



The Concept of “Dharma” and “Liberation” with Reference to the teachings of Sikhism

SHIVAM SHARMA
Ph.D. Philosophy
Department of philosophy
University of Delhi, Delhi

Abstract:

The youngest of all, the origin of which can be traced back to 1649, to have been thrived to become the fifth-largest Religion in the World and a cosmopolitan one. Sikhism yet remains as a misinterpreted Religion where few consider it to be a subset of Hinduism or as synchronisation of Islam and Hinduism, sometimes which is also understood under the paradigms of Vedantin Philosophy, the problem lies behind the ambiguous translations of its texts, Gurbānī, in the process of which the authenticity of the same seems to have been distorted, it becomes a crucial imperative to discuss the Philosophy of Sikhism with reference to the concept of Dharma and Liberation and to argue for a thorough recognition of the Sikhism Philosophy and Religion as one of the emerging religions of the World. The article also concurs with the view that Sikhism is more of Dharma than Religion.

Keywords: Dharma, Liberation, Religion

1. Introduction

The word ‘dharma’ in the Indian context has different meanings and is used in different senses, it deals with the whole of human being, which shows the path to true living. Rajiv Malhotra in his article “dharma is not same as religion” defined that dharma has multiple meanings which depend upon its usage. He said “dharma includes “conduct, duty, right, justice, virtue, morality, religion, religious merit, good work according to the right or rule, etc. Dharma has no equivalent in the western lexicon.” He defined dharma, “as to be rooted in the Sanskrit term ‘dhri’, which means that which upholds that which maintains stability and harmony of the universe. Dharma provides the principles for the harmonious fulfilment of all aspects of life, namely, dharma, Artha, Kama, and moksha. Religion, then, is only one subset of dharma’s scope”. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rajiv-malhotra/dharma-religion_b_875314.html) Though in modern times the concept dharma has been replaced by its translated term ‘religion’ both the concepts are not the same. The concept of dharma in India is used in a broader sense which includes many aspects of living of human beings whereas the concept of religion is narrow and limited to some of them. I would not like to go into that debate that how and why dharma was replaced by religion, but I would say it is the result of colonial discourse on Indian philosophy and the Orientalists-Liberal-Indian nationalist discourse, which was primarily driven by westerners. Similar things happened with the philosophy of religion (POR), it is an attempt to critically examine all the elements of religion and its practices, which has no fixed boundaries but for the people and scholars of the west, POR is exclusive to the religion of Christianity only. They do not include the religions of the east in that. Still in contemporary times, however, the ‘religions’ of India (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism) get their place in the philosophy of religion. But Sikhism which is one of the newest religions to have emerged, developed, as well as become popular in India still does not have any place at the world level as well as in India also. My argument is that Sikhism should also have its place in the philosophy of religion as it is one of the emerging religions of the world. “In literature, Sikhism is usually represented as syncretism (Islam and Hinduism) and lately it is being represented as a sect of Hinduism based on Vedantic philosophy. My analysis of various interpretations of the Aadi Guru Granth Sahib in English and Punjabi available in the market are mainly translations without any consideration to interpret the

original theme or philosophy in the sabad. Moreover, Gurbānī has been interpreted in the past and is being interpreted in such a way to show that the Gurbani is based mainly on various interpretations of Vedantic philosophy. (is Sikhism) now Sikhism is being represented in such a way that many Sikh and non-Sikh scholars are labelling it as the sect of Hinduism. Misinterpretation of Gurbānī and misinterpretations of Sikhism was started during the guru's period. Misinterpretation of Gurbānī is going on either innocently due to its improper understanding in its originality and entirely because of the strong influence of Vedantic philosophy on the scholars, or intentionally to meet certain motives".(Granth, 3)

In this paper, I will discuss the philosophy of the Sikh religion with reference to the concept of "dharma" and "liberation". That how they look upon these concepts and what are their views on these concepts.

2. The Concept of "Dharma" in Sikhism

Gurū Nānak set out the establishment of Sikhism throughout the fifteenth century, the time of the renaissance (between the fourteenth century and seventeenth century) while researchers were trying some of the ideas of the congregation in Europe. All through this period, Gurū Nānak tested the old folklore and ceremonies wherein the people of South Asia were shackled for many years and had been not ready to communicate their freedom of thought even a tiny bit of their daily routines because of the reality their lives have been controlled with the guide of their non-mainstream tutors. Gurū Nānak declared a totally remarkable way of thinking that is deductively and intelligently exceptionally strong and as a result having ordinary adequacy. His way of thinking is named as Nanakian theory.

