

Interfaith Dialogue: Sikh Perspective

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Abstract:

In the contemporary world, religion has a vital role in the lives of human beings. Even though there is religious diversity, ethnicities, different cultures, we can live together with love and harmony by sharing our virtuous values. Every religion has given moral and ethical values to its followers. So there should be dialogue on different levels in the followers of different religions. In the present day scenario world peace is possible only by interfaith dialogue.

Keywords: Interfaith, Dialogue, Religious Diversity, Harmony, World Peace, Mutual Respect, Coexistence, Humanity.

Introduction:

In today's era of globalization, corruption, consumption of drugs, destruction of human relations, mutual hatred and hostility, etc. are worrying topics. Today's society is deteriorating day by day. Only religion can relieve us from these problems. All religions emphasize human respect, mutual love and brotherhood; there is a need for proper knowledge of the spiritual and moral values taught by their Gurus, Peers, Prophets and Sages. Only then world peace is possible.

Therefore, we should not only have the knowledge of the values and teachings of our own religion, but also need to know and appreciate the spiritual and moral values of others. To promote mutual acceptance and religious tolerance among people of different religions or spiritual beliefs, it is very important to promote interfaith understanding, which is possible only through interfaith dialogue. The purpose of dialogue is to create equality by identifying mutual differences so that all human beings can understand each other and learn from each other. In this way world peace can be established through mutual discussion by tearing down the walls of division. The Gurus maintained constant dialogue with the followers of other religions during their lifetime. Guru Nanak Dev travelled to various religious centers of different religions. The Sikh Gurus always emphasized interfaith understanding, mutual respect and harmony. Guru Nanak Dev emphasized the unity of ideas and said:

ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ ॥¹

(As long as we are in this world, O Nanak!

We should listen, and speak of the Lord.)

Interfaith Dialogue Meaning and Definition:

Through interfaith dialogue, a sense of respect develops among people of different religions. Despite the recent emergence of interfaith dialogue on a global scale, it has been a part of ancient Indian religious traditions. Even in the contemporary world, religion has a very influential role in people's lives. With the

widely prevalent diversity of religions, races and cultures among human beings, they can live together by sharing good values. This is possible only through dialogue. Dialogue means discussion; question-answer or we can say a healthy discussion which is useful for good results. Issues can be resolved through dialogue and conflict can be avoided. The purpose of dialogue is to remove mutual tension and reduce mistrust and suspicion. Through dialogue, mutual support, coordination and mutual community are created. Dialogue should not be taken as an antonym of 'Monologue' or 'Soliloquy' because 'Monologue' means 'a long speech made by a person during a conversation in which other people are prevented from speaking or expressing their views while 'Soliloquy' negates the existence of the other. 'Dialogue' is different from 'Communication'. 'Communication', meaning is the act of sharing or exchanging information, ideas or feelings. Communication is usually understood as the transmission of information: a message is conveyed from a sender to a receiver. 'Dialogue' is a type of transmission that involves two-way exchange of ideas and information, while 'communication' can be one-way and focus on expressing thoughts or ideas. The word 'dialogue' isn't even 'Di' + 'Lounge': in Greek 'Di' means two, as opposed to 'mono', which means one. If we accept this argument, then 'Dialogue' means a conversation between two persons, a conversation which may not necessarily be friendly and which may not necessarily lead to a transform. We need to understand the word 'Dialogue' as a combination of 'dia+logue': the word 'dia' is a preposition meaning 'through' and the word 'logue' is derived from the word 'logos'. The word logos is usually taken to mean 'Word'. Thus, the term dialogue refers to the worldviews being debated through important and potentially transformative outcomes for one or both participants in the dialogue. Through dialogue, the two parties clarify their views. Through which doubts and differences can be eliminated.

Interfaith dialogue means dialogue, conversation or discussion among people of different religions. Interfaith dialogue thus refers to the existence of different worldviews expressed by individuals or groups of individuals who hold different ideologies and share experiences, insights and values with the aim of arriving at the truth.

Need of Interfaith Dialogue:

Dialogue between different religions of the world is very important to maintain peace among individuals, communities and nations. For interfaith dialogue, sincerity towards other religions is very important. Clearly, this also means that the relationship so far between different religions and the sects and sub-sects within them is not friendly and peaceful – as it should be. Since the destiny of man today is linked to the social reality of religious pluralism, peace among religions becomes necessary for man to lead a life of peaceful coexistence. Dialogue between religions is the only way through which world peace is possible.

Hans Kung said, “No survival without a world ethic. No world peace without peace between the religions. No peace between the religions without dialogue between the religions.”²

According to the Knitter, "There will be no real and effective dialogue among the religions if each religion continues to make its claims of superiority."³

Thus there is a great need for interfaith dialogue in today's era of globalization with ever-increasing facts of religious pluralism. Each religion has its own history, Guru, scripture, social and moral values. Still, we need to try to understand the similarities as well as the differences. Religions are our common heritage and through interfaith dialogue we move from mutual strife and hatred to tolerance,

understanding, mutual trust and cooperation. It seems difficult for him to be tolerant and cooperative until he knows the ethics, traditions and philosophies of other religions.

