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**SAMANVAYA**

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# In Search of Religious Samanvaya- Universal Brotherhood of mankind from the primary perspective of Sikhism.



-Savio Saldanha

*"The One Light is the light in all bodies."*

*"The One Light is all pervading, only a few know it."*

## I. Abstract:

The above quotes are taken from the sayings of Guru Nanak, and form the Naam Jappu of the Sikhs (Ang. 120 and 124). In this paper, I have selected the Sikh tenet of Universal Brotherhood (Sarbat Da Bhala), and compared it with similar tenets from other organised religions. I wish to bring out the Samanvaya which binds the entire humanity as one family through the bond of Universal Brotherhood.

## II. Introduction:

'The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of men' is one of the basic tenets of Sikhism. The Sikhs believe in monotheism, like the Abrahamic religions. However unlike Christianity, they do not believe in a Trinitarian God, but in 'Ik Onkar' (The Formless One). Let us consider their Mul Mantra (Basic Mantra): 'Ik Omkar sati namu karata purakhu, nirbhau nirvairu akal murati ajuni saibhan gur prasadi', which translated means, 'There is but One God. He is all that is. He is the Creator of all things and He is All-pervasive. He is without fear and without enmity. He is the Enlightener and can be realised by the grace of Himself alone'. As God is One Formless and Omniscient, He is present in everyone. This unites the entire mankind into One Universal Brotherhood. Being tied together as sisters and brothers through a divine bond; is something which mankind has been aware of since ancient times.

## III. Universal Brotherhood:

### A) Spiritual Perspective:

Let us look at how this tenet of Universal Brotherhood is included in the very Spirituality (Soul) of Sikhism. The Sikhs are bound to pray aloud twice a day in the words: "O God, in Your Name, shower Your blessings on everyone."

In other words, Sikhs pray not only for themselves alone but also for the entire humanity. This belief in the oneness of humanity, and the insistence on working for the welfare of all people, whether Sikhs or not, even at the cost of sacrificing one's life, is what sets Sikhism as a unique form of religion. Sikhs are expected to treat all people with equal respect, irrespective of their religion, caste or nationality.

The Sikhs are men of prayer. They believe in goodness of humanity. They wish welfare of humanity as a whole during their prayer normally offered twice a day. They pray for universal peace, prosperity and protection of human beings over this universe.

The Ardas-Sikh Prayer goes like this, "God's glory ever increases; in His Will, Nanak prays for the good of everyone". They pray for everyone in the beginning of the prayer and conclude it in a similar manner. The Sikhs like to share an example of a certain Bhai Kanhaiya who used to give water to everyone on the battle field irrespective of the religion of the fighting soldier, thus, implying that they care for every soul, even if it is of the enemy on a battlefield.

Guru Nanak Dev said, "Within every one is the soul and the soul is God Himself who pervades all and everywhere." Thus, he clearly told his followers that every person has within himself the Real Presence of God, and so everyone should be treated with the same respect and dignity as one would bestow on God.

Guru Nanak Dev further said, "Let universal brotherhood be the highest aspiration of your religious order". Thus, Guru Nanak Dev gave his followers a hierarchy in the tenets that they should always consider, among them Universal Brotherhood was to be of utmost importance and preference in Sikhism.

Guru Arjan Dev said, "None is my enemy and I an enemy to none. No one is stranger to me and I am friend of all." He thus, spoke of universal connectedness, the Divine presence which binds the entire humanity into one. Guru Arjan Dev was also a warrior guru, he fought numerous battles against the Mughals, but it is recorded as how he gave honourable burial to the slain enemy soldiers, and made provisions for the treatment of all the injured, irrespective of them being friend or foe.

Guru Arjan Dev said, "I have befriended all and unto everyone, I am a friend." This statement shows the spiritual depth of the Sikh guru, who felt connected to the entire humanity rising above the petty differences.

The Sikhs daily prayer includes the following verse: 'Nanak Nam Charhdi Kala, Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhala', which means Supreme is the Word of God, May God bless every human being.

Thus, we see that the tenet of Universal Brotherhood is among the most important ones in Sikhism. It can also be said as to contain the very essence of Sikh Spirituality and is the foundation block of its philosophy.

## **B) Practical Interpretations and Applications:**

Considering the above prayer verses and the sayings (Gurmukhi) of Sikhism, a Sikh is expected to conduct himself/herself in the following manner, with regards to the Universal Brotherhood: The Sikh must lead a harmonious (Samanvaya) life, within himself as well as those around him. He must stand for human liberty, equality and fraternity.

Before the advent of Guru Nanak Dev, the society in India was routinely and systematically flouting human freedom and equality. There was a rigid caste system of power and privilege for high caste and men. The women were relegated to second class status, just above cattle and crops. They were dependent on goodwill of men. She was to find fulfillment of her life through the achievements of her husband and offspring. She did not have an independent identity of her own, and was known in relation to her male relatives (very much like the women in Israel, during the times of Jesus).

