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CHAPTER VII

RELEVANCE AND IMPACT

Increasing materialism and spread of nuclear weapons is giving birth to a new kind of political philosophy to the world. As a result politics of convenience has come to replace the polity based on ethics and morality. Growing competition between the two super powers and their allies has resulted in piling up of nuclear arms, which is posing a major threat to the world peace. The danger of nuclear warfare is best described in the following sentence: There would be no conquerors in a war without survivors. Apart from this major threat the world at large is passing through a number of other crises.

The biggest problem is of ever-increasing gulf between the 'have-s' and the 'have-nots'. Growth of capitalism has engulfed some of the socialist countries as well. And this is resulting into neo-colonialism and another type of Imperialism wherein the capitalist countries are trying to dominate the poor and developing countries.

Another problem is that of war crimes. The laws of war are often violated. Undeclared wars, bombardment of nonmilitary areas, violations of cease-fire declarations and other agreements are often noticed.

Among various reasons for the growing crimes and increasing threat to peace one major cause is that most of the societies the world over have forgotten the essentially peaceful message given to them by their sages and seers. Therefore there is the need to rediscover and understand the political philosophy of thinker's like Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine and message of peace given by great men like Christ, Buddha, Kabir and Nanak.

Political Philosophy of these great thinkers and sages, who taught to transcend the limits and talk in terms of one nation and one world, can greatly help solve many of the

problems of the present world. Since we are dealing with the Sikh political philosophy, an attempt is made to give an overview of the philosophy of the Sikh Gurus with a view to suggesting how this can help alleviate the sufferings of humanity.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, saw the whole world, nay the cosmos, as a single unit which is created by one God, who not only dwells in all but all is his creation, a part of the Creator himself. Such monistic thought and cosmopolitan nature of the Guru's message comes out vividly from the following lines:

Thousands Thy eyes, Thy forms:
 yet without physical eyes, formless Thou remainst;
 Thousands Thy lotus feet, Thy senses of fragrance
 Yet without visible organs art Thou!
 Wonderful to me are Thy ways.
 In all creation shines Thy effulgence— Thou who art light.
 In Thy light shines all that exists.
 By the Master's Word is this light made manifest
 Submission to His will in the Highest prayer offering.

A.G., p. 13

Universality of the Sikh elan finds confirmation in the following lines of Bhagat Kabir:

First God Created His Light; and from it were all men made
 Yes, from God's Light comes the whole universe:
 so, whom shalt we call good, whom bad?
 O men, be not strayed by Doubt.
 For, the Creator is in the Created, and
 the Created in the Creator, who fill all, all over.
 The clay is the same, but fashioned in a myriad shapes
 So, it avail not to find fault either with the clay-vessels,
 or with the Potter, who moulds them, each in a different way.
 The One True God is within all, and it is He alone who creates all
 And whosoever Realises His Will, knows the One alone,
 Yes, he alone is the Servant of God.

A.G., pp. 1349-50

Guru Nanak condemned divisions amongst human beings based on different races and especially the pride of higher race. While denouncing such pride Guru Nanak says:

Caste and dynastic pride are condemnable notions.
 The One Master shelters all existence.
 Any one arrogating superiority to himself shall be disillusioned.
 Saith Nanak: Superiority shall be determined by God,
 crediting such a one with honour.

A.G., p. 83

The third Guru, Amardas, further enhanced the importance of the institution of *Langar* with the purpose of giving a lasting blow to caste-pride. Guru Gobind Singh gave a deathblow to the idea of caste-pride by creating the *Khalsa*. After entering the fold of the *Khalsa* its members were required to give up their caste pride and become members of a casteless society. Spirit of universality of Guru Gobind Singh's message is evident from the Guru's emphasis that different colours and features of human beings are due to different environments in which they live.

Since all human beings are made of the same five elements there is no room for any superiority or inferiority of any being. Similarly the Guru rejected discrimination based on religion. To quote him:

The temple and the mosque are the same;
 the Hindu worship and the Musalman prayer are the same;
 All men are same; it is through error they appear different.
 Dieties, demons, Yakshas, heavenly singers,
 Musalmans and Hindus adopt the customary dress of their different countries.
 All men have the same eyes, the same ears,
 the same body, the same build, and
 a compound of earth, air, fire and water.
 Allah and Abhekh are the same;
 The Purans and the Quran are the same;
 they are all alike; it is the one God who created all.

Akal Ustati, 16/86

Guru Gobind Singh saw one God abiding in all persons round the globe and anyone who meditates on His name could achieve salvation. He did not see any difference amongst different people in different parts of the world such as: Afghanistan, Arabia, France, Maharashtra, Magadh, Telangana, Bengal, Delhi, England, Rohelkhand, Nepal, China, Manchuria, Tibet, Kamrup, Kanaun etc. (Akal Ustati). He did not make any distinction on the basis of language. Whether one speaks Arabic, or Turkish, Persian, Paharvi (language of Iran), Pasto, Sanskrit or any other vernacular or godly language makes no difference (Akal Ustati), since God knows and understands all languages—Jaap, v. 155.

Sikhism preaches understanding among different communities and people with different ideologies and lays emphasis on settling difference through mutual discussions. In one of his hymns the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, advises that in cases of disputes and differences of opinion conflicting parties should sit together and settle their differences after seeking Divine guidance (A.G., p. 1185). The biggest problem the world is facing today, is lack of mutual understanding. If this ideology of understanding and dialogue were accepted, the danger of destruction, which we are facing today, would be lessened.

