

Concept of Interreligious Harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism: A Comparative Study

(This Thesis is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Master of
Philosophy at the University of Dhaka)

Submitted by

Injamam Mahbub Mojumder

Master of Philosophy

Roll No. 48, Session: 2018-2019

Registration No. 48/2018-2019

Department of World Religions and Culture

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Department of World Religions and Culture

University of Dhaka

Supervised by

Dr. Fazrin Huda

Professor

Department of World Religions and Culture

University of Dhaka

Co-Supervised by

Dr. Mohammad Jahangir Alam

Associate Professor and Chairman

Department of World Religions and Culture

University of Dhaka

Date of Submission: 27 June, 2022



Department of World Religions and Culture

University of Dhaka

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those who have devoted their lives to promoting interfaith harmony.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this thesis on **Concept of Interreligious Harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism: A Comparative Study** is my own work and this research work, either in whole or in part, has not been submitted for candidature or for any other degree at this university or elsewhere.

.....

.....

Injamam Mahbub Mojumder
(Degree Candidate)

Date

DECLARATION OF THE SUPERVISOR

This is to certify that, Injamam Mahbub Mojumder, a student, a learner and researcher of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.), Session: 2018-2019, Roll No-48, Department of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka, has completed his M.Phil. thesis on the topic entitled **“Concept of Interreligious Harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism: A Comparative Study”** under my supervision and guidance.

It is a compulsory work for the completion of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) degree offered by the department of World Religions and Culture, faculty of Arts, in the University of Dhaka.

I also certify that, I have scrutinized the report and found it satisfactory for the submission as partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.).

I wish him every success in his life.

.....

(Dr. Fazrin Huda)

Professor

Department of World Religions and Culture

University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

DECLARATION OF THE CO-SUPERVISOR

Injamam Mahbub Mojumder has conducted his M. Phil research titled **Concept of Interreligious Harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism: A Comparative Study** under my supervision in World Religions and Culture at the University of Dhaka. The current work of Mojumder, makes an effort to fill a gap by propounding a comparative analysis of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism. The researcher, however, has considered the main focus of this thesis is to provide a comparative study of the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism. This conceptual research works identifies, analyzes, and explores interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism by following comparative methods of study and putting forward constructive discussions and analysis.

On the basis of my careful study of this thesis and the assessment of its professional standard of writing, I do hereby recommend that this thesis is satisfactory for the submission as partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.).

I wish him every success in his life.

.....

(Dr. Mohammad Jahangir Alam)

Associate Professor and Chairman

Department of World Religions and Culture

University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

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Abstract

The main focus of this thesis is to provide a comparative study of the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism. This conceptual research work identifies, analyzes, and explores interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism by following comparative methods of study and by putting forward constructive discussions and analysis. This research work maintains the standards of the Comparative Study of Religion, which includes an unbiased, unprejudiced study of religions with genuine respect, empathy, and sensitiveness.

Interreligious harmony assumes great importance in this contemporary world. Its implications have been expanded from personal and religious spheres to the global atmosphere. A peaceful and harmonious environment is inevitable for a physically and psychologically healthy generation. Besides, interreligious harmony can assure political, social, cultural, national, and global stability. Lack of interreligious empathy and understanding has jeopardized world peace to a great extent. Consequently, problems like minority tension, racism, xenophobia, theory of replacement, islamophobia are at their peak. That is why the necessity of interreligious harmony is being felt at the global level much more than ever before.

This thesis has taken an attempt to highlight the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism. In the fact-finding process, geographical, religious and socio-historical accounts have been scrutinized to determine the rise and development of Sikhism and Caodaism. The necessity, development, and pattern of the concept of interreligious harmony have been analyzed from both religious and socio-historical

perspectives of Sikhism and Caodaism. Comparative study of this thesis has explored that the rise and propagation of interreligious harmony by these religions was revolutionary for the respective societies. Besides, this thesis has clarified the research question that how the concept of universal religion of Caodaism and Sikhism is acceptable and possible, preserving individual convictions intact. Furthermore, it has been argued that both Sikhism and Caodaism propagate an inclusive unity not uniformity of religions and believe that this unity and harmony may lead towards sustainable global peace.

Keywords: Interreligious Harmony, Sikhism, Caodaism, Comparative Study, Pluralism, Universalism, Religion, Culture, Academic Study of Religion, Scientific Study of Religion.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

This thesis deals with the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding and analysis, the method of the comparative study of religions has been followed. Through this method, the researcher has analyzed, and discussed the concept of interreligious harmony and explores that the emergence of Sikhism and Caodaism and the concept of interreligious harmony are deeply rooted in their respective socio-historical contexts. Unity and interreligious harmony are often misunderstood as uniformity or assimilation of religions. Followers of other religions often misunderstand the concept of unity and religious harmony of Sikhism and Caodaism as an attempt of unification of religions. This research work analyzes and explains this problem with proper arguments from the perspectives of Sikhism and Caodaism. The main focus of this thesis is to identify and discuss the interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism from a comparative perspective to provide a clear insight on how two different religions promote interreligious harmony and to what extent their concepts are similar and where they differ.

1.2 Research Questions

To carry out research, the researcher needs to pose one or two central questions which may be followed by a few sub-central questions (Creswell, 2003). In general, a researcher can raise a question and put forward arguments for it and that argument supplies more sub-questions and arguments. In this research work, however, the research problem has been analyzed on the basis of two central questions and two associated sub-central questions.

Central Questions

1. What socio-historical and cultural settings of India and Vietnam influenced Sikhism and Caodaism in promoting “interreligious harmony” as a holistic approach?
2. What are the major sources of “interreligious harmony” in Sikhism and Caodaism?

Associated Sub-central questions

1. How does the concept of “interreligious harmony” in Sikhism and Caodaism promote the unity of religion?
2. How do the concepts of “universality” and “syncretism” in Sikhism and Caodaism indicate the possibility of one universal religion?

1.3 Context of the Study

The academic study of religions is one of the most pivotal additions to the continuous growth of human consciousness. The study of religions from different perspectives and disciplines has dragged religion from the theological and personal boundaries and posited it as a multi-dimensional life-oriented factor. Religions have now become an

important part of the cognitive realm that deals with almost everything connected to human life (Giddens, 2006). From a socio-historical and psychological perspective, religion has proven itself as an integral part in individual and collective human life, which is natural to individuals and it is not a fixed or finished function but a changing and growing one. (Coe, 1904). In the field of the study of religions, the concept of interreligious harmony is gaining impetus in the global policy levels and it has been considered as one of the most influential factors to meet the challenges of intolerance, extremism, and religious militancy of the world (Zou'an, 2013). This research work lays out the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism following the method of the comparative study of religion.

Sikhism and Caodaism are two comparatively new religions of the world. Sikhism started its beginning in around 1500 CE with the teachings of its founder Guru Nanak in India (Chatterji, 1971). Caodaism emerged to take its present form in the early twentieth century in the South of Vietnam with Ngo Minh Chieu's (1878-1932) acceptance of the religion of God-Duc Cao Dai (Alam, 2010). India and Vietnam are significantly different from each other in culture, religion, spiritualism, and philosophical thoughts. While Vietnam is famous for its natural tradition of assimilation and syncretism, India has legendary accounts for its religious and cultural diversities.

Despite almost all the religions of the world pose the notion of harmony in their doctrines, Caodaism and Sikhism are unique in that sense that they have had added the notion of "interreligious harmony" as their core belief and acknowledge the existence of the truths in almost all religions and call for a unity based on harmony. Sikhism and

Caodaism both posited the need for a harmonious existence in an unprecedented manner (Islam & Islam, 2016; Alam, 2010; Farid, 2010). In this research work, the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism has been analyzed on the basis of unity of God, unity of mankind, unity of religion, and examples of freedom of religions. Since this study is a comparative study of the concept of interreligious harmony between Sikhism and Caodaism, the religions are divided into two chapters, and each chapter is divided into sub-segments that deal with the related concepts independently. After that, both of the religions were taken together for comparative analysis and each of the related terms were examined and explained with the similarities and differences following the scientific method of the comparative study of religion. For getting a clear concept of Sikhism and Caodaism a background study has been made and presented. It is notable that political, conflicting, ambiguous historical and religious accounts have been excluded from the study. Only related concepts and historical reports have been given top consideration. In analyzing the core concept of interreligious harmony, the concept of unity has been examined to find out whether this “unity” stands for uniformity or not. Meaning, nature, and application of each concept have been explained and analyzed according to these two religions as well. In the next phase, some related research questions that originated in the process of analyzing the concepts have been discussed. This research work takes both theological and historical accounts into consideration for understanding the religions. To constitute arguments in support or oppose, both theological¹ historical incidents, social, and cultural findings have been used.

¹ sacred verses, legends, and sayings.

1.4 Literature Review

Sikhism, Caodaism, and related subject matters such as; interreligious harmony, and the Comparative Study of Religion have occupied major significance in the literature domain. Besides the scholars of religions, discussions, arguments, and theories have also been covered by specialists from sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, and political science. Apart from these, independent researchers from diverse disciplines out of their interest have prompted scholarly research on these areas and many of them are considered with greater significance. To effectuate the proposed research in this thesis, the researcher has conducted relevant scholarly pieces of literature from different disciplines related to the research topic. In this part, the key literature is divided into three parts based on subject matters. Repeat mentions of authors, similar books, and topics have been omitted.

1.4.1 Sikhism: History, Philosophy, and Interreligious Harmony

Eleanor Nesbitt (2005) in his *Sikhism a Very Short Introduction* illustrated Sikhism covering the background of the emergence of Sikhism and its appeal in the contemporary world. Nesbitt's work is considered one of the finest works on Sikhism for the beginner. This book followed a chronological order in introducing Sikhism. It is found that extensive research on Sikhism has been done by W. H. McLeod (2009). In his *The A to Z of Sikhism*, McLeod described Sikhism following a dictionary format. This book is essential for understanding Sikhism in its initial phases. This book has described essential theories, philosophies, and historical events of Sikhism in brief but with clear words. Nesbitt and McLeod in their books have touched on the crucial facts of Sikhism from the perspective of history based on shreds of evidence. Nesbitt has

put forward argumentative explanations for the early developments of Guru Nanak and the flourishing of Sikhism. Both the books provide historical and definitional supplements for understanding Sikhism at an initial level.

Khushwant Sing (2001) is prominent for his major works on Sikhism. In his, *A History of the Sikhs* 6th edition, the history of Sikhism, early developments and biographies of the Sikh Gurus with other influential Sikh figures have been discussed. In this book, Khushwant Sing has done extensive research for portraying the historical backgrounds, organizational developments, confrontations of the political ideologies, etc. J. S. Grewal (2008) in *The Sikhs of the Punjab* has instantiated Sikh history by dividing the history into different phases. In this book Sikh history has been described as keeping Punjab as the center. Major phases of Sikhism such as the development of the temporal and spiritual (*Miri & Piri*) system of Sikhism, political conflicts with the Mughals have been outlined scholarly by this book. Sardar Harjeet Singh (2010), in his *Faith and Philosophy of Sikhism*, explained Sikhism from theological and historical background.

Sikhism, authored by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2009) is one of the latest comprehensive studies of Sikhism. This book covers Sikhism from both ancient to modern times. In this book, Sikh ethics, thoughts, and important issues like the position of women, the relation of Sikh tradition with modern culture have been explained. Khushwant Sing, J. S. Grewal, and Nikky- Guninder Kaur Singh have conducted extensive research on Sikhism that helps the student of Sikhism for getting a clear outline of this religion. Besides historical events, theological teachings were taken into consideration for explaining Sikhism by the authors. These three books

have provided clear stances of Sikh philosophies of interreligious harmony, equality, and worldview.

Srelata Menon's (2011) *Guru Nanak, The Enlightened Master*, and *Spiritual Master*, *Guru Nanak* authored by Harish Dhillon (2013) sketched the life, teachings, ethics, and philosophy of Guru Nanak. Kazi Nurul Islam has contributed in framing out the concept of interreligious harmony in the Guru Granth Sahib. He has several papers on Guru Nanak and His interfaith philosophy. The *Guru Grantha Shahib: A Model for Interfaith Understanding in Today's World* (2019), and *Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Harmony* (2019) both have focused on the egalitarian and interreligious harmonious aspects of Guru Nanak, mentioning the factual events and logical reasoning. Nanak Singh Nishter (2018) in his book *Sikhism and Other Religions*, and his paper, *Interfaith Promotion by Sikhism* (2010) have described the historical and theological footings of interreligious harmony of Sikhism. In his study, he has focused on controversial issue like Sikh- Muslim relations during the Mughal period which is often conceived as a religious conflict, in his book and paper, Nishter has tried to prove that those conflicts were completely political. In fact, religiously, there existed harmonious relationships between the Muslims and Sikhs. Kazi Nurul Islam also focused on the historical events that suggests that Sikh-Muslim conflicts were not interreligious conflict but consequences of some political causes.

Previously mentioned Grewal (2008), Singh (2001), and Renu Gosain (2016), in her *Guru Tegh Bahadur- His Supreme Martyrdom* also made it clear that identifying the entire Mughal period as a period of hostility with Sikhism will cause historical errors, thus the conflicts were periodic and during the period of Aurungzeb, that conflict was

in its zenith but otherwise, there existed a peaceful co-relation between Sikhism and Islam. In the paper of Kazi Nurul Islam (2019) it has been mentioned that Emperor Akbar donated lands for the erection of the holy Golden Temple for the Sikhs. Again, in the papers of Islam and Nanak S. Nishter, they have put forwarded the facts like many of the founding stones of Sikh Gurdwaras and even the founding stone of the Golden Temple was laid by a Muslim that suggested that the conflicts of Sikh - Muslim during the Mughal empire cannot be regarded mere religious conflict, either they were political or, in some cases, it was the outcomes of certain other causes.

1.4.2 Caodaism: History, Philosophy, and Interreligious Harmony

Gabriel Gobron's (1950) *History and Philosophy of Caodaism* is one of the major contributions and one of the most cited reference books in the study of Caodaism. Gobron has embellished the doctrines of Caodaism in this book, almost covering all the grounds for understanding Caodaism. In this book, Gobron has identified the background elements for emerging spiritism in Vietnamese soil. Political, social, and theological factors have been discussed that make it constructive to find out the genesis of Caodaism. Besides, the theological basis of Caodaism, goals, principles of Caodaism, early and later developments, international recognition has been discussed based on facts and data. Many verses from the holy scriptures of Caodaism, rituals, and praying format of the Caodaists have been mentioned.

Victor L. Oliver (1976) in his famous book *Caodai Spiritism, A Study of Vietnamese Religion in Vietnamese Society* is another influential and prominent work on Caodaism. Oliver has done intensive field research on Caodaism and introduced many unknown facts of Caodaism. In this book, Caodaism has been studied from the

perspective of the scientific study of religions like Gobron. The socio-political background of Caodaism has been scrutinized and the impact of French, China, and Indian elements on Vietnamese society was identified. It was found that in-born Vietnamese tendency of assimilation and syncretism in Vietnamese society made it easy for accepting Western spiritism, Chinese philosophical thoughts and religions like Taoism and Confucianism, and even Indian Shaivism a part of Vietnamese traditional religion. These diffusions have generally made the way for emerging Caodaism. Besides the religious and cultural influences, pre-existing political groups had noteworthy contributions to shaping the base of Caodaism.

Another prominent work on Caodaism is *The Cao Dai: A New Religious Movement* by Sergei Blagov (1999). This book also has a similar pattern to the books by Gobron and Oliver. Blagov in his book discussed Caodaism elaborately. The nature of Vietnamese religions, syncretic elements, and finally the emergence of Caodaism as a syncretic religion have been analyzed in this book by examining the religious, cultural, social, and political facts. All these above three books can be taken as important books for understanding the development, doctrines, and interreligious teachings of Caodaism.

The Concept of Unity in Bahai Faith and Caodaism by Mohammad Jahangir Alam (2010) is a comparative study of the concept of “unity” in Bahai faith and Caodaism. This book is significant and unique in that sense that such studies between these two comparatively new religions are rare. Mohammad Jahangir Alam has analyzed the concept of “unity” from the perspectives of “unity of God” “unity of mankind”, and “unity of religions”. In his comparative study, he has followed the principles of the scientific study of religions and put forward his arguments by an impartial study of the

Baha'i faith and Caodaism. *Caodaism, A Syncretic Religion of Vietnam* by Md. Shaikh Farid (2010) is another intensive research work on Caodaism. In this book history and philosophies of Caodaism have been explored. Besides the historical facts, this book is significant for understanding syncretism in Vietnamese life, the position of Caodaism in posing anti-colonial expressions. Toan Tap's (2000) paper on *Caodai, Out of Many, One, A Religion of Unity* discusses the concept of interreligious harmony and unity of mankind of Caodaism. Tap has explained the concept of unity and harmony both from the theological and sociological perspectives.

Jeremy Jammes (2015) in his paper *Divination and Politics in Southern Vietnam: Roots of Caodaism*, examined the sociological root of Caodaism in the 20th century. Jammes has done ethnographic research on the Chinese Minh religions focused on the five Minh religions in Vietnam, shedding light on the esoteric roots of Caodaism. *An Introduction to Caodaism: Origins and Early History* paper by R.B. Smith (1970) is important as it attempts to clarify some misconceptions regarding Caodaism. In his study, Smith has argued about the Western or according to him the Christian writers' suspicion over Caodaism as "occidental spiritualism" and identifying Caodaism as a political platform. Smith has tried to portray the actual nature and origin of Caodaism and he opined that superficial knowledge on Caodaism can create misconceptions about Caodaism to the world.

1.4.3 Comparative Study of Religion: Nature, Objective, Method, Significance, and Challenges

Studies in Comparative Religion by Pritibhushan Chatterji (1971) is a comprehensive book on the comparative study of religion. In this book, Chatterji has described the nature, scope, development, method, challenges, of comparative religion. Besides, he has explained the origin and development of religions dividing them into primitive, civilizational, and contemporary phases with a touch of new contemporary challenges. In this book different approaches to studying religions, viz, historical and psychological approaches have been discussed. *Comparative Religion* by Rama Shankar Srivastava (1974) is another piece of a significant book for the students of comparative religion. This book has added the nature, scope, method, significance of the comparative study of religions in its introductory part and in its second part, made a comparative study on the concept of God in Semitic religions. In its third part, a comparative study of the concept of God was done on Oriental religions, then a comparative survey was done among Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Kedar Nath Tiwari's (2012) book *Comparative Religion* is essential for the beginners of Comparative Religion. This book has explained the nature, scope, and method of Comparative Study of Religion briefly. In this book, Tiwari has taken nine major world religions of the world and made a comparative study between them keeping the same standard of all of them. All of these three books are very prominent for understanding the role of the academic approach in religion. In their book, one thing is common that the study of religion should be unbiased but an empathetic attitude has to

be maintained. In the academic pursuit of religion, religion should be studied in a scientific manner, that is unbiased, aloof from personal judgment.

World Religions (Easter & Western Traditions) edited by Willard G. Oxtoby is an anthology of the writings of different writers on different religions. Through this book, the structure and approach of comparative study of religions has been found. Azizunnahar Islam & Kazi Nurul Islam (2012) in their *Tulonamulak Dharma: Naitikata O Manavkalyan (Comparative Religion: Ethics and Welfare of Mankind)* is the study of different religions and religious philosophies of the world. In this book, the writers have explained the need for interreligious and intercultural dialogue and formulated the ways of effective dialogue which is an important outcome of comparative religion. Besides, this book has discussed some theological and philosophical issues such as; is Sikhism an independent religion or not, the Buddhist concept of soul, the concept of God in Hinduism, Japanese perceptions on religion, comparative study of the concept of suffering between the philosophies of Buddhism and philosophy of Schopenhauer. This book is an advanced-level book for the students of comparative religion. Muhammad Akram (2016) in his paper *Emergence of the Modern Academic Study of Religion: An Analytical Survey of Various Interpretations* has done over-arching research on the background and development of the discipline of the academic study of religions which is also known as comparative religion. In this paper, various interpretations and arguments posed by different researchers have been examined. Through this study, it has been found that the renaissance and expansions of European consciousness have played a major role in the religious and cultural arena. This renaissance has played a greater role in the development of the systematic

study of religions freeing from its apologetic and communal boundaries and in the modern world it has become a marriage of convenience between science and religion. Chatterji and Tiwari are argumentative at the point that the full credit of the development of the comparative study of religion cannot be given to the 19th-century westerners, in fact, the practice of studying religion was prevalent in ancient India and even in other ancient cultures. Tiwari criticized the Westerners for being blind and egoistic for a long time to overlook the Eastern and any other religions apart from their own and that delayed the expansion of the academic study of religions. *Muslim Treatment of Other Religions in Medieval Bengal* by Mohammad Elius, (et. al) (2020) is relevant for getting a historical understanding of medieval Bengal. Through this research work, it has been found that in medieval Bengal there was enough attempt to know the different religions by the monarchs and also by the commoners.

Undoubtedly, these afore-mentioned kinds of literature have contributed a lot to build the structure of this thesis. The researcher has gone through deep research for understanding some crucial philosophical and theological concepts and in that process dealt with several other literatures consisting of philosophy of religion, anthropology, and sociology, etc. Besides, the researcher maintained continuous contact with the scholars of Sikhism and Caodaism for getting explanations for many words and theories to present a good theoretical framework. For this descriptive research, we can take into consideration the view of Wallace (1956), that there is such a vast number of descriptive works of literature that can be combined to present new data on a particular movement in addition to some form of theoretical analysis. Thus, the subject matter and scope of this research work with major emphasis on interreligious harmony

in Sikhism and Caodaism provides a valid justification and importance for further research work on this subject.

1.5 Research Objectives

The purpose of any research is to discover the answer to questions through the application of scientific procedures (Kothari, 2004). This research deals with the comparative study of the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism, and through this research, the researcher formulates following objectives:

1. This research seeks to identify and analyze the concept of interreligious harmony, unity, and empathy in Sikhism and Caodaism.
2. Since religions are integrated in a complex manner (Chatterji, 1971), a comparative study between the socio-historical, religious, and cultural factors is important to understand the development of any concept or thought in any religion. That is why the researcher aims to explore the influential factors, social and religious (according to Sikhism and Caodaism) necessities that influenced and resulted in the emergence of Sikhism and Caodaism and how they worked for the development of the concept of interreligious harmony within these religions.
3. This research also aims to clarify the theological concepts that exist in these religions such as the unity of God, mankind, and religions and reveals new insights for understanding these concepts. Besides some crucial elements such as *Khalsa* of Sikhism, syncretism of Caodaism, differences between unity and the uniformity, universality, and other related terms have been analyzed.
4. Therefore, this research is a comparative study and comparative study is essential for understanding two subjects analyzed from the scientific tenure. In this research, the

concept of interreligious harmony has been analyzed following the method of studying comparative religions. This research tends to explore the similarities, differences, and uniqueness of the core concept i.e., “interreligious harmony” of Sikhism and Caodaism and intends to offer a new cognizance in the realm of the comparative study of religions.

1.6 Importance of the Study

Systematic study of religions has gained utmost momentum in this globalized integrated world. Researchers from different disciplines are now proceeding with focusing on various aspects of religions. The study of Sikhism and Caodaism occupied a crucial position in the field of the academic study of religions. Although many research works have been done on Caodaism and Sikhism, any combined study of these two religions has not been carried out. Apart from this, this research work undertakes an endeavor to discuss and analyze the very significant concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism and offers new insights through the process of the comparative study of religions.

This study is important as it has initiated an attempt to combine the two most unique religions of the world; Sikhism and Caodaism and put forward the very basic concept of religious harmony which most of the time did not get proper attention. The present world is more connected and thus a genuine concern and consciousness for mutual harmony among the different nations, religions, cultures, and society are important. It has been proved that mere law and punishment cannot guarantee peaceful coexistence and interreligious harmony. A genuine insight for interreligious harmony is essential and without it, all the outer attempts will be in vain. To meet this challenge, knowing

and understanding different religions are inevitable. This research work fulfills this need by presenting systematic research on two world religions.

Besides discussing and analyzing the theological understanding of the concept of interreligious harmony of Sikhism and Caodaism, a comparative study has been done taking into consideration the social, historical, and cultural factors connected to these religions. Through this study, one can get an idea about how there exists an intertwined relationship between religion and its outer ambience. Moreover, this study follows a simple structure in analyzing and discussing the subject matter, which will be beneficial for the commoners and also for the researchers for a good understanding by removing any misconceptions regarding the interreligious harmony in these two religions.

This is important to note that, this piece of study is unique in Bangladesh since no other study on this subject matter has been undertaken by anyone or any organization, this thesis, therefore will be an important source for further future researches as well as useful reading for the students, researchers, and academics seeking to understand Sikh and Cao Dai concept of interreligious harmony within a new dimension of comparative study covering religious, socio-historical and cultural elements.

1.7 Research Methodology

To conduct this research work, the researcher has adopted the qualitative approach or method because of the subject matter of this thesis. The qualitative method is essential in research for addressing and understanding a concept. The strength of the qualitative method could be found in research which is descriptive, exploratory, and analytical. That is why the researcher has preferred to adopt the qualitative method. Following the qualitative method, the researcher has utilized secondary sources as a method of data collection. This is important to mention that, since this research work mostly depends on secondary sources, the collected data and sources have been used after analyses, assessments, rechecks, cross-checks, and careful evaluation to avoid any error. Besides, the researcher has collected some information from the video images, photographs, and verified them from the participant observers.

The researcher did not use the numerical technique for data analysis as this research work relies on descriptive information. The researcher has intended to utilize the collected facts and information from the available sources and undertook an analytical method to make a critical evaluation of the facts and theories. The researcher has adopted the exploratory method and analyzed the collected data by providing necessary explanations in the required sections. As exploratory studies do not attempt to offer any final statement or concluding answers to research questions, the researcher only aims to explore his particular research area². The research design of this study is loosely structured, methodology of data collection is flexible and investigative.

² See, *Types of Research Methods according to the nature of the study*, available at: https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-types/#_ftnref4, Retrieved: 14/02/2018.

American Psychological Association (APA), 7th edition referencing format has been followed in in-text citation and referencing. Furthermore, this study does not involve testing of hypotheses, and the research findings are topic specified, without having much relevance outside of the domain of the researcher.

1.8 Research Limitations

The researcher has faced some obstacles in data collection to conduct this research. First, as the research was carried on amid the global pandemic COVID-19, the researcher did not take part in an in-person interview. Besides, due to this pandemic, field research was impossible. The researcher had plans to take the interview using other mediums (such as; email, cell phone) but it was time-consuming that is why the researcher had to bring changes in his method of data collection. As this thesis is descriptive, focused on certain theories, the absence of field research and interview did not hamper the focus of the study.

Second, there were some problems in collecting literatures especially on Caodaism, as most of the literature on Caodaism is in Vietnamese, with English as the secondary language sources, the researcher therefore had to depend on the secondary language sources. For clarifying certain confusing concepts of Caodaism and Sikhism, the researcher sought help from the scholars in this area residing in Vietnam, India, and the USA via email.

Thirdly, the specific schedule to submit the thesis did not provide enough scope for more intensive study covering vast areas but this study has been done with full

attention given on the specific research points and there remain scopes for further study in this sector in future.

1.9 Organization

This thesis contains six closely interconnected chapters. Chapter One gives an introductory description of the thesis highlighting the research problem, research objectives, context of the research, research importance, literature review, research methodology, and research limitations. Chapter Two discusses some related concepts such as; religious pluralism, unity and uniformity, empathy and sympathy for constructing the theoretical framework for understanding the core issues. Besides, the conceptual framework defines the key concepts about how and in which direction certain points and terms have been used and have been discussed in this thesis. Chapter Three and Chapter Four trace the background of the emergence of Sikhism and Caodaism. In these chapters, socio-historical, religious, and cultural elements have been discussed. In addition, these chapters discuss interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism considering the theological and historical facts on the basis of unity of God, unity of mankind and unity of religions. Chapter Five examines the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism, comparison and appraisal following the method of the Comparative Study of Religions. This chapter also includes a brief introductory part on history, development, definition, scope, and nature of Comparative Study of Religions for clarifying the subject matter. Then a systematic approach has been followed to do a comparative study between Sikhism and Caodaism on the concerned issue; interreligious harmony along with the findings. Chapter Six provides conclusion of this research work.

