man truly becomes the citizen of the world. When asked who was better, a Hindu or a Muslim, Guru Nanak's spontaneous reply was:

*Without good deeds both Hindus and Muslims will be doomed.*³

For him being a Hindu or a Muslim did not have any meaning. What really mattered was being a good human being- who follows the soul agenda rather than the body agenda, a spiritual being. The religion of Guru Nanak believes in one and only one God who is the father of whole humanity.⁴

Brotherhood of man comes as a natural corollary to the Fatherhood of God. All humans are members of the same family and hence siblings, fellow beings. No one can think ill of the members of one's own family. God shows equal love on all his children and expects the same from us. The test of one's own love for God is the measure of one's love for His creation. Guru Nanak's doctrine is the doctrine of love:

*Those who are imbued with the love of God, love all creation.*⁵

It is a philosophy of love and humanitarianism where good of everyone is sought without any consideration of caste creed and religion. Gurbani says:

*O Lord! Out of thy mercy save this burning world
Save it whatever way it can be saved.*⁶

All are treated with the same compassion. Even the detractors are not dealt with any hatred. There is no suppression of heresy by physical force. It is to be combated with Truth, the Word of God.

*That which seemeth is but thy manifestation
Then why hate anyone.⁷*

Guru Sahib forbids us to think or speak ill even of the enemy.

The Guru Nanak Sahib gave practical lessons in community living on the principle of universal brotherhood. After he settled down at Kartarpur, Guru Nanak started community kitchen where all would cook together and eat together like one family, and pray together for the welfare of the whole humanity. He believed that the essence of religion was not the formalistic religion practiced by most of the religious communities. All kinds of rituals and formalism have been completely rejected. What was miscalled religion has been cast aside and man is exhorted to live a deeply spiritual life. For him, the essence of religion was having spiritual attitude, i.e., living in soul consciousness.

Guru Sahib wants man to get rid of egoism because he believes that all egoistic action becomes power seeking socially and politically, which ultimately lead to discord and all kinds of divisions which are antithetical to the idea of universal brotherhood. In *Asa ki var*, Guru Sahib hits at the social customs which stand in the way of his ideal of the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. He does not address any particularly group or class. His message is meant for the whole humanity. His love for humanity took him to the four corners of the world. He tried to uproot evil in whatever form it existed, so that the kingdom of God could be established on this earth. If love compassion and trust is truly practiced as stressed in Gurbani, the world will certainly be a better place to live in. The idea of universal brotherhood propagated by the first Guru, finds expression in Guru Granth Sahib, which has been recognized by UNESCO as a heritage for the whole humanity.

Notes & References

¹ <https://www.un.org>

² ਨਾ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ॥ ਅਲਹ ਰਾਮ ਕੇ ਪਿੰਡ ਪਰਾਨ॥ Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 1136.

³ ਸੁਭਿ ਅਮਲਾ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਦੋਨੋ ਰੋਈ॥ Bhai Gurdas, Var 1, Pauri 33.

⁴ ਤੂੰ ਸਾਝਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ॥ Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 97.

⁵ ਜੋ ਰਤੇ ਸਹਿ ਆਪਣੇ ਤਿਨ ਭਾਵੇ ਸਭ ਕੋਇ॥ Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 557

⁶ ਜਗਤੁ ਜਲੰਦਾ ਰਖਿ ਲੈ ਅਪਣੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ॥

ਜਿਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਉਬਰੈ ਤਿਤੈ ਲੈਹੁ ਉਬਾਰਿ॥ Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 853.

⁷ ਬੁਰਾ ਭਲਾ ਕਹੁ ਕਿਸ ਨੋ ਕਹੀਐ ਸਗਲੇ ਜੀਅ ਤੁਮਾਰੇ॥ Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 383