And again, the Sikh philosophy, which stands for limited personal property can greatly help lessen the gulf between the 'have-s' and the 'have-nots'. The Gurus stood against piling up wealth and worldly riches. According to the Sikh thought every one should get the basic essentials. Kabir, whose teachings are enshrined in the Holy book of the Sikhs, condemns the accumulation of wealth in the following words:

Kabir: I am a mere puppet of clay, but I'm called a man.

We stay here for a brief moment, but usurp as much as we can! A.G., p. 1367

Much before the introduction of the Marxian idea of state ownership of property the Sikh, ideology supported nationalisation of wealth. Emphasis on the rule by the Khalsa in the Sikh political thought should not be taken to mean as rule by the Sikhs. The word Khalsa, taken from the Persian word *Khalis*, means pure. According to the interpretation well meaning people alone should rule. Another interpretation can be that like Khalsa (crown) lands in medieval India all property should vest with the state.

It is interesting to note that the Sikh thought advocates free flow of goods from one place to another. With the free flow of goods to all corners of the world, the commodities come into the open market. Consequently the producers are constrained to improve the quality in order to make their production face the challenge of the competition. Further such a step was sure to help the lower strata in society who were supposed to pay any duties or sales tax etc. on things of daily needs. It is commonly known that while different kinds of excise and custom duties help the state earn revenue, such a practice also leads to smuggling and other illegal activities. In the ideal kingdom visualised by Bhagat Ravidas there is no such tax:

Begumpura (Griefless) is the name of the town....

There is no fear of tax of goods there.

A.G., p. 345

The indication of the idea of peasant-proprietor and the land belonging to those who [cultivated it](#)¹ was an attempt by the Sikh Gurus to eliminate feudal lords who thrived on the earnings of others.

Sikh Gurus' emphasis on earning one's livelihood through honest, though dignified means, greatly contributed towards strengthening the egalitarian values. Elevation of Bhai Lehna, later known as Guru. Angad Dev, to the position of Guruship Guru Nanak shows that only an ideal Sikh, who ungrudgingly passed the severest tests, could succeed to the highest office of Guruship. This indeed is a unique example where the Guru bypassed his own sons and appointed some one who truly understood the message, nay become *Angad*, literally part of the Guru's body. There are a number of other examples which can be quoted from early Sikh history where Guru Nanak and his successors openly sided with the ideal Sikhs and not with wealthy and influential persons of their times. The example of Guru Nanak rejecting the dainty dishes of a rich man named Bhago and eating the simple coarse food offered by a poor carpenter named Lab points to the moral that the Guru not only preached honest living but also had clearly rejected those who were amassing riches at the cost of others. The Sikh Gurus believed in the basic goodness of all human beings because, according to Sikh thought, God dwells in all His creation. It was with this aim in mind that a confirmed *thug* like Sajjan is brought on the right path by Guru Nanak. Later, Guru Hargobind

reformed desperado like Bidhi Chand and used his services for the good of others.

Since the Sikh Gurus believed that all human beings were the creation of one Father they did not recognise any manmade distinction in the name of religion, language or country. The first words that Guru Nanak uttered after his enlightenment were: "There is no Hindu, there is no, Musalman", meaning thereby that all human beings were equal and worldly labels of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' had ceased to have any meaning after he had realised the Truth. Therefore it would be wrong to describe the later day conflicts between the Sikh Gurus and the contemporary rulers who happened to be professing Islamic religion, as Sikh-Muslim conflict. It is interesting to mention that when Guru Arjan conceived the idea of building the Harimandir at Amritsar it was a Muslim divine named Mian Mir who laid the foundation stone of this holiest of the holy of Sikh shrines.

When Guru Hargobind, came into conflict with emperor Shahjahan, one of the Muslim commanders, Pained Khan, joined the Guru and fought three battles under Guru's command. There is a strong Sikh tradition, which mentions about quite a number of Muslim soldiers serving in the army of Guru Gobind Singh. Paradoxical as it may seem to some of us, these soldiers were allowed to say their prayers in the Muslim style. According to the *Mahankosh* Pir Buddha Shah's four Sons and five hundred followers fought under Guru Gobind Singh's command in the battle of Bhangani. An interesting feature of the battles that Guru Gobind Singh fought is that he was not fighting either for territorial gains or other material benefits. His wars were more in the nature of fighting oppression in which the Guru was joined by other conscientious people including Muslims.

It is interesting to know that some of the basic ethical values, which are being preached by international organisations like United Nations, had been successfully implemented by the Sikh Gurus during their own life-time. That the Sikh Gurus succeeded in evolving a new kind of political culture and a polity based on ethics is evident from the fact that in their own life-time they were able to establish an ideal society which neither craved for material indulgence nor suffered the agony of deprivation. Following ethics even in the thick of the war was essential. Based on the principle of equal justice for all, the Gurus tried to create a fearless society. Wherein neither could one threaten others nor could bullies cow him down.

The present world is facing many problems. Among these, neo-colonialism, global phenomenon of apartheid and political oppression are most serious problems. Politics has become the game of scoundrels. Lawlessness is prevailing all over. So justice, based on 'not to grab others due' and idea of universal brotherhood as taught by the Gurus are urgently needed to be implemented. The matter of prime concern is, need to install righteous rulers. The rulers must understand their duties towards public. They must stop their policies of clinging to their 'thrones'. The model of the '*Janak*' should be before these rulers. Only then the ailing humanity can find succour in today's 'burning' world.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Us Khet Karan Rakha Karai. Tiskai Palai Kachhu Na Parai, Adi Granth, p. 179.*



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