Chapter Two

Conceptual Framework

Research works related to social science and humanities are not usually conducted under the fixed law and laboratory conditions (Flick, 2014). Researches on these areas are concerned and study complex and unique social behavior and dynamic group phenomena, such as religion, culture, historical and educational background and also socio-economic and political status (Ritchie et. al. 2014). Researchers have independent and different thought patterns. As such, they predict and use different words to explain research problems and phenomena, thereby causing conceptual confusion. In qualitative research, this problem is more acute and it has been identified as the “cognitive deficiency”. In this regard, a clear, comprehensive conceptual framework can function as an integral part, an invaluable tool for focal point (Van der Waltd, 2020). Conceptual framework explains the path and direction of a research and the grounds on which the research findings stand (Adom, et. al. 2018). A conceptual framework is a structure which a researcher believes can best explain the progression and phenomenon to be studied (Camp, 2001). It is the researcher’s explanation of how the research problem would be explored (Adom, et.al. 2018). Besides, it makes it easier for the researcher to specify and define the concepts and arguments within the study easily (Luse, et. al. 2012).

This chapter discusses the conceptual framework; the key concepts and terms related to this study. For getting a clear understanding of the research problem, the researcher has explained certain key concepts linking their connections to this research work.

2.1 Concept of Religious Pluralism

“Religious pluralism” is one of the most discussed connotations in global policy, politics, religions, and inter-disciplinary contexts. In theology, this term mainly refers to harmony, convergence, or compatibility across religious traditions in contrast to religious exclusivism (Banchoff, 2008). From a sociological perspective, religious pluralism denotes the diversity of different religious traditions within the same socio-cultural space (Malone & Khong, 2003). This sociological definition of religious pluralism to some extent narrows down the vast implication of religious pluralism. The application of religious pluralism has crossed the barrier of defining it only within the boundary of the existence of different faiths. John H. Evans has described the term ‘religious pluralism’ in a more elaborative and constructive way which covers almost all the prerequisites of harmony. According to him, “...the term ‘pluralism’ intends something more than diversity, which refers to the simple fact that differences exist. Pluralism rather involves understanding the diverse religious groups in society for what they are, appreciating them and respecting them; it is a strategy for managing diversity” (Evans, 2003, p. 43).

However, diversity refers to different kinds of people divided by race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, political allegiance, and many distinctions living together but that does not ensure cordial interaction and harmony among them. Pluralism is a moral term that is the way to deal with diversity by an effort to make people connected keeping aside the isolation or ideology of separation. One should not get puzzled with tolerance and religious pluralism considering two as synonymous. Tolerance, of course, is a precondition of religious pluralism, but religious pluralism

has a bigger impact than tolerance. As the director of the “Pluralism Project” of Harvard, Diana Eck (n.d.) opines, pluralism is not mere tolerance and diversity, it is the energetic engagement with diversity, active engagement for understanding across lines of differences. Diana further adds that pluralism and dialogue are connected, while dialogue does not mean that everyone on the dialogue session will agree with one another, pluralism involves the process of the commitment to being at the dialogue “table” with one’s commitments. More precisely, if diversity is the fact, pluralism is the achievement. It is an inevitable way for maintaining liberal commitment in every sphere including global economic ties, mass migration, and social democracies. Although pluralism is not the only solution, it has the merit of balancing social unity with the right which upholds that each individual has the right to “be themselves” in a multicultural-religious world (Spikard, 2017).

Thus, religious pluralism denotes a peaceful interaction, recognition, and harmonious acceptance among the different faiths. This acceptance and interactions should be based on mutual respect, peaceful interaction, will to healthy understanding of the diversity of religions for learning, and growing thyself, commitment to maintain or at least not hamper equal rights, accepting the right for believing and non-believing in religions, equal rights in practicing and not practicing religions. Hence, religious pluralism is against the idea of the monopoly of any single faith, and rejects the fanatic notion of declaring a particular faith true while demonizing “other” as invalid. In this thesis, the term “religious pluralism” not only indicates mutual harmony, and respect towards other faiths but also validating the religious views of other religions. Pluralism has been categorized in this thesis as the acceptance of different religious

groups as true and authentic based on Cao Dai and Sikh perspectives of empathy and universality for ensuring global peaceful co-existence.

2.2 Concept of Unity and Uniformity

While studying religion one must be well-acquainted with the related words like “unity” and “uniformity”. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines “unity” as “a state of not being multiple: oneness, a condition of harmony: accord,” (Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, n.d.). etc. Cambridge English Dictionary (n.d.) defines “unity” as “the state of being joined together or in agreement” (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.) According to Collins’ dictionary, “When there is unity, people agree and act together for a particular purpose, the act, state, or quality of forming a whole from separate parts, something whole or complete that is composed of separate parts” (Collins’ Dictionaries, n.d.). However, unity can be analyzed and defined from various perspectives, and different interpretations often put one in a blur state of getting a concrete definition. From the above mentioned most commonly used definitions of “unity”, it can be defined as a state or sense of oneness, simultaneously having the quality and consensus of the diversity or plurality. In the sectors of inter and intra-religious harmony and pluralism, “unity” is the integration of different faiths for reaching a common goal most often which is peace and social cohesion. Aspects of unity are diverse. When unity is formed for the holistic betterment, religious-cultural and other differences such as racial, sexual orientations, languages become secondary. Unity in religion is regarded as one of the crucial initiatives in preventing intra and inter-religious conflicts. Not only in intra-inter-religious conflict situations, but also, unity of different faiths has now become a genuine way to meet global challenges such

as pandemics, hate speech, gender rights, child protection, global migration, racism, environmental protection, and so on³.

“Unity” should not be mixed with “uniformity”. Because, while unity means integration, a social psychological condition that connotes a sense of oneness, a sense of “we-ness”, that makes the foundation of bonding which holds the members of diverse religions, cultures, economic conditions, languages, races, colors, thoughts, genders, etc. together. “Uniformity” is opposite to unity and pluralism. “Uni” refers to “one”, and “form” refers to the common ways. In a simple way, when there is something common in all we can say this as “uniformity”. For example, students of schools, and members of police forces and army maintain the same type of dress code, that is why we call them “uniform” (Unity and Diversity, 2007). Uniform also has a collective aspect, a group of people may share a similar characteristic in belief, language and religion or anything else, it shows uniformity in that respect. Practically, absolute uniformity is quite impossible in today’s integrated, globalized world. Uniformity proposes a condition of similarity while unity does not presuppose similarities. The problem of uniformity is that it can sometimes lead to fanaticism and extremism. Unity gives enough space for individual freedom and it is based on mutual understanding, accepting the diversities, and respecting the differences. But uniformity sometimes compels others to agree on any point. While there are enough rooms for personal opinion and constructive criticism in “unity”, uniformity closes the possibility of freedom of personal opinion. In this thesis, the concept of “unity” is

³ 1. See World Religious Leaders and Scientists Make pre-COP26 Appeal (2021). Available in <https://unfccc.int/news/world-religious-leaders-and-scientists-make-pre-cop26-appeal>.

2. See also Partnership with Faith-based Organizations UNAIDS Strategic Framework (2009). Available in https://data.unaids.org/pub/report/2010/jc1786_fbo_en.pdf.

considered as the sense of “oneness” and “we-ness” that accepts the diversity of faiths and propagates pluralism for global solidarity, peace, and interreligious harmony.

2.3 Concept of Empathy and Sympathy

The term empathy is notable to all as it envelops greater parts of psychology, religion, behavioral science, ethics including practical ethics and morality. The origin of the English word “empathy” is rooted in the ancient Greek word *empathia* meaning physical affection of enthusiasm. Empathy is the synthesis of two words; *en* "in, at" and *pathos*, "passion, feeling, emotion" or “tribulation, calamity” (Titchener, 1909). This term was adjusted by German Philosopher and rationalist Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881) and Robert Vischer (1847-1933) to make the German word *Einfühlung* ("feeling into"), British psychologist Edward B. Titchener translated and expressed it in English as “Empathy” (Titchener, 1909). 'Empathy' stands for the affections for others with genuine fondness and care devoid of any sort of personal gains and hypocrisy. It is the capacity and quality to comprehend and share the inclination, suffering, and position of other's circumstance as their own circumstance and act accordingly. Empathy is a positive state of mind which generates genuine concern for anyone who is in distress considering that distress as their own distress. In interreligious harmony, empathy denotes a strong unity of mind despite having differences in faiths and thoughts. That empathy makes oneself refrain from doing any harm to his or her fellow friends.

One should not be confused by the confounding connection between 'empathy' and 'sympathy'. Even though compassion and sympathy are closely related words, they do not express synonymous expression in action. Empathy is known as the cousin of

sympathy and sympathy is a hundred years old established word that existed in the language before the word empathy was introduced (Empathy vs. Sympathy, n.d.). There are some pivotal contrasts between empathy and sympathy. Sympathy is the capacity to share the feelings or sensation of another human or living being without adapting a similar inclination envisioning oneself in the spot of that being, where empathy, in general, be accustomed to envisioning or at least tries to envision and feel the same as near as possible of other's to be cooperative in minimizing or at least understanding his problems. Sympathy can also refer to the tendency or sense of harmony with the people of the same disposition, tastes, or opinions and that often causes loyalty, support, and approval. For example; one can have sympathy for any particular political group and one can have sympathy for any cause (Empathy vs. Sympathy, n.d.).

This can be explained through examples; at present, the world is facing the common crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has shown many unknown scenarios of the world to us and shook the human psychological status largely. A man, for example, is a father of an infant who lost his job for a world-wide layoff and due to a lockdown, his family ran out of money and suddenly they noticed that they do not have enough baby food (milk) for his baby. As lockdown is imposed on the town and everyone is maintaining self-isolation, he could not take any help from anyone. Having no other options, he entered a grocery shop and stole a packet of milk from the shop. While he was leaving the shop, the CCTV footage caught him stealing baby food without paying money. They caught him red-handed and threatened to handed-over to the police. Suddenly the shop manager came and asked him why he did that.

He (the father) replied that he had to do this because he has no money and his baby is starving for milk, so he had no other choice except to steal. After hearing this, the manager and others became emotional and let him go and freed him from the charge of treachery. Besides, they handed over him a pack of milk and shopping voucher to buy the necessities and they have decided to offer him a job based on his qualification⁴.

From this situational case, we can identify sympathy and empathy. Where the shop manager is showing tenderness towards the father but failed to understand the gravity of the condition of the father. That tenderness is sympathy. On the other hand, the shop staff realized the situation deeply and felt the condition of that father presenting (imagining) himself in that same situation and that made him buy a pack of milk for his baby. Here the shop staff was empathetic to the father. One can question here, does it legalize stealing in that situation? Well, the cited example is for making clear the confusion between empathy and sympathy, not to dig into any debate and empathy does not support any crime. We can look for another example; imagine, a man works in a well-known multinational company for years and suddenly in a road accident he lost one of his legs. After hearing about this accident, the CEO of that multi-national company visited him at the hospital with a get well soon flower bouquet and gave him a check for his treatment. After some days the injured person managed to join the office and continued his job. But a few days later, the CEO terminated him because he had been late in the office for a few days and he was taking a long time to fulfill his

⁴ This example was given based on a true incident that occurred in Bangladesh. See "Man gets caught stealing milk for his baby offered job instead of prison." *Dhaka Tribune*. Accessed on October 21, 2021. https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2019/05/12/man-gets-caught-stealing-milk-for-his-baby-offered-job-instead-of-prison?fb_comment_id=2016965021762267_2017680031690766.

assigned work as he was having complications from his injury. Here the attention should be given to two situations where the CEO visited him at the hospital and gave him a check that was a gesture of “empathy” at the first impression, but when he terminated him from the job, he didn’t show either sympathy or empathy. If the CEO was empathetic in nature, he could have understood the situation and problem of his employee and could not terminate him in that situation. That means his prior visit to the hospital was just for showing “sympathy”, not empathy. At the same time as the multinational company is well-known, that ensures that they were not having any serious financial problem to appoint him as their employee even though he was doing work slowly⁵.

Empathy should not be confined to a person-to-person relationship. It can even be extended to non-human relationships. A person can be empathetic towards animals, birds, and plants and refrain from causing harm to them, and can be in action for helping any sentient being who is in suffering. Precisely, when sympathy marks its boundary in mere words, empathy makes oneself be in action or at least willing to be in action for minimizing the misery of anyone. Sympathy can be the outcome of humanity, morality, and duty without necessarily having emotional attachments but empathy makes an emotional attachment with others. It is like to be happy with the happiness of others, become sad when anyone is in distress, obviously, that depends on some other indicators, that it must be lawful, humane and harmless.

Empathy among the adherents of different faiths is a significant issue in the contemporary world. For mitigating intolerance among the different religions,

⁵ This example is inspired from the previous example.

dialogue practitioners and other policymakers are now giving prime importance to inter and intra-religious dialogue for growing the capacity to learn, understand, and personal empathetic growth. The need for growing tolerance and understanding among the various faiths have been touched by the early scholars, for example; John Locke (1632-1704), acclaimed empiricist, Philosopher, and Physician in his *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), content about the separation of the civil and religious life of a state. Locke puts his primary objective as ‘distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion’. Past and present incidents have proved that in the sectors like interreligious harmony and pluralism, tolerance is insufficient for maintaining genuine peace, and for a harmonious relationship, a more effective way than tolerance is obligatory. Since one can “tolerate” others despite having disdain in mind and thought and sometimes this tolerance is the outcome out of pressing factors like law and punishment. This doesn't fulfill the actual conditions of pluralism, unity and interreligious harmony, and harmony of different convictions and opinions. Along these lines, it was important to reconsider what can be the most effective way to forestall clashes among religions. Empathy has ended up being one of the most ideal methods of interfaith harmony. Interfaith harmony is the affections for the adherents of various religions thinking that they may have a different conviction of religious thought but we are brethren which maintains the motto: religions are many but mankind is one, this is the reason we should keep harmony and be associated with each other. For instance; there are numerous social and philosophical contrasts between the Hindus and the Muslims. Empathy will be in force, if any Muslim deals with any problem of any sort, that time if a Hindu feels the torment of the Muslim

even without knowing him in person and stand by him with genuine concern, that is called interreligious empathy.

Chapter Three

Concept of Interreligious Harmony: Sikh Perspective

Before proceeding to the subject matter, the researcher has done a brief but coherent background study of Sikhism and Caodaism to understand the history of the origin of each religion. Historical analysis in research is important since it is a method of discovering the past events from records and accounts (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). In historical analysis, researchers consider various sources of historical data to gain insights into social phenomena (Wyche et. al. 2006). There was a general trend towards historical research in the domain of academic study of religions in the nineteenth century. The “History of Religion” became the dominant approach to the ‘Study of Religions’ which was later slowly supplemented by sociology and anthropology (Otto et. al. 2015). In the academic study of religions, studying the history of religions is sometimes expressed as an identical domain as comparative religion but in practical comparative religion is more extensive than the history of religion, needless to say, comparative religion dispenses history of religion in its process (Tiwari, 2009).

A holistic study of religions consists of the historical, sociological, philosophical, environmental, and cultural study of religions. The history of religions explains the origin and development of religions over the phases. Each religion has a long, eventful history of origin and development. Origin and development of any religion not only discusses a single religion and its struggles, but it is also a checkered history where there take places many onslaughts, influences, fusions, and penetration of other religions along with cultural phenomena. In these journeys of religions, many thoughts

and outer elements make their places in every religious domain, influence and change the very forms of religions. This changing tendency is reciprocal; religion, culture, civilization, and traditions are intertwined and the growth and changes of tradition, civilization, and culture are also the influence and penetration of religious thoughts and practices over them. These simultaneous changes have resulted in the formation of religions in their matured forms (Shrivastava, 1974). Therefore; this chapter illustrates the origin and development of Sikhism and Caodaism and their interreligious doctrines. In this process, their respective homelands; Punjab and Vietnam have been given importance for having significant geo-social importance from historical perspective to enable the research problem to be more comprehensive.

3.1 Background and Origin of Sikhism

Punjab, the Sikh homeland, has geographical and historical importance that makes it distinct from the rest of its neighboring countries and even from the rest of the parts of India. The word Punjab has its own significance, it is a compound of two words; *panj* and *ab*. Panj (five) and ab (water), which means the land of five rivers (Bhardwaj & Singh, 2019; Singh, 2001). The origin of this name can be traced to Sanskrit *Pancha nada* or five rivers. The five rivers consist of the Beas, Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, and Sutlej (Bhardwaj & Singh, 2019; Singh, 2001). History suggests that when the Aryans came to India there were seven rivers in Punjab, so that they named it Sapta Sindhva, the land of seven rivers and the Persians took Sapta Sindhva as Hafta Hindva. The seventh river Sarasvati had dried up after some time and people have also begun to exclude Indus from the list of Sapta Sindhva as it marked only the western boundary

of the province and renamed it after the remaining five rivers as Pentapotamia or the panj-ab (Singh, 2001).

Being the main gateway into India, Punjab was the fertile land for becoming an amalgam of different cultures, religions, and languages. Traders and conquerors were common in that land, few of them had bought wives and family with them and most of them who settled down in their conquered or business domains married to local women. That resulted in the amalgamation of the blood from different races, and many foreign languages like Arabic, Persian, Pushto, and Turkish had begun to be spoken in Punjab. Existing animism, aboriginal, and Vedantic doctrines, Jain, and Buddhist philosophy, newly welcomed Islam from the Arabs, Turks, Mongols, Persian, and Afghans provided a new sense of pluralistic identity and an expectancy of Panjabi nationalism (Singh, 2001).

Popularly it is said that Sikhism was born out of wedlock between Hinduism and Islam. Before proceeding to Sikhism, it is necessary to go through a brief introduction to Hinduism and Islam. In India, Hinduism has been a religion for ages. The antiquity of Hinduism made it quite difficult to define Hinduism in simple language. N. MacNicol (1915) describes Hinduism as ‘the question what is Hinduism is one of those which no one is likely ever to be able to give a simple or quite intelligible answer. It has no creed summing up authoritatively its tenets. It has no historical personality as its center whose life dates its beginning that can be discerned. It may be described rather as an encyclopedia of religion than as a religion, a vast conglomeration, comprehensive in the widest sense, an amalgam of often

contradictory beliefs and practices, held together in one by certain powerful ideas and by a system of social regulations”.

Hinduism is famous for its rich philosophy. Poetry of the Vedas and commentaries provide philosophical justifications, spiritual, and ethical sustenance to Hinduism. Apart from its large pantheon of deities, and philosophical discourses, the social order of the caste system occupied a more important and major role in ancient Hinduism than the present (Renou,2012). The caste system divided the populace into four categories viz., Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. Brahmins were the upper class, mainly the priesthood, Kshatriyas, the warriors who were assigned to defend the country, Vaishyas the tradesmen, and the Sudras, the workers. The Brahmins had established an excessive monopoly of priesthood and racial purity and degraded a large section of people as sub-human. Thus, the caste system of Hinduism has been described as Brahmanical Hinduism (Singh, 2001).

The Hindu society was overridden with the caste system. The religion became handmaiden of the upper-class. The so-called lower-class people were devoid of studying the sacred texts and they were called ‘untouchables’, that touch or even their shadows seemed to pollute the self-made upper classes. As Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, philosopher and former President of India, writes, ‘the Hindu leaders neglected to teach the spiritual realities to the people at large who were sunk in superstitions and materialism. Religion became confused with caste distinctions and taboos about eating and drinking. The Muslims were also victims of superstition and some of their leaders were afflicted with the disease of intolerance’ (Radhakrishnan, 2006, p. 143).

It was quite obvious that this type of anarchy cannot sustain longer and would not go unchallenged. The first strong challenges came from Mahavira (5th B. C.) and Gautama Buddha (567-487B.C.). Buddhist messages of non-violence and equality attracted the commons and Hinduism had lost its position (Singh, 2001). For seven hundred years or more the predominant faith of India was Buddhism. To bring back Hinduism in its previous honor, attempts of reformation had been taken by two groups of saintly orders, the Alvars and the Adyars around 9th century A.D. in South of India. The Alvars were the devotees of Vishnu and the Adyars were Shaivites. They made the caste system more flexible and allowed the lower orders to join in worship. Their message of love through hymns attracted a lot who were in isolation for not understanding the higher tune of the ethics and philosophy of Buddhism and Jainism. This turned around the mode of Buddhist and Jain flux and brought back Hinduism in its previous position (Singh, 2001).

Commercial relations between Arabia and India had been going on from times immemorial. The spread of Islam followed a very peaceful way but some historians state that oppressions on the Hindus were not uncommon. In the *Taj-ul-Ma'asir* by Hasan Nizam-i- Naishapuri, it is stated that when Qutb-ul-Din Aibek (1194-1210) conquered Meerat, he demolished all the Hindu Temples of the city and erected mosques on their sites. In the city of Aligarh, he converted Hindu inhabitants to Islam by the sword and beheaded all those who adhered to their own religion (Sikh Religion, n.d., p.11). Khushwant Singh (2001) in his *The History of the Sikhs* states, “the storm burst in all its fury with the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni (A.D. 971-1030), who swept across Northern India down to Gujarat, annihilating all opposition and

destroying Hindu temples wherever he went" (Singh, 2001, p. 21). Khushwant Singh opines that neither the massacre of the Hindus nor the succession of victories by Muslim armies bought many Hindus under the force of conversion to Islam. He further states: "On the contrary, as would be natural in the circumstances, conquest only built-up Hindu resistance, and the conversions that were made by force were followed by reconversions back to Hinduism. The battles of Islam were not won by Muslim iconoclasts but by peaceful missionaries" (Singh, 2001, pp. 21-22).

At that time, besides Hinduism, Islam was getting momentum in India and Hinduism found itself in a position to answer the arguments posed by this new religion. It was Shankara (c. A.D. 800) of Malabar who started a renaissance and reformation of Hinduism based on the Vedic inspiration, and logical approach towards religions based on uncompromising monotheism with a rejection of idol worship. After Shankara, Ramanuja (A.D. 1016-1137) advocated the path of bhakti (devotion) and disagreed with Shankara's philosophy. Ramanuja propagated bhakti by extensively travelling throughout Northern India as far as Kashmir and left a large number of followers. His Bhakti tradition was based on the notions that God is one, He is indescribable, He is the only reality and the rest are *maya* (illusion). The Bhakti tradition was popularized by Ramananda (1400-1476) in Northern India and followed an egalitarian approach by allowing the Hindus of lower caste and even the Muslims to join him in prayer and to become his followers. That resulted in the spread of the message of "Bhakti" across the Indo-Gangetic Plain by a Muslim disciple of Ramananda, Kabir (A.D. 1440-1518) who is regarded as the chief protagonist of a harmonious understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims. By the end of the

15th century, the Bhakti order became more influential than the orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism and many of the Bhaktas initiated a positive approach towards Islam.

A positive and peaceful approach was also initiated by the Muslims who wanted to preach the gospel of the love of Islam. That is why they intended to study the culture, language, religion, and ways of life of India. They were known as Sufis. The Sufis conquered the heart of the people based on their cardinal principle *talif-i-kulub* – stringing together of hearts. The ‘out castes’ of Hindu society found their respect and identity as equal in Sufism and many of them were given honorific titles like Shaikh, Malik, Khalifa, and Mumin, etc. By the beginning of the 15th century, Sufi orders became very prominent in Northern India, and Chishti, Qadiri, Suhrawardi, and Naqshbandi were the most prominent. There are many noteworthy Sufi names in the list who settled in Punjab, of them, the most important Sufi name of Punjab is Shaikh Farid Shakarganj (13th century) of the Chishti order (Singh, 2001; Singh, 2010).

Starting with Qutub-ud-din Aibek’s Slave dynasty right from the 12th century, India followed a succession of dynasties by the Khiljis, the Tughlaks, the Sayyids, and finally the Lodhis of Delhi Sultanate. The Sultanate ruled most of India from Bengal in the east to the Deccan in the South until they were overthrown by the Mughals. According to historians, Taimur’s invasion in 1398 was the end of organized government in North India. Local governments disagreed to be aligned to the Sultan at Delhi and declared themselves as independent monarchs. Political instabilities affected the religion’s steadiness which was founded by the Sufis and the Bhaktas. Both the Hindus and the Muslims were devoid of their true religious paths and became intolerant towards each other. The position of women was degraded in both religions.

Female infanticide and child marriage were widespread. Hindus had back to their rigid caste system again and both Hinduism and Islam became strict ritualistic, devoid of the sense of harmony but full of superstitions. The situation was captivity under the clerics of both religions and they fooled the masses by making them understand that they can reach God only through themselves; priest and Mullahs (Menon, 2011; Singh, 2001).

History suggests that long-time ineffective monarchies and extreme priestly domination gave rise to the demand for reformation and in the West, the reformation of the Catholic Church in Germany in 1517 is a vivid example of the revolt led by Martin Luther against the corrupt practices of the Catholic Church. This same thing happened during the Lodhi rule (1451-1526). Amidst all the political and religious turmoil, medieval Indian people were compelled to think of a remedy against those anarchies. Peace-loving commoners including thinkers, philosophers, and religious communities started to question the authorities of the Brahmins, the Ulemas, and the Qazis of their misleading paths of religions. This gave momentum to the Bhakti and Sufi movement among the Hindus and the Muslims which propagated a peaceful way to God, based on equality of humanity and justice, rejecting superstitions and existence of any Godmen, (Menon, 2011). These historical incidents and a peaceful coalescence of Sufism and Bhakti tradition influenced the young Nanak with whom Sikhism traces its beginning.

Guru Nanak (1469- 1539) is the founder of Sikhism and it is based on the teachings of nine successive Gurus. Guru Nanak was not previously called Guru by his early followers. He was preferred to be addressed by the respectful title Baba (Father). To

later generations of Sikhs, however, Guru Nanak was the one who had revealed the truth and enshrined it in works of great beauty, that is why they were considered as their Guru, and so too were his nine successors (McLeod, 2009). This religion has been commonly known as *Gurmat* or the Sikh Dharma. The word Sikh derives from the Sanskrit word *sisya* meaning ‘disciple’ or ‘learner’ and or *sikhsha* meaning “teaching” (Singh, 2010). Guru Nanak is an example of unique characteristics who never claimed himself as a prophet or redeemer but through his fascinating teachings, life examples and his influence on mankind attained him a great divinity (Dhillon, 2013). If anyone attempts to understand Sikhism, there is no other way but to study the philosophies and ideologies of Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak was born in a Hindu family in the Panjab, a village of Talwandi Rai Bhoi, presently named Nankana Sahib, forty miles west of Lahore, now in Pakistan. The sources of the life account of Guru Nanak are mainly the hagiographies known as *Janamsakhis*. ‘Janam’ meaning birth or life and ‘sakhi’ meaning stories. They are in Sant Basha and Punjabi, dialect and language of that time but the script is Gurmukhi. There are four broadly accepted versions of Janamsakhis: 1. The Bhai Bala Janamsakhi, written when many of the contemporaries of Guru Nanak were alive. It is said that the second Guru, Guru Angad dictated it and it was written down by Bhai Bhalu, who was also a contemporary of Guru Nanak and accompanied him in his travels. 2. The Puratan Janamsakhi, written almost eighty years after the death of Guru Nanak and considered one of the oldest. It contains; a) The Vilayati Wali Janamsakhi which was discovered and sent to London by one H.T. Colebrooke of the East India Company and b) Hafizabad Wali Janamsakhis that was discovered by an acclaimed

Sikh scholar, Bhai Gurmukh Singh of Oriental College Lahore in Hafizabad. 3. The Meherban Janamsakhi, written by Sodhi Meherban (1581-1640), a grandson of the fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das. 4. The Bhai Mani Singh Ratnavali, written by Bhai Mani Singh, a businessman during the time of Guru Gobind Singh. It is the elaboration of the selection of the stories borrowed from earlier Janamsakhis (Menon, 2011, pp. 26-27). Janamsakhis are the records of Guru Nanak's miracles and they undoubtedly support his divinity. Although they are full of color and dramatic incidents, and lack exact details of time, dates, and places (Menon, 2011), they contribute a lot in describing the historical events, teachings, actions, moral, and ethics of Guru Nanak which are a significant source of studying Sikhism.