"It was reinforced, enhanced and lectured by the nine succeeding masters to the place of Nanak called Nanakian theory." (Granth, 3)

Sikhism famously known as Gurmat (master's insight) plummeted to Gurū Nānak directly from God, is neither dependent on subculture, culture, progress, and records of the people of a nation and geological situation. It is neither union of monotheistic Islam nor of Vedantic Hinduism.

"It is a spiritually practical way of life, called Nam-Marga, Sehaj-Marga, national high way (gadirah) open to everyone who cared to treat it irrespective of caste, colour, community, and nation. Sikhism establishes three points, that (1) basically there is no duality between transcendent and immanent God. (2) Man has the highest position in the creation and (3) man is the only in this creation who can realize himself." (Singh, 135)

Sikh dharma is one of the youngest among the major world religions. This religion originated in the Punjab region of north India. The founder of the Sikh religion was Gurū Nānak Dev, who was born in 1469. The message that has been put to the fore by Gurū Nānak Dev is of "ek oan kar" which means that "we all are one," created by the one creator of creation. This teaching came to the fore when India was stifled with divisions in and around castes, sectarianism, religious factions, and fanaticism. He and his followers denounced oppression based on creed, caste, colour, class, or sex. "Gurū Nānak sided with no religion and valued all religions. He expressed the belief that there is one God and many pathways. The name of God is truth, Sat Nam." <http://ccky.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/06/Sikh-Dharma.pdf>.)

"The followers of Gurū Nānak were Sikhs, which literally means "seeker of truth." He showed them how to bow just before God, and to connect themselves to the master, the light of truth, who was dependably in the immediate awareness of God, encountering no detachment. Through words and cases, the master showed adherents how to encounter God inside themselves, bringing them from darkness into light. Gurū Nānak was a modest carrier of thought of truth. He contradicted superstition, foul play, and deception. He roused his devotees through singing melodies thought to be supernaturally motivated. The melodies were recorded and framed the start of the Sikh's hallowed compositions, known as the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. <http://ccky.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/06/Sikh-Dharma.pdf>.)

“The opening hymn of the Adi Granth(first book) which is known as the ‘Mool Mantra’ of Sikhism explains the nature of ultimate reality” (ch8 63) as “ ikk ōankār satnām karatā purakh nirabhau niravair akāl mūrāt ajūnī saibhan gurprasād” which means “Universal Oneness, The supreme Unchangeable Truth and that is the ikk oankar, the Creator of the Universe, Beyond Fear, Beyond Hatred, Beyond Death, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent, by the Guru's Grace” <http://ccky.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Sikh-Dharma.pdf>)

According to this, “there is one supreme being, the eternal reality. He is the creator, without fear and devoid of enmity. He is immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the guru. The eternal one, from the beginning, through all time present now, the everlasting reality.” <http://ccky.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Sikh-Dharma.pdf>.)

“The human body is a safe haven of a living God. The neglectful people find it outside the body while continuing with everyday life. Self-shame and monkish life were both dismissed by Sikhism. Through the expert's promise (holy examples) Sikh fails horrendously in the word, for example, controls his obscenities, use the normal things as need, not as an excess. He favours this world and avoids any kind of allure like salvation conceded in the following scene. He didn't want to relinquish the current life for salvation in life following death.” (Singh, 140)

3. God

God has been acknowledged as a central idea in Sikhism. God is the maker, sustainer, destroyer of the world. God is both characteristic and extraordinary. There is not anything at all like knowing God. In the event of the ever-innovative God, to do His will (hukum) is the best way to know him, and to know his will is to complete it. http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf, pp-62-63)

In Sikhism, the concept of God is both impersonal and personal. God is impersonal; formless and beyond human reach. When God discloses himself through his creation, he becomes related and personal. When God manifests himself, he first formed into Nam (divine name), then created nature. <http://ccky.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Sikh-Dharma.pdf>.)

In Sikhism, the idea of God is both nirguna and saguna. "Nirguna as in he is unconditioned, without normal traits and totally past the scope of human appreciation. God progresses toward becoming saguna by his own will, by showing himself in and through the world. The term saguna applies in the feeling of celestial innateness. Saguna part of God is comprehensible to individuals. Be that as it may, the nirguna part of God is the supreme character of God. Other than these characteristics, God is additionally all-powerful, omniscient and inescapable in nature. God is transcendent in light of the fact that God has the ability to give the substance of his will with reality, and the entire domain of his reality is always maintained by his movement'. http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf, pp-65)

With respect to confirmation of the presence of God in Sikhism, it keeps up that God isn't a question that requires any verification, our own self is the vivacious evidence for God's presence. Henceforth to provide the presence of God the master depends on the acknowledgement of knowing self. God exist in each human heart, yet man needs to hoist himself for achieving God. Gurū Nānak said “O Man! Realise your divine origin.” http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf, pp-67)

