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An Appraisal on ‘Embracing the Other’ in Praxis: The Inherent Unifying Dynamics of Community Meal Services in Religion

We know how special a meal is for a family and for any gathering. Eating together, being together and sharing from the same preparation builds bonds and deepens the commonality of a shared identity. This paper titled “An Appraisal on ‘Embracing the Other’ in Praxis: The Inherent Unifying Dynamics of Community Meal Services in Religion” attempts to present a practical approach of emulating the intrinsic values encapsulated within religious meal services. The presentation specifically focuses on Guru ka Langar in Sikhism and the Eucharist in Christianity.

Guru ka Langar is a community kitchen run in the name of the Guru, usually attached to a Gurudwara. Guru Nanak, the first Guru of Sikhism, started this communal meal, the Langar, which has served two primary intended purposes; firstly in fostering the principle of equality between all peoples of the world regardless of religion, caste, colour, age, gender or social status and secondly to put into practice the spirit of humble, selfless social service, thus expressing the ethics of sharing, community living and inclusiveness.

Jesus lived a life of selfless service and was endowed with supernatural capacities which were oriented for the welfare of the less fortunate ones in the society. Despite his enormous influence and power, he lived a simple and poor life and in humble service to humanity. In his last supper, although being their master, he washed the feet of his disciples and asked them to “do this in my memory” – that is, to embrace one another in love, service and humility. The Eucharist is this meal celebrated in memory of the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples.

Jesus’ call to “do this” in his memory, and Nanak’s vision of sharing the communal meal have the eternal principles of sacrifice, love, service and equality encapsulated in the meals they instituted. The effort in this paper (within the theme of the seminar: ‘Embracing the Other’ commemorating the International Day of Non-Violence) is to subtly attempt highlighting that within the in-depth study of these meals, there is an enormous scope for ‘embracing the other’ and facilitating the well-being of contemporary humankind.

Key Words: Langar, Eucharist, Community Meal, Service, Table Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

We know how special a meal is for a family and for any gathering. Eating together, being together and sharing from the same preparation, builds bonds and deepens the commonality of a shared identity. This paper titled “**An Appraisal on ‘Embracing the Other’ in Praxis: The Inherent Unifying Dynamics of Community Meal Services in Religion**” attempts to present a practical approach of emulating the intrinsic values encapsulated within religious meal services. The presentation specifically focuses on *Guru ka Langar* in Sikhism and the Eucharist in Christianity.

Guru ka Langar (literally meaning *Guru’s* communal dining-hall) is a community kitchen run in the name of the *Guru*, usually attached to a *gurudwara*.¹ Guru Nanak,² the first *Guru* of Sikhism, started this communal meal, the *Langar* (Hindi: लंगर) which has served two primary intended purposes; firstly in fostering the principle of equality between all peoples of the world regardless of religion, caste, colour, creed, age, gender or social status and secondly to put into practice the spirit of humble, selfless social service, thus expressing the ethics of sharing, community living, inclusiveness and oneness of all humankind.

Jesus lived a life of selfless service and was endowed with supernatural capacities which were oriented for the welfare of the less fortunate ones in the society. Despite his enormous influence and authority, he lived a simple and poor life and in humble service to humanity. He time and again shared table fellowship with social outcasts, the poor, the sick and the needy. In his last supper, although being their master, he washed the feet of his disciples and asked them to “do this in my memory” – that is, to live, like him, embracing one another in love, service and humility. The **Eucharist** is this meal celebrated in memory of the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples.

Being a Christian myself and having lived in the North of India and often amidst the multi-religious social setting, I was inspired to attempt presenting my experiences, research and reflections; sincerely acknowledging the inherent enormous potential for peace, sharing and human well-being, which we possess in our motherland. The effort in this paper (within the theme of the seminar: ‘Embracing the Other’ commemorating Gandhi Jayanti and the International Day of Non-Violence) is to subtly attempt highlighting the basic, intrinsic, similar and dissimilar aspects of the community meal of the Sikhs and the Eucharistic meal of the Christians, in a bid to foster and arrive at an inclusive, realistic, constructively critical, humane, mutually enriching, community and praxis-oriented paradigm.