3.2 Pluralism in Sikhism

Sikh concept of religious pluralism is a milestone in the practice of interreligious harmony. All the Gurus of Sikhism followed and propagated the notion of religious harmony and established the fact that all the religions of this world are true. Guru Nanak states that the precondition of becoming *sishya* (Sikh) is practicing empathy and tolerance towards others' faiths, and that should be ensured that adherents of different religions could observe and follow their religions without any fear and oppression (Islam & Islam, 2016). Guru Nanak's philosophy of religious pluralism and harmony can be witnessed from the perspective of the formation of the Sikh sacred scripture; Adi Granth and later the Guru Granth Sahib. It was Guru Nanak who dreamt of an egalitarian society devoid of the caste systems and religious antagonisms. That is why he intended to form a universal religious text which will contain spirituality, philosophy of love, and harmony. Guru Nanak's dream was accomplished

by his followers and the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev in the year 1603 named the book the *Adi Granth* literally signifies “the first book”. The *Adi Granth* was the compilation of the Sikh scriptures, Later, *Adi Granth* was supplemented by the compositions of the ninth Guru, which got its full form in the days of Guru Govind Singh (1666-1708), and renamed the book as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The scripture was installed in the central shrine of Amritsar known as *Harimandir Sahib*, which eventually became renowned as the Golden Temple. At the death of the tenth Guru, Golden Temple came to be regarded as the permanent habitation of the eternal Guru, as *Guru Granth Sahib* (McLeod, 2009). *Guru Granth Sahib* is considered the treasure house of knowledge and philosophies. *Guru Granth Sahib* is the religious scripture of the Sikhs. It completes the human Guruship of the Sikhs by providing an eternal guideline for the Sikhs as a living Guru.

Former President of India, A P J Abdul Kalam states about *Guru Granth Sahib*: “The cherished and Noble values of the *Guru Granth Sahib* should inspire all of us to follow the message of love, compassion, unity, the brotherhood of man, and supremacy of God the Almighty, respect for all religions have also been preached by this Holy Book, a message relevant in today’s world” (Neki, 2007, p. 11). J. K. Neki opines: “Today we talk of interfaith dialogue as the essential means for achieving inter-religious peace. *Guru Granth Sahib*, compiled several centuries back, not only affirms the need for inter-faith dialogue but provides a model of inter-faith communication within its corpus. It contains works not only of the Sikh Gurus but also of even more numerous Hindu Bhaktas and Muslim Dervishes thus making it a really pluralistic scripture” (Neki, 2007, p. 7).

Interestingly, the Guru Granth Sahib is not any revealed text like the Qur'an and the Bible, nor its words are considered as the actual words of God, but the material in this scripture is treated as divinely inspired. Because it has the essence of the divine words both from Hinduism and Islam. All the Hindu names, as well as "Allah", are used when mentioning God (Singh, 2010). Guru Granth Sahib is also not written by any single author nor even its writers are only the Sikhs. It is undoubtedly perceptible by the identities of the writers of Guru Granth Sahib that this holy scripture integrated with the intention that it appeals to all the varnas, and religions of India harmoniously, religiously, spiritually, and emotionally.

The writers were from various backgrounds, among them were Jaidev of Bengal, Surdas of Awadh, Namadev, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas and Bhikhan of Uttar Pradesh, Dhannu of Rajasthan, and Farid of Multan. Kabir was a weaver, Sadhna was a butcher, Namdev a seamster, Dhana a farmer, Sain a barber, Ravidas a cobbler, Farid a Muslim Sufi (Islam, 2011). Despite the diversity of the authors, there is a coherence and harmony of message that a person should attain to become a perfect human being.

Guru Nanak wanted to spread the message of harmony around the world and he was an ardent devotee of freedom of thought and diversity. During the time of Guru Nanak, he realized that people are deprived of the true message of God, in fact, they are getting the fabricated and false messages of God conveyed by the Mullahs, Priests, Pundits, and Qazis. He was determined to spread the true words to the masses. The Hindus used to get their scriptural verses and religious teachings in Sanskrit and the Muslims in Arabic or Persian. But those languages were not the languages of the Punjab. Guru Nanak felt the necessity of spreading the message to the masses, and

adopted the strategy to use Punjabi, which was the language of the masses. Guru Nanak's teachings and words were simple and direct and they were full of sophisticated gentle humor. According to Guru Nanak, music connects the heart with God, that is why he composed his words and hymns with the help of Mardana, his longtime faithful Muslim companion and musician.

Guru Nanak felt the necessity to enhance the boundary of his mission of spreading the true message of God, that is harmony, and in 1499, he left for his divine mission to spread the message of love and empathy. Historical accounts suggest that Guru Nanak made his world tour in all four directions; East, West, North, and South. These tours are called *Udasi* meaning travel. It is believed that he traveled 28,000 km in his four major tours. He spent twenty-odd years on foot, singing, preaching, and explaining his idea of *Sat Kartar* (true creator), and *Sat Nam* (true name).

Guru Nanak believed in spreading and sharing good thoughts and words among the others so anyone can be acquainted or enlightened by the message of harmony. In his first *Udasi*, Guru Nanak reached a village where he received ill-treatments from the villagers and they refused to feed him. When he left that village, he wished, 'May this village flourish and prosper,' then he went to another village and this time the villagers welcomed him with generosity and served him with respect. When leaving the second village, Guru Nanak uttered, 'May this village be dispersed.' Mardana got shocked and asked him, 'Why do you bless the village which ridicules us while you wish to disperse those who welcome us?' 'Because,' replied Nanak, 'it is necessary to keep the first lot of villagers in their own village, in case they cross their boundary they could spread their ill manners and selfishness to others.' So, he wished them to

flourish with the realization of selflessness and harmony within their boundary. 'But if the good villagers scatter and go in different directions they would be able to spread and share their goodness with others and others will imitate their goodness' (Menon, 2011).

Guru Nanak is an example of unique characteristics who never claimed himself as a prophet or redeemer but his fascinating teachings, life examples, and his charismatic influence on mankind made him a divine personality. He tried throughout his life to eradicate the hatred and violence for each other from the mind of the Hindus and Muslims. Guru Nanak was equally respected by both Hindus and Muslims. Both Hindus and Muslims claimed him to be one of their own. One example of his acceptance is noteworthy to mention. Guru Nanak was the one who visited Jagannath Dwara Temple at Puri in Odhisa, where non-Hindus were not permitted to enter. Even in modern times, the then Prime ministers of India Srimati Indira Gandhi and Rajib Gadhi could not get access to that temple. At the same, Guru Nanak also visited Ka'ba at Mecca where non-Muslims were not permitted to enter. At both places not only was he welcomed, but also, he listened with patience and respect. A very popular proverb says: '*Guru Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindoovon ka guru, Masalmano ka peer*' (Nishter, 2018). Also, it has been found that in Punjab, his Hindu disciples called him Satguru Nanak Dev while his Muslim followers referred to him as Hazrat Nanak Shah, to the yogis he was Nanak Nath, while to the Buddhists he was Nanak Lama (Dhillon, 2013).

3.3 Freedom of Religion and Origin of the Concept of Khalsa and Arms in Sikhism

The concept of Khalsa in Sikhism is one of the most controversial terms. Sikhism advocated by Guru Nanak followed a spiritual way to realize the one God and Guru Nanak proposed his followers to resist evil even to the point of sacrifice and martyrdom. The second Guru appointed by Guru Nanak, Lahina who adopted the name Angad (1538/39-1552) continued to direct the path of Sikhism following the manner of Guru Nanak. By the time he was succeeded by Guru Amar Das (1552-1574), from that moment, times were changing. Guru Amar Das felt the necessity of meeting the needs of the *Panth* (Sikh Community). There needs to be clarified the “Panth” of Sikhism. In Nanak’s time, the person who followed Guru Nanak used to become Sikh or “learner” and the community of his followers was called the *Nanak-panth*, meaning those who followed the way of Nanak. Later the term Nanak was dropped and simply “Panth” became a commonly applied term for the Sikh community (Mcleod, 2009).

Guru Amar Das aimed to give an organizational form to the Panth and he appointed his village of Goindval as a pilgrimage center, Sikhs were encouraged to gather twice a year. Digging there was a well, considered a sacred well where pilgrims were expected to bathe. Devout Sikhs were named and appointed as *manjis* to engage in preaching, and particular days (notably Diwali) were designated festival days (Mcleod, 2009; Singh, 2010). Mcleod argues that to modern eyes it may seem that Amar Das was stretching the *Panth* from the “inward emphasis” founded by Guru Nanak to a visible materialistic one, but Amar das had to contend with a changing

situation. The earlier Sikhs chose the *Panth* from their conviction and they were connected with little organization that holds them together. But the Panth included many of that time who were born into it, and it was extending beyond the existing geographical boundary when the Sikh traders were carrying their faith to diverse places, that is why a firmer organizational identity was required. These basic changes were welcomed by the Sikhs because they perceived that the actions were unanimous, taken by the one eternal Guru. As ten torches can successively pass on the same flame, so the ten Gurus were in essence one. Decisions taken by Guru Amar Das were therefore decisions that Nanak would have taken in the changing circumstances (Mcleod, 2009).

Son-in-law of Guru Amar das, Ram Das (1574-1581) became the fourth Guru and he moved the centre of the Panth to the new foundation of Amritsar. After Guru Ram Das, his youngest son Arjan Dev became the fifth Guru (1581-1606), and Guru Arjan Dev occupies a very significant place in Sikh history for two reasons. The first as noted before his contribution to the delivery of a formal scripture, the *Adi Granth* to the Sikhs. The second reason was the death of Guru Arjan Dev, which is according to the Sikhs as the first *shahidi* (martyrdom). During that time, north India was ruled by the Mughal dynasty and Mughals were anxious about the growth of the Panth. Sikhism's altering influence led the Mughal emperor Jahangir to curb the rapid growth of the new faith (Mcleod, 2009; Singh, 2010). Besides this, it is claimed that Guru Arjan Dev had support for Jahangir's son Khusro to succeed Akbar as Mughal emperor. Emperor Jahangir's autobiography, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, states that the emperor was irritated by the fact that this 'Hindu' had attracted some 'ignorant, stupid

Muslims'. Consequently, Guru Arjan Dev was arrested by the Mughals and died in their custody in 1606, and according to Sikh tradition Guru Arjan Dev was burnt alive on a griddle in Lahore (Nesbitt, 2005).

Guru Arjan Dev was succeeded by his son, Hargobind (1606-1644). Guru Hargobind resorted to the practice of carrying two swords against the hostility of the Mughals. This is interpreted as the introduction of '*miri and piri*'. '*Miri*' signifies the temporal cause, willingness to engage in worldly affairs to fight for the preservation of the Panth, and '*Piri*' stands for the religious or spiritual authority. Guru Hargobind also responded by erecting Akal Takht (throne of the Timeless One), a seat of temporal authority as the worldly counterpart to the spiritual quality of the Harimandir Sahib (the Golden Temple). The seventh Guru Har Rai (1644-1661), was the grandson of Guru Hargobind, and the eighth Guru Har Krishan (1661-1664) was the son of Guru Har Rai. They somehow avoided the confrontation with the Mughal emperors, and for Guru Har Krishan it was quite obvious because he was only five when he became Guru and before reaching his eighth birthday he died of smallpox. Guru Har Krishan's dying words were, *baba bakale* which was interpreted as that his choice of successor was his granduncle and the surviving youngest son of Guru Hargobind, Tegh Bahadur (1664-1675).

Guru Tegh Bahadur is a very significant figure not only in Sikhism but also in Indian history. He was a brave warrior who fought in the battle of Kartarpur in 1635 when he was only 14. He participated in most of the battles fought by his father Guru Hargobind. To recognize his bravery, Guru Hargobind changed his name from Tyag Mal to Tegh Bahadur-the fearless master of the sword (Singh, 2017). Guru Tegh

Bahadur had sacrificed his life for the sake of the freedom of religion of the Hindus. To get a glimpse of the history, we need scrutiny of the period of Emperor Aurungzeb. Emperor Aurungzeb, full name Muhi Ud-din Muhammad Aurungzeb (1618-1707) became emperor on 21 July 1658. Aurungzeb, according to some scholars followed a fanatic way to rule and adopted brutal methods to justify his tyranny. He ruled for 50 years from 1658 to 1707. History suggests that his rule was contrary to his predecessors, and historians have marked him as, “Emperor Aurangzeb, whose life is a sharp contrast to that of his predecessors/ ancestors, was a barbaric ruler of the Mughal Dynasty” (Gosain, 2016, p.39). Researcher Harbans Singh opines, he had waded through a river of blood to come to power (Singh, n.d. p.70).

Aurungzeb killed and had killed his three brothers in the war succession and even imprisoned his sick father Shah Jahan in Agra Fort on 18 June 1658 where he passed away in February 1666. He imprisoned his sister and he did not even spare his oldest son Sultan Mohamad. Aurungzeb’s reign was an extreme fanatic one. He misused Islam to justify his cruel regime in the eyes of the zealot Muslims. To quote Harbans Singh, “The consciousness of this guilt only sharpened his (Aurungzeb’s) religious prejudice, and it drove him to the harshest measures he could devise against the non-Muslim population. By this policy he wished to please the Muslim orthodoxy and win a reprieve for the crimes he had committed to gain the crown” (Singh, n.d. p.70).

To protect his throne, he used to sanction fanaticism in the name of religion by those like Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) of the Naqshbandi order. He was given the honorific title of *Mujaddid-i-Alf-i-Sani*, meaning the savior of the second millennium of the Islamic era. He was extremely angry by the policy of tolerance towards the non-

Islamic traditions propagated by Akbar. Aurungzeb preached that he got the divine order that he was appointed *mujaddid* or savior of Islam in the second millennium. In 1669, Aurungzeb issued an order to all provincial governors to shut down and destroy schools and temples of the infidels and to check any kind of their religious teaching and practice (Grewal, 2008).

Aurungzeb forcefully eradicated the secular policy of his forefathers by re-imposing *jizya* (a protection tax paid by the non-Muslims), in 1679 which was abolished by Akbar. The amount of which often was as much as 60%. Aurungzeb's brutality and fanaticism caused him to face many revolts from the beginning of his reign. In 1669, the Jat zamindars (landowners) led a revolt consisting of 20,000 peasants, in 1672 revolt by the Satnamis, and in 1674, the Maratha Chief, Shivaji established his own sovereign kingdom in the south (Gosain, 2016; Grewal, 2008). Besides these, many revolts were increasing, and that caused Aurungzeb to become desperate to protect his throne. He looked for the ultimate solution by implementing an extreme form of Islamization.

It is said that Aurungzeb had adopted a very calculative plan according to which he began to liquidate Hindu scholars in India in general and the Kashmiri Pundits in particular (Gosain, 2016). He targeted the upper-class Brahmins to be converted into Islam who was at the top of the Hindu caste system. The logic behind this, if the Brahmins or pundits adopt Islam, others would follow them. Kashmiri Brahmins were renowned Hindu and notable for their high intellect and education. They had maintained a good relationship with the Gurus of Sikhism and with the Sikhs. Aurungzeb got support from his bigoted governor of Kashmir Iftikar Khan (Singh,

2017). P.N.K. Bamzai in his book *A History of Kashmir* (1962) describes: Iftikhar Khan...was using force to convert the Pandits of Kashmir to Islam. Some pious men amongst the Pandits then met and decided to go to Amarnath and invoke the mercy of Siva there for deliverance from the tyrannies of the bigot. At the Amarnath cave, one of the Pandits saw Lord Siva in a dream who told him to go to Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, in Punjab and ask for his help to save the Hindu religion. He spoke to his companions about the revelation. About 500 proceeded to Anandpur where Guru Tegh Bahadur was living.

Harbans Singh writes whether the size of delegation 500 or 16, according to Bhatt Vahi Talaunda, reached Anandpur on May 25, 1675, led by Pundit Kirpa Ram Datt, who had been the teacher of Gobind Das, son of Guru Tegh Bahadur. It is logical to assume that Kirpa Ram Das persuaded the other Hindu Pundits to seek help from Guru Tegh Bahadur instead of relying on any miracle and divine direction. It is said that Kirpa Ram Das was well aware of the capabilities of the Sikh movement to stand up to the Mughal tyranny. That delegation not only included the Brahmins of Kashmir, but also Brahmins from Hardwar, Mathura, and Kurukshetra were present there (Singh, 2014; Singh, 2017).

The Brahmins approached Guru Tegh Bahadur to seek his assistance. Pandit Kripa Ram with his large delegation met Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chak Nanki (now known as Anandpur Sahib). He explained their situation that the emperor had given a deadline to convert to Islam or to be executed. And the time had expired, now they have to convert to Islam or die. They added that they did not have an army to protect them, so

Guru Tegh Bahadur was their last hope. Guru Tegh Bahadur listened to them attentively and went into deep thought.

It is said that seeing his father in a pensive mood, nine years old Gobind Rai asked his father what was the problem. Guru Tegh Bahadur replied that they were the delegates from Kashmir, who were in deep crisis. They were told to convert to Muslim otherwise they will be persecuted. Some well-known spiritually awakened soul will have to make a sacrifice to stop this butchery. We have to find a divinely inspired soul for this sacrifice who will awaken the sleeping consciousness of the people of Hind, Guru Tegh Bahadur added. Hearing that, Gobind Rai promptly replied, “there is an easy answer to this problem, you are the most spiritually awakened person in this whole Hind, therefore you can make this sacrifice”. Guru Tegh Bahadur was very pleased to hear these brave words from his son who was only a nine years old child and he felt his duty on Earth had been completed and his son was capable of becoming the next Guru. Guru Tegh Bahadur asked the Brahmins to go back and tell the Mughal emperor that if he could convert Guru Tegh Bahadur to Islam, they would convert willingly, otherwise, he should leave them alone (Gosain, 2016; Singh, 1964).

The emperor already had a prejudice in his mind about Guru Tegh Bahadur and he hated the word ‘*Sacha Patisha*’ used by the Sikhs for the Guru. The word referred to that the rulers of India were not the real or true King while a Guru to be true King. Again, he was against the title ‘*Bahadur*’ in the Guru’s name, as this was reserved for the nobility of the Mughal court only (Gosain, 2016). He had been kept continually aware of the Guru’s preaching tours. Besides, Guru Tegh Bahadur’s efforts to mobilize the people to a new socio-religious consciousness were taken as a threat by

the authoritarian regime of Aurungzeb which was midway through its proselytization program (Singh, 2014. p 61). Aurungzeb directed his courtiers to summon Guru Tegh Bahadur to Delhi and to force him to accept Islam or to be prepared to be slaughtered. Guru Tegh Bahadur made his journey to Delhi despite knowing that death was waiting for him. The Guru blessed his Sikhs and three of them asked to accompany him to Delhi. These were his ministers: Dewan Mati Das, Sati Das and Dyal Das.

They were first taken to Wazir of the empire and asked Guru Tegh Bahadur to perform any miracle to prove that he is a true guru, otherwise to embrace Islam. Guru replied that showing a miracle is the interference of the order of God's divine design which is fully improper. To the question of embracing Islam, he considered his religion as good as Islam, and therefore there is no need to change of religions. Failing to convert Guru Tegh Bahadur into Islam, Aurungzeb ordered that Guru be put to severe tortures. After five day's persecution, on 10th November 1675, Dewan Mati Das, Sati Das, and Dyal Das were brought to the place of execution, and Guru Tegh Bahadur was kept in an iron cage to witness the event. Everything was happening in front of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Aurungzeb's thought was that such ghastly deeds might force him to adopt Islam. (Latif, 1997; Grewal, 2008; Gosain, 2016).

First Dewan Mati Das was asked to accept Islam and he was even offered to marry Nawab's daughter as well as the governorship in reward if he accepts Islam (Singh, 2005). But Mati Das was determined and refused to change his religion. Then he was tied between two posts and was sawn across from head to the joins. Then they tied Dyal Das like a bundle and threw him into a huge cauldron of boiling oil. Then Sati

was hacked to pieces limb by limb. Guru Tegh Bahadur witnessed all those brutalities calmly and he knew that he was the next to be executed.

The Guru woke up early in the morning on the fixed date of his execution, 11th November 1675, he bathed and sat for meditation and was getting ready for the event. On the appointed day, huge gatherings occurred including the government officials, nobles, and courtiers to witness the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chandni Chauk, the main market square close to the Red Fort. Though Guru Tegh Bahadur was against performing any miracle, some accounts suggest that he agreed to perform a miracle at the request of a devoted spectator. The Guru asked for a piece of paper and wrote some words on it and asked that it should be tied around his neck. He said that the sword of the executioner would not be able to cut that thread and paper. The executioner swung the sword and the head of Guru Tegh Bahadur was severed from the body, the thread and the paper fell on the ground intact. The written words on the paper were, "I gave my head but not my resolve (faith)" (Gosain, 2016; Singh, 2017).

The death of Guru Tegh Bahadur had a profound effect on his only son, Gobind Rai (later Guru Gobind Singh, 1675-1708). He emerged as the leader of his Sikhs and in 1699, or shortly before he took the most critical and impactful decision in the entire Sikh history by establishing the order of the Khalsa. In Sikhism there had already been an order of Khalsa, constituting those Sikhs who were in direct supervision of the Guru. Most of the Sikhs were under the intermediate supervision of '*masands*' (agents), who were appointed to watch over the Sikhs of the Guru and convey their offerings to him. Masands were the contribution of Guru Ram das and by that time, it got corrupted, dangerously independent, and had lost its integrity. Therefore, Guru

Gobind Singh decided to bring back control over them and have all the Sikhs join his own newly formed Khalsa (Mcleod, 2009).

There are two interpretations of the origin of the word Khalsa. The first one denotes that Khalsa has its origin in the Arabic word *Khalis* which means pure, clean, genuine, and authentic. This interpretation emphasizes the concept of honesty, loyalty and sincerity, and security in religion (Zain et al., 2017). The Arabic origin of the word Khalsa cannot be dismissed completely as asserted by Archer (1971) that Guru Gobind Singh had learned the Arabic Language. But the word 'Khalsa' was not alien to the Indian vocabulary and was used by Sheikh Kabir (1398-1448) much before the initiation of formal Khalsa. Sheikh Kabir wrote '*Kaho Kabir jan bhaiye kisse, prem bhaga jin j n*' (*Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 655), meaning 'Kabir says, those fearless who imbibe God's love and devotion have become Khalsa.' (Nishter, 2018). Nishter (2018) opines that Khalsa does not denote 'purity' because to mean Khalsa as pure, demolishes the very purpose of the Sikh basic philosophy of equality for all. At the same time to define Khalsa as 'pure' shows disrespect towards other religions and marks other faiths as impure, inferior, and adulterated. Thus, this interpretation is completely wrong and it stands against the very fundamental principle and teaching of Sikhism.

Another interpretation is that the Arabic word Khalsa was adopted in Persian and Urdu languages and during the period of Mughal rule, 'Khalsa' meant land that was in the direct possession of the emperor. And this 'Khalsa' word has become a part of Indian languages and till today all the government lands are recorded as 'Khalsa Lands' (Nesbitt, 2005; Nishter, 2018). Mathew (2008) and Harpreet K. (2011) opine that the

written and reading aspects of the word 'Khalsa' convince that its origin is Persian and not Arabic and the fact that Guru Gobind Singh had great reverence for the Persian language and profound knowledge of Persian poems.

The objectives of establishing Khalsa can be understood from different perspectives. From the historical perspective, the establishment of Khalsa roots to check the attacks on Sikhism. The traditional reason given for the rise of Khalsa was to give its followers a militant order with rigorous disciplines, and a highly visible identity to show their absolute loyalty to its master or Sikhism (Mcleod, 2009). Khalsa got its momentum with the preposterous deaths of the Gurus and other Sikhs during a segment of Mughal rule. That is why to save Sikhism and to evoke the heroism to defend persecution, Khalsa evolved (Buck, 1917).

The historical narrative is effective for that particular time from the post- Guru Arjan era (1581-1606) to the time of Guru Gobind Singh. However, the historical causes are now not relevant and especially the Mughal regime no longer exists. From an eclectic examination, it is found that Guru Gobind Singh wanted to form Sikhism as distinctive from the existing social stratifications, commonly known as the caste system. Although the formation of Sikhism was based on the elimination of the caste system, Guru Gobind Singh wanted to strengthen it by Khalsa (Bailey, 1992; Griffin, 1901). The initiation of Khalsa reinforced brotherhood among the Sikhs by abolishing discrimination to get closer to God (Sarjit, 2008). This explanation seems suited for the present application of the Khalsa. Sikhs are now in a well-off position and they have access across the world. Khalsa promoted bonding by giving the Sikhs a strong identity and made Sikhism distinctly recognizable among the other faiths

3.4 Unity of God

Sikhism is unique in defining its concept of ‘Ultimate Truth or Reality’ or God. Sikhism rejects the finality of the revelation and opens the way for accepting and reaching the “Truth” through different ways (Singh, 1980). As we have contemplated the fact that Sikhism has the extraordinary principle of accepting the truths from all the existing religions and rejects the monopoly, the authority of any certain holy book or religious personality. Thus, Sikhism accepts the kernel and rejects the husk. Unity of God is the core doctrine of Sikhism. The one Self-Existent God created the Universe and nurtures it.

In defining the concept of God, Sikhism follows uncompromising monotheism. A precise concept of God is given in the very opening hymn mentioned in the opening section of the Guru Granth Sahib which is called *Mula Mantra* (essential or root teaching) of Sikhism and it is as follows:

*“Ek onkar satnam karata purakh nirbhaw nirvair akal
murat ajuni saibhang gur prasad.”* (Guru Granth Sahib, p.1).

The mantra can be paraphrased as: This being is one universal creator God, He is the true name ‘*Satnam*’. God is ‘*Karta Purakh*’, the maker being. He is ‘*nirbhaw*’, without fear and ‘*nirvair*’, enmity. God is Akal Murat, the eternal being, and ajuni, not subject to time, He is beyond birth and death. He is *saibhang*, self-existent and illuminated, He, who is responsible for His own manifestation. He is known and realized by the *gur prasad*, grace of the true Guru (Tiwari, 2012; Singh, 2010).

In the above verse, “Ek” signifies the strong Sikh belief in the unity of God, and in the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib, unity of God has been emphasized consistently. In Sikhism, paths of attaining the essence of God are open to all. One can attain the light of God, can perceive His closeness through dedication and one’s inner unquenchable enthusiasm to know the Creator (Singh, 2010). But since human beings are inherently imperfect and have certain limitations, it is not possible to comprehend God completely, and cannot decode the mystery of God. Through meditation, living a virtuous life and quest for searching the reality and essence of each religion can achieve human beings the knowledge and reality of God (Singh, 1980).

To eradicate the prejudiced concept of God among the followers of different religions and unnecessary demonizing the other’s religion, Sikhism adopted the way of reconciliation among the religions, especially between Hinduism and Islam. In the Adi Granth, it has been said: “There is but one God. But Hindus and Muslims think that their God is different from the God of other religions. The one God whom I worship is both Allah and Rama; to the formless one, I bow in my heart. Thus, I have settled the dispute between Hindus and Muslims” (Adi Granth, p.1136). The unity of God has been clearly stated in the Sikh Scripture: “The One God is the Father of all, we are all his children; O Guru, O friend, I dedicated my heart to thee; let me have a glimpse of God” (Adi Granth, p.611).

