Peaceful co-existence among different communities and states of the world is the ideal state of affairs on the earth. But if some dispute arises between different states or parties, it must be settled by one way or the other. The best and amicable way of settling such a dispute is, beyond doubt, tête-à-tête talk between the disputant states or parties. However, war is also recognised as one of the modes of settling disputes among the belligerent states or parties. But it is to be used only in the last resort, that, too, following the Ethics of War.

The term 'Ethics', according to the Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, means 'rules of behaviour.' In the words of T.J. Lawrence, "War is a contest carried on by public force between states, or between and communities having with regard to the contest the rights of states." According to the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, "The term 'war' is popularly applied to any conflict between nations, communities, or other large social groups in which

1. Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, p. 448
violence is used for the settlement of a quarrel."¹ According to The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, war is "a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between political units, such as states or nations or between rival political factions of the same state or nation."² The term 'Ethics of War' stands for the Code of Conduct to be observed by the warring parties or states during warfare.

The 'Ethics of War' is not an altogether novel concept. It existed in ancient times also. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Identifiable features of the present law can be traced back to ancient times in diverse parts of the world. As a rule, however, the mitigating features of law represented only an ideal, and wars between kindered people or like civilizations.³

In India, the Mahabharata holds that disarmed person and one who has surrendered should not be attacked but simply arrested. There should not be any general massacre. Women of the invaded area must not be attacked and the area should not be plundered.⁴

In *Santi Parva*, Bhism exhorts Yudhishthira not to subjugate any territory by unfair means: "A king should never desire to subjugate the earth by unrightful means, even if such subjugation would make him the sovereign of the whole earth. Which king is there that would rejoice after obtaining victory by unfair means? A victory stained by unrighteousness is uncertain and never leads to heaven."\(^1\)

Manu put forth the ethics of war as under:-

1. Not to use concealed weapons, arrows smeared with poison or the points of which are blazing with fire.

II. Anybody who had surrendered or fled was not to be killed.

III. Disarmed or sleeping persons were not to be harmed.

IV. Wounded were not to be attacked.\(^2\)

In ancient Greece, there existed a religious association known as Amphictyonic Council whose function was to act as an arbiter for settling the disputes amongst the states to avoid war and in case of war to mitigate its horrors by suggesting ways and means for it.

violation of which was forbidden. Peace at any cost was preferred. "The chief elements of the code were the rights of the alien, the sacred immunity of the herald, pious treatment of the slain (whose corpses might not be mutilated and should not be left unburied), and merciful treatment of prisoners. Unconditional surrender, if voluntary, carried with it a right to mercy; conditional surrender, if confirmed by an oath, was to be respected; and a captive had a title to be liberated (though it was doubtful if the captor was compelled to accept it) on payment of a fixed sum."¹

A firm measure taken in this direction, in human history, was the Fetial Law passed by Rome. Under this law it was made obligatory that a demand for satisfaction from the enemy be made before waging war. The prisoners of war were to be meted out compassionate treatment.

Despite the various measures taken to regulate the warfare the brutalities of war did not lessen. The reason for such a situation was rare observance of the ethics of war by the warring parties. Even in the war of Mahabharata, one finds some instances of sheer violation of the ethics of

war. It is found in the human history, with a few exceptions, that the armies often plundered the invaded areas. Moreover, no distinction was made between civilian and military population, religious or non-religious places etc.

The brutalities of war can be seen everywhere in the history of mankind. In India, the havoc wrought by Emperor Ashoka's conquest of Kalinga - the first major event of his reign - is unforgettable. In the words of Romila Thaper, "The 13th Rock Edict states clearly that this event took place in the ninth year of Asoka's reign, i.e. 260 B.C. The tone of this edict, in which he mentions his regret and remorse at the suffering in Kalinga, is not the regret of a man moved by a passing emotion, but the meaningful contribution of a man who was consciously aware of the sorrow he had caused."¹ The inscription of the 13th Edict reads: "The country of Kalinga was conquered when king Priyadarsin, Beloved of the gods, had been anointed eight years. One hundred and fifty thousand were therefrom captured, one hundred thousand were there slain, and many times as many died. Thereafter, now when the country of Kalinga has been acquired..."²