Guru Nanak Dev revolted against this injustice. Resultantly, Sikhism does not teach discrimination on the basis of caste, color, creed or gender. It strives for liberty, equality and fraternity. Its goal is equality of lowest with highest, men with woman and equality of human beings. It believes in social, economic, political and religious freedom on equality basis. Internally, Sikhism believes that we all have the same spirit. They explain it beautifully with the following example, just as gold can be made into ornaments of different designs but it remains gold, so people's outward appearances can be different but still they remain human beings created by the same God. The revolt of the Sikhism towards injustice, is thus to be seen as an extension of our universal brotherhood. Violence was often used as a last resort and against armed opponent only. There were strict rules of battle; something of chivalrous code of conduct we see in medieval Europe as well. A sense of Samanvaya flows through each of us, Sikh or not, binding each of us in a form of universal brotherhood.

#### **IV. Similarities with other religions:**

A Sanskrit shloka from Upanishad, says, 'Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayah, sarve bhadrani pasyantur ma kascid duhkha bhagbhavet', which means 'May all people be happy, free from illnesses. May all see what is auspicious, and may no one suffer'. This prayer is often recited since olden times for the wellbeing of humanity; it gained a renewed significance especially during the pandemic times. It also resonates in the same samanvaya of universal brotherhood aspect which is preached in the Sikhism. This is considered as an integral part of the Hindu Philosophy. Hence, differences should never be a reason for discriminating against people.

The Quran says: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Indeed the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" (Quran 49:13)

The holy Quran says: "whoever kills a human being without any reason manslaughter or corruption on earth, it is though he had killed all mankind" (Quran 5:32). We thus see the aspects of Universal Brotherhood and equality of human beings are fundamental philosophy of Islam.

Islam has always encouraged its followers to live with tolerance, harmony, love, brotherhood and peace on the earth adding that humanity is more precious than any of the religions. God has granted human dignity to all mankind. Islam also asserts that no nation is created to be above other nations, rather the differences of region, religion, colour, and gender makes no difference of man's worth in the eyes of Allah, rather his good deeds and obedience to the Will of Allah is what makes the difference.

The Holy Bible clearly mentions the tenet of Universal Brotherhood several times. In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus clearly tells his followers that, 'Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.' (Mark 3:35). He thus implies that everyone is a child of God irrespective of race, gender and other differences, if only he/she does what is right in the eyes of God. In the very first book of the Holy Bible, Genesis (Gen.1:27), it is mentioned 'So God created humankind in His image', further in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 17:26) it is mentioned that 'From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole world', thus the Holy Bible underlines the union of all humanity as originating from one ancestor, and created by the same Creator and in His sacred image. To further strengthen the bond, Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1Cor.6:19) asks 'Do you not know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.', thus confirming as Sikhism, that humanity is not only bound by a physical bond of shared ancestry, but also a strong spiritual bond. The same Holy Spirit of God dwells in every human being, irrespective of his religion, race, caste or gender.

In the tribal cultures around the world, the feeling of a Universal Brotherhood was ingrained deeply. They worshipped the Nature as The Great Spirit to whom all the spirits of the world moved. Their reference to the earth as the Mother, and the fruits and vegetables which grow in the nature as her gifts to humanity proves a sophisticated and deep entrenched philosophy albeit an unwritten and unorganised existed, passed in the form of oral traditions, generation to generation.

## **V. Conclusion:**

The tenet of Samanvaya through Universal Brotherhood is very interesting as it enforces the common belief that the Spirit of God is alive in everyone irrespective of any differences. The Hindu belief of Vasudaiva Kuumbakam, 'the world is my home' was also spoken on the other side of the world by Jerome Nadal when he said, 'el mundo es nuestra casa'. This inbuilt feeling of brotherhood makes people rush to the aid of a stranger who has met with an accident. It is also this feeling of Universal Brotherhood which makes you feel the pain of the oppressed in different parts of the world.

We see this ideal being practiced till now by the farmers in India, who after returning from his field, although tired, washes and cleans his bullocks that have helped him in ploughing the field, he then proceeds to feed them lovingly and only then proceeds with his personal bath and other ablutions.

This act of extending the Universal Brotherhood beyond humans to all the animals and even the vegetation is another beautiful example of the samanvaya of Universal Brotherhood which binds together not only the humans but all of the creation.

At the same time, we also see the distress and turmoil being caused in the world where humanity has lost its touch with this ideal. There seems to be a force of division which thrives on exclusivity and elitism which is inimical to the ideal of 'Samanvaya'. The people, who advocate supremacy on the basis of religion and caste, are somehow proving to be obstacles to the very teachings of the faith they think they are upholding.



In the conclusion, I would like to add that the tenet of Samanvaya through Universal Brotherhood is a value which unites all humanity into one family of being God's children. It should be propagated to bring about the peace, equality, fraternity and liberty which the humanity is craving for. Dalai Lama, Pope Francis are two religious leaders of a great standing and goodwill throughout the world and seem to be propagating Universal Brotherhood, they should be supported in their endeavors by all the people of goodwill. Sarbat Da Bhala.

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