In the Sikh scriptures, the doctrine of the oneness of God has been described with utmost clarity and supporting the freedom of worship for all without any barrier. “The one Lord is the cause of all-cause, knowledge, wisdom, discrimination are His gifts to us; He is not far, He is not near, He is with us all. Saith Nanak: Praise the Lord with

abiding love” (Adi Granth, p.235). “God of the Hindus, God of the Muslims is the same. What can the *mullah* and *sheikh* do if they want to prove them to be different.”

In consonance with Sikhism, God is one, people call him variously. Manifest or unmanifest, He is always one: “the one is revealed, the one is hidden, the one is behind the dark veil” (Adi Granth, p.1215; Singh, 1980, pp. 53-54).

Sikhism strictly rejects the doctrines of polytheism, and henotheism, it also discards the concept of incarnation of God in this world in the form of human beings. According to Sikh belief, the concept of the incarnation (*avat rav da*) creates the problem of equating humans with God, and it also rigorously rejects the practice of associating prophets parallel to God. “Burned be the tongue which says God came to earth as a human being” (Adi Granth, p. 1136). Guru Gobind Singh says: “Whoever calls me God, is doomed to hell” (Baicitra Natak, Ch.6).

The oneness of God in Sikhism does not denote monism, rather it is monotheism. God is both impersonal (Nirguna) and personal (Saguna) in Sikhism. God is nirguna when he is formless, unconditioned, devoid of any worldly ordinary attributes, and beyond human reach. By His own will, He becomes saguna, when He reveals or manifests Himself through His creation. It is mentioned in the Adi Granth, “From this absolute condition, He, the pure one became manifest, from nirguna He became Saguna (Adi Granth, p.940).” Guru Arjan says, “*Nirguna api Saraguna bhi ohi*”, that is God is both nirguna and saguna (Tiwari, 2012).

God in Sikhism is infinite, absolute, and eternal. Sikh theology describes the infinity of God as qualitative infinity. Qualitative infinity denotes the quality of being limitless who cannot be limited with the spatial order. In this sense, God is self-existent, and He

is Himself the sufficient reason for the existence of all the finite existences that come out of His will (Hukum). God's eternity and infiniteness should not be described as endless duration or cannot be measured by the worldly time process rather it means that God is beyond time. God is eternal because He is the ultimate cause and condition of the existence of time and therefore not subject to it. Sikh theology of God is panentheism, not pantheism. The universe is a system not absolute, nor identical to God. The universe is the creation of God and fully dependent on Him. He is the unconditioned absolute ground for the existence of all finite entities and He is harmonious with his creation. God is responsible for the preservation and destruction of the universe (Singh, 1980).

Though are the Creator;
All that is, is Thy handiwork
There is none besides Thee.
What Thou creates,
That Thou sees and knows;
Through the Guru, says Nanak
Thou art revealed in Truth (*Rahiras, 7*)⁶.

God in Sikh theology is the ultimate symbol of justness and loving-kindness. God does not discriminate between the sinners and saints and treats both justly based on each person's actions, words and thoughts. *Karama upar hoe tapavas*, on man's deeds, are judgments proclaimed (Singh, 1980). God is one and to Him, mankind is equal irrespective of religion, color, and nationality. Sikhism rejects the concept of any chosen land and chosen people who are destined to get superior preferences to God

⁶ *Rehiras* or *Rahiras Sahib* is the evening prayer of the Sikhs, which consists of the hymns of the four different Gurus; Guru Nanak, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas and Guru Arjan Dev. It speaks to the magnificence of God.

(Islam, 2021). God is impartial and He is omniscient who watches all over His creation impartially.

The final vision of justice is not with man,
Nor with any creature in the Universe.
The Lord's alone is the vision of Justice;
Thou alone art! Thou alone art!
(Adi Granth, p 144; Singh, 1980, p. 60).

God is beyond any kind of external influence and He acts kindly to those who act righteously. In the Bhai Gurdas' words, 'if a man goes one step towards Him, the Lord comes a thousand steps towards the man'. That means God loves mankind more than they deserve, this is the grace of God. In the human sense, God is not a dominating master who always controls His creation, rather God is like a mother, who tries to correct His beloved Children. The Gurus have repeatedly compared God's love with the love of a mother who controls, wields her children to guide them, and even if her children make her angry by straying away from her, mothers cannot but love her children (Singh, 1980). In the love of God, all other loves are rooted. God's love shows the path that God wants unity among mankind and the ultimate condition of love is the profound fraternity and harmony and this love can lead everyone towards the First Beloved.

3.5 Unity of Mankind

The birth and journey of Sikhism didn't follow the traditional way. Sikhism from the very inception followed a different path which was humility, harmony, justice, and peace. Sikhism was not concerned about the very concepts of conversion, ritualism and was not egoistic to develop distinct norms and rules. As it has been found that from the very beginning Sikhism practiced harmony and unity and that is why Sikhism accepted the good essence of all faiths without any discrimination. In the words of Guru Nanak, the spirit and grounds of Sikhism can be understood precisely;

"Not the ascetic way, But a life of truth and love
Amid the world's temptations, Is the secret of spiritual life.

Put away thy pride.

The essence of religion is humility, Service, and sympathy.

Not the yogi's garb and ashes, not long prayers,

Not recitations and self-torturing..."

"As fragrance dwells in a flower, and reflection in a mirror,

So does God dwell in every soul; seek him, therefore, in thy self" (Bigger, n.d., p. 5-6).

Guru Nanak was dead against caste system and social stratifications. Since his childhood, he had the instinct of showing equal respect and affection for all irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. One day Child Nanak came back to his home after playing with his mates. When it was time for the evening meal, he declared that he was not hungry. His mother got worried and checked his forehead to see if he had a fever. Nanak replied that he was completely fine. He then said, 'I was passing by Shambhu's house and saw him eating his meal. I was hungry too and when Shambhu

offered me to join him, I joined him and shared his meal. My stomach is full now and cannot eat more' (Dhillon, 2013).

Shambhu's mother was from the Sudra caste and her profession was sweeping and cleaning. At that period having food with a so-called lower caste was a great sin and crime for the higher caste Hindus. Since Guru Nanak was born to a Kshatriya family and Kshatriya was among the top two higher castes of the Hindu society, his mother and father were surprised and worried about his behavior. Guru Nanak's mother was afraid that if that continued, they may be outcast from society. She began to explain the caste rule to young Nanak that he (Nanak) must not eat in Shambhu's house again. Nanak was calm but puzzled. He asked: 'Why? He (Shambhu) eats here when his mother comes to clean and sweep.' 'That is different. But you cannot do this. They are Sudras, untouchables. Their food is polluted and unclean. You are Kshatriya, you will defile your caste if you share their food' his mother replied (Dhillon, 2013).

Nanak promptly protested and said, 'but the food was not unclean, in fact, it was very delicious. They served me *allu vadi* (a famous cuisine) and it was much tastier than the *allu vadi* that you make. Even Shambhu's mother spread a little ghee (clarified butter) on my chapatti.' Nanak's mother was perplexed and became very concerned about the future of Nanak that it would be very difficult to teach Nanak the caste rules. The society made her composed by saying that Nanak will learn it automatically when he is grown-up (Dhillon, 2013).

But Nanak had an enlightened heart and he stood against the false formalisms and imposed barriers on the way of humanity and equity. When he was about eleven, he reached the age of the sacred ceremony of *Upanayana* or wearing the sacred thread.

Nanak's father made great arrangements for the ceremony and guests to attend. Nanak was seated, and the priest after reciting the Sanskrit verses from the Veda was about to put the sacred thread on the shoulder of Nanak. Guru Nanak told him to stop and asked the priest about the thread.

'What is this cotton thread? Why is it worn, and what advantages does it give to the wearer?' He asked. The priest replied that thread is the symbol of high lineage and high birth. Nanak asked again, how it was made, who made it and how long it lasts, and how it carries the spiritual and high lineage. The priest was confused but replied that the thread is special and sacred because a Brahmin made it and endowed it with the power of the mantras. When it decays, it is replaced by a new one. Then Nanak again asked, 'why are goats killed to arrange the feasts?' The priest again replied: your father is a Kshatriya and the invited guests are Kshatriyas and it is lawful for you all to have goat meat.

Nanak uplifted his glowing eyes and said boldly; what strange ceremony is this? The Brahmin spins a thread out of cotton and twists it into shape. When it decays a new one takes its place. If the thread had any virtue, it would not decay or break. They kill goats without mercy and prepare feasts and guests clamor for more and more (Singh, D.& Singh, J., n.d. p.11). Guru Nanak then stared at the priest and said that he would not wear that thread. The entire assembly was stunned and tried to persuade him to wear the thread. But he was strict and refused to be persuaded. Guru Nanak was asked by the priest, 'what kind of sacred thread would you like to wear?' Guru Nanak answered with these most insightful words;

Out of the cotton of compassion

Spin the thread of contentment,
Tie knots of continence, give it the twist of truth.
Make such a sacred thread for the mind,
Such a thread once wore will never break
Nor get spoiled, burnt or lost.
The men who weareth such a thread are blessed.
Though buyest a thread for a piece
And seated in a plastered square
Putteth it rounds the neck of others.
Claiming an inheritance of holiness
Thy thread helps neither here nor hereafter.
The wearer dieth and leaves it behind.
(Singh, D.& Singh, J., n.d. p.12)

The congregation was astonished at the same time shocked by hearing such deep philosophical realities from a boy who was only eleven years old. Boy Nanak touched everything in his composed words and expressions. He disclosed the illusion of aristocracy which depends on a mere thread. He unveils the reality of life which is love, compassion, and empathy not only for human beings but also for sentient beings. He rejected wearing the 'thread' as a sacred symbol of the higher class because he believed that wearing this thread may cause the rise of pride and arrogance in one's mind.

It is tremendously amazing that at this very young age Nanak could realize the temporariness of this materialistic world and he stressed the contentment and truth. At that age, he was able to distinguish the differences among false symbolism, empty ritualism, ancient blind faiths, and real spirituality. He was very confident of the truth

of his convictions and he questioned the priest bravely about the applications and usefulness of the meaningless ritualism devoid of actual spiritualism. Guru Nanak says:

Let contentment be your yogi earrings;
Let modesty be your pouch and begging bowl;
Let meditation be the ashes you religiously wear;
Let the consciousness of death be your head-covering;
Let pure living be your vow of celibacy
And faith in God, your staff.
Accept all humans as your equals
And let them be your only sect (Adi Granth, 6).

To establish and strengthen a casteless society, Guru Nanak took practical steps by initiating *guru ka langar* (free community kitchen) for all irrespective of caste, and religion to eat together. In *guru ka langar* or shortly *langar*, everyone prepares food together, eats together sitting on the floor, and wash the used utensils together, thus it testifies the unity and equality of mankind and family hood. The food that is served in *langar* is pure vegetarian so that everyone can consume it and it does not offend anyone's belief and practice (Singh, 2009). 'Guru ka langar' is associated with the very central concept of Sikhism i.e., *Pangat*. *Pangat* means line or long row which is maintained by the *Sangat* in *langar*. Following *Pangat* is very essential because this straight line signifies the notion of anti-caste (McLeod, 2009), *Pangat* demolishes the barriers of race, color, religion, and class. At the same time sitting in a long row or *Pangat*, no one can claim superiority by sitting in front of the *Sangat* and no one can feel inferior by sitting backward.

One of the central importance of the Sikh faith is ‘Sangat’ that denotes being together. It is the gathering of the Sikh local community or congregation with others. According to Sikhism, Sangat is essential for both spiritual and moral inspiration. Guru Nanak marked the importance of Sangat by saying that “Through Sangat, one obtains the treasure of the Divine Nam (Name). . . . Just as iron rubbed against the philosopher’s stone turns into gold, so does dark ignorance transform into brilliant light in the company of the good.” A popular Sikh saying about Sangat is: “One disciple is a single Sikh, two form a holy association, but where there are five, there is the Ultimate Reality Itself” (Singh, 2009, p. 33).

Sangat is also open for all like Pangat. Members of Sikhism sit on the floor together, engaging themselves in listening to the readings of the holy texts, singing hymns, reciting verses, and praying. Thus, Sangat portrays an inclusive harmonious session for all. During the time of Guru Nanak, Sangat was open to all who wished to follow him (Singh, 2009). The main motive of establishing Sangat was to remove the false barriers of the so-called higher and lower classes. Guru Nanak wanted to give his visions of harmony and egalitarianism an institutional structure by establishing Sangat and Pangat and it was a bloodless revolution led by Guru Nanak (Islam, 2016).

There is a very popular legend regarding the langar and Emperor Akbar. As it is well-known that Emperor Akbar was an admirer of interreligious dialogue and harmony and he had a great interest and affection for the Sikh community. On the way to Lahore from Delhi in 1569, Emperor Akbar visited Guru Amar Das in Goindwal, a place in Punjab not very far from Amritsar, accompanied by the Raja of Haripur. When he reached the Gurdwara, he was welcomed warmly. It should be mentioned

here that the Gurdwara is sometimes translated as the Sikh Temple, and the literal meaning goes as the “door or house of the Guru” is open to all, and anyone is welcomed to enter into Gurdwara by following some decorum to show respect.

When Emperor Akbar entered the Gurdwara, he was surprised to see that a large number of men and women were dining together sitting in a row. It was very unusual for all because at that time in Indian society, different castes and classes were eating together was unbelievable and unfortunately even today in some cases! Emperor Akbar saw that Brahmins are eating with the Sudras and even with the people of other religions such as Muslim, Hindus, and Sikhs. The Emperor explained about the essence of langar that in the langar, there is no caste, upper class, or lower class, even there is no conflict between the religions of two contradictory faiths. All are received with equal respect and have to share the same food, and eat in the same place. Then the Emperor was offered to accept the hospitality of the langar by sitting on the ground just the same as the others were doing!

All the accompanied fellows of the Emperor were very shocked at the gestures from the langar authority and they felt that it was an insult for the mighty Emperor Akbar. But the Emperor was different from the others, he was delighted by the groundbreaking philosophy of the langar and Sikhism. He accepted the offer and he was served on the ground and foods were served on a plate made of leaves. He realized the significance of the langar for any society because this free kitchen is providing food to the poor and the travelers also. And people from miles away came to eat at the langar and no one was sent back on an empty stomach. Emperor Akbar wanted to contribute to the langar and offered the Guru some local villages that he

owned so that they could arrange food from the taxes of those villages. Guru Amar Das refused that offer politely by saying that the langar must be operated by the voluntary work, *seva*, and “each day’s collections are spent on the same day and for the next day I trust in God” (Islam, 2016; Islam, 2019; Bigger, 1990).

Emperor Akbar again proposed that he wanted to give those lands to the daughter of the Guru, Bibi Bhani. According to some Sikh versions, this proposal was also being rejected. But some mentioned that it was accepted and the city of Amritsar (city of the nectar) was founded upon the land gifted by Emperor Akbar (Bigger, 1990). According to some historians, the Sikhs demanded a small piece of land for the Gurdwara but the emperor was so pleased by them, that he donated 500 bighas of land to the Guru (Das, 2006). On the direction of Guru Amar Das, his son-in-law Guru Ram das dug a tank for the water supply and a pool for the ritual washing. In the centre of this pool the famous Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple now locates (Islam, 2016; Bigger, 1990).

Sikhism has included the notion of charity and community service in its core theology also i.e., ‘*Sarbat Da Vala*’. ‘Sarbat Da Vala’ is a Punjabi phrase that means “welfare to all”, “may good comes to all”. It is the concluding term of Sikh prayer called “Ardas”. This phrase is the core concept of Sikh principles and it is repeated in Sikh scriptures with absolute significance (“Sarbat Da Bhala”, n.d.). The full couplet reads: *Nanak nam chahrdi kala tere bhane sarbat da bhala* (May God’s Name, may the human spirit forever triumph, Nanak: And in Thy will peace and prosperity come to one and all) (“Sarbat Da Bhala”, n.d. para. 3).

Sikhism is suited to the needs of modern life on the basis of logic and justice. Scholars have termed Sikhism a ‘this-worldly,’ ‘modernistic,’ and ‘pragmatic’ tradition (Prill, 2015, p. 215, Singh, 2010, p. 28) because Sikhism does not encourage reluctance to the world and denouncing the duties but emphasizes on non-attachment to lust, greed, pride, anger, and other worldly-ills. According to Sikhism, mankind has certain duties to the community (Sangat). This is called “Seva” (selfless - service) which is an integral part of Sikhism. Guru Nanak says: you shall find peace, doing seva (SGGS, p. 25, line 19), In the midst of this world, do seva (SGGS, p. 26, line 1). Seva reflects the Sikh concepts of universal love, justice, and morality. It is a charity, selfless work for the community.

Sikh morality has been summed up by the maxim: *kirat karni, vand chhakna, te nam japna*, meaning labor for honest earning and living, sharing with others, and to the practice of the chanting of the Divine Name repeatedly. In Sikhism, the Punjabi word *kirat* means labor that is physical labor for earning one’s daily life. This is the basis of Sikh ethics and marks the dignity of all labor. Sikhism believes that those who do not work despite being able to work offend the faith. Honest earning and living enable a positive attitude towards life and responsibility. Sikhism does not promote renouncing the worldly duties. At the same time, Sikhism disproves overconsumption because overconsumption leads to selfishness and this is against the concept of fraternity and harmony of Sikhism.

There is an anecdote where Guru Nanak made us realize the futility and unnecessary of overconsumption in our journey of life. One day Guru Nanak and his companion Mardana visited a village and Mardana was given many gifts and food

for his journey. Mardana was carrying them with difficulties because the gifts and food were too heavy to carry. Guru Nanak asked him whether he needed all or any of this for his journey. Mardana replied: “no”, so then “why,” asked Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak then advised him to carry and consume only the necessary pieces and to avoid unnecessary things. Guru Nanak says: “possessions do not always bring you happiness. Don’t hanker after them.” Again, he advises us to take what we need, not to be greedy, and to suppress our temptation. His message: “No black magic and witchcraft can affect you if you believe in the power of God. Also do not succumb to unnecessary temptations.” (Menon, 2011, p. 50-52).

Contentment does not imply a compromise with poverty and privation. Contentment is not a barrier to advancement and does not mean submerged in fatalism and pessimism. Guru Nanak’s teachings on contentment denote self-restraint for a balanced life. Sikhism promotes dynamism and encourages humankind to work for development. Contentment is an attitude of mind which accepts victory or defeat in the same way. A contented man is active and happy because he tries his best to go forward, if he fails to do so he does not become violent (Singh, 2010, p.134). Contentment is the stage of mind where one becomes sensible of one’s needs, means, and ends and realizes that material possessions are means, not the ends of life. At the same time, a contented person keeps in mind his or her duty and responsibility towards society and the environment.

According to Guru Nanak, detachment to worldly unnecessary possessions does not imply renunciation of asceticism. To clarify the concept, he has given a wonderful example of lotus in the pond which is unaffected by the mud or the movement of the

water and pollution, in the same way, one should remain detached and keep him/herself away from worldly things. That means, just as lotus, we can remain aloof from the lust, greed of the world in spite of living in the world by keeping our heads high to look for a spiritual goal and to lead a more honest spiritual life (Singh, 2010, p.135).

3.5.1 Gender Unity in Sikhism: The Foundation of the Unity of Mankind and Religion

Sikhism firmly believes that unity of religion and unity of mankind is not possible if unity between men and women is not established. In point of fact, those who denounce this concept of unity cannot be called Sikh. Guru Nanak from the beginning voiced for the rights and equality of women. According to Guru Nanak, it is completely inhumane and irreligious to consider a woman as half of a man. Men and women are all God's creation and they were created with equal dignity and all of God's creation is good (Guru Granth Sahib, p.304). Sikh concept of equality transcends the illusory barriers of gender, creed, sex, and colour. According to Sikhism, both men and women are capable of attaining the grace of God and salvation. A woman has similar rights as a man in reading sacred scriptures, becoming a priest, leading prayers, and preaching the messages of God (Singh, 2010).

In Sikhism, women can lead prayers in Gurdwara, and in the times of Guru Amar Das, he assigned to women the responsibilities to supervise certain community sectors. They were appointed in the office of preacher-ship and missionary works (Wani, 2019). Mata Sahib Kaur, wife of Guru Gobind Singh participated and played a significant role in the initiation ceremony of Khalsa founded by Guru Gobind Singh

and made *Amrit*. *Amrit* is a mixture of sugar and water and it is essential for those who want to be a part of Khalsa. To get baptized into Khalsa one needs to drink *amrit* and sprinkle some *amrit* on eyes and hair. Many women are distinguished in Sikh history for their notable contributions in the fields of religion, society, and politics. Mata Kheevi for her benevolent social works, Mata Gujri, Mata Sahib Kaur, Mai Bhago, Mai Sada Kaur, Maharani Jind Kaur, and Maharani Sahib Kaur for their significant role in politics and other significant Sikh events are remembered with deep respect in the Sikh community (Wani, 2019).

Unfortunately, the position of women in 15th century Indian society was derogative and it was over-burdened with the curses of the customs like *sati* ((burning down the widow in the funeral pyre of her husband)), female infanticide, and *purdah* (veil). While women were taken as by born inferior and sub-human, Guru Nanak boldly spoke out against those social disabilities. He challenged the religious scriptures that there is no mention of treating women less than men. He had put forward reason and called for social sanity. Through a sermon of Guru Nanak, he tries to illuminate the blinds who do not respect women and do not realize that everyone has to take birth from a woman:

From the woman is our birth;
In the woman's womb are we shaped
To the woman are we engaged
To the woman are we wedded.
The woman, yea, is our friend,
And from the woman is the family.
If one woman dies, we seek another;

Through the woman are the bonds of the world,
O' why call woman evil who giveth birth to kings
From the woman is the woman;
Without the woman there is none;
Nanak, without the woman is the
One True Lord Alone

(Adi Granth, p. 473; Guru Granth Sahib, p. 747; Wani, 2019, p. 15).

Sikh Gurus were progressive and raised a strong voice against brutal practices like “Sati” in the name of religion and tradition. He also opposed the tradition of unnecessary “purdah” of women, because extreme purdah custom was curtailing the position of women as human beings. Women were forced to be confined indoors in the name of social tradition purdah. Guru Amar Das played a significant role by carrying out a strong campaign against barbarous, inhumane practices like sati and female infanticides in the name of religion and customs. According to Guru Amar Das:

A Sati is not she, who burns herself
On the pyre of her spouse.
Nanak: A Sati is she, who dies with
The sheer shock of separation.
Yea, the Sati is one who lives contended
And embellishes herself with good conduct:
And cherishes her Lord ever and calleth
On Him each mourn.
The women burn themselves on the pyres
Of their lords,
But if they love their spouses well,
they suffer the pangs of separation even otherwise,

He further said:

She who loves not her spouse,

Why burns she herself in the fire?

For, be he alive or dead.

She owns him not

(Adi Granth, p. 787; Guru Granth Sahib, p. 967; Wani, pp.15-16).

Sikhism condemns the Indian social custom of dowry. According to Sikhism, those who accept dowry are materialistic (*manmukh*), centered with ego and material greed, devoid of spirituality. In Sikhism, the only dowry or wedding gift to her daughter from her father should be a Divine Name, nothing related to money or worldly luxuries. Those who give preference to dowry rather than Divine Name and spirituality are ignorant and unable to value the divine aura (Kaur, 2014).

Guru Nanak damned the existing derogative concept of identifying women as impure during their menstrual cycle. Guru Nanak pointed out that there is nothing impure in this. It is a natural cycle, and there cannot be any impurity in the body function, in fact, impurity comes from the bad qualities, evil thoughts, and the mouths which tell lies after lies. Again, Guru Nanak deconstructed the tradition of considering women as impure after giving birth to the child. Women were kept isolated from the family affairs and main home for some days after the child's birth. The mother was not allowed to touch anything assuming that impurities from her will render the things impure. This tradition was called *Sutak*, and Guru Nanak came to his logical arguments saying, reproduction is the ultimate truth and very concept of existence, hence even cow dung- cakes which are used to make fire and cook food are not free from this. Because the insects and bacteria are reproducing and multiplying, then,

there must be the fire is impure and the food cooked from the fire is also impure, Guru Nanak added. The reality is whatever we eat and use is not free from life which is related to reproduction. Guru Nanak says; actual impurity lies in the mind which thinks of evil, impurity is in the tongue which is busy in falsehood, those eyes are impure which are coveting another's women, riches, and beauties. Those ears are impure which carries lies. The irony is even the purest of the men is bound to go to the city of the dead (Adi Granth, p.472; Kaur, 2014).

Guru Nanak's philosophy and practice of Ahimsa (non-violence) and his lifelong advocacy for harmony are unprecedented in history. Guru Nanak said: No one is my enemy, No one is a foreigner, with all I am at peace, God within us renders us incapable of hate and prejudice (Balakrishnan, 2014, p. 45). In the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Golden Rule has been explained as: I am not unfamiliar to no one, and no one is unfamiliar to me. Indeed, I am a friend to one that denotes a common universal family (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299). His concept of universal empathy and compassion was a revolution in that period. Guru Nanak raised his voice against all kinds of injustice and inequalities that existed in the society and he was free from any kind of ego and pride. Guru Nanak is called the 'Ambassador of Harmony' because he not only preached harmony among the people of different faiths and classes but also with mother nature (environment). He realized that everything is part of God's creation and forming and maintaining harmony is the divine order.

3.6 Unity of Religions

Unity of religion has been affirmed by Sikhism in many ways. Sikh Mul-mantra signifies “One” Supreme being for all and opens the rooms for reaching the singular reality for all. To be spiritual and religious Sikhism does not allow anyone to renounce their own faith to accept Sikhism. Guru Nanak never asked anyone to become Sikh and to give up their own faith, on the contrary, Guru Nanak advised them to be fully acknowledged about their own faith and follow their faith ethically and spiritually. He advised the Hindus to be authentic in their deeds and thoughts, to the Muslims he advised the same because the “One” reality is common to all (Singh, 2009).

According to the Janamsakhis, when Guru Nanak was young, he had his first vision of enlightenment. Guru Nanak went missing for three days and after three days he came back and pronounced the words that formed the basis of Sikhism. He said: “*Nah ko Hindu, Nah Mussalman*” meaning “there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim” (Nesbitt, 2005; Menon, 2011). This statement has intense significance. In a society that was downtrodden with religious fanaticism, casteism, and rivalry between the religions especially between Hinduism and Islam regarding the superiority, authenticity, and power, Guru Nanak’s statement “*Nah ko Hindu, Nah Mussalman*” was not only bold but also blasphemous.

Through this sentence, Guru Nanak did not reject these two religions, nor vanishes the variety of religions, rather he pointed out the false distinctions among the religions including Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, etc. The motive behind that statement was to unite the people of all sects and religions eliminating hatred and enmity among the adherents of the different faiths. Guru Nanak stressed the beauty and richness of

the varieties of the different faiths and focused on the spirituality and depth of the philosophies of different faiths. When Guru Nanak was asked about his disappearance, he replied that he had encountered God, and God has penetrated the essence of divinity in his mind that all religions taught one true message, and that leads towards the devotion of One Reality.

Guru Nanak's philosophy of interreligious harmony is based on the concept of purity and realization of the truth and reality. Guru Nanak witnessed the atrocities in the name of religion and that affected Guru Nanak vehemently because those atrocities, hypocrisy, and oppression with a religious mask were making people intolerant and irreligious. Guru Nanak says; one cannot become true a Muslim or true Hindu just merely mouthing the words of God without realizing the inner meanings, or simply doing bodily postures in the mosque and temples. He also said blind recitation of the Qur'an and the Bible is useless if the teachings and values of the Qur'an and the Bible cannot enter into your mind. You need to activate your sensory organs, control your lusts, engage yourself in selfless charity and practice the teachings of the holy texts upon your life (Singh, 2010; Islam & Islam, 2016). Guru Nanak focused on understanding the words of God, ascertaining the meaning of prayers, one needs to believe in them, apply them in daily life and repeat them with devotion, only then the mind will be purified.