Different religions are like different paths leading to the center, they are different historical and limited manifestations of the Infinite One. Of course, there are similarities as well as differences. It is useful to make comparisons between the different religions of the world and to find and appreciate the similarities as well as the differences among them. Only then we will feel unity among them. Intent to increase the greatness and glory of one's own religion and belittle the religion and faith of others, such conduct actually causes serious injury to the religion. Dialogue and an attitude of religious superiority cannot go together. Therefore, the attitude of religious superiority must be abandoned in order to successfully reach the truth through authentic and meaningful dialogue. Those who go for dialogue but at the same time believe in the myth of the superiority of their religion are not fundamentally different from those who refuse any dialogue. Such persons need to get information about other religions. Claiming the superiority of one's own religion and denigrating the religion of others cause divisions among people. Such claims mainly become the cause of religious bias. We need to understand this causal link between the two and the sooner we realize it, the better it will be for mankind. The need for people of different religions to live with love and respect for each other is especially important today because we now have the means to destroy the entire humanity at the push of a button. Both respect and knowledge of the other are essential for positive dialogue between different religions/communities.

Interfaith Dialogue plays a major role in the study of religion and peace building. Religious pluralism is a fact of human existence in the modern world. In the past people lived safely in their small and isolated religious groups.

New developments in the fields of transportation and communication have transformed the world into a small global market where humans are living in a religiously and culturally pluralistic society. Understanding and valuing the beliefs of others is essential for harmonious coexistence in such a social structure. Interfaith Dialogue is the best way to understand and appreciate other religions as well as overcome ignorance and prejudice. Interfaith dialogue reminds us that we should try to identify some common moral values while celebrating the plurality of religions. Communicating with each other is very important to overcome or avoid religious conflict.

Interfaith Dialogue in Sikhism:

A true and effective inter-religious dialogue is possible only if each dialogue person has a deep knowledge of his own religion. For that he needs to adopt the inner meaning of his religious tradition as well as the outer form prescribed by it. Our knowledge of the beliefs of others certainly helps us to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of our own. Guru Nanak Dev highlighted the fact that all religions are historical manifestations of the One, no religion is better or worse than the other. Truth cannot be the monopoly of any religion or prophet and interfaith dialogue is the only way to peace between different religions. Guru Nanak communicated with God through the medium of dialogue with the people. Guru Nanak Dev preached through dialogue and showed the way to people who had strayed from the path of religion. He has never called any religion bad or inferior. This is the reason why Guru Nanak Dev is respected not only by Sikhs but also has a very respectable place among Hindus and Muslims. The writings of the Gurus and their lives clearly show that they were among the pioneers of inter-religious dialogue in their time. Guru Nanak Dev gave the first sermon, 'Neither Hindu nor Muslim'. Guru Nanak Dev visited the country/abroad during his lifetime which is called Udasi in Sikh

history. Bhai Mardana (a Muslim) was with Guru during the Udasi. Apart from different places in India, he also went to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Tibet etc. He had discussions with Sadhus, Saints, Mullahs, Qazis, Pandits. Guru Nanak Dev interacted with the followers of different religions during the Udasi.

He himself went to the famous centers of different religions of the world and tried to explain to them the truth about their religion in their own religious idiom by meditating among them like their inner devotee. This movement launched by Guru Nanak Dev was a great need of the world at that time. This shows that the message of Guru Nanak Dev was and is common to all and not for people of any one caste, creed, race, colour, region, etc. He met and interacted with hundreds of people during his visits (Udasi). Guru Nanak Dev attracted every human being with the power of his divine wisdom. Through Dialogue, Guru Sahib urged the people of different religious communities to stay connected with the spirit of their scriptures and do good work. Bhai Gurdas mentions an incident in the life of Guru Nanak Dev in which he said that during his visit to Mecca, the Qazi and the Maulvis asked the Guru to tell them who among the Hindu and Muslims is virtuous. Bhai Gurdas mentions this dialogue and writes:

ਪੁਛਨਿ ਫੇਲਿ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਵਡਾ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੇਈ।

ਬਾਬਾ ਆਖੇ ਹਾਜੀਆ ਸੁਭਿ ਅਮਲਾ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਦੇਨੇ ਰੇਈ।⁴

(They asked Baba Nanak to open his book and let them know whether Hindu is virtuous or the Muslim. Baba replied to the pilgrim Has, that, without good deeds, both will be lost.)

At the very beginning of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, in the Japu Bani, the Guru uses the question-answer style:

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ॥⁵

(So, how can you become truthful?
And how can the veil of illusion be torn away?)

The answer is also given in the next verse:

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ॥੧॥⁶

(O Nanak! It is written that you shall obey the Hukam of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will.)