4. Guru

“Guru miliai mili anki samaia Kari kirapa gharu mahalu dikhaia Nanaka haumai mari milaiia”

Which means “by meeting the guru he is absorbed in God’s embrace; Out of mercy the house and the place of God are shown to him. Nanak says: having killed the ahamkara, he is united (with

God).”(Gaeffke, 272) Sikhism is master oriented religion. It is the religion of ten gurus. In Sikhism master is the courier of God, an illuminated, and one who gets a dream and message of truth from God and lectures that message to humankind. Guru in Sikhism isn't God, yet he is as flawless as a God. The word guru is the blend of 'Gu' signifies 'dimness' and 'ru' signifies 'light' or disclosure. Consequently etymologically 'master' is the "dispeller of haziness, revealer of light. Master is a go-between amongst God and his creation. It is through the medium of a master that the finesse of God and words are made accessible to all men. They trust that the master is impeccable in all regards and through the masters, the greatness of God is transmitted to mankind.
http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf, pp-68)

5. Maya

In spite of the fact that this world is Maya, as indicated by Sikhism, it isn't unreal like specified in the Vedantic reasoning. This world is genuine on the grounds that it is the formation of God. Yet, however, it is genuine, yet it isn't lasting. Maya is the unconstrained imaginative energy of God, due to which this world has appeared. In the expressions of Wazir Singh “Maya is assumed to stand between man and reality, producing error and illusion in the human mind, and creating difficulties in the individual’s way to a state of knowledge and bliss” Nanak did not give Maya the connotation of pure illusion. “By Maya, Nanak intended to say that material objects, even though they have reality as revelations of the creator’s eternal truth may build around those who live wholly in the mundane world a wall of falsehood that darkens their view from seeing the truly real.”

6. Karma

Sikhism believes in the philosophy of Karma and the transmigration of souls. Good deeds will lead to the attainment of God. Nanak believed that all human beings are inherently good. Our sins of the past can be done away within the next birth through good deeds. One’s own karma decides the person’s fate. However, delivering oneself completely to God can enable a person to be uplifted by God’s grace and free the person from the cycle of Karma. Our sufferings are due to our poor karma, which shackles us to this world through Maya. Considering the above aspects one can safely submit that Sikhism is more of a Dharma than religion. Its emphasis on practicalities of life and ethics gives it a wider scope and dimension than that of religion and hence we can call it Dharma.

7. The concept of “Liberation” in Sikhism

Like different religions, the idea of liberation has its fine and essential place in Sikhism additionally, which is a definitive predetermination and the preeminent end of life, which is to be free from the cycle of birth and passing. In Sikhism liberation intends to be free from this cycle and converge in God. Liberation in Sikhism is conceivable through contemplation on God's name and by following master's instructing.

"In Sikhism nirvana (liberation) implies association with the celestial being. Genuine satisfaction can be achieved by association with God and not the natural ensnarement. Adi Granth states about salvation as “if with a pure heart the name meditated upon, he obtains the gate salvation.”http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf, pp-91)

The submission to the divine law is one of the important factors in Sikhism. Similar to meditation following the teachings of the Guru also has an important role in Sikhism. Other than this the service of humankind is likewise one of the imperative perspectives in Sikhism keeping in mind the end goal to achieve liberation. The service of humanity has additionally its place with a specific end goal to accomplish the most elevated end of life in Sikhism. It isn't just an ethical obligation or duty however the best approach to get liberation and association with God. Sikhism rejects the rationality of sanyasa and guides individuals to live in family life and play out their obligations towards family and society also. A religion of high morality attaches great importance to ethical conduct. Seva or selfless service of humankind is the premier point of the Sikhs. Sikh enthusiasts ought to dependably be prepared for social

service for the welfare of mankind. In spite of the fact that truly seva implies service, yet the implication of the term is substantially more extensive which incorporates all ways of activity freed from any of the desires of the conscience, for example, the yearning for benefits, self-premium and so on.