Guru Nanak had an inquisitive mind to know the different religions and understand the inner philosophies of each religion. That is why he made his journey to know Islam and he made his visit in Mecca, the heartland of Islam, and he wore unstitched cloth like the Muslim Hajj pilgrims. Even at one place of the cloth, there was a verse of the

Qur'an which was written by Guru Nanak himself. Perhaps the motive of wearing Muslim pilgrim costume was to get assimilated into the religion, to make feel others that I belong to you all. In the life history (Janamsakhi, pp.116-17) of Guru Nanak, it is stated that Guru Nanak was taking a rest or sleeping at one place of the Ka'ba and his feet were towards the Ka'ba which is considered a grave sin and disrespect to the house of God. The Khadim (attendant) of Ka'ba rushed to the place and asked Guru Nanak with an intimidating voice that his feet were pointing towards Ka'ba, the house of Allah, and ordered him to move his feet immediately. Guru Nanak politely asked him to help him to move his feet towards that direction where Allah does not exist. The attendant got surprised and said: are you Muslim? Guru Nanak replied: I do not know whether I am Muslim or not, but I know it is quite difficult to be a Muslim (Field, 1914; Gordon, 1904; Singh, 2001; Islam, 2016).

Another incident happened in Mecca, the chief priest at the Ka'ba asked Guru Nanak, whether he was a Muslim because he was preaching the oneness of God because Islam also speaks of only one God. Guru Nanak replied; the Vedas also speak of one God, one supreme God who is called by many names but He is one, does that make me a Hindu too? If you believe in one God then how can there be difference among mankind? A true believer in the "oneness" of God can never approve of any division between the followers of different religions. Because there is no division of religion before God, no creed nor caste superiority before God. These differences are manmade which exist in the mind of us. If there is one God, I am a man of that God, who is eternal, created everyone without division, before whom everyone is equal and

He who dwells everywhere, recognizes the men who are truthful and carry out good deeds (Menon, 2011).

Guru Nanak wanted to establish social unity and that is why he started it with the mission of establishing harmonious relationships among the different faiths. His stances were clear, he denied the categorization of religions and opposed the hoarding of the valuable philosophies within the upper class and priestly class of each religion. That is why he collected the meaningful philosophies, verses, and examples from the existing religions and included them in the Guru Granth Sahib so that everyone comes to know about the commonness and beauty of each other's religions and follows it overcoming caste, religion, and gender prejudices.

Once Guru Nanak was asked, "which the greater religion is – the Hindu or the Muslim?" Guru Nanak answered: "Without good deeds, both leads only to suffering, neither Hindu nor Muslim finds refuge in (God's court)" (McLeod, 2000, p. 43). That means only good deeds are countable to God and this will ensure the reunion with God and that should be the Summum-bonum of life. As Professor R. C. Majumdar states about Guru Nanak, "from all associations with prevailing sectarian religions... His was the first and also the last successful attempt to bring together the Hindus and Muslims in a common fold of spiritual and social brotherhood" (Banerjee, 1977, p.481).

Guru Nanak had warned, "...listen, listen to my advice, O my mind, Only Good deed shall endure, and there may not be some other chance" (Singh, 2010, p. 11, 46). Guru Nanak also reminds: "says Nanak, the (maya) illusion of after death may or may not be true, but the fact is evident that our deeds are the tree which we sow; bear the fruits

of poison or Amrit (nectar). Our doing is better known to God Himself, who is the reason and doer of all deeds, why He makes us do so?" (SSGE, p. 1290).

The fifth Guru Arjan says: the essence of the all-true religions is the same, some call it Rama, some call it Khuda; some worship it as Vishnu; some pray to Allah. Guru Gobind Singh echoed Guru Arjan's words by saying: ...Hindus and Muslims are one! The same reality is the creator and preserver of all; know no distinctions between them. The monastery and the mosque are the same; so is the Hindu form of worship (puja) and the Muslim prayer (namaz). Humans are all one (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 885, as cited in Singh, 2009, p.57). He further says that "*Sarab dharm meh serast dharm, Har ko naam jap, nirmal karam*", meaning: of all the religions, the best religion is to remember the name of God and to do the good deeds (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 266).

No Sikh Gurus has ever said that their religion is only true or acceptable to God. They forbade strictly to dishonor others' faiths and scripture. Sheikh Kabir, who has profound contribution and impact on Sikhism states that: do not say the scriptures of the Semitic religions are false, do not say the religions of India's are false, false is he, who does not act according to these scriptures and who does not reflect upon them correctly (Nishter, 2010). The Sikh Gurus had profound respect for the religions and the holy persons of the different faiths. For example, Guru Nanak's respect towards Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was known to all. He said: *Dikha Nur Mohammadi, Dikha Nabi Rasul, Nanak Qudrat Dekhke Khudi Gaye Saab bhool*, that means, I have seen the divine aura of Muhammad (with inner eyes), I have seen the prophets and the messenger of God. After contemplating the glory of God and his messages, my ego

has been eliminated (Khan, 1967; Islam & Islam, 2016). The third Guru Amar Das in his words showed how to respect all the religions and through his prayers, he requested God to save humanity from the ongoing vices. Guru Arjan says: “*Jagat jalanda rakh laye apni kirpa dhar. Jit dwarai ubrai thithai lahu uba’r*” meaning, O God, the world is now tormented and burning, be merciful and save all those whoever come from any passage, through different religions and faiths (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 853).

Sikh Gurus did not confine their harmonious zeal into the concept, rather they had implemented it in their actions. Guru Arjan had profound respect for Hazrat Mian Mir, a celebrated Muslim Sufi. Mian Mir laid the foundation stone of the Shri Harmandir Sahib, popularly known as the Golden Temple (Islam, 2016; Nishtar, 2010). It is undoubtedly unprecedented that a person or a religious personality of the other religion has been invited to lay the foundation stone of the major temple of another religion. At the same time, it can be understood that Sikhism had reached towards the hearts of people of that time and people from different faiths accepted Sikhism with love that is why Hazrat Mian Mir did not hesitate to contribute to lay the foundation stone of the Sikh temple. Islam & Islam (2016) opine that this is enough instance to prove and understand the magnanimity and catholicity of Sikhism. Not only that, Sikhism has even its temples and institutions which have been named after the person of different faiths. This kind of pluralism and generosity cannot be seen except Sikhism. Nishtar (2010) states that “undoubtedly this is the unchallenged sole property of the Sikhs...” There is a Gurdwara at Nankana Sahib, Pakistan named Gurdwara Moulavi Patti Likhi also known as Gurdwara Patti Sahib. Guru Nanak learned Arabic

and Persian from that Moulavi. Gurdwara Majnu Tilla located in Delhi, in the name of a Sufi saint with Guru Nanak interacted. There are many Gurdwaras in Muslim names in Punjab, such as Gurdwara Farid Tilla, at Farid kot, and Gurdwara Haji Rattan at Bhatinda, etc. The name of the university guest house of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar is named “Sheikh Sajjan Guest House”, the guest house of Punjabi University, Patiala, is named as “Waris Bhavan” in the name of Waris Shah, a Punjabi Sufi poet. Not only that, Gurdwara Mata Kaulan is built in the name of Bi Bi Kaulan, a Muslim woman, the daughter of Rustom Khan, Qazi of Lahore (Nishter, 2010).

Even the last moment of Guru Nanak’s life is full of events and profound philosophies for the interreligious harmony, love, and magnanimity for mankind. According to the Janamsakhi Guru Nanak was lying under a tree on the bank of the Ravi River, just outside of Kartarpur. Angad, who later became the second Guru was beside him with a heavy heart for the approaching end. People from all around and distant places were coming to see their Guru for the last time. Guru Nanak was falling unconscious and his eyes were becoming cloudy but suddenly he heard murmuring among his Muslim and Hindu followers.

The Muslims were demanding to hand over the dead body of the Guru Nanak so that they could bury him with honor. Hearing that the Hindu followers became upset and said that, Guru Nanak was born as a Hindu and his mother and father were Hindu. Overall, he never claimed himself a Muslim. “So, we will take his dead body and cremate according to Hindu custom,” the Hindu followers said. As Guru Nanak was equally accepted as a “holy man” to all in Punjab, especially to the Hindus and Muslims, it was said that the Muslims considered him as their “*Pir*” (saint) and to the

Hindus, he was their “Guru”, “Baba Nanak Shah fakir, Hindu ka Guru, Mussalman ka Pir” (Janamsakhi, p.129). However, this kind of conflict centering on the dead body of Guru Nanak was easy to assume before. Guru Nanak who devoted his life to harmony among the religions, could not remain silent even at his death bed. He opened his eyes, chuckled slightly and Angad held up his hand, and the quarrel between the two groups fell silent.

Guru Nanak replied that both of the groups were right and he belonged to all of them. Then he requested the chiefs of each group to cover his body with a white bed sheet then bought flower bouquets. Hindus were ordered to keep the flower bouquets on the right side of Guru, and to the Muslims, on the left side. Guru Nanak said that the flowers should be left throughout the night and the next morning, if the Hindus’ flowers remained fresh then he belonged to the Hindus, if the flowers of the Muslims remained fresh then the Muslims had the right on his body. By saying this Guru Nanak requested them to pray and by obeying the order of the Guru, they left the home covering Guru Nanak with a white bed sheet. It came to know that the Muslims were reciting from the holy Qur’an and the Hindus from the holy Gita.

The next day on September 22, 1539, Guru Nanak went on eternal sleep in the early hours of the morning, which was his favorite time of the day and he described it as “*amrit-vela*”, precious time to meditate on the name of God. In the morning, according to the legend, both the Hindus and the Muslim groups came to check the flowers, when they removed the bed sheet, they found that the body of Guru Nanak was missing. At the same time, they discovered that both the flower bouquets were as fresh as they bought. The Muslim devotees erected a mausoleum in the name of Guru

Nanak, on the bank of the Ravi River and the Hindus built a *samadhi* (monument of remembrance) for Guru Nanak. Surprisingly within a year, devastating flood and river erosion destroyed the both mausoleum and samadhi, thus the possibility of worshipping Guru Nanak's last resting place as an idol and monument washed away at the same time (Singh, 2001; Islam & Islam, 2016; Dhillon, 2013). The mystery behind the disappearance of the dead body of Guru Nanak is yet to be resolved.

Chapter Four

Concept of Interreligious Harmony: Cao Dai Perspective

4.1 Origin and Background of Caodaism

Caodaism is the native religion of Vietnam. It is also popularly known as the monotheistic and syncretic indigenous religion of Vietnam. The official establishment of Caodaism was in 1926, in the city of Tay Ninh, southern Vietnam. The followers of Caodaism are called the "Caodaist ", and the term "Cao Dai" literally means "High tower or palace" (Oliver, 1976). This term sometimes has been associated with the meaning "temple in the mountain" indicating restoration of the monarchy, or "temple which guards the mountain". The ambiguity of the meanings was the outcome of Caodaism's secretive tendency in its formation period. One of the Cao Dai sacred texts "*Dai Thira Chom Giao*" which formally forbids the clarification of the words "Cao Dai" (Blagov, 1999). Hence, it is now universally accepted that the "High Palace or high tower" refers to the supreme higher spiritual palace where the Supreme Being dwells. It is also considered as the "Kingdom of Heaven " or "The Center of the Universe" which is beyond humans' capability and imagination, that place holds and directs the energy which controls and keeps the universe in absolute balance (Trinh, 2014). The official name of the Cao Dai religion is "*Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do*" meaning The Great Way of the Third Universal Salvation (Blagov, 1999). The in-depth meaning of "*Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do*" will be discussed elaborately in the next sections.

The history of Caodaism and Vietnam is highly influenced by Chinese, French and Indian elements. Chinese contact with Vietnam started as early as the 6th century B.C. while in 218 B.C. the Red River Delta became part of China. At that time in China, Shuh Huang Ti was the emperor. After he died in 210 B.C, China experienced a period of anarchy. Amid this period the Red River Delta and coastal areas of Southeastern China became the Kingdom of Nam Viet (Hickey, 1954). In 111 B.C. Emperor We Ti of the Han dynasty conquered northern Vietnam's Red River Delta and ruled Vietnam for the next 1000 years (Farid, 2010). Certainly, ten centuries of Chinese rule inculcated Vietnam and its lifestyle significantly. (Hickey 1964), states that Vietnam was highly influenced by the Chinese elements, both structurally and culturally. Chinese literary tradition provided Vietnam an emerging basis for Vietnamese literature and poetry, legal codes were modeled following those in Chinese, communication system was improved and irrigation projects were undertaken. Confucianism was made the state cult in China in 58 A.D (Oliver, 1976). All the schools were ordered to institute the reverence of Confucius and being a part of China at that time, Vietnam did not remain untouched from the impact of Confucianism.

Taoism was introduced in Vietnam almost during the same period as Confucianism. While orthodox Taoist schools and philosophical systems were competing in China, in Vietnam, the situation was the opposite. Taoism became a grass-root force in Vietnam and it was hardly distinguishable from the Vietnamese indigenous elements (Oliver, 1976). Buddhism was introduced in the second century A.D by the Buddhist bonzes (monks). In the third century A.D., many Indian Buddhist monks stayed in Vietnam

on their way to China and some of them stayed permanently. Through various ways, both Mahayana and Theravada sects were introduced in Vietnam. Gradually the Buddhist Mahayanist sect "Thien" sect became the dominant element of Vietnamese Buddhism. Both Taoism and Buddhism were synthesized in the Vietnamese indigenous religious beliefs. That resulted in the inclusion of spirit cults both tutelary and ancestral, heroic cult and animism (Oilver, 1976; Duncanson, 1968).

While the Red River Delta was greatly influenced by Chinese culture, many independent states in Southeast Asia were influenced by Indian civilization. Indian religion, laws, pattern of kingship, language, mythology was carried in Southeast Asia by the traders, seamen, and religious teachers. In some of the independent states such as Funan and Champa, the elite classes were highly fascinated by the effect of the Indianization process. Hall (1955) suggests that the earliest inscriptions indicate that the royal family of Champa adopted Indian names and started the worship of Shiva. King Bhadravarman (most probably before 400 A.D.) constructed a sanctuary dedicated to Siva-Bhadresvara. It is said that the Indian influence was never as strong as Chinese influence. Scholars opine that despite the long Chinese impact over many centuries, Vietnam could manage a distinct identity and individual civilization (Oliver, 1976).

Vietnamese were part of the French Protectorate from 1883 and got independence at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. European contact with Vietnam had occurred for three centuries before the French. By the end of the 16th century, the Portuguese had a trading connection with Annam and Tonkin of Vietnam. Franciscan missionaries came to central Vietnam in 1580. Jesuits' missionary works started in 1615 in central

Vietnam. They spread their missionary work and in 1627 they established another mission in Tonkin under the leadership of Alexandre de Rhodes who developed the script for today's Vietnamese alphabet. But in 1630, emperor Trinh Trang expelled Alexandre de Rhodes, and missionary works were made forbidden and conversion to the Roman catholic was made forbidden under the penalty of death. In 1659 the Societe des Missions Étrangères was founded to propagate missionary activities in China, Annam, and Tonkin. It is said that the 350 years of Vietnamese European contacts were a period of fighting, friendship, suspicion, and betrayal. The French influence was a turning point from a purely agricultural and medieval society to a modern society based on modern economic activities. The social consequences of that modern economic society destroyed traditional Vietnamese societies as effectively as the conquest of Indochina had destroyed the 'mandarinal' political structure of Vietnam (Buttinger, 1967; Oliver, 1976).

Caodaism originated in colonial Cochinchina, i. e., the South of Vietnam in the 1920s. Vietnam was completely conquered by the French colony in 1906 and the state was divided into three separate states: Cochinchina (South Vietnam) as a colony, Annam (Central Vietnam) as an autonomous kingdom, and Tonkin (North Vietnam) as a French protectorate (Trinh, 2014). South Vietnam was the most exploited by the French colonists, especially in the agricultural sector. The imposition of heavy taxes on the farmers, occupying lands to build plantations left the farmer class in severe poverty, they were deprived of their land and they were not provided any compensation. French colonists also maintained feudal classes as their lackeys to grave land and charging of taxes. They were also backed by the Indochina Bank, an

"old Octopus" of the French financial capitalists. Consequently, the farmers were turned into slaves by French colonists and the Vietnamese feudalists right in their own country. French colonialism followed the policy of "one-way proletarianization." The economic and political domination of the French colonists extended to the cultural enslavement of Vietnam. Economic and social policies have made the lives of the Vietnamese farmers difficult, in particular, the most victimized were the South Vietnamese farmers (The Origin of Caodaism in Vietnam, 2021). Protest against French colonialism rose as high as soon as they invaded Vietnam. It is said that the Vietnamese in general and the South Vietnamese in particular have the nationalistic zeal and patriotic fervor for fighting against anti-nationals and invaders. It is also opined that Caodaism emerged as a burgeoning religious movement in southern Vietnam in the late 1920s (Perrin, 2011; The Origin of Caodaism in Vietnam, 2021).

Caodaism is referred to as the new religious movement, sectarian movement, and also social movement. Most of the researchers on Caodaism identify this religion as an outcome of political movements and also a religion. Bernard Fall (1955), observes that Caodaism is no more than a political movement concerned with preserving its private armies and local power by using its religious elements and ideas merely to dupe a credulous peasantry. Herbert Blumer (1957) defines Caodaism as a social movement stating "a collective enterprise to establish a new order of life". Well-known Cao Dai scholar Sergei Blagov (1999) opines that "ideologically, Caodaism drew from the politico-religious symbolism and imagery of popular rebellion: but it developed as an attempt to face the ideological challenge of the West." Researches on religions prove that almost all the religions of the world, directly and indirectly, related to the politics

and social movement of the then period and outcome of any new religion has its root in socio-political consequences of any certain period and any particular state. In this sense, it would not be sensible to mark "Caodaism" simply as a political movement because it will curtail its religious elements which played a greater role in the formation of a new religion with extraordinary features that influenced all existing Vietnamese religious life vis a vis Vietnamese tradition.

To study Caodaism, it is mandatory to analyze the background of this religion and the catalyst for the origin of Caodaism as a religion of Vietnam. The background and origin of Caodaism can be categorized into two major directions, social and religious background. Social background discusses the Vietnamese elements such as cultural and traditional ambiances, along with the social and political influence of that period. Religious elements define the religious causes, spiritualism, and divine injunctions for the formation of the new religion; Caodaism.

Vietnam is a country with rich cultural elements and religious diversities. It is said that the Vietnamese have four thousand years of history and it is a four-thousand-year history of war. Vietnam was under Chinese occupation for almost a thousand years and thus Vietnamese culture and religion were greatly influenced by the religions of China especially by the famous Confucianism. At the same time, Buddhism and Taoism also extended their influence and enjoyed a significant position in Vietnamese religion and culture. It is noteworthy that Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism along with other indigenous Vietnamese religions flourished together without confronting or challenging each other; rather the people of Vietnam welcomed and accepted the different religions with harmony (Trinh, 2014). That is why it was very natural for the

Vietnamese cultures, religions, traditions, and philosophies to reflect the effects of different historical elements of colonialism and wars alongside different religious vibes. In the early 20th century, Vietnam got influenced by Western characteristics and the people of Vietnam became familiar with Western thoughts, specifically Christianity and Christian thoughts (Trinh, 2014).

Although the official inauguration of Caodaism was in 1926, the roots of Caodaism can be traced to other Asian religions including Western philosophical thoughts that existed in Vietnam (Oliver, 1976). The religion is syncretistic and to the disciples of Caodaism, it is the synthesis of the five great teachings of the past and they are Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and the cult of ancestors (Blagov, 1999). Much of this religion has been adopted from Buddhism, especially from the Mahayana sect of Buddhism, mixed with its Confucian and Taoism origin. The Buddhist idea of "the good man" played the role for forming the basis of Caodaist ethics, and into the ideal behavioral scheme of the disciples, the whole complex of little -tradition, Vietnamese taboos, and sanctions have been incorporated (Hickey, 1964). The syncretic nature of this religion is identified through its organizational structure, theology, philosophy, and ritual practices (Oliver, 1976).

The foundation of Caodaism begins with Ngo Minh Chieu, also known as Ngo Van Chieu, born on February 28, 1878, in Cholon of South Vietnam. He was the only child in his family and His family was not so well-off. In 1885, due to his family's poverty, his family had to move to Hanoi for job purposes and Chieu was left to his aunt at My Tho and that time he was only seven years old (Tan, 1967; Smith, 1970). Chieu's aunt was married to a wealthy Chinese pharmacist (Huan, 1971), and it is said that he

inspired Chieu to explore the Chinese spiritual tradition. Ngo Minh Chieu had a zeal for religion and spiritualism and at the age of ten, he began to study the prayers and worship of the Confucian deity Quan Thanh (Blagov, 1999).

Ngo Minh Chieu attended a French school in My Tho, then he transferred to the Chasseloup-Laubat College in Saigon in 1899 to qualify for the administrative service. He graduated at the age of twenty-one and on March 23, 1899, He got a job as the secretary in the Saigon Immigration office. He immediately brought his parents from Hanoi to Saigon. He was posted to a position at the Headquarters of Governor-General at Indo China. In May 1909, He was given the position of secretary at Tan An city administration. Chieu got married to Bui Thi Than at this period and they had nine children, among them two daughters who died in infancy (Blagov, 1999; Oliver, 1976).

Ngo Minh Chieu was well-known for his modesty and simple life, even holding an administrative position. It is known that Chieu was among those few officials in Cochinchina, who were not accepting bribes. According to some modern Vietnamese experts in Hanoi, Chieu was an agent of the French secret service. But this claim is not true. This claim is the outcome of the problem of misinterpretations of the French administrative terms. Ngo Minh Chieu was a simple civilian officer and he had no connection with the military (Blagov, 1999).

Ngo Minh Chiu's interest in spiritism played an important role in his becoming the first adept of Caodaism. From 1902, he used to read the writings of French spiritist writer, Flammarion (Blagov, 1999). It is said that he got initiated into Dao Minh Su or Dao Phat Drong sect in 1917 (Tai, 1983). Chieu had taken spiritism more seriously

when his mother became sick and on the advice of his friends, he visited a séance at Thu Dau Mot to seek a cure for his mother, on that séance he received a message that directed him to follow a religious life as well as receiving a prescription for his mother and subsequently his mother got recovery (Oliver, 1976). Between 1917 and 1919, Chieu indulged himself in séance practices and attended mediumistic seances. It is claimed that since 1919, Ngo Minh Chieu led a life of high wisdom strictly following the rules of Taoism (L' Histoire du Caodaisme, 1950).

His mother became sick again and this time Chieu sought help in two places, at first, he visited the séance in Cai Khe, near Can Tho (later known as Hiep Minh temple), in the Mekong Delta where the spirit called "Cao Dai Tien Ong" first appeared to him. He visited Minh Thien temple at the Thu Dau Mot twice and at that time it is said that he got a spirit message replying to him that there is no cure for the illness of his mother and soon after in 1919 she died (Blagov, 1999).

While Chieu was searching for a cure for his ailing mother, he got acquainted with some fellows who were interested in spiritism and at Tan An they formed an informal group of spiritualists and they used to hold their own seances (Blagov, 1999; Oliver, 1976). Ngo Minh Chieu was deeply immersed in religious affairs and consequently, in February 1920 the name of Cao Dai spirit was first received by this group. Chiu moved to Ha Tien in 1920 and stayed eight months there, during his stay he actively participated in many spirit sessions and he made further contacts with Cao Dai spirit. Reports claim that Chieu's presence in the seances made the sessions more profound and the involved members used to experience more satisfaction and ease and the spirit

communication reached a higher level. On the contrary, in Chieu's absence or before his arrival, it was difficult to achieve that ambience (Chan, 1967).

After that he moved to Phu Quoc Island and since that the Cao Dai spirit began to dominate Chiu's life completely (Blagov, 1999). Chieu used to arrange seances gathering interested spiritists at the Quang Am Pu pagoda of Phu Quoc. Chieu involved himself in a deep study on religion and read every book available related to his interest (Anh, 1967). He got a further revelation from Cao Dai and obeying his direction, on February 8, 1921, Chieu became a complete vegetarian. In a later vision in January 1924, Cao Dai gave him the revelation of the "Divine Eye" which became the symbol of Caodaism (Oliver, 1976; Blagov, 1999).

In 1924, Ngo Minh Chieu returned to Saigon and he realized the importance of the spirit, Cao Dai. He started to convert his friends and motivated them to worship the "Celestial Eye". The first disciple of Chieu was Vuong Quan Ky, who according to the instructions of Chieu designed the image of the Celestial Eye for the Caodaists to worship. Chieu and Ky used to practice mediumistic seances at Ky's place and in October 1924, Cao Dai altar was established and the Cao Dai rites were performed for the first time. In the Da Kao temple in Saigon, Chieu spent a good deal of time. That temple was called the "Jade Emperor Palace" which was built by a Chinese, member of the Minh Su Vegetarian sect in China. According to reports, that sect was responsible for overthrowing the Manchu dynasty and restored the Ming dynasty in China. British historian R. B. Smith (1970) argues that those obscure affiliations with the traditions of Chinese secret society could be "a clue to the real roots of Caodaism".

Along with Ky, Doan Van Ban, friend and neighbor of Ky began to venerate Caodaist altars and the Divine Eye. Doan Van Ban was in charge of a primary school at Cau Kho situated in Cho Lon where he founded the famous Cao Dai temple, which later became the center of the Caodai unification movement. In fact, Cau Kho became the first Caodaist temple and also as a group of the initial adepts. This group was infiltrated by the French adepts (Trung & Ta, 1972). But later, they were said to be so impressed with the Cao Dai teachings and philosophies that they became devoted Caodaists (Blagov, 1999).

In December 1925, Ngo Minh Chieu became familiar with the Pho Loan group. The term "Pho Loan" indicates that their office would be the recipient of divine law (Oliver, 1976). This group was established in 1925 with Pham Cong Tac, Cao Quynh Cu, and Cao Hoai Sang. All of them were officials at the French institutions in Saigon (Blagov, 1999). The Pho Loan group was not well-known of Vietnamese traditional religions and even had no education on Chinese culture and religion (Blagov, 1999; Oliver, 1976). Though it is often incorrectly said that all of them were Buddhist, in reality, Pham Cong Tac was a Roman Catholic and the other two were primarily followers of the traditional family cults (Oliver, 1976). They used to follow Western literature on spiritism and practiced spiritism in a "European manner" using the popular Ouija-board (Blagov, 1999). In July 1925, they contacted the spirit of Vuong Quan Ky's elder brother's daughter Voung thi Le who had died in 1918. In August 1925, the anonymous spirit A appeared in their seances, and also at the same time the spirit of medieval Chinese poet Li T'ai Po appeared. The anonymous spirit A on December 15, 1925, proclaimed himself as the Cao Dai Supreme Being (Blagov,

1999), proclaiming that he had come to teach "truth" to the Vietnamese and said in substance: "Rejoice this day. It is the anniversary of my coming to Europe to teach my doctrine. I am happy to see you, my disciples, full of respect and love for me. This house will have all my blessings. Manifestations of my power will inspire even greater respect and love in my regard..." (Caodai Holy Message, 1925, as cited in Gobron, 1926, p. 23).

During this period another influential personality emerged and it was Le Van Trung (1875-1934) who originated from Cho Lon, the canton of Phuoco Dien Trung. He was a former elected official of the Colonial Council of Cochinchina (Oliver, 1976). It is claimed that Trung used to have lived a dissident life and he also had a spirit that was completely averse to religion (Gobron, 1950). He was a close friend of Vuong Quan Ky and being a friend of his, he used to attend the seances. It is said that he had been a victim of eye disease and he was near to blindness, but after attending the seances at Ky's place, he got healed completely. According to sources, Trung was invited by his relative Nguyen Huu Dac to attend a séance at Cho Gao where Trung received a significant message from Ly Thai Bach, a spirit sent by Cao Dai and after that Trung's life was completely changed and he engaged himself devotedly in religious affairs (Chan, 1967; Oliver, 1976).

