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 conqueror in a war without survivors." Apart from this major threat the world at large is passing through a number of other crisis.
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 non-military areas, violations of ceasefire-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 thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine and message of peace given by gurus like Christ, Buddha, Kabir and Nanak.

Political Philosophy of these great thinkers and sages, who taught us 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 and ethics 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.

Universality of the Sikh faith 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 came the whole universe:

so, whom shall we call good, whom bad?

O men, be not strayed by Doubt.
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.

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:
Costa 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.

The third Guru, Hargobind, further enhanced the importance
of the institution of Lakhbir with the purpose of giving
a lasting blow to caste-pride. Guru Gobind Singh gave a
death blow to the idea of caste-pride by creating the Kehila.
After entering the fold of the Kehila 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 therefore there is no room for any superiority or inferiority complex among the different beings. Similarly the Guru rejects any 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
Dxsties, 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, a compound
of earth, air, fire and water.
Allah and Abhek are the same;
The Purans and the Quran are the same;
they are all alike;
it is the one God who created all.4

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, Megad, Telangana, 
Bengal, Delhi, England, Rohilkhand, Nepal, China, Ranchuria, 
Tibet, Kerurup, Kanauj etc. He did not make any distinction 
on the basis of language. Whether one speaks Arabic, or 
Turkish, Persian, Pahalvi (language of Iran), Pashto, Sanskrit 
or any other vernacular or godly language makes no difference, 
since God knows and understands all languages.

Sikhism preaches understanding among different communities 
and people with different ideologies and lays emphasis on 
settling differences through mutual discussions. In one of his 
hyms the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, advises that in cases of 
softes and differences of opinion conflicting parties should 
sit together and settle their differences after seeking Divine 
guidance. The biggest problem the world is facing today is 
ack of mutual understanding. If this ideology of understanding 
and dialogue is 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' 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 am called a man.

We stay here for a brief movement, but usurp as much as we can.

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 of 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 (Griefloss) is the name of the town

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There is no fear of tax of goods there. 10

The idea of peasant-proprietor and the land belonging to those who cultivated it 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 means and the dignity attached to manual work the steps which greatly contributed towards strengthening the egalitarian values advocated by the Sikh Gurus. Elevation of Bhil Lehna, later known as Guru Angad Dev, to the position of Guruship by 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 by the Guru bypassed his own sons and appointed some one who truly understood the message, may 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 compared to wealthy and influential persons of their times. The example of Guru Nanak rejecting the dainty dishes of a rich man named Shago and eating the simple coarse food offered by a poor carpenter named Lalo points
to the moral that the Guru not only preached honest living but 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 Muslim like Sajjan could be brought on the right path by Guru Nanak. Later, Guru Hargobind reformed a desperado like Biddi 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 man-made 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 Muslim", 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 Muneer named Mian Mir who laid the foundation stone of this brilliant of the holy of Sikh shrines. Again it was saint Mian Mir who tried in vain to intervene and save the life of Guru Arjan, who was ordered to be tortured to death by the contemporary Mughal Emperor, Jahangir.
When Guru Hargobind, came into conflict with Emperor Jahangir, one of the Muslim commanders, Painde 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 Mahankosh Pir Budhu Shah’s four sons and five hundred followers fought under Guru Gobind Singh’s command in the battle of Bhagani. 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 lifetime. 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 were 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 one be cowed down by bullies.

The model of such a society was provided by Guru Nanak himself. His major travels and dialogues with the religious teachers of his time being over the Guru settled at a place on the banks of river Ravi and named it Kartarpur, the Guru's abode. It was here that the Sikh values found their practical implementation. An interesting feature of the life at Kartarpur was that the Guru himself worked in the field along with his followers and they all shared the fruit of their labour with others. This egalitarian spirit was continued by the successive Gurus, who all encouraged the dignity of labour, concern for other fellow beings and fighting for just causes, transcending sectarian barriers. The ideology of the Sikh Gurus emerged triumphant when in the Panjab Banda Bahadur succeeded in giving a death blow to the feudal system and by creating a class of peasant-proprietors. The sense of dignity and spirit to resist the unrighteous rulers resulted in the liberation of Panjab from the oppressive rule.

Now that the world is facing the twin challenges of capitalism and communism the ideals of a classless society based on righteousness and freedom of conscience to all as enshrined in the ethical and political values of the Sikh Gurus should provide succour to ailing humanity.
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