“The ideal man of Nanak is one who lives a family life, performs his normal duties but keeps himself free from earthly desires.”

http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf, pp-88)

http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf, pp- 91)

Sikhism isn't one of the uninvolved examinations. It tries to satisfy itself in real life, asking a man to be dynamic in the undertaking's dynamic world. The Sikh religion is a disclosure of truth which is connecting the internal existence of thought and feeling with the external universe of activity. The Sikh mysticism not only reveals truth but inspires activity. “It is not merely a way of understanding but also a way of life. Gurū Nānak says:

Truth is high
Higher still is truthful living.”(Singh, 137)

Liberation can be attained through ethical action. Sikhism focuses on being in this world but not becoming engrossed in worldly affairs. It gives the message of being a lotus i.e. to grow in the mud but still protects oneself from being stained by the mud. Liberation can come to fruition just by contemplating over the Divine Name (God). This message of salvation is given in the Adi Granth, the Holy Scripture. As per it, all individuals without divisions for race, sex, standing, religion, have an equivalent opportunity to achieve liberation and salvation. God sends his elegance to everyone who puts forth a valiant effort. The last objective of the Sikhs is to end up one with God. From one viewpoint it relies upon God and his grace, and then again on human effort, on what they do and what they don't do. (Gachter, 3-4) Prayer has a central role in Sikhism. It helps the Sikh followers to connect with God and purify themselves. Through prayer, the follower can fulfil his desire to achieve God. Remembrance of God known as Nam Simran is important to attain unity with God. Sikhs firmly believe that it is only their prayer that is complete. Prayer should be done not for oneself but for everybody. The Sikh thought of Mukti has a mystical approach. It leans towards salvation nowhere in life with the goal that the freedman as the instrument of God may motivate others. “As per Sikhism, a deep sense of being, Mukti, goodness and ethics are futile on the off chance that they sink to individualism. The Sikh spiritualist neither looks for domains nor deliverance yet the affection for lotus feet. A perfect man in Sikhism accomplishes not only progress starting with one level then onto the next yet an aggregate change inside and without. The Sikh mysticism asks them to make divine the entire of humankind on this planet by changing personality, life and matter, through a cognizant exertion and will and with the profound method of the Nam-yoga”. (Singh, 136)

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to explain that religion and Dharma are different contexts. Dharma is an all-encompassing idea while calling it religion restricts and reduces its scope. The POR should be inclusive both for the East and West. Sikhism should be given a place in POR to put it through perusal and scrutiny for further research. I have also dealt with the reasons why Sikhism is not given a place in POR, as it is considered to be a syncretism of Islam and Hinduism and later came to be understood as an interpretation of Vedantic philosophy.

When Gurū Nānak in one of his couplets

“There is no Hindu,
There is no Musalam”

was seen clearly demarcating his followers from the two popular traditions of that time, the desynchronisation from the two is explicitly required has been felt by many scholars.

Moreover, I have tried to explain how Sikhism emerged and how the concepts of God, Guru, Maya, Karma etc., which are central to the teachings of all the religions, are having different positions in

Sikhism. Liberation in Sikhism can be attained through the combination of several means. Prayer, Sewa, God's grace, complete surrender to God and Gurus's teachings are primary to liberation in Sikhism. These tenets are central to most religions but Sikhism occupies a special place because it has given a practical angle to these tenets. For example, one has to remain in the world but yet not be engrossed by worldliness, Sewa has to have an ethical angle to it etc. Considering these aspects, we can affirm that Sikhism is more of dharma than religion, as it is practical and tailored for individuals of this world.

Reference

1. Chahal, Devinder Singh. "IS SIKHISM A VEDANTIC PHILOSOPHY OR HAS ITS OWN UNIQUE PHILOSOPHY?" UNDERSTANDING SIKHISM- The Research Journal, 2006.
2. Dhillon, S. S. "Universality of the Sikh Philosophy: An Analysis." The Sikh Review 52 (2004): 15-20.
3. Gächter, Othmar. "Sikhism: An Indian Religion in Addition to Hinduism and Islam." Anthropos, vol. 105, no. 1, 2010, pp. 213–222.
4. Gaeffke, Peter. "Karma in North Indian Bhakti Traditions." Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 105, no. 2, 1985, pp. 265–275.
5. <http://ccky.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Sikh-Dharma.pdf>.
6. http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/67749/8/08_chapter%203.pdf.
7. http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Sikh_Dharma
8. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism>
9. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rajiv-malhotra/dharma-religion_b_875314.html
10. <https://www.sikhdharma.org/ideology-beliefs/>
11. Mandair, Arvind. "The Politics of Nonduality: Reassessing the Work of Transcendence in Modern Sikh Theology." Journal of the American Academy of Religion, vol. 74, no. 3, 2006, pp. 646–673.
12. Singh, Sardar Harjeet. Faith and Philosophy of Sikhism. Kalpaz Publications, 2009.
13. Singh, Shamsheer. "DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF GURMAT MYSTICISM." Global Religious Vision: The Quarterly Research Journal 3 (2003): 130:143.
14. Takhar, Opinderjit Kaur. Sikh Identity. Ashgate Publishing, 2005.