Mrs. Cao Quynh Cu reports that a few days after the event of Le Van Trung's revelation with Ly Thai Bach, on January 11, 1926, he visited Cu's house to see her husband. Cu's husband was a leading member of Pho Loan, the first group of Cao Dai mediums. Le Van Trung wanted to become a disciple of Cao Dao officially (Hieu, 1968). After that Cu and Tac, two of the first three Cao Dai mediums made a return

visit to Trung's place on January 18. On that day, they had a séance and, on that occasion, Cao Dai revealed himself to Le Van Trung and he was said to follow a religious life. From that time on, Le Van Trung began to take a leading role in the administration of the Cao Dai movement (Oliver, 1976; Blagov, 1999). In the same month of January 1926, Le Van Trung and Pho Loan group met Ngo Minh Chieu and on January 27, they started their joint seances under the guidance of Chieu at his house. On February 12, 1926, it was the eve of the lunar new year, on this day the full name of the new teaching, "the Great Way of the Third Salvation" (*Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do*) and the Supreme Being "*Cao Dai Tien Ong Dai-Bo-Tat-Ma-Ha-tat*" were announced. The séance was presided over by Ngo Minh Chiu, Cu and Tac were the mediums and Nguyen Trung Hau interpreted the message (Blagov, 1999). They continued their spiritualist communication and veneration of Cao Dai for the next three months but unfortunately, that harmonious relationship did not last long because of the conflicts among the leaders (Oliver, 1976).

That conflict was the conflict of religious thought and according to one source because of the solitude of Chieu, he was annoyed by the influx of adherents and it bothered him (Gobron, 1950). At the same time, Chieu was not interested to be involved in the politics of the new religious organization that is why he removed himself from the leadership and handed over his leadership to Le Van Trung (Smith, 1970) and that resulted in the formation of two different schools of Cao Dai thought. The one was "esoteric", or *vo vi* (inaction), and the other was "exoteric", *pho do* (to ferry across, to help others). Because of that conflict of thought, Ngo Minh Chieu separated from the Pho Loan and some of his followers followed him. Chieu's way was to practice

personal holiness and to lead a life of an ascetic. According to him, by leading an ascetic life, one can cultivate the religious characteristics that can ensure one's freedom of rebirth, and a heavenly permanent union with Cao Dai. Quoted from Luoc Khao Can Nguyen va Giao Phap (1966), by Oliver (1976), the "esoteric" school is "exclusively reserved for the elect, selected personally by the Divine Master in the calm and silence of the sanctuary, this cycle of teaching does not have temples, nor priesthood, nor liturgy, nor material organization. The disciple, bound by an irrevocable vow, severely and at length prepared by the adept, renounces the honors, the riches, all the pleasures of earthly life, to adapt to the rigorous conditions of existence imposed by the discipline.

religious ... in order to obtain a gradual extinction of his "lower self," hence, his identification with the Absolute, his integration into the Dao ad infinitum." The "exoteric" school emphasized over the propagation of Cao Dai message to win converts and to change the world (Oliver, 1976) which can be is characterized as: "organism of propagation and "evangelization" par excellence, the Exoteric School is aimed at the general public without special preparation. It is concerned with social life, directs the religious formation of neophytes, orients the spiritual aspirations of the adepts, for whom salvation can only be obtained through devotion, the practice of virtue and divine Grace" (Luoc Khao Can Nguyen va Giao Phap, 1966, p.26).

Under Trung's leadership, the new group began to expand their religion by arranging seances in suburban and rural areas. In May of 1926, Trung requested government permission to open twenty-one "oratories" in the east and central Cochinchina (Smith, 1970). The believers were confident enough to disclose their new religion to the world

and on October 7, 1926, signed a petition to Mr. Le Fol, the Governor of Cochinchina. According to the decree of 1873, official authorization was required for establishing a new religious community. The petition was signed by 28 officials and 247 adepts but Ngo Minh Chieu was not among the signatories (Blagov, 1999; Oliver, 1976; Anh, 1967).

The French official accepted the application and stipulated that it would be studied. The application summarized the feature and goal of Caodaism in short that Caodaism was a new religion and that had perfected the three ancient religions of Vietnam. That religion had completed its assigned works in Vietnam and the world. Cao Dai was identified as the Universal Creator and to communicate with him, mediums and spirits were chosen. The application also stated that the sole goal of Caodaism was to propagate the new teachings in a spirit of peace and mercy (Oliver, 1976; Chan, 1970). Governor Le Fol informed Le Van Trung that a certain period is required to observe the developments of the new religion before making any official decision and a confidential telegram was sent by him to the province chiefs, particularly to Vilmont in Tay Ninh to scrutinize the outcomes of Cao Dai propaganda (Bernardini, 1974; Blagov, 1999).

Though official recognition by the French authority was not granted until 1939, on November 18, 1926, the religion was inaugurated with a grand ceremonial exhibition in the village of Go-Ken, three miles south of the provincial capital Tay Ninh. It was claimed by the Caodaists that Cao Dai instructed them that the disciples were prepared for the public inauguration of the religion. The ceremony was attended by French officials, military officers, civilian administrators, and a reputed 50,000 followers and

also the curiosity seekers. Reports claim that Ngo Minh Chieu did not attend the inauguration ceremony of the Cao Dai religion, who is ostensibly regarded as the founder of this religion (Oliver 1976; Blagov, 1999). In the beginning, the religion was centered on east Cochinchina but gradually it became equally popular in the provinces of the center (along with the Mekong Delta) and began to spread to the west (Alam, 2010).

4.2 Unity of God

The concept of God in Caodaism is monotheistic. God is considered as the Supreme Being who is the first cause, who has created the Universe and nurtures it. The attributes associated with the Supreme Being of Caodaism; the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent (Blagov, 1999). God of Caodaism is identified by the Caodaists using the symbolic names "Cao Dai", literally means a "Roofless high Tower or the Supreme Palace"⁷ where Cao Dai God is believed to reign and nurture over the universe. Cao Dai God is also addressed as the "Duc Cao Dai", the Supreme God and official terminology for denoting God is *Cao Dai Tien Ong Dai Bo Tat Ma Ha Tat*, which has been translated as Teaching the Great Way for The Southern Quarter (Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do, 2018). This terminology also denotes attributes like the high palace, immortal, his honor the eldest Boddhisattva, the venerable saint (Oliver, 1976). At the same time, the Caodaists believe that God has no name or cannot be named as no human being has the capability of naming God, and God cannot be explained through any human word (Oliver, 1976).

⁷ See Cao Dai Tu Dien (Cao Dai Dictionary), at <http://www.daotam.info/booksv/CaoDaiTuDien/>. Retrieved August 10, 2021.

In accordance with Caodaism, using the word "God" tends to cause disagreement and hostility among human beings. Cao Dai theology states that, due to disagreement in realizing the unity of "One God" people are intolerant to each other and take their own religion as the Supreme and deny the truth of other religions. Caodaism emerged to unite mankind, and the God of Caodaism stands for all, He has diverse names in the globe but "He is One" that is why they prefer to use terms like "the most-high" and "the absolute" to prevent further conflict and it indicates the cause behind naming the God of Caodaism as "Cao Dai" (Gobron, 1950; Oliver, 1976). Even the Caodaists use the traditional names for refereeing God such as Ngoc Hoang Thuong De (Emperor of the Jade God), Nam Phuong Giao Chu (Spiritual Master of the South), Dai Bo-Tat (the Eldest Bodhisattva), and Ma-Ha-Tat (the Venerable Saint) (Dutton, 1970). Mentionable, Caodaists do not have any problem in calling the Supreme Being by any name which is commonly used to refer to God by any religion (Farid, 2010). However, according to the Caodaists, the Cao Dai is only the one name among the numerous names of One-God and names are only one of the aspects while God is infinite (Gobron, 1950)).

God is higher than any other thing in this universe in Caodaism. God is described in TAM, KY, PHO, DO. TAM means praying to one absolute God three times in a day, KY stands for the eternity of God which extends beyond time and space also it means that the present time is the epoch of God, this is the time of God as Cao Dai manifests Himself in the three phases; past, present, and future, PHO means sacrifice, fasting, anticipation, prefiguration Here fast is an expectation for the divine celestial food which is the "divine word". Those who are wise, sage, and virtuous do fasts and

expect celestial food while refraining from the territorial extravagance, and the DO ensures resurrection, judgment, and deliverance from God for forgiving and to love (Gobron, 1950).

In the concept of God of Caodaism, there are multiple mentions of a secret Goddess. She is Dieu Tri Kim or Duc Phat Mao (the Mother Goddess). Experts of Caodaism opine that that is the result of the influence of ancient Chinese supposition of *Yin* and *Yang* (Gobron, 1950; Oliver, 1976). *Yin* and *Yang* are also one of the core concepts of Taoism. *Yin-Yang* represents the principle of duality of the manifestation of the universe. *Yin* is the principle of negation, of darkness and it is also taken as the female principle, while *Yang* represents light, a positive principle, and often as a male principle. Sometimes, this dualism represents Heaven and earth. *Yin* as the "earth" and *Yang* as "Heaven". It is often interpreted as the opposite character or opposing each other but in a deeper sense, this duo is complementary to each other and forming unity to maintain balance. The equilibrium of *Yin-Yang* ensures all-pervasive unity, harmony, and discipline (Tiwari, 2012).

Since the philosophy and theology of Caodaism has been highly influenced by Taoism, Caodaism adopted this *Yin-Yang* concept. Anthropology of Caodaism also suggests that human being is identical to the unity of vitality-Mind-Spirit (*tin*h, *-khi*-*than*) and Caodaist spiritualism is also highly influenced by the *Yin-Yang* concept and the process of interaction of Vitality-mind-Spirit is interpreted as the mystic purification of human nature (Blagov, 1999). In explaining the dualism of the Caodaist God, it does not indicate the possibility of "two-Gods" contrasting the monotheistic concept of "One-God". These two entities are the manifestations of "One-God" and

the "One-God" is the only cosmic principle of the universe. Gobron explains it as: God is One and the Goddess contains Him. She is One and all God is manifested in Her. *Yin-Yang* merged to form the source and basis of the Universe and everything in this Universe came from the unity of *Yin-Yang*. Thus, most importantly it suggests that the universe is the result of the unity of *Yin-Yang*, without unity, there is no possibility of creation (Gobron, 1950, pp.51-52).

In explaining the attributes and unity of God, Caodai scholar Gobron (2001) cites, "There is only one God, the First cause, the principle of all that exists. There is one God worshipped, venerated, prayed to under diverse names at every point of the globe. There is only one God. God has taken to manifest Himself in Vietnam and to indicate to the world the new religion in which men are certain to find Him. Cao Dai, such is the name of the unique God who is in all the present and past names given to God or under which God manifested Himself to man. Cao Dai, such is the name" (Gobron, 2001, p.42).

The Supreme Being has explained His "Oneness" in one of His messages: "After creating the universe, I divided My spirit and with it made all creatures, plants, and materials. Everything in this universe comes from My spirit, and therefore has a life. Where there is life, there is Me even in materials and plants. I am each of you and you are Me" (Thanh Ngon Hiep Tuen, Selection of Selected Holy Messages, 1972, cited in Tap, 2000, p. 19).

In the Cao Dai scripture, one of the significant teachings stands out: "*Thien Dia Van Vat Dong Nhat The*" which means: "The sky, the earth, and ten thousand things are of one same constitution." The extended meaning implies that all the things in this world

organic and inorganic consist of the same nature. The “ten thousand things” symbolically represents the multitude of diverse forms of matter in the universe (Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do, 2018). Through this term, it has been implied that all the things in this universe have shared basic principles and a similar conscience that suggests the oneness of God's creation.

This can be explained through an example of a man, a stone, animal, and plant and identical physical nature experiment. A pedestrian is walking in the extreme heat and searching for a shade. A plant is also wilted down by the fierce heat from the sun. Animals are craving for water to save their lives. A roadside stone seems untouched by the heat compared to the living organisms but extreme heat can decompose a stone also. Thus, the similarity of excessive heat is common to human beings, plants, animals, and eventually for the stone also. Caodaism argues that if they do not possess the same basic constitutions, how can the same effect be felt?

Atoms are the core of all existing elements in this universe. This is the basic constitution, according to which the same unitarian universalist oneness of the human beings, and nature with the eternal God can be understood and that can also be called the reign of the Natural Law. Again, it is observable that all living beings need the energy to survive. In the reproduction process, a dog after conceiving will give birth to a dog and the same applies to all animals and also for human beings. The rule of specific continuation of line applies for the animals, plants, and humans and that is how the genetic law governs (Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do, 2018; Tap, 2000).

From the emotional point of view, people have an instinct for fellow feelings. For example, while watching any movie, in any sequence of comedy people laugh

together, and feel emotional together in any painful sequence. This tendency applies to the majority of cases. This emotional experience identifies that all human beings have an empathetic nature. One needs to identify this empathy from within and apply it in the way of life. This empathy will create an atmosphere of shared loving and peaceful family in this world where everyone will be able to overcome the mutual hatred and will embrace the common loving nature of one another. According to Caodaism, this "emotional oneness" is the cause of the essential "spiritual oneness" with the eternal "One" God. The entire cosmos is a part of His spirit. Being a part of God's creation, human beings also share this spirit and therefore human beings have a similar principle. That is why all religions, despite having varieties in outlook, have a common goal, and the essence of all religions is peace and empathy. This common nature of the different religions proves their stem from the one same origin; "One God". It is explained in Vietnamese as *Nhut Bon Tan Van Thu* means from one, emanates many, and *Van Thu Qui Nhut Bon* means from many, emanates one (Tap, 2000).

Spiritism is the core concept of Caodaism and the beliefs and practices of Caodaism originated centering spirit mediumship also known as seances. The Caodaists believe that they are unique in receiving religious messages because they are the first such religious community so far which has granted its adepts to receive divine messages by maintaining direct communication with the transcendental world or can be said that they can receive divine messages directly and that enables them a direct connection to the transcendental world (Blagov, 1999). All the religions of the world are based on certain fundamental messages. Major World Religions have sacred scriptures which are the compositions of messages both divine and the messages of the messengers. But

for Caodaism, direct communication with the transcendental world, the direct revelation of messages, and instructions through seances have reduced the necessity of written scriptures for the Caodaists (Farid, 2010) but in Caodaism, there are many important Cao Dai canons for regulating Cao Dai governing bodies. There are also scriptures for shaping the activities of the Caodaists and instructions for the Cao Dai rituals.

The Caodaists believe that the world is full of spirits and they have different categories also such as Phat (Buddhas), Tien (holy spirits), Thanh (saints), and Than (lower-ranking spirits). Each of these categories can be classified into three grades; Thien, Nhan, and Dia. Humans are the part of the spirit hierarchy but before entering this spirit stage humans have to pass a humanity stage. Not only humans but also animals and plants are also part of the spiritual hierarchy. Spirits have to evolve out of a materialistic world and by following the "Law of Karma" one gets rank in the spirit world. Thus, one's rank in the spirit world depends on one's earthly deeds (Oliver 1976; Farid, 2010). The Cao Dai seances have experienced more than seventy different spirits and the list of spirits includes deceased leaders of Cao Dai Church, patriots, military warriors, heroes, political leaders, poets, philosophers, and religious personalities.

According to Western observation, the Cao Dai list of spirits follows a universal character. It has been found that most of the messages were received from Jeanne d' Arc, La Fontaine, Shakespeare. Aristide Briand, Leo Tolstoy, Le Van Duyet, Ly Thai Bach, Phan Boi Chau, and Quan Thanh De Quan, Lenin, Sun Yat-Sen, and Ngo Minh Chieu (Oliver, 1976). Among the spirits, the most important spirits and source of

revelation are the Duc Cao Dai, the Supreme Being, Buddha, Chinese Poet Li Bo, and Victor Hugo. Hugo was named as the chief of foreign missions, and Ly Thai Bach, a Chinese poet was designated as the disembodied spiritual pope of Caodaism by Cao Dai. The disembodied spirits have been bestowed with different roles. They serve as the benefactors of mankind, messengers of salvation, and instructors of doctrines (Oliver, 1976; Alam, 2010; Farid, 2010). It should be mentioned here that spirits are not positioned as God nor equal to Duc Cao Dai (Supreme Being; God), Duc Cao Dai is the "ultimate being" and that ensures the monotheistic notion of Caodaism.

As it is mentioned before, according to Caodaism, God is the heart of this Universe, the ultimate source of the creation of everything in this Universe and He is the Father of all mankind. Being the Father of mankind, God has revealed Himself to mankind for letting them become acquainted with the truth of life and the will of God from the beginning of time. The Cao Dai principles of creating mankind explicate that Caodaism will fulfill the goals of mankind by unveiling the truth. According to Caodaism, this religion grants its followers a consciousness of power when their spirits are united with the Spirit. This consciousness is the cause of the emergence of Duc Cao Dai and shows that human reason will triumph over all obstacles and misunderstandings (Blagov, 1950).

The history of mankind and revelation in Caodaism is divided into three phases or periods (Tam Ky). In the first two phases, God has sent His messengers who got direct instructions from Cao Dai to serve humanity and to guide them towards humanity such as Krishna, Shakyamuni, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Mohammad (Nhan Dao, Than Dao,

Phat Dao, Thanh Dao, and Tien Dao) and even Hermes, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato.

In the first revelatory era, Nhien Dang Co Phat (Dipankara Buddha), Thai Thuong Dao Quan (previous incarnation or life of Lao Tse), Moses, and King Phuc Hi respectively founded Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, and Humanism for mankind according to the guidance of God. In the second revelatory era, Shakya Muni, Lao Tse, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Khuong Thai Cong, and Confucius respectively founded Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam, Shintoism, and Confucianism. Each of them had their disciples and the messengers served humanity and showed them the way to overcome sufferings by developing religions (Tap, 2000).

Each of the messengers has unveiled the "truth" but according to Caodaism, because of the "frailty" nature of human beings including the messengers, those messages were unfollowed and eventually got corrupted. God's words were misunderstood and misinterpreted by the people. Due to superstitions and ignorance, they got distorted from humanity and deviated from the way of God. They found amusement in violation of harmony and that violated the nature of the human spirit. Caodaism affirms that the creation of the human spirit is always actual and the up-gradation of human nature is indispensable by following the words of God, those who fail to grasp the word of God, fall into misery (Oliver, 1976; Blagov, 1999; Gobron, 1950).

Concomitantly, Caodaists believe that messages and messengers sent by God in the previous two phases were for specific time, nationality, and culture. More specifically, those messages applied to the people of any particular place where any of the religious founders lived. Being time and cultural bound, those messages were partial and did not

fulfill the will of Cao Dai. That is why it was necessary for another revelatory period and Cao Dai decided for a new amnesty, a new revelation of the will of Cao Dai to the world through His new religion Caodaism (Oliver, 1976).

This was ensured through a message which was received on January 3, 1926. It emphasized the importance of a "true spirit or Perispirit" which is mysterious and immortal. That true spirit would be the Cao Dai God, who is the Father of all deities and mankind and cause of the unity of microcosm and macrocosm, it was explained as "God is you and you are God" (Blagov, 1999; Thanh, 1970; Oliver, 1976). Another message was for the adepts that were more intense that revealed that "possessing the three True Religions, now you are blessed with another True Religion." It was also warned that the period of Three Religions was nearing the end and "thou shalt not ignore it" (Ngon, 1964, p. 47; Blagov, 1999, p. 26). The first Cao Dai message in French delivered on October 27-28, 1926 warned about a critical period where destruction is near the end. That message clarified the necessities of a third revelation, emphasizing that the new doctrine is meant to keep humanity in peace. It was mentioned that Christianity and Christian doctrines were perceived without clarity and deep insight, the New Testament was preached without proper understanding of the Holy Scripture. And in the message received on November 28, 1926, it was mentioned that the advent of Cao Dai is inevitable to check heresies to propagate the new doctrine to the world (Ngon, 1967, pp. 23, 63, 46; Blagov, 1999, p. 26).

Two more major messages were sent on October 27-28, 1926 in which it was clarified the motive and applications of a new religion "Caodaism" that it is the continuation of the former religions which were sent in the last two phases and people misunderstood

the intention of the Supreme God, and even today people are following religions, not deeply but superficially that is mere ritualism devoid of the essence of true religiosity: "Humanity was suffering from all kinds of vicissitudes. I sent Allen Kardec, I sent Flammarion, as I also sent Elijah and John the Baptist, precursors of the advent of Jesus Christ. One was persecuted, the other killed. Who did it? Humanity. Even My Son was killed by you; you worship Him in spirit but not in holiness. I wanted to talk to you just once during Moses' day on Mount Sinai, but you could not understand Me. The promise I made to your ancestors for your redemption, the advent of Christ, was prophesied but you did not care to listen...Now I must make use of spiritual means so as to convince you... (Ngon, 1964, p.50)." Spiritistic communication and messages that were sent in French were intentional to form a Franco-Vietnamese harmony, avoiding conflict and stressing on living in a community of life and mutual interests. This was explained in a message sent on December 19, 1926: "Many of you know French, so I use it for better understanding" (Ngon, 1964, p. 67).

The most prolific sign of unity in Caodaism is the symbol of the "Celestial Eye". This is not just a symbol for the Caodaists, it is the most respectful and venerable object to the believers of Caodaism. This Celestial Eye symbolizes the "Universal Unity" and the "Unique Truth". It is a symbol of "One Eye" most accurately the left eye which reflects the Positive Yang-Duong Principle. The temples of Caodaism are to be built keeping in the design that the eye is directed to the North. The "Eye" according to the Caodaists, is the Gate to the human heart, the heart is the creation of spirit, the spirit is the idea of emptiness, the idea of emptiness is heaven. The inner meanings cannot be explained through science but it has deeper esoteric importance (Blagov, 1999).

According to Caodaism, God ordered them to symbolize Him by an Eye which stands for the universal and individual conscience. This Eye also stands for the "One God", the creator of all, the first cause of the existence of the Universe. This one God is for all, who is prayed, venerated, worshiped under the diverse names in different parts of the world (Farid, 2010). Cao Dai message says:

"The Eye is the principle of the heart.
From Which comes the light which is master.
Light is the spirit.
The Spirit itself is God.
God is me (Khoa, 2002, p.22).

As it has been mentioned that this Divine Celestial Eye symbolizes God, all-seeing "Eye of the God " that is why the Caodaists pray to the Eye of God. The prayers follow: "Though art the gold and the Crystal of heaven. Ethereal essence of all things. Thou seat in all bodiless spirit expressed in the look. The wise never confuse the symbol that; which it represents. Their vision is infinite. Total intelligence penetrating, enveloping: Zodiacal. Life: Principle of life, life of all principles which the Sun's regard develops and multiples in the God of Heaven. Night's repose in the light of the moon: Crystal of heaven. Sidereal light, Solar light, lunar light. The unique light in the Eye of God. The unique light in the Eye of God. Thou Three-in-one of the One-look, Eye of the God. Bathe my spirit in the light of crystal and gold, Amen" (Khoa, 2002, p.50). God said:

The Eye represents the heart
From which twin pure lights beam.

Light and Spirit are One,
God is the Spirit's gleam (Tam, 2000).

It was found that, during the formation period of Caodaism, Ngo Minh Chieu was asked by spirit Tien Ong to choose a symbol for the new teaching. At first, Chieu had chosen a 'cross', and immediately after that in a message, Chieu was told that that "cross" has already been a part of an existing religion and on April 1921, and on January 1924, it is believed that Chieu had visions to adopt "Celestial Eye" as a symbol of Cao Dai spirit (Blagov, 1999). In the early stage of the development of Caodaism, some of the Caodaists argued that the symbol of the Celestial Eye is almost identical to the ecumenical religious symbol of the catholic churches. Some observers opined skeptically that the adaptation of the Celestial Eye was intentional because the Celestial Eye resembles the Masonic Symbol, it was chosen to gain the sympathy of the French government officials who were the members of masonry (Dufeil, 1956). But the believers of Caodaism deny this claim, according to them, the adaptation of the Celestial Eye was not the byproduct of syncretic borrowing and reject any kind of link of Celestial Eye to the Masonic Eye (Blagov, 1999).

4.3 Unity of Mankind and Religions

In Cao Dai theology it has been reaffirmed that the goal of Caodaism is to unite mankind and it is the ultimate will of God. The emergence of Caodaism is for bringing the third era of salvation which will ensure the perfectionism of the harmony of mankind including all religions, and even the animal and plant kingdom based on tolerance, love, justice, and peace. This is the third era of salvation and this is the high time all should unite for greater peace. In this regard, Caodaism rejects the concept of any of the fourth era of salvation (Blagov, 1999). Caodaism emphasizes the unity of humanity and religions focusing on the root of all is the same God, the Supreme being. According to Caodaism, all religions are for truth, but due to lack of consciousness, people forgot the essentials of their own religion that all are created by the same God and forgot the "Golden Rule" (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you). Caodaism affirms that all the previous religions have taught that God is one, for example, the Islamic fundamental belief that "there is no God but God", again the tolerance and teachings of empathy was taught by Christianity such as: "love thy neighbor as thyself".

Unfortunately, people failed to be truly religious and they adopted the way of separatism, denied eternal, universal diversity, developed personal arrogance and racism. The approach of Caodaism towards this disharmonious situation is a universal one. The universality of Caodaism can be explained through its philosophy of "oneness" based on the fundamental concept of one principle that all the religions are from the same God and there is no scope for discord. This philosophy has been described through a Cao Dai holy message from the Supreme God as: "Formerly,

people lacked transportation and therefore did not know each other. I then founded at different epochs and in different areas, five branches of the Tao: Confucianism, Shintoism, Christianity, Taoism, and Buddhism, each based on the customs of the respective race. In present days, transportation has been improved, and people have come to know each other better, but do not live-in harmony because of the very multiplicity of those religions. That's why I have designed to unite all of those religions into one to bring them back to the primordial unity" (Tap, 2000, p. 15).

4.3.1 The Syncretic Nature of Caodaism: The Harmony of Diverse Thoughts

Caodaism has widely been marked as a religion that is "fundamentally, deliberately syncretic" (Smith, 1970, p. 574). It is also perceived that Caodaism, both a social movement and religion, follows syncretistic features in its organizational structures, philosophy, theology, and ritual practices (Oliver, 1976, p. 1). Syncretism can be tentatively defined as the borrowing, affirmation or integration of concepts, symbols, or practices of any one or more religious traditions by another religion through a process of selection and reconciliation (Berling, 1980, p.10). These tendencies are common or perhaps central to Vietnamese religious life. Importantly, syncretic borrowing may not be entirely conscious but it is understood that syncretism is not a hypocritical manipulation (Blagov, 1999, p. 21).

Religious amalgam is universal in Vietnamese life and in some cases, its content varies from place to place. For example, to some Vietnamese, any place which is sacred was appropriate for worship. Pham Cong Tac identifies another consequence of that tendency of Vietnamese that, paradoxically, because of possessing too many religions in Vietnamese religious life, they became atheistic" (Tac, 1970, pp. 85-86).

For Caodaism, it is said that this religion is not the overt outcome of "syncretism". The syncretism was natural and most perfectly can be identified as the "grassroots" syncretism of Vietnam. The advent of Caodaism enriched that traditional grassroots Vietnamese syncretism and this new religious doctrine contains numerous elements of the preexisting syncretic amalgamation that became an integral part of this religion (Hickey, 1964).

According to the followers of Caodaism, the Cao Dai doctrine brings forth the synthesis of five great teachings of the past: Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor cult, and Western religions. It is believed that synthesis of the teachings will show new teaching to overcome the intolerance of the past salvations. A part of Caodaists' prayer signifies the concept of harmony of five great teachings, such as:

My Brethren, My Sisters, I ask you to pray
and sing the praises of Him who gives life.
I bring flowers of five colors. I bring flowers.
The white lily of innocence, candid, united
with God.
As all colors are found in the white of the
faith, so all beliefs are of one.
The blue of the fields of heavenly hope. The
blue of the heavens which induces the upward look.
In divine hope are all human ideals (Blagov, 1950, p.44).

Although there is a paucity of details, it is said that Caodaism has been documented as a syncretism of the Vietnamese "Three-Religion" (*Tam Giao*) system (Blagov, 1999). This three-religion system denotes the amalgamation of Confucianism, Buddhism, and

Taoism. Despite Caodaism organizationally affirming that it has taken a departure from the ancient Vietnamese practices, its ideology is highly derived from the three-religion tradition along with the existing Vietnamese belief systems at large (Werner, 1980).