¹ Romila Thaper, Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas, pp. 35-36.
² XIII Rock Edict of Asoka quoted in D.R. Bhandarkar, Asoka, PP. 290-91
In the opinion of D.R. Bhandarkar, "These are the figures for Kalinga only, and do not include the casualties in the King's army. We thus have to note that even in such a small province as Kalinga, as many as 1,00,000 were killed on the battle field, many times as many died as the result of burning and sacking, and, what is more, no less than 1,50,000 were seized as slaves. Surely these are appalling figures for a tiny district like Kalinga, and indicate the extreme horrors of war in that ancient period when the weapons of destruction were not so diabolical and deadly as now."¹

Though after the battle of Kalinga, Ashoka fought no battle, but war could not be effaced from the scene of human history. The disaster and miseries inflicted by the invasions of Mahmood of Ghazni, Mohammad Ghauri, Timur, Chengiz Khan, Ahmad Shah Abdali and others still horrify the Indian people.

Not only in India but in other parts of the world also, the brutalities often accompanied war. In the Egyptian tradition, the battle of Megidde is quoted as an example. In this battle, general massacre

was ordered by the king and the invaded area was ransacked.¹

According to Ahmose, "The monuments of Asyria and Babylonia as well as the records of the Hebrews bear witness to the barbarity of the Asyrians and certain of the slain were often mutilated and rebel captives were imputed and subjected to the most horrible tortures. Those who escaped, were chained and enslaved."²

Thus the people had to suffer the brutalities of war due to lack of laws of war and non-observance of ethics of war by the fighting armies.

"War in ancient times knew few restraints, and slavery or death awaited those who were defeated. By the late Middle Ages, a substantial body of law, influenced by religious concepts and chivalry as well as by rationalist and humanist sentiment, had evolved. For example, Christians captured by other Christians were not to be enslaved. Medieval law applied primarily to gentlemen-soldiers, however, and civilians and soldiers of lower rank were likely to suffer grievously."³

1. Ahmose, Megiddo, fought by Thutmoses III in Asia Minor, 15th Century B.C., quoted in P. Bandyopadhey, International Law and Custom in Ancient India, p. 107
2. Ibid.
In the opinion of Guru Nanak, it is essential for the warring parties to observe Ethics of War. However, the general tenor of his hymns is that of love and compassion for humankind which tend to establish peace and harmony among different communities and states of the world. He is an antagonist of war due to the destruction it causes. He is so agitated to see the sufferings of the people in the wake of Babar's invasion on India that he cannot help calling even God, the Almighty Himself, for an answer in the following words:

Having conquered Khurasan Babar has terrified Hindustan.

The Creator takes not the blame on Himself and has sent the Mughal as Death's Myrmidon. So much beating was inflicted that people shrieked. Didst thou, O God, feel not compassion? ¹

Herein, he seems to be invoking the Lord of the Universe for mercy and abolition of such a horrible thing like war from the world.

Thus, Guru Nanak is for a war-free world. But if ever war has to be fought, it is to be fought in the last resort for protection of people's honour, for alleviation of their suffering, for restoration of

¹.  

Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 360
righteousness, for establishment of peace and harmony
and for the welfare of the whole humankind and not for
any personal gain or selfish motive. His view is best
expressed in the Zafarnama by Guru Gobind Singh in the
following couplet:–

Chu kar az hamah hilate dar guzasht
halal ast burdan ba shamshir dast.¹

'When all avenues have been explored, all means
tried, it is rightful to draw the sword out of the
scabbard and wield it with your hands.'² This principle
was further elaborated in a directive to the Khalsa
in 'Prem Sumarg': 'He (the Khasla) must always put on
sword. He should behave like a gentleman, but when
he finds a tyrant incorrigible and when it is the
question of righteousness or when the king has abandoned
the path of justice, he may make use of the sword
according to the contingency of the situation but
always as the last resort.³

Moreover, whenever war has to be fought, Ethics
of war must be invariably observed by the states or
parties involved in war. Guru Nanak stresses the need

1. Guru Gobind Singh, the Zafarnama, Verse 22, ed.
in Lal Singh, Chonvi Bani Dasam Granth, p.484
2. Khushwant Singh, History of the Sikhs, vol.1,
p.78.
3. Quoted in Fauja Singh, Some Aspects of State
of the Ethics of War i.e. the code of conduct or rules and regulations to be followed by the fighting armies during warfare. His ethics of war can be inferred from his verses wherein he points to the rules of war in an indirect manner while condemning the unrightful ways of the invader, Babar, and his army. He, in this way, puts forth a few rules of conduct for the warring parties and armies.

Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh had also to fight many wars, but they fought these wars against tyranny and oppression, to defend the human rights of the people and to restore righteousness. They themselves observed the ethics of war during warfare and made it obligatory for the Sikhs to observe it as well.

1. Not to wage War for Territorial Gain :-

A cursory glance at the human history makes it clear that so far the wars have often been waged and fought for the selfish motive of the ruler i.e. territorial gain. Guru Nanak thinks that kings, for the satisfaction of their ego, cherish to subjugate more and more people and to be the sovereigns of the whole world. That is why they wage wars and make invasions on other states, especially the weaker ones,

1. "Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 226"
for the purpose of annexing them to their own dominion. It can be inferred from the following words of Guru Nanak:-

Kings, being egoistic, make many expeditions (wage many wars).¹

The very comment of Guru Nanak is suggestive of his condemnation of the idea of invading any other state for territorial gain. Aggression by one state upon another is, thus, to be considered a political crime on the part of the aggressive state.

2. Not to attack the Weak or the Unarmed:

If need be, war is to be fought for the cause of righteousness and not for exerting oppression on the innocent populace of any state. Guru Nanak indicates the rule of war that the weak or unarmed persons, who are not fit or prepared for fighting, must not be attacked. He comments that the killing by a mighty person of another equally mighty person may be tolerable, but the killing of the weak and unarmed persons by a mighty belligerent person is an utterly condemnable act. To quote Guru Nanak:-

If a mighty man smites another equally mighty man, then the mind feels no agony.

If a powerful tiger pouncing on a herd, kills it, then its Master should be answerable.²

2. Ibid., 360.
These words also suggest that if at all a mighty person has to fight with a weak person for settling some dispute between them, the former, at first, must let the latter become as mighty as he himself is or the former must shed his might and come down to the level of the latter, only then the former is entitled to fight with the latter. In other words, only a fight between the two equals is justified. Moreover, since war is to be fought only for upholding the principle of righteousness, therefore, victory or defeat hardly matters with the righteous party.

This rule of war was strictly followed by Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh during warfare. Not even a single instance of attacking any weak or unarmed person can be found in the battles fought by Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Hargobind, in the last battle, was attacked by Painde Khan, but the former managed to evade the attack. When the Guru attacked Painde Khan, the latter's horse was killed. Observing the ethics of war, Guru Hargobind also alighted his horse to fight on foot at an equal level with Painde Khan. Depicting the situation, Kavi Sohan writes in Gurbilas Patshahi-6 as under:

The Guru aimed and gave a smite with the left hand. Painde Khan fell on the
ground and started crying. The Guru alighted the horse and stood on feet and challenged him.  

The Sikhs also followed the principle of not attacking the weak, unarmed, the coward or the fugitive. In Jang-Nāmā, Nur Mohammed writes:—

"In no case would they (the Sikhs) slay a coward nor would they put any obstacle in the way of a fugitive."  

3. **Massacre of General Public:**

The invaders, in ancient times, mercilessly shed the blood of general public during warfare. The history is replete with the instances of the massacre of innocent people by the Muslim invaders of India. In 712 A.D. Mohammad Bin Qasim attacked Sind and killed a large number of Hindus. According to Twarikh-e-Sind, he killed 16000 Hindus in the siege of Hiraon fort only. According to one estimate, Timur alone killed 77000 Brahmins and 29000 women including infants and aged. Bhai Gurdas, depicting the situation before the birth of Guru Nanak, writes that the Muslim invaders

1. Kavi Sohan, Gurbilas-6, Adhiyae 20, Verse 574-75.
3. Ishar Singh Nara, Sri Krishna Bhagwan Te Kalgidhar p.11.
4. Ibid., p.12.
and rulers killed innocent people and sin prevailed all around:

They massacre the faultless and the helpless,
Sin is prevailing all around on the earth.¹

Guru Nanak's words 'So much beating was inflicted that the people shrieked' imply the massacre of the innocent people committed by the ferocious hordes of Babar during his invasion of India. Guru Nanak's invocation of God for mercy is also suggestive of the rule of war that there should be no massacre of the general public during the warfare since war is to be fought only for the cause of righteousness and not for unleashing violence on innocent people. Therefore, the peaceful life of the innocent people who do not fight on the battle-field, must not be disturbed even during warfare.

4. Not to plunder the invaded area:

During the wars fought in the history of mankind the invaders often ransacked the invaded area and took the booty along with them which were usually distributed among those who took them. They plundered the private property even of the civilians.

2. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 360
Babar's army made no exception to this evil practice. His soldiers also plundered the people's property. The following words of Guru Nanak indirectly refer to the destruction or ransack committed by Babar's army:

Where are those sports, stables and horses?
Where are the drums and bugles?
Where are those sword-belts and chariots?
Where are those scarlet Uniforms?
Where are those mirrored finger-rings and beautiful faces?

They are no longer seen here.¹

It is quite understandable that, as Guru Nanak, herein, is commenting in the context of Babar's invasion of India, the things mentioned above had either been destroyed or looted by the army of Babar. Guru Nanak, through these words, also suggests that the warring army should not plunder the invaded area. He is not for fighting a war for personal gain in form of property or anything else.

In the Bachitra Natak, Guru Gobind Singh condemns Hussaini, the commander of Lahore's army,

¹. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, P. 417
for his act of looting the peaceful citizens' property in the Doon area:

He looted the Doon and none could challenge him. He distributed the booty amongst his armymen and thus he did this heinous act.¹

The Nawab of Lahore, after the defeat in the battle of Nandaun, sent troops to defeat Guru Gobind Singh but faced defeat once again from the latter. The defeated royal army took to heels, but on their way back, they plundered a village, Barwa, out of frustration only. Guru Gobind Singh condemned this act of the defeated army. The Guru commented that the royal army failed to defeat him and out of sheer frustration looted Barwa as a grocer cannot eat meat but to quench his taste he satisfies himself by eating a dish of stones. He says:

When he could not be successful here he ravaged Barwa.

As a grocer, to satisfy his hunger for meat eats a dish of stones.²


Even after Guru Gobind Singh the Sikhs never plundered the private property of the people during warfare. Nur Mohammed, the author of Jang Nāmā, who was no friend of the Sikhs, writes:—

"They do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of a woman, be she a well-to-do lady or a maid-servant."¹ Thus, the Sikhs used to follow a stern moral code during warfare.

5. Not to damage Places of Worship:—

The history of India is full of instances of razing of the places of worship by the alien invaders. Babar's army also damaged indiscriminately the places of worship of Hindus as well as of Muslims. Guru Nanak refers to the gruesome event in the following words:—

Millions of spell-binders tried to stop the Lord Babar,
When report of his invasion went abroad,
Hindu temples and Muslim sacred spots went up in flames,
And princes cut to pieces with dust were mingled.
No Mughal by such spells was struck blind;
None by their spells was affected.²

These words of Guru Nanak are suggestive of such a rule of war as does not permit attack on the places of worship in the war-area. It is no use restraining the invaders from committing the damage of the places of worship through spells etc. The religious places are the places of worship of God who is all-pervasive and above any conflict, therefore, such places belong to all and hence these places must not be damaged even during warfare.

6. **Not to molest Women** :-

History shows that the womenfolk have always been the worst victims of the giant of war. Their honour has always been at stake during warfare. Many women have been molested and raped by the savage armymen not observing the ethics of war during the wars fought so far. Sometimes they have been forced to enter into fake wed-locks with the armymen and this phenomenon gave rise to the concept of the 'war-baby'. Babar's army also treated the women of India in the same way. Describing the situation Guru Nanak expresses his agony in the following verse :-

Friend Lalo! as descends to me the Lord's word,
I express it.

Babar with the wedding-party of sin from Kabul rushed down,
And forcibly demanded surrender of Indian womanhood.
Then went modesty and righteousness into hiding,
And falsehood was strutting about in glory.
Set aside were Kazis and Brahmins, and
Satan went about solemnizing (Sic. solemnising)
marriages.
Muslim women, reciting the Koran, in their affliction
called on Khuda.
Other women of lower castes and of the Hindus in
this suffering too include in your account.
Saith Nanak: Divine Beloved! sung are paeans of blood,
And sprinkled is blood for saffron.¹

At another place, Guru Nanak vividly depicts
the pitiable plight of the women who fell victims to
molestation at the hands of the invading army during
Babar's carnage in Punjab in 1521 A.D. He writes:

The heads elegantly coiffured, with vermilion
decked and painted,
Now with scissors are shorn, dust into their necks
rises.
These females formerly in mansions abided;
now are they not allowed near them.

When they were wed, their bridegrooms by their side
in glory sat.