This paper acknowledges that the present age is engulfed with the horrors of divisions and all that can keep us separated. But the presentation also recognises that Jesus’ call to “do this” in his memory, and Nanak’s vision of sharing the communal meal have the eternal principles of sacrifice, love, service and equality encapsulated in the meals they instituted. Thus a genuine and in-depth study of these meals, would for sure, provide us an enormous scope for ‘embracing the other’, widen our perspectives of understanding one another and facilitating the well-being of contemporary humankind.

1. GURU KA LANGAR

After presenting a brief description of *Guru ka Langar* in the introduction, this part of the paper attempts to reflect on the intrinsic aspects of *Sangat* and *Pangat* within the context of *Langar*. The twin concepts of *sangat* and *pangat* were introduced by Guru Nanak in a bid to

bring people together as a congregation for prayer, meditation, discourses and to share a meal of fellowship as well. Thus there was a sharing of a common bond in both, thought and deed; which enabled inculcating a common mode of worship and social praxis as well.

1. 1. Sangat

Guru Nanak had a subtle way of constructively challenging the prevailing status quo. Recognizing a level of individualism prevalent in the religious practices of his time, Nanak in turn instilled a sense of social consciousness, wherein each one supports and contributes towards the physical and social growth of humanity as a community. Thus he introduced the concept of *sangats*; the closest meaning which could be attributed to this concept is the idea of coming together as a congregation that shares a wavelength of interests and wants to be identified as a community in which the members support each other towards their temporal and spiritual welfare.³

1. 1. 1. A Community seeking the Divine

Sangats were typified with an assembly of devotees in worship – recitation of hymns and singing of *shabad*,⁴ and listening to discourses. This assembly had no distinction of classes, gender or status. This exhibited equality itself was the most striking facilitation for the person and the community, to reflect on the oneness of God. The approach here was to contribute collectively even to the concerns of another's spiritual growth and liberation, as in contrast to the individualism in the then prominent religions which emphasized the search of individual *moksha*.⁵

Sangat is also called *Sat Sangat* (congregation of true ones) or *SadhSangat* (the congregation of the saints) and it highlighted the chief belief, that the *Guru*⁶ manifests himself in the *sangat*. Thus being part of the *sangat* is considered to be spiritually a must for a Sikh and s/he is recommended to spend considerable time there, since here s/he receives enlightenment, direction and strength to live the tenets of Sikhism.⁷ (GSSG 12, 65, 81, 303)⁸

1. 1. 2. The Community being aware of the Social Situation

Guru Nanak and his successors attached a great deal of importance to the *Langar* as it became, in their hands, a potent means of social reform, chiefly through the discourses and interactions *via* the *sangats*. This avenue was well utilized as a platform to exchange views on common problems and generate a feeling of communal and national consciousness at a time when the sense of nationalism was absent among the populace. The movement generated a consciousness of creating a society characterized with equality and a spiritual reform that took recourse to the inner spirit, rather than external rituals and irrationality. Those who join the *sangat* learn to serve and become convinced to aid social causes. One learns to work in a co-operative and democratic set-up and by doing so the sense of selfishness vanishes. Energies are now directed to *seva* and social well-being.⁹

1. 2. Pangat

This system was popularized by Guru Amar Das, the third *Guru* of Sikhs. *Pangat* as a modality was adopted to make visible and further instill the principle of equality by fostering a sitting arrangement during the *Langar* which was intended to serve the purpose of ensuring equality.¹⁰

1. 2. 1. Equality: The Praxis of its Literal Meaning

Pangat literally means a 'same row'. It stands for people sitting and eating together in the same row during the *Guru kalangar*. It does not simply mean sitting in a row; it means sitting equally at par with each other without any type of distinction. No special meals, seats or sections (in the *Langar*-hall or any other part of the *gurdwara*) can be reserved for any one whosoever he/she may be. The concept of *pangat* is to bring an end to hierarchy of caste, creed, colour, sex, status and any other dissension. We can thus expect to see at a *Langar*, a landlord sitting along with his workers or some person from the high caste having his meal along with a *dalit* and so on.¹¹ The acceptance of equality in all spheres is well expressed as one serves the *pangat* where people of all ranks, denominations and political affiliations rub shoulders, share the same food and partake the *Karah Parsaad*.¹²