It is believed that these three religions are the three branches of a common stem that existed from prehistoric periods. These three religions grew from the common stem and that stem is the religion of the Universe, its parts, and phenomena. De Groot (1912) describes it as the teachings seemed to be a doctrine of Universalism, actually being "the one religion." These three religions are the core of Caodaism and the colors of the Cao Dai religious banner: yellow, blue, and red are viewed as the symbolization of these three great teachings and stand for the unity of the "Three Religions". The red color symbolizes Confucianism, yellow is associated with Buddhism, and blue emblemizes Taoism (Blagov, 1999). This symbolization theory was revealed in the early stage of the movement (Tan, 1974). These three colors have deeper meanings which explain the goals of Caodaism; the red color implies the symbol of authority, yellow stands for morality, and the blue represents tolerance. It is understood that there is no association between the three colors and three periods of revelations (Tan, 1974, Blagov, 1999).

Cao Dai philosophy explains the manifestation of this new religion: All the pre-existing religions and their adherents had submitted the authority of those religions to the human founders and that was opposed to the Universality. Because, the human founders of the prophets rose up declining the truths of other religions, showed obvious intolerance (Gobron, 1950). Cao Dai doctrine includes the concept of Karmic

law which holds that incarnation and life after death depend on the present deeds (Tap, 2000). According to Caodaism, a human soul may go up and down the ladder of existence and this is directed by the will and actions of the individual. Caodaism emphasizes the deliverance of the human soul from the endless cycle of existence after evolving out of a material world. Human beings possess an immortal soul which must be liberated from this cycle to go back to one's origin; the Supreme Being and that is called the complete victory. Transgressing this cycle and the complete victory is possible by one's physical and spiritual cultivation from within. (Alam, 2010; Tap, 2000).

This physical and spiritual cultivation comprises humanity and helping humanity. Caodaism explains this self-upgrading process from various points of view. From a moral perspective, Caodaism evokes human beings to be aware of his or her duties towards themselves with an extension to one's duties towards his family, and society realizing and accepting the society as a broadened family. Then it also reminds one's duty towards humanity which is the universal family. From a philosophical position, Caodaism encourages disrelishing from pride, riches, and luxury, in a word encourages emancipation from the materialistic bindings to find peace in spirituality. From the worshipping point of view, this religion directs the veneration and adoration of the Supreme Being; God, and the Superior Spirits that constitute the August Hierarchy. It also acknowledges the national worship of the ancestors while prohibiting meat offerings and the use of votive paper. The spiritualistic position of Caodaism ensures its harmony with the other religions along with the organization of spiritualistic and psychic philosophy. Also confirms the existence of soul and body

and survival of soul beyond the body, and enjoins the law of Karma which determines the posthumous consequence of the human soul and its evolution through successive reincarnations. From the viewpoints of the initiates', Caodaism propagates that by uniting the existing religions, this religion provides universal teachings that encompass all the phases of human beings' physical, emotional, and spiritual progress. Through this one can experience a progressive spiritual evolution. In the phases of human life, there are many secular relations and obligations such as the relation with parents, siblings, conjugal relation, obligations to children, and also the relationship with humanity. Caodaism with its humanistic teachings can guide anyone in all the activities in one's life and later if anyone wishes to in the way of self-realization and to merge with the Almighty, Caodaism will provide necessary guidance for self-realizing and cultivation through the process of deep meditation (Blagov, 1950; Tap, 2000).

In a spiritual message it has been affirmed that the emergence of Caodaism is meant for humanity and harmony: "Out of Love and Mercy, out of respect for life, I have founded the Great Way's Third Revelation to save the earthly human, to help the virtuous attain a world of peace and avoid reincarnation to the earthly world of suffering" (Tap, 2000). The essence of interreligious harmony of Caodaism is rooted in its concept of universal love and this universal love extends towards love and kindness for animals and plants. Caodaism emphasizes the formation of a universal family, based on brotherhood and sisterhood. Caodaism gives importance to the duties towards animals considering them as our brethren behind us in the process of evolution. That is why, they must be treated with gentleness and if we appoint them as our service, we should be very careful that they should not suffer needlessly. All

animal's lives must be respected and harming them will delay the evolution of the victim. So, all the Caodaists are conscious about their duties and for this reason, they prefer a vegetarian diet to avoid further crime realizing the fact that humans are engaging in multiple crimes in daily life. Schopenhauer connects a link between pity towards animals and kindness of soul saying that: "there is a close link: we may say without hesitating, that when an individual is cruel toward beasts, he will not be a just man" (Blagov, 1950).

In our life, there is no other alternate benefactor than trees that render us innumerable services. Trees are in fact, silent benefactors for both mankind and all living beings. Unfortunately, people become ungrateful towards their best friends on this earth but trees never blame us and never discriminate in providing shelter, shade, medicine, and other life-supporting materials whether it is a tired traveler, a sick person, and a wicked destroyer of forests. Plants teach us the philosophy of sacrifice and goodness to mankind without hoping for a return, it is said that the sandalwood, perfumes the axe that strikes it. It has been proved by the experiment of the scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose that plants have a nervous system that is why plants are in some cases more sensitive than humans to physical impression. Caodaism is very conscious of the kingdom of plants and reminds mankind to owe to the goodness of trees and recommends to be vegetarian, never to abuse, mutilate nor needlessly destroy them for material excessive luxury (Blagov, 1950).

Caodaism heightens the service to one's neighbor and affirms that completes the goal of the human fraternity (Blagov, 1950). Caodaism urges mankind to find happiness in living together because living a secluded life is not worth living. As noted, the goal of

Caodaism is to establish global harmony including interreligious, intra-religious, intercultural harmony. Indeed, a universal family should be formed consisting of mankind, animals, and plants with varieties of cultural, linguistic, religious, colors, and species. In searching for the way to God, one can find that the origin of all the species is the same. All are from the same God and this realization is very needed for establishing harmony in this world. This is the principle of humanity and Caodaism gives stress on humanity, services to one's neighbor as the fundamentals of religions. Services, not necessarily always to be physical, and economic, that can be readiness to help his or her fellowmen in every circumstance either by his acts or even by his good thoughts, wishes, and sweet words (Blagov, 1950). The honest desire for helping others is more fruitful than fake attempts to help anyone who is in misery. The fundamentals of Caodaism teach us to be empathetic. Empathy mitigates hatred and differences and opens scopes for harmony. Caodaism encourages one to be empathetic even to those who hate us and to be firm with the Cao Dai notions of love of good and worship of truth.

According to Caodaism, working for others, the act of love and chanting opens rooms for one's viaticum in their wanderings towards ultimate happiness and enlightenment. Caodaism declares that service to one's neighbors and fellows is one of the paramount prerequisites for his or her salvation. Caodaism acknowledges the fact that it is very easy for mankind to be tempted for worldly attractive affairs and in his moment of quietness, he may get self-realization of his motive of life. In this stage of thought and realization, one intends to purify his or her thoughts, actions by controlling and calming his or her actions and passions. This self-purification realization leads one to

the nearness to the Supreme Being, where he gets the light of Divinity and attains enlightenment. Sometimes people pretend to be religious but in action it is unseen. Caodaism teaches to be morally advanced and honest in religiousness and encourages to practice good and virtue with one's coreligionist rather than being a mere preacher. One can reach his goal of salvation by not speaking vain speeches, but practicing what he preaches, conforming to the doctrines in his life that he professes. Strong conviction on morality, goodness, fraternity, harmony helps one from being misguided by the temptation of evils (Blagov, 1950).

Harmonious principles of Caodaism firmly hold the principle of equality and harmonious unity between men and women. Women are equally granted to take part in both administrative and religious affairs including the priesthood. Caodaism preaches, the world of unity has been offered by God through the Third Alliance and it is meant for peace (Oliver, 1976). Caodaism offers this world a great opportunity for peace, tolerance and empathy gleaned from unity and harmony. Mutual understanding and empathetic attitude are inevitable for the harmony of the great cultures of East and West, and religions, and faiths. This religion stands for a solution of sensitive spiritual healing for the troubled, injured world. Caodaism believes that ongoing world problems notably racism, intolerance, and ignorance can be solved through a spiritual solution. In fulfilling the noble mission, Caodaism directs its followers to follow the five interdictions because the values of non-harming and essential values of all the religions are summed up in these five interdictions (Blagov, 1950), and they are as follows:

1. Not to kill living beings
2. Not to covet
3. Not to practice high living
4. No to be tempted by luxury
5. Not to sin by word

The first interdiction explains that the center of consciousness exists in the living beings and that is the cause of the spark of life. The second interdiction is to refrain mankind from the gross materialism, dominating the nature and lust of possessions which stray human beings from the essential nature of humanism, and this is evident in contemporary societies where everyone is in a rat race, craving for riches and bound to stir up pride. The third interdiction proposes to lead a decent life and encourages to be vegetarian instead of consuming the bodies of the beasts. It also disallows drinking alcohol because it causes harm to the body and the spirit for its noxious effects. The fourth interdiction suggests mankind not be a victim of luxury that causes or attracts cruel karma. The fifth interdiction commands to be conscious about words and avoid sinning by words. Theology of Caodaism teaches that God has appointed a guardian angel to take care of each human life. This guardian is fully impartial and by his mission, maintains a ceaseless communication with the Supreme Being and maintains an account of all good and ill deeds of human beings. The guardian angel will submit all the deeds of human beings to the Counsel of Lords of Karma (Toa` Phan-Xet); therefore, all the human acts will be settled by the Great Karmic Law. This spirit or guardian-angel is also appointed to teach humans from his inspiration. In simple language, human beings can call this spirit "conscience" and if anyone deceives anyone with his or her lies has already deceived his or her conscience. This spirit records not only the actions but also the words and thoughts of men though they have

not yet intimated in acts, because to the eyes of the Lords of Karma, sins of tongues are as punishable as those sins which arise from an overt fact (Blagov, 1950).

Chapter Five

Comparative Study of the Concept of Interreligious Harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism

5.1 Definition of Comparative Study of Religion

Prior to progressing towards the comparative study of the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism, it is imperative to impart the prefatory concept of the comparative study of religion. Comparative study of religion or comparative religion is the “science of religion” that offers a comparison of the religions formed on different traditions and cultures (Shrivastava, 1974). This is also called the scientific study of religion that studies various features of the different religions of the world from a comparative perspective (Tiwari, 2009). In elementary form comparative study can be stated as the study of the principal religions of the world, furthermore, it also evaluates the various sects of each religion that emerges from the common stock. The field of this branch of study not only deals with the resemblance of the basic elements and principles of different religions but also to reveal the differences among them. In the process of comparison and contrast, it displays the salient features of different religions. By evaluating and understating the salient features, the comparative study of religion investigates the interrelation of one religion with the other (Shrivastava, 1974).

Scholars in some cases prefer designating Comparative Religion as Comparative Study of Religion focusing on the fact that the expression of Comparative Religion may create some misunderstanding and the expression “Comparative Religion” is not

a happy one because to some audiences, it may suggest estimating, evaluating, and criticism of religion. To avoid these implications and misconceptions, hence, a more descriptive or non-technical term “The Comparative Study of Religion” has been suggested to use (Chatterji, 1971). Pritibhushan Chatterji suggests that to indicate the unbiased character of Comparative Religion, a better expression would be simply ‘Study of Religions’. Some again prefer the term ‘Science of Religion’ for a better neutral standpoint (Chatterji, 1971). Addressing Comparative Religion as “The Science of Religion” is not imposed but proven scientifically to a great extent. Rama Shankar Shrivastava (1974, p.4) argues that if the word “Science” is not taken in an orthodox sense but as a rational inquiry of the truths and the contents of religions, it may be the most fitting substitute of “comparative religion.” The scientific approach requires systematized verification and learning including empirical experiences, but in the case of religion, the sacred spheres, including soteriology, post-life existence, and the concept of soul narrows the verification process of science. But in the inclusive sense, science attempts to remove irrationalities and unjustified concepts in all spheres of knowledge and that must include religion. (Shrivastava, 1974).

But there remains a problem even with the term ‘Science of Religion’ because this may not be acceptable to all. Some scientists object that it is yet not the appropriate time to study religious phenomena under rigorous scientific observations. Similarly, adherents of some religions or a part of every religion show an objection to testing the faiths of religion scientifically (Chatterji, 1971). George. W. Gilmore (1908, p. 191) observes, “Hence the time is near when the expression ‘Science of Religion may be

admitted, and when the scientific method into religious inquiry will be not only permitted but privileged.

5.2 Comparison, Appraisal and Findings of the Concept of Interreligious Harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism

This thesis explores the concept of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism following a comparative method. To find out the concept of interreligious harmony of these two religions, attempts have been made to analyze and explain the dogmas, doctrines, and basic tenets of Sikhism and Caodaism. To continue this process, interreligious harmony of Sikhism and Caodaism has been outlined under the conceptions of unity of God, unity of mankind, and unity of religions as the bases of discussion and research. In the comparative study of religions, similarities and dissimilarities have equal importance to identify the uniqueness and basic factors of each religion. Although the outlines of interreligious harmony of Sikhism and Caodaism were drawn in the previous segments, in this chapter a more comprehensive, arranged discussions will be presented following the comparative method of studying religions.

Sikhism and Caodaism both are comparatively new religions of the world, while Sikhism originated in India, Caodaism emerged in Vietnam. India and Vietnam have completely different types of cultures, languages, society, and religious impressions. Both Sikhism and Caodaism are intensely intertwined with their respective culture, history and ethnicity. Studies have found that the emergence of these religions were the consequences of social, religious, and political events and they have evolved in the intimate response to unfolding patterns of events and this process is still going on. In

fact, this is true for all the religions of the world. In this chapter, besides discussing the doctrinal concepts of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism, historical, social, and cultural influences will be investigated for a better understanding.

5.2.1 The Background of Influential Factors for Developing the Notion of Interreligious Harmony

Doctrines, concepts, and ideologies of religions are not sudden occurrences; they have intense significant backgrounds, history and events and consequently those events influenced and led the development of certain concepts in almost all religions. In the academic pursuit, a background study of religions neither deny nor decay the theological concepts such as God and His of divine revelation, spiritual commandments, and supernatural elements as the basis of any religion. If we look at the revealed religions of the world and their revealed texts, we can see that the doctrines, teachings, and instructions were given in response to a sudden event and it was guidance for mankind to deal with the challenges. At the same time, some doctrines were for the future and it was made obligatory to follow those doctrines as the guiding principles. However, in Sikhism and Caodaism, the scenarios are almost the same.

Comparative study shows that Punjab, the Sikh homeland is one of the most popular places in both India and Pakistan. The 15th century of India was full of events that caused the emergence of various movements. Sikhism is one of them. Gradually Sikhism became powerful in its appearance and achieved the position of a distinct religion. Individually Punjab was an important part of India which was once called the main gateway to India was productive for the outsiders and that stemmed the

coalescence of the different fur-flung foreign cultures, religions, races, and languages. India which is also called the mega shop of religions and philosophies and that paved the easy way for the introduction of foreign elements. In India, specifically in Punjabi soil, and the people of Punjab got acquainted and accepted the plurality of thoughts in philosophies and also in religious spheres. The gradual development of Sikhism adopted the pluralistic notions of its surroundings that became the fundamentals of Sikhism which makes Sikhism quite distinct from the other faiths originated in India.

Caodaism, a Vietnamese religious tradition which originated in the South of Vietnam. Vietnam is popular for its diverse cultural and religious histories. It has almost four thousand years of history of struggle and war. Pluralism and syncretism are the inherent quality of Vietnam and that is why Chinese religions, specifically Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism were welcomed and mingled with the indigenous Vietnamese traditions. Vietnamese people were always welcoming and harmonious in accepting the diverse foreign faiths and gradually they became part of the Vietnamese culture and religious tradition.

The emergence of Caodaism was significant for forming Vietnamese national integrity. This religion, of course, worked as the turning point for Vietnamese religious life. Caodaism emerged both as a social movement and religion with a strong flavor of politics and became the third largest religion of Vietnam (Perrin, 2011; Smith, 1970; Farid, 2010). Since its beginning, Caodaism attracted more followers than any other movement in Vietnam and it fulfilled the vacuum of the religious, political, and social dynamics among the Vietnamese. Sikhism originated with a reformative outlook against the existing social, and religious instabilities and gradually it has

become one of the most influential religions in India and now it is the fifth-largest religion in the world (Almasy, 2018). Both the religions were misunderstood and there was the tendency to remove Sikhism and Caodaism from the position of a distinct independent religion. Sikhism was called the sect of Hinduism, sometimes a syncretism of Hinduism and Buddhism. Similarly, Caodaism was also marked as the peasant movement, reformed Buddhism, military movement, political movement, etc. (Blagov, 1999; Oliver, 1976; Perrin, 2011).

As it has been mentioned before, no religion can remain aloof from the socio-political thoughts of its homeland, and its followers, Caodaism and Sikhism both had developed a sense of political and social consciousness. Caodaism, according to some scholars, evolved as an anti-colonial expression, patriotism, and national sentiment. Sikhism also developed a sense of political involvement by introducing *Khalsa*, and two swords; *Miri* and *Piri* symbolizing temporal and spiritual sides of Sikhism. During the period of Guru Hargobind, a group of 300 bodyguards was maintained and it was directed towards political functions. This attempt was a defensive measure against the emperor Jehangir. This political outlook got more intense during the period of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, and he refined the Sikh community as a military order, forming the *Khalsa* (Oxtoby, 1996). However, the development of political notions did not divert the motion of Sikhism and Caodaism towards a complete political movement. Hence, they have emerged as organized religions with a strong religious identity. Since this research does not intend to study the political sides of Caodaism and Sikhism, further discussion on this particular topic has been omitted.

Oliver (1976) states that the peasants of both China and Vietnam found little difficulty in accepting the three Asian religions, viz. Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism with their native or indigenous religious beliefs. The fact was none of these religions were mutually exclusive and the tendency to add and adapt their rituals and teachings to other religions made them tend to be “syncretic”. Hanh (1967) adds that Vietnamese find no problem in asserting and accepting the faith of other religions despite having their own religion, such as a Vietnamese who professes Confucianism does not deny his belief in Buddhism, nor a Buddhist disbelieves Confucianism. That is why, the accuracy of claiming the number of Vietnamese Buddhist is a difficult one because examining the faith of a Vietnamese Buddhist it is found that the elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism intimately mixing with the native beliefs that existed before the introduction of these three religions in Vietnam. The Vietnamese soul is dominated by the synthesis of these three religions. Durand (1952) observes that socially the Vietnamese are generally Confucian, generally Buddhist from the religious point of view, from the pragmatic side, the manifestations of the Vietnamese spirit (non-regulated characteristics) are Taoist.

Although India has a long-rooted history of tolerance and interreligious harmony, synthesis and assimilation of other religions side by side of their own religion are completely peculiar for the Indians. It cannot be denied that Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism have many similarities in their beliefs and practices but to the followers, it is an essential part of each religion with different applications, no one will claim that they had borrowed that part of their religion from another religion nor will claim that they are following more than one religion. Assimilation of cultures and

festivals are common in Indian life and showing respect, inviting each other and visiting each other's festivals, and enjoying are the essential parts of Indian culture. This is the practical vibe of unity in diversity. Respecting, accepting the differences does not mean denying one's own faith or adopting other faiths besides one's own religion.

Manifestation of Caodaism is deeply rooted in "Spiritualism". Nineteenth-century has been marked as the rise of European Spiritualism (Nartonis, 2010). European spiritualism was brought into Vietnam during the French colonial period. Consequently, the age-old traditional Asian divination and Taoist mediumship came under the influence of European Spiritualism. That confluence was revolutionary for the rise of the human quest for spiritualism and it took an evolutionary leap and consummated in its final phase forming new Vietnamese spiritism that is "Cao Dai Spiritism ". Ngo Van Chieu, founder of Caodaism, was also very interested in religions, especially Asian classics and Western spiritism from his childhood. He was the ardent follower of the French spiritist writer Flammarion since 1902. In 1917, he introduced the Dao Phat Dong sect and attended many spirit-mediumship sessions commonly known as seances. In search of a cure for his ailing mother, Chieu became deeply attached to seances and Chieu influenced other groups of people who are interested in spirit mediumship and began seances frequently. Gradually Ngo Van Chieu became the influential figure for spirit-mediumship. After six years of intense veneration of Duc Cao Dai, Chieu is said to have been assigned this new divine mission and became the first disciple of God. Through him, as all Caodaists believe,

God announced His new religion as the Third Universal Amnesty to the Vietnamese in particular and thereby to the world in general.

Guru Nanak, the first Guru and the founder of Sikhism did not feel the necessity to start a new path suddenly. Historical accounts and his life testimonies (Janamsakhis) state that from his childhood, Nanak had the opportunity to meet both Hindus and Muslims, the society in which he grew up was liberal enough to pose a friendly gesture to each religion. Again, it is known that the governor of Talwandi (birthplace of Guru Nanak) Rai Bular converted to Islam from Hinduism, but he had maintained equal respect for both religions. Rai Bular wanted to establish a tolerant outlook among the followers of Hinduism and Islam and encouraged reconciliation between the conflicting ideas of Hinduism and Islam (Chatterji, 1971). Nanak found interest in Rai Bular's thoughts and made him his friend. It is said that Nanak's first friend was a Muslim and Nanak, from a very early stage of his life, came closer with the Islamic ideologies, Dervishes, Hindu sadhus, etc.

Guru Nanak's philosophy and motivations were significantly shaped by the Sant Tradition and Sufism. In north India, Sant tradition was very popular in those days. *Sant*, according to some, can be identified with the Sanskrit sadhu, holy ascetic, and another etymology of Sant is *Sat* which is "truth" not to be confused with the English word "saint". Some Sants were the followers of the *Nirguna Sampradaya* teachings that uphold the belief that God is divine and beyond description, transcendence of God without any form. The Bhakti movement of Hinduism was an important element in Sant tradition. Bhakti was based on pure love for the Supreme Being. The second element can be connected with the Saivites of North India who are called the Naths.

They were the devotees of Lord Siva. The Naths were among those who contributed a strong emphasis on experiencing unity to the Sant movement, bridging a duality between the practitioner and the divine. Interpreters looking at Nanak's piety see an awareness of this emphasis. Another most influential factor was the environment of Sufism, Islamic mystic tradition. It is said that Sufi elements were influential in Sant tradition and Guru Nanak (Oxtoby, 1996).

Among the famous Sant poet-mystics were Namdev, Ravidas, and Kabir. All of them have a significant contribution to the Sikh scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The founder of Sikhism is Guru Nanak, but its founding is keenly associated with Kabir who was a mystic and was eager to seek truth wherever, no matter in whatever faith it is found (Islam, 2016). Kabir and his ideas influenced Guru Nanak greatly for adopting a syncretic approach towards truth. Kabir's personal religious view was mystical and a sense of union with the divine, transgressing the barriers of castes and religions. Kabir used to identify himself as the "child of both Allah and Rama". To the Sants, God is the loving one which is much similar to Sufism. God's love is manifested both in the world and in the human heart. Devotion to God as the Sat Guru (true teacher) rejects the mediumship of priestly class, social distinctions, and formal ritual. This devotion is expressed in poetry with accessible vernacular dialects along with repetitive God's name for meditation. This notion of experiencing God has become a central feature of Sikh devotion (Oxtoby, 1996, p. 179-81).

Nanak grew up in a society of Hindu majority and political dominant Muslim minority. Punjab of Guru Nanak was much diverse spiritually and culturally but unlike Vietnam, it was not largely assimilative and syncretic. To the Sikhs, the rise of

Sikhism was not the result of full assimilation or synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. It was the repercussion of the personal thoughts and philosophy of Guru Nanak who led the movement for an egalitarian society. Besides, Guru Nanak wanted that all should embrace the truth whenever or wherever it is found. That is why Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib consists of the religious, ethical teachings from both religions along with other philosophical thoughts of that period. The rise of Nanak was a reformation for the then existing society. Sometimes Guru Nanak is compared with the German reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) who almost shares a similar life span like Guru Nanak. In north India and Europe, both criticized dogmatism, priestcraft, and emphasized the religious insights and that is why they proclaimed the need to spread religious teachings through vernacular rather than ancient sacred language (Nesbitt, 2005).

Comparative study shows that the theological motivation behind the emergence of Caodaism was centered on the unity of all religions. “Third Amnesty of Universal Salvation” or the “Third Revelation of the Great Way” focused on interreligious harmony and calls for direct communication with God forming the universal brotherhood. Vietnamese aptness to syncretism anticipated the adoption of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism along with traditional Vietnamese religious beliefs. Vietnamese socio-historical and cultural context shows that this country has had an age-old tradition of religious tolerance and harmony, that helped Vietnam to be a meeting place of different religions and cultures. Vietnamese spiritual life was more focused on the harmony of the present rather than salvation in the hereafter. Prime focus on ethics constituted the amalgam of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian ethics. Amid

this synthesis, Caodaism emerged structured by the doctrines of “Three Great Teachings” and flourished as an independent religion of the world with distinct doctrines, sacred canons, unique features, and a large number of adherents.

The context of the emergence of Sikhism was slightly different. Not only Punjab, but also whole India is the storehouse of age-old civilizations, religions, philosophies, and cultures. India gave birth to four major World Religions, viz., Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and many more philosophical schools and sub-schools within these religions. Punjab was and still is one of the influential provinces of India and a hub of trade and political movement. Like Vietnam, the Indian tradition of pluralism, tolerance towards different faiths, and a sense of harmony made India and also Punjab a meeting ground of diversity. Besides this, the Hindu and Muslim background of Punjab was influential in developing a sense of harmony. Philosophies of the Upanishads, moral and ethical teachings of the great Epics; *the Ramayana*, and *the Mahabharata* produced an emotional form of faith, Bhakti philosophy based on the Vedas were significantly in contrast to the corrupt Brahmanical Hinduism. The philosophies of Ramanuja and Shankara were also very impactful and insightful for growing a mature sense of understanding of God. Saint Ramananda of North India initiated the mingling of castes and also welcomed Muslims to be a part of his circle. Dialogue between the Hindus and the Muslims started from the time of Ramananda (Bigger, 2004). Islam entered India by not following the means of invasion and trade, the introduction of Islam in India occurred through more peaceful means. Scholars have admitted that the process of achieving the heart of India was not won through invasion but the scholarly approach of the Sufis. Sufis were focused on the experience

of God, submission to the will of God through love and devotion. The Sufis showed the way of embracing all the faiths through a harmonious bonding (*Talif-i-Kulub*), “the stringing together of hearts” (Bigger, 2004). Besides these, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jain philosophy of God, harmony, Ahimsa (non-violence) provided the significant footings for growing up a notion of empathy and harmony.

Unfortunately, the 15th century of India had experienced tremendous political unrest. The conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims polarized both religions. Muslim overlords gained an aggressive attitude while the Hindus fall for their excessive conservatism, superstition, and social stratification. The emergence of Sikhism is seen as the need for interreligious and social harmony and a protest against tyranny both in religious and political spheres. Hinduism and Islam were the major religions of Punjab but unfortunately, both of them were escaping from their root casteism, the degrading situation of women, intolerance among the faiths, over-materialism compelled Guru Nanak to preach the message of harmony. Guru Nanak through his teachings deeply criticized this polarization and emphasized bringing a correction in all those aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism which resulted from that polarization.

The dress that Nanak wore showed a remarkable combination of the Hindu and Muslim patterns (Chatterji, 1971). Nanak’s policy was to show equal respect to all. He had proved his loyalty and interreligious harmony to all sections of people. That made him a man of respect irrespective of all the religions not only in India but also his deep philosophical understanding of God and spirituality made him a man with high wisdom even outside of India. Sikh theology is based on the unity of God and brotherhood. Sikhism was a voice against the injustice that existed in the then society.