Sidh Gosthi used to be so strong from the title itself. This is the first authentic Goshti of Punjabi literature. It is a dialogue between two parties. One side is Siddha and the other side is Guru Nanak. This is not an ordinary conversation, but a philosophical one. Dialogue is also such which is related not only to the Siddhas but to the entire people. The basic idea is logic. By this way, anyone can argue on any subject, but this argument is among the leaders of different religions. Guru Sahib solves questions like the creation of Universe, how did it happen, etc. through dialogue. Guru Sahib interacts with followers of different religions and tells them about the importance of religious scripture:

ਬੇਦ ਕਤੇਬ ਕਹਹੁ ਮਤ ਝੂਠੇ ਝੂਠਾ ਜੇ ਨ ਬਿਚਾਰੈ॥⁷

(Do not say that the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran are false.
Those who do not contemplate them are false.)

The Gurus assert that God is common to all beings, even though all remember Him by different names:

ਕੋਈ ਬੋਲੈ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਮ ਕੋਈ ਖੁਦਾਇ॥ ਕੋਈ ਸੇਵੈ ਗੁਸਈਆ ਕੋਈ ਅਲਾਹਿ॥੧॥

ਕਾਰਣ ਕਰਣ ਕਰੀਮ ॥ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ ਰਹੀਮ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਕੋਈ ਨਾਵੈ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਕੋਈ ਹਜ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਕਰੈ ਪੂਜਾ ਕੋਈ ਸਿਰੁ ਨਿਵਾਇ ॥੨॥

ਕੋਈ ਪੜੈ ਬੇਦ ਕੋਈ ਕਤੇਬ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਓਚੈ ਨੀਲ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਪੇਦ ॥੩॥

ਕੋਈ ਕਰੈ ਤੁਰਕੁ ਕੋਈ ਕਰੈ ਹਿੰਦੂ ॥ ਕੋਈ ਬਾਛੈ ਭਿਸਤੁ ਕੋਈ ਸੁਰਗਿੰਦੂ ॥੪॥⁸

(Some call Him, 'Raam, Raam', and some call Him, 'Khudaa-i'.

Some serve Him as 'Gusain', others as 'Allah'..... Some bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage, and some make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Some perform devotional worship services, and some bow their heads in prayer. Some read the Vedas, and some the Koran. Some wear blue robes, and some wear white. Some call themselves Muslim, and some call themselves Hindu. Some yearn for paradise, and others long for heaven.)

All religions are ways to reach the Supreme Personality of Godhead through which man attains the attainment of bliss and perfection.

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥੧॥⁹

(No one is my enemy, and no one is a stranger. I get along with everyone.)

Following the teachings of the Gurus, the Sikhs made the welfare of all, a part of their prayer (Ardas): Nanak Naam Chardi Kala Tere Bhane Sarbat da Bhala.

Dr. Nurul Islam said, "Guru Granth Sahib is unique in that it contains holy text not only about the Sikh Gurus, but also about Hindu Saints and Muslim Sufis. The Golden Temple (Harmandir) enjoys a special status among the Sikhs. But it is surprising to note that Mia Mir, a Muslim saint, laid the foundation stones of the temple. No religion on Earth can claim to have shown this kind of respect towards a man of another tradition. The principles of Sikhism are a powerful force in interfaith peace building. Sikhism as a religion is based on the principle of fearlessness, mutual love, coexistence, shared humanity, and oneness of all human beings, irrespective of their caste, colour, or creed. There is no room for hatred in this religion."¹⁰

Mosleh Uddin, who came to learn about Sikhism under the guidance of Dr. Islam, "I am in love with the Sikh philosophy, as it does not contradict my Islamic religious values or any other values."¹¹

Former President of India A.P.J. Abdul Kalam writes in the message of the book *Guru Grantha Sahib and Its Contexts*, "The cherished and noble values of Guru Grantha Sahib should inspire all of us to follow the message of love compassion, unity brotherhood of man and supremacy of God, the Almighty. Respect for religions has also been preached by this Holy Book, a message relevant in today's world."¹²

Langar, Pangat and Sangat by Guru Nanak Dev without any discrimination, inclusion of hymns of saint poets of different faiths in Sri Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Dev ; construction of mosque by Guru Hargobind ; and martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur for Hindu Dharma are some of the examples of initiatives taken by Sikh Gurus in this field. **Conclusion:** Spirituality requires wisdom, patience, courage, humanity, coexistence, listening and understanding to others. The outward form of communion is based on man's inward desire to do it. The inner self is pure and tries to connect with the universal spirit of life but hardly anyone has got success in this direction. The ego comes in the way. It is the duty of religious leaders to guide the followers to the true path of life and help them to overcome the

obstacles in the way of social-spiritual progress. Every religion presents a way of life to achieve the goal of life. Thus, interfaith dialogue creates a sense of understanding others, living together and helping others. Sikhism presents a model of a spiritual-moral society that accepts others as members of the wider human race. All human beings are equal in dignity and rights. Thus, a stable and peaceful society is impossible unless different religions are understood in their proper perspective. Therefore, it is necessary that people belonging to different religions understand and appreciate each other's faith properly. All this is possible only through dialogue. In such a situation, world peace is possible only when we talk about the welfare of all.

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