¹ Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p. 722
Riding ivory-decked palanquins they arrived;  
Over them was water waved, with fans dazzlingly shining.  
With each movement were they gifted lakhs.  
Munching coconut pulp and dates, in decked couches they rested.  
Now are halters thrown round their necks, their pearl-strings broken.  
Wealth and beauty turn enemies of such as had enjoyment of them.  
The conqueror commanded his minions to lead them out in dishonour.  

The above verses of Guru Nanak indicate that Guru Nanak considers women's molestation by the warring armymen an act of unrighteousness and cruelty. It is sheer violation of the ethics of war. Guru Nanak exhorts the menfolk not to cast a lustful glance at the woman who does not belong to them. He says:—  

Abandon thou another's woman, another's wealth, avarice, the poisonous sin of self-conceit, evil inclinations, Other's slander and the pariahs of lust and wrath.

2. Ibid., p. 1255
Thus, Guru Nanak suggests that it should be the rule of war that no armyman can molest or rape any woman even during warfare.

This rule of war was ever followed by the Sikhs in the battles fought by them under the command of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikhs never misbehaved with women during war-times. According to Kavi Santokh Singh, once some Sikhs asked Guru Gobind Singh why should not they capture the Muslim women in retaliation while the Muslim soldiers had forcibly carried away the Hindu women along with booty. But the Guru forbade them saying that they have to be persons of higher character and higher values of life. The Kavi puts it in these words in the _Gur Partap Suraj Granth_:

The Sikhs told the Guru that the Muslim soldiers raped the Hindu women.

Why should not the Sikhs take revenge?

Why does the Sikh code forbid it?

The Guru replied, "I wish to exalt the Panth, the Sikh community, to much higher planes and not to let it degrade. That is why I forbid you to commit sins."

Following this high principle of life, the Sikhs saved many women's honour during the invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali and Durrani. The invaders used to capture and carry with them a large number of women along with other things. But the Sikhs always got those innocent women freed and returned them to their guardians honourably. Not only this, they also kept intact the honour of the Muslim (enemy's) women who came their way, and respectfully restored them to their parents. Even Nur Mohammed who is full of vile abuse of the Sikhs, is constrained to pay them a tribute as men of character in his Jang Nāmā. He writes, "There is no adultery among these dogs (the Sikhs), nor are they mischievous people given to thieving. Whether a woman is young or old, they call her a buriyā and ask her to get out of the way. The word buriyā in the Indian language means 'an old lady'. There is no thief at all among these dogs, nor is there any house-breaker born among these miscreants. They do not make friends with adulterers and house-breakers, though their behaviour on the whole is not commendable."¹

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many conventions have been held on warfare. A close perusal of these conventions shows that the Ethics of War to be observed by the belligerent parties or states as suggested by Guru Nanak proved to be the precursor of these conventions. The most important among these conventions are the Declaration of Paris of 1856, the Geneva Convention of 1864, the Declaration of St. Petersburg of 1864, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Geneva Protocol of 1925, the Submarine Rulers Protocol of 1936 and the four Geneva Red Cross Conventions of 1949.

It will not be out of place to mention here that Bhai Kanhaiya, an ardent devotee of Guru Gobind Singh, was assigned the duty of serving water to the soldiers irrespective of their allegiance on the battlefield of Anandpur Sahib during the battle between Wazir Khan and Guru Gobind Singh in October, 1702. A few Sikhs lodged a complaint with the Guru against Bhai Kanhaiya for serving water to the foes. When the Guru called for his explanation for this act, Bhai Kanhaiya very humbly replied that he, while serving water, saw none else - friend or foe - but God in all. The Guru was extremely pleased with his absolutely impartial service to humanity, and offered him a small box of
ointment for dressing the injured of both the armies. In this way, Bhai Kanhaiya's act of serving humankind without any discrimination between friend or foe even on the battlefield, became the precursor of the Geneva Convention of 1864 which granted privileges to the International Red Cross Society founded by Henri Dunant, for tending the sick and wounded in war.

Some of the significant laws of war passed by the Conventions mentioned above are: not to kill the civilians; to give humane treatment to the prisoners of war; not to sink the merchant ships without securing the safety of the crew; not to use poisonous gases; to accord due regard to women; free treatment of the wounded, not to make vehicle and aircrafts, engaged in evacuation of the sick and injured, the target of attack.

"The laws of war are based on the assumption that war should be a disciplined political act undertaken to achieve particular political ends and not just an indiscriminate unleashing of violence on others."¹