Guru Nanak and the other Gurus have adopted many elements of Hinduism and Islam and the Sikh scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib* is unique in the world for comprising the writings of the writers belonging to different faiths. A deep insight was behind that, Guru Nanak was a truth seeker and his nine successive Gurus followed the trend and they accumulated the truth wherever they found it. That was a tremendous example of egalitarianism and Catholicism.

Sikhism and Caodaism do not force or influence anyone to convert into Sikhism and Caodaism. Both of the religions put emphasis on interreligious harmony and bringing back the primordial harmony with God. Guru Nanak's approach was different from the other religious founders. To promote harmony and recompilation, he emphasized the Hindu to be good Hindu and so to the Muslims. His philosophy was simple, interreligious harmony and brotherhood. Unlike Caodaism, Sikh theology does not propagate any "combination of religions" or founded upon the basis on any one or more particular religions. For Caodaism, its basic tenet-monotheism corresponds to Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Bahai conviction and on the other hand, the spiritist sources and its doctrinal characters are in agreement with Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, etc. As religions, society, culture, and ideologies work as an integrated complex, similarities between a new religion and the old ones are natural. No religion in an absolute sense can be regarded as a pure distinct type of religion without having a single similarity with the previous religions and existing cultural values. Caodaism followed a syncretic approach without uprooting its spiritist origin and indigenous elements. Importantly, Caodaism invariably assimilated into a homogenous tradition that can be called a synthesis of great teachings.

On the other hand, the Sikh concept of absolute monotheism has a deep connection with Islam, the concept of reincarnation, and rebirth seem to be the adoption from Hinduism but for Sikhism, those similarities are not blind imitations. The ideologies are also the personal experience and thoughts of Guru Nanak that he realized from a very young age. It is true that Sikhism also followed the same way in collecting and synthesizing the great teachings of the world but Sikhism firmly denies addressing Sikhism as a “synthesis of faith”. There is a dilemma associated with Sikhism that Sikhism is often regarded as one of the sects of Hinduism. But this claim has no such strong arguments and logic. Theologically and popularly Hinduism stands on the three most important pillars, such as; the Vedas, the Caste system (not the caste system of grading people based on their birth and race but their work), and the concept of God that includes a large pantheon of deities. Perspicuously, Sikhism is not based on any of these three elements and there is no such concept in Sikhism that resembles any of these three pillars. Thus, both of the religions are rich in unique philosophy and doctrines that fill the vacuums of the need and aspiration of faith and shelter for their followers and as well as fulfill all the criteria to be noted as “independent” religions of the world⁸.

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See Myhre (2009), especially chapter 1 for more clarification regarding the criteria of religion.

5.2.2 Concept of Unity of God as the basis for Interreligious Harmony

In this thesis, it has been found that both Sikhism and Caodaism are monotheistic religions in character. While Sikhism is uncompromisingly monotheistic in its Godhead, Caodaism to some extent is vague in identifying one and only God. This vagueness is the result of affirming different categories of spirits, including Genies, Sage, saint, Sephardim, and Buddha (Blagov, 1976). It is the result of the influence of Western and Asian concepts of spirits that played a role in developing the Vietnamese concept of Spiritism and naturally, Caodaism got influenced by it. Again, there is a sign of a female character which is much relatable to the Taoist concept of *Yin* and *Yang*. However, it is generally taken as the female expression of the one Supreme Being and denies the possibility of a Goddess (Gobron, 1950).

Sikhism from its very inception is a monotheistic religion and there is no place for admitting other spirits and incarnations of God in Sikh theology. God in Sikhism is all-pervading, absolute, Supreme eternal reality, creator, sustainer, and destroyer of all creation. He is the God for all, not confined to any nation and specific religion, He is the God of grace, He is loving, has no enmity with any of His creation and to Him everyone is equal. In the Cao Dai theology of God, Caodaists consider that Supreme God (Duc Cao Dai) is the reason for the creation of all and His position is high above all. Veneration of all messengers of all the religions and accepting the existence of spirits are secondary to the Supreme God. Thus, Caodaism has a strong ground for claiming itself as a monotheistic religion and this monotheism is essential to the Cao Dai philosophy of interreligious harmony.

The concept of the unity of God in Sikhism and Caodaism is very essential to understand the approach towards interreligious harmony of these two religions. The oneness of God is not constricted within the theological precept but also it has a dynamic sociological principle that rejuvenated the prejudiced social norms and religious hierarchy. The underlying philosophy of “Cao Dai” which stands for the Supreme Palace, High Palace. Guru Nanak’s concept of “*Ek Onkar*” implies that there is One God who is the common source for our origin, source of the creation of this universe, and all the religions born out of Him. It also assures that God has manifested Himself differently in different epochs and He is remembered by the myriad names.

According to Cao Dai theology, God is all-loving and He has communicated with mankind since the beginning of time. The Supreme Being has revealed His will to human beings many times. As it has been discussed that Caodaism divided the history of religions into three categories and admits the fact that all the previous religions and their messengers are divine as they were sent by God to guide mankind. But because of the limitations of human beings and as the messages of God were sent through the human beings according to Caodaism, those messages were not followed correctly that is why this is the time when God designed to manifest the third revelation through a unique method. This time God speaks to humanity directly. A strong communicational link had been established through the spiritism of Caodaism that linked heaven and earth. This third revelation wills for the unification of mankind towards a harmonious society of self-cultivation and reunification with the divine spirit of Supreme Being.

“Unity of God ” in Sikhism was a direct and most powerful shake to the inertia and amnesia of the society. Unity of Godhead challenged the heinous caste system of

society. It also challenged many of the social issues like underestimation of women including women infanticide, priestly class, and their unethical dominance that checked the real positive growth of religions both in Hinduism and Islam. Sikh concept of "Unity of God " stood for socialism, democracy, and secularism. Sikh concept of secularism was a much progressive and most harmonious one, that promulgated the need for human fraternity and interreligious and intra-religious harmony. By making "Unity of God " as the basis, both Sikhism and Caodaism adopted the most systematic and strategic way to divert humanity to harmony. This unity was a revolutionary approach and it proffered the concept of "inclusive monotheism" that was very appealing to the seeker of interreligious harmony. Man Made problems such as complexing religious dogmas, competition over religions, degrading position within own religions because of caste and gender made the adherents somewhat suffocated. The concept of "Unity of God" in Sikhism and Caodaism provided a comfort zone for the common people where people found acceptance and a respectful identity.

To avoid any kind of misinterpretation of the messages of God that can cause interreligious conflict and misunderstanding about God, Caodaism believes that God has now established direct communication through "spiritism". But in Sikhism, there is no such concept of "spiritism". To be fixed with the essentials of God, Sikhism emphasizes meditation and repetition of God's name which is called *Naam Japna* or *Naam Simran*. Sikhism sharply rejects the necessity of an ordained priest and Pope for the preservation of the faith. Any Sikh can lead prayers and recite the holy scriptures in the congregation. In each Gurdwara, a *Granthi* is appointed who organizes the daily

prayers and reads from the holy Guru Granth Sahib. A *Granthi* cannot be called a priest, he is respected as the reader of the Guru Granth Sahib. In contrast, Caodaism has a priesthood and a high position for the Pope. The Pope in Caodaism is the head of the executive body. He is believed to be the representative of God who is bestowed the responsibility to watch over the preservation of His (God) religion in this world (Blagov, 1999).

Both Caodaism and Sikhism believe in the dynamic nature of God. God is both transcendent and immanence according to these religions. According to Caodaism, God is the spirit of all, His existence is found in all His creations and He reigns in everyone's heart. God is sometimes regarded as personal in Caodaism but strictly maintains that God cannot be treated as a person and cannot be attributed to anthropomorphism (Alam, 2010; Tap 2000). God in Sikhism is perceived as all-pervading God and His essence can be found within the spiritual realization. God is not a distant entity. He is the cause of all and an indwelling spirit of all. Again, both Caodaism and Sikhism believe that God was before the creation of the world, which means He is different from His creation, which makes a clear distinction from monism, therefore God is transcendent. God is beyond human comprehension. This is also the sign of God's transcendence. God is immanent in both religions because God is the source of all creation, He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. He is present everywhere and He is the sole director of the universe.

There exists a clear difference between Sikhism and Caodaism. In Caodaism, there are multiple mentions of the incarnation and reincarnation of God in this world. A message from God was received in January 1926, in which God emphasized his

identity more strongly by claiming to be another revelation of Jesus Christ. And among the Chieu Minh disciples, Nog Minh Chieu is regarded as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. But in Sikhism, there is no scope for incarnation and reincarnation of God, in fact, Sikhism strongly opposes the concept of the incarnation of God and is often critical to the concept of *Avataravada* of Hinduism. Despite having some minimal differences in the adaptation of the concept of God in Caodaism and Sikhism, there is no scope of discord that both the religions propagate a unity of God formulates a base of interreligious harmony. This unity is the strong ground for understanding the unity of mankind and all. Both Caodaism and Sikhism believe that they have a similar God like others and God is one, everything in this universe is the creation of this only "One God " and thus there is no scope for mutual conflict. We all are connected through One Supreme God. That is why interreligious harmony is inevitable for acknowledging the unity of God.

5.2.3 The Concept of Unity and Interreligious Harmony

Sikhism and Caodaism have raised the voice for the unity of mankind and removing all kinds of intolerance and injustice in the name of religions, race, sex, social backgrounds, and nationality. For moving towards an empathetic society of harmonious pluralism, both of the religions started from the core problem. From a scientific and sociological perspective, Caodaism and Sikhism were much ahead of their times and endorsed the most systematic approach in reducing social, religious, and psychological gaps that existed among the then people. As it has been found the fundamental concept of Sikhism and Caodaism is the "unity of God" and that unity of

God in its first attempt rejects the hierarchy of social status and any other pseudo differences regarding the social status, race, gender, and religions.

Sikhism has witnessed the deterioration of human dignity in the name of caste and gender. Guru Nanak's first prophetic message was "there is no Hindu, no Muslim", this sentence is short but emphasized and pointed towards the very basic and innate concept of unity, equity, equality, human dignity, and humanity. This sentence itself alone stood for the voice of the oppressed and the realization of the fakeness of gender and caste biases. Sikhism promoted the world to be with a single race in the name of humanity, free from all kinds of racial, national, gender, religious, and caste biases. Guru Nanak and the other influential nine Gurus were determined to the fact that this world should be a just one and there should be a perfect balance of emotions, desires, and thoughts among mankind. Making a certain group elite and keeping others submerged in superstition, illiteracy and overall, mentally backward is unprogressive and opposite to development and integrity thus chaos is bound to happen in any society like this.

Comparative analysis shows that the Cao Dai concept of the unity of mankind has its footing on the fundamental principles confirmed in 1946 that is "the adoration of God", "the Father of all" (Gobron, 1950). This doctrine foregrounds the universalistic attitude of Caodaism that views that all mankind is the members of a single universal family. Both Caodaism and Sikhism promote the way to divinize mankind by breaking away the parochial illusion of caste, creed, nationality, color, race, language, gender, and religion. An ecumenical and universal fraternity, according to Caodaism and Sikhism, is essential for uniting the Ultimate Reality that God is One with diverse

names. Consequently, this ultimate reality rejects the misconceptions of multiple God and prejudice and monopoly of religions.

Both Sikhism and Caodaism have addressed the social problems more pragmatically and got rid of the cocoon of individualistic or anthropocentric patterns. Both of them have formulated an effective structure of understanding the importance of the environment including animals, plants, and other non-organic elements of the environment. Sikh and Cao Dai theology of God and mankind is not a mere vertical one, it also suggests a horizontal relation between mankind and environment in its upgraded version it is a triangle or circle that implies an intertwined relationship of God, mankind, and the environment. The Sikh concept of *Sarbat Da Bhala* denotes a corporate character that suggests selfless service to all including the environment. The *Sarbat Da Bhala* is a deep philosophical thought that should not be confined to only humankind. It is holistic in approach and suggests the dynamic, progressive thought of Sikhism towards nature. The concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) was uttered by Guru Nanak also, in his sayings, no one is my enemy, no is a foreigner, with all I am at peace, God within us render us incapable of hate and prejudice (Guru Nanak's Universal Message, cited in Balakrishnan, 2014, p. 45). In the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak strongly proposed for the protection of the mother earth, saying: "*pava guru p pit m t dharat mahat*" meaning: "Air is the Guru, Water is the "Father", and Earth is the "Great Mother of all" (Guru Granth Sahib, p.8). Caodaism is perhaps one of those religions that has witnessed the catastrophe of environmental destruction more than any other religion. Being one of the newest, it has witnessed the twentieth-century problems from the beginning, and for the Vietnamese, wars and their

disastrous consequences are part of their history and this resulted in the growth of environmental consciousness simultaneously to the consciousness of humanity and brotherhood. This consciousness is the principal part of the Cao Dai faith and it is stressed in prayer to Cao Dai: “The life of the heart to love all men, all beings, to love all life, all divine life, angelic, human, animal, vegetable, mineral, and atomic life. I ask you to love the earth, water, fire, air, the pebbles of the road, and the stars of the heavens. Position of order in repose. That of rest which must be an act of grace” (Blagov, 1950, p. 43).

Both Sikhism and Caodaism agree on the point that the “unity of mankind” paves the way for interreligious harmony of religions. One of the basics of these two religions is that both of them do not propagate that their respective religion is the only truth and to get salvation one has to convert into Sikhism or Caodaism. Caodaism and Sikhism stemmed from the very concept of tolerance and interreligious harmony that make these two religions unique among all. Although almost all of the religions show much tenderness and respect towards other faiths, Sikhism and Caodaism are unique in that sense that more or less both of them have accepted the “truths” of other religions, more elaborately the philosophy and teachings of different faiths as their part of fundamental belief system, confess this synthesis, acknowledge that all the religions are valid and true and made interreligious harmony as their core. Though these two religions do not promote conversion and are yet not marked as a devoted missionary religion, they keep the certain option for those who want to be the official member of these two religions performing certain initiation rites.

While Caodaism is “millenarian” in outlook, professes that the “Third Universal Era of Salvation” was bound to appear. Because people have distorted the unity with God by misinterpreting and exploiting the words and guidance of God. Besides, according to Caodaism, the previous two salvations faced language, cultural, spatial, and racial barriers, in this third salvation God chose to connect with the people for ensuring the primordial unity of the divine Supreme Being and as well as dismisses the doctrine of any fourth era of salvation. Caodaism explains that the need for a third amnesty is the consequence of the limitations of the previous faiths but this does not reject the previous faiths at all. Caodaism is about bridging the gaps caused by the human frailty nature and evil motives of some people. Through this new amnesty of salvation, the unity of the Great Ways will be formed.

On the other hand, Sikhism is not a millenarian religion and does not provide any such concept of salvation period. According to Sikhism, all religions are intact in their own positions. It is the fault of the people, especially those who are the traders of religions and because of them, people are not stuck to their own convictions. Guru Nanak repeatedly said: “do not call the Muslims that their religion is false, do not call the Hindus that their religion is not true, those who do so are nothing but the liars and traders of falsity” (Guru Nanak’s sayings, cited in Islam, 2017, p. 9). In both religions, it has been ensured that any of the religions are not false, either it was misunderstood or the people were misguided and still they are being misguided and that is causing the problems of intolerance and bloodshed.

The confusing part of studying interreligious harmony and unity of mankind is assuming “unity” as the “uniformity”. While uniformity is turning all into one, unity is

for becoming united for a common goal. If we perceive the common goal as “peace”, then it is the obligatory responsibility to be united for peace. In the domain of study and physical approach of interreligious dialogue, a search for identifying the commonality and common ground is inevitable. Without finding and reaching the common goal, the appeal, and necessity of interreligious dialogue vanishes. The common goals may be global peace, social cohesion, and inclusive harmony. In brief, the motive of dialogue is to reach a solution, based on understanding and genuine empathy. This solution could be related to any certain problem not necessarily always directly connected to inter or intra-religious harmony. For example, in the recent time of COVID-19 pandemic, this side of interreligious dialogue has been felt greatly. During this global pandemic, the need for reexamining and reanalyzing certain religious injunctions such as religious funeral rites, praying during epidemic and pandemic have come into focus. Besides, social media awareness, community services, and overall awareness building have become the most crucial points of dialogue. The world has seen unprecedented unity and cooperation of the religious leaders along with interfaith activists, peace-builders and other stakeholders. Therefore, many profound, relevant, and practical solutions have come in practice. This “unity” is the basis of interreligious dialogue. This “unity” should not be considered synonymous with monolithism. Monolithism supports the concepts of orthodoxy and rigidity in ideology where the natural tendency is to divert the differences into “one” which is considered a barrier in the concept of unity in diversity.

Both Caodaism and Sikhism are clear in their position on the concept of “unity”. Caodaism and Sikhism believe in freedom of religion and reject the concept of extra *ecclesiam nulla salus* which means “outside the Church no salvation” (Hartney, 2008). Both religions are universal in nature and outspoken about their syncretic nature. Caodaism affirms that Cao Dai (the path being taught) without being Cao Dai is the true Cao Dai, more elaborately, various religions contain the one primordial truth that is Cao Dai (God). If the Cao Dai religion defines Cao Dai (the path) as a separate entity and as the only true path, it would not be true Cao Dai. It would be truly Cao Dai if it embraces all the path towards God (Tap, 2000). Sikhism is identical with this view. God, in Sikhism, is not a separate entity. As it has been mentioned before, Guru Nanak called the God “True Name” (*Satnam*) and avoided any particular name (Nesbett, 2005). Guru Nanak’s philosophy behind that was to accept the diverse ways towards God. In Sikhism, God is known by many names but He is eternally one that embraces all the faiths towards Him. This embracement is the unity of thought that all the faiths are one same principle and that teaches tolerance, empathy, and harmony between the religions.

In the study of interreligious harmony of Sikhism and Caodaism, it has been explored that both religions are more open in their acceptance of the different faiths compared to the Abrahamic faiths. In doing so, these religions emphasize globalism, which calls for global unity. This globalism is finely explained in Caodaism: “Formerly people of the world lacked means of transportation, therefore they did not know each other. Nowadays, all parts of the world are explored: humanity, knowing itself better, aspires to real peace. But because of the very multiplicity of religions, humanity does not

always live in harmony. That is why I decided to unite all these religions into One to bring them back to the primordial unity” (Caodai Holy Message, 1926, cited in Caodai Overseas Missionary, *The Third Universal Amnesty of God*, 1999). Besides, these two religions are universalistic in nature that includes respect and high position for the prophets of different faiths and other religious personalities in their faith. It should be noted that Baha'i Faith also includes Krishna and Buddha in its prophetic lineage. However, from an analytical perspective, questions may arise: What is the necessity of this universality? Is it for attracting more people to their newly emerged faith? Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw opine that this is the “politics of religious synthesis”, which is the ideal way to attract the widest possible audience (Shaw & Stewart, 1994, p.7). This comment is partially correct but cannot be accepted fully. For Caodaism, as Blagov (1999) states, this religion ‘was built up and gathered dogmas as it gathered adherents’ (Blagov, 1999, p.17) This is also true for Sikhism. Sikhism took a long time to emerge as a distinct full-fledged religion and the doctrines were compiled in the holy *Guru Granth Sahib* during the periods of the Sikh Gurus from 1469-1708. From this perspective, it is identifiable that the universalistic approach was not developed overnight and Caodaism, and Sikhism were not put before the common people as a tempting cake to attract the adherents. Factually, religion grows with its followers and this process is never-ending. Rather it is applicable for almost all world religions.

From a critical perspective, one can question whether the concepts of “universality” and “globalism” as well as the syncretism of Caodaism and Sikhism lowers the necessity of the ancient faiths? The answer is no. As these religions are not claiming

that they are the “only true” religions, then theologically this presupposition is incorrect. If people are interested in converting to any new faith influenced by the appeal of universality and globalism, then it is common for all religions as the conversion is common for all the faiths. Unity of mankind, God, and religion of Sikhism and Caodaism promotes a sense of universal religion. From the harmonious perspective, the call for a universal religion indicates a sense of global unity i.e., fraternity.

Now, we can ask the question: Is it possible? Do all the people of the world follow a universal religion besides their fundamental religions? It seems quite problematic when we identify this notion with the word “religion”. As common people are used to hearing and using the word “religion” only for the existing faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, etc. The concept of universal religion can be expressed through the “social sense” of religion (Tiwari, 2012). The etymological meaning of religion is ‘binding together a new (re + legare = religion, re = Again; legare= to bind together)’ (Islam & Islam, 2016). If we consider religion as the way of life then it makes it easier for anyone to understand the concept of “universal religion” that promotes a universal way towards peace, keeping intact one’s convictions.

The Cao Dai concept of the advent of “Third Amnesty” is for the unity of the homo sapiens. This is an inclusive attempt for peace where the ultimate goal is to establish peace from the position of each religion. From the perspective of syncretic religions, universality and globalism mean the strategy to deal with the various temperaments of the world by mixing the different elements of different religions and to become suitable for the global sustainable pluralism. This seems one of the most pragmatic

responses to deal with many global problems. In this growing diversified world, promotion for the uniformity of religion or waiting for all the religions to become one is quite impossible and unrealistic.

At the same time, while theoretically, the concept of universal religion sounds easier, but in the practical realm, it is quite complex. There are several issues included in this process. Religions of the world are significantly different from each other on many points, how could all be in agreement for a universal religion? To solve this problem, the interreligious dialogue could be helpful. Through interreligious dialogue, one can get closer to each other. Despite differences, one can identify some internal bonding, spiritual knot, and sense of empathy in the dialogue process. In this process it can make people enthusiastic and sensible to follow the common way towards harmony and peace that fulfills the doctrines of universal religion.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Both Sikhism and Caodaism are less understood and, in some cases, misunderstood religions of the world. Sikhism, although one of the largest world religions, has been miscoded from its very inception as a blend of Hinduism and Islam. Unfortunately, still to a large section of people and even to some scholars, Sikhism is a sect of Hinduism. Thus, Sikhism is still brawling for its recognition as an independent religion (Islam & Islam, 2012). Caodaism is another independent religion of the world that had its origin in Vietnam but to the majority of the world, this religion is unknown. In the academic field of religions, Eastern religions have gained late introduction compared to Western ones. For Caodaism, it is said that to some extent, it is the Caodaists who are responsible for the later disclosure of Caodaism to the world than the Western ignorance. Because, in the early stages, it was the deliberate intention of the Caodaists to conceal their activities especially from the French. It has also been claimed that it is a traditional tendency of the Vietnamese religious sects to maintain secrecy about their innermost belief system and that resulted in the small amount of literature on Caodaism (around 1950-1) in French and English (Smith, 1970).

To meet this gap, Sikhism and Caodaism have been explored from religious and academic perspectives to comply with the standard of the academic study of religion as well as to give a better understanding of the research theme. As the fundamental

rule of the comparative study of religion, neutrality and empathy have been followed in identifying similarities and differences between the religions. Unnecessary criticisms and discussions on the weak and strong points of these two religions have been avoided to make the current study consistent with the research problem. Relevant issues such as syncretism, Khalsa, arguments for considering Sikhism and Caodaism as independent religions have been discussed and analyzed for clarifying the core concept; interreligious harmony. Therefore, theoretical and analytical arguments have been constructed based on impartial, honest, and factual judgments.

To make this research work more relevant and to provide enough room for critical reasoning, a brief but constructive background study has been made on both religions to find out the congenial elements that played a role in developing the notion of interreligious harmony in Sikhism and Caodaism. It has been explored and analyzed that both Sikhism and Caodaism had experienced significant social, cultural, and religious transitions simultaneously. These religions have had a great influence on their respective socio-cultural and religious spheres and that caused the rapid expansions of these religions.

Since these religions do not provide sufficient direct mentions and theories regarding interreligious harmony, the researcher has structured these two religions within the outlines of unity of God, unity of mankind, and unity of religions. These outlines have made the concepts related to interreligious harmony easier and more organized. It has been found that both Indian and Vietnamese innate elements regulated the beginning of Sikhism and Caodaism and gradually obtained the position as independent religions. Guru Nanak and Ngo Minh Chiu were undoubtedly the men of advanced

thoughts and through their charismatic leadership and teachings, they made people influenced for their new thoughts. Both religions propagate that there is only one God and He is the source of all the creations. Through this fundamental doctrine, Caodaism and Sikhism assure that religions are many but mankind is one. All are connected through a single root. The root is the Supreme Being; God though He is called by different names in different religions.

Sikhism states that all religions are true but people failed to understand their messages. Caodaism also proposes a similar concept and adds that God has sent his messengers and prophets in the first two revelatory periods to guide people, but those messages were misinterpreted by the human beings because of their innate frailty nature and in some cases, the messages were cultural, time, and spatial bound. That is why a third revelation was required to form the primordial unity with God. Thus, “Third Revelation of the Great Way” was established through a direct communication with God focused on the interreligious harmony which calls for a direct communication with God forming the universal brotherhood. Sikhism does not promulgate any third revelatory period but calls for an urgent need to establish harmony by establishing a spiritual connection with God by meditation and repetition of various names (qualities) of God.

Both Sikhism and Caodaism are very dynamic in their philosophies. Comparative study of the unity of mankind has explored that Sikhism emerged as a bold righteous voice against the 15th century social degradations. Guru Nanak from his childhood was uncompromised against any kind of injustice and illogical social functions. Sikhism from its very inception understood that unity and harmony of religions are not possible

if the unity of mankind is not established. That is why Sikhism stood forward against the false casteism of Hinduism, female infanticide, Sati custom, restricting the lives of women in the name of veil, etc. It is unequivocally said that Sikh concepts of *Sangat* and *Pangat* were a revolution against those social, and psychological decays. Both Sikhism and Caodaism teach that all mankind is the members of a single universal family and that is why it is absolutely necessary to diminish those parochial illusions and ego of caste, creed, nationality, color, race, gender, and religion. Universalism is the cardinal concept of Sikhism. Sikhism opposes the concept of any chosen land and chosen people. Sikhism upholds the primary essential concerns such as social, political, cultural, and economic are universal and equal for all (Mayell, 2006). A harmonious, universal fraternity is the will of God and those who destroy this harmony are devoid of the grace of God.

Comparative study of the unity of religions shows that both Sikh and Cao Dai understanding of the unity of God and mankind ensures the unity of religions. This unity of religions must not be confused with the unification of religions. Caodaism and Sikhism are very practical and conscious about their standpoints on this concept. Sikhism has categorically said that all the faiths are “true” and anyone who disrespects and denies any of the faiths deny the truth of God and they are nothing but the traders of falsity (See, *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1350). Caodaism affirms that the root of all religions is the same and all the previous religions have taught us these same teachings and there is no scope of discord among religions. If the Cao Dai religion says that it is the only path towards God then it is not true Caodaism, rather it would be true if it

accepts and embraces all the paths towards God. Thus, the unity of religions posits a harmonious bond of all religions that leads towards global harmony and peace.

Through this study it can be ascertained that Sikh and Cao Dai concepts of interreligious harmony and unity were accepted by the majority of the people with great value. Not necessarily that all of them had converted to Sikhism and Caodaism but the philosophy of harmony of these religions attracted the attention of the people of irrespective religions. And still today their appeal is relevant to the common people. If their concepts were vague and irrelevant, they would surely be lost in the abyss of time. In this highly competitive global era both Caodaism and Sikhism are getting prominence and expanding throughout the world and that suggests that to the majority of people, teachings and philosophies of Sikhism and Caodaism matter significantly.

The research problem of this thesis and its subject matters are very pertinent to the contemporary academic domain. Interreligious harmony is getting the utmost significance in world affairs in dealing with multiple global problems. Today, religion, religious harmony, and other religion-related affairs are no more considered as personal convictions, rather they are considered with pragmatic significance, indispensable to cope with the problems like intolerance, extremism, and global terrorism. The necessity of studying religions could be finely understood by Professor Hans Kung's words: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions" (Boase, 2005, p.16). This thesis is relevant to both academic and non-academic pursuits. Therefore, the application of this research work does not end here. Thus, this thesis

leaves significant scopes for further intensive, analytical, and explorative research in this particular area or other related research problems.

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