1. 2. 2. The Tenet of *Seva* Practiced

Seva is another cardinal principle and a unique institution of Sikhism. *Seva* is not ordinary un-paid service. It is voluntary, selfless, and humble, without motive, without hope for reward or compensation. *Pangat* in the community mess gives practical training in the discipline of service. Children and younger folks are specially entrusted the role of serving food to the gathering arranged in rows, in a bid to foster an early formation. As one goes to every person seated s/he may recognize visible or known differences, but the gesture of humbly serving food practically intensifies the spirit of equality. Thus the service is an orientation towards inculcating equality and strengthens oneself to be free of biases and distinctions. The practiced habit then is expected to find expression beyond the *Langar*-hall, out in the required social contexts of deprivation, necessity, hospitality, hostility, etc.¹³

Comprehensively, *seva* can be practiced in any form: through money, body, mind, etc. *Seva* can be done by cooking food or by washing dishes in *Langar* (the sacred Sikh kitchen); by sweeping and cleaning floors in the *gurdwara*; by helping the poor and the needy in the street; by imparting knowledge; by participating in national struggles; by doing any humanitarian action and so on. It is a part of a Sikh's being to do some *seva* as a daily routine. *Seva* in a *gurdwara* is generally believed to be more sacramental, as it disposes one to be humble, tolerant, and generous. It also brings the satisfaction of being useful for humanity.¹⁴

2. THE EUCHARISTIC MEAL

The introduction presented a concise description of the Eucharist. This part of the presentation attempts to highlight the dual aspects of the Eucharist as a sacrament or a rite and its praxis in living (living what is professed, reflected, recalled or prayed during the rite).

2. 1. The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Humans are not sustained or satisfied by physical necessities alone. There is an inner urge in us to transcend, to search for the spiritual core of our existence. The Eucharist is such a meal that nourishes us not at one table only, but at two. Jesus reminded his listeners, "Man does not live by bread alone" (Mt. 4: 4).¹⁵ The Eucharist is similarly a coming together of two liturgies, that of the word and that of the food or the Eucharist.¹⁶

2.1.1. The Liturgy of the Word

The proclamation of the readings from the Bible occupies a very special significance, in that we embrace the readings as God's Word. This understanding is well articulated in the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), "He (Jesus) is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church" (SC 7).¹⁷ Words, as we know are for the communication of thoughts or ideas, but here it is not just information but a subtle formation that takes place unto the one who is open to receive God's intervention unto his/her life. The Word is thus a power which can actuate a transformation.¹⁸

2.1.2. The Liturgy of the Eucharist

For the Eucharistic liturgy the congregation centres their attention upon the centrally located altar – both, a place of sacrifice as well as the table from where the assembly is fed. During this rite, the prayers, aspirations, hopes and gifts of the community are presented. These and other gifts are all united with the chief symbolic offering of bread and wine. The latter are used as a means to recall the last supper of Jesus with his disciples and his command to do likewise. These also recall the sacrifice of Jesus' body and blood on the Cross. Consuming the sacred and sacramental offerings of bread and wine, each one is reminded to offer themselves to love God and fellow humans. The themes of sacrifice, thanksgiving and meal are celebrated here.¹⁹

2. 2. The Challenge of living the Eucharist

The challenge of living the Eucharist arises due to the fact that the memorial meal could be limited to a mere ritual and the actual intended praxis might not see its materialization. If the Eucharist does not find a continual existential effect in the quality of one's life, then there is a plain reduction of the substantial medium to a mere rite.²⁰

3. LANGAR AND THE EUCHARIST REVISITED

3. 1. Parallels Shared

The basic similarity shared is that both the ceremonies are embraced as a community meal and distinctions of caste, class, gender, age, race, etc. are expected to be disregarded entirely. Some spiritual, human and ceremonial aspects are described below and corresponding scripture and relevant texts consolidating the views are cited.

3. 1. 1. Spiritual Facilitation

Both Sikhism and Christianity acknowledge the divine presence in and through the community celebration of the meal. The teaching of the Catholic Church upholds:

To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, [...], for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). (SC 7)²¹

Sangat, acknowledged as the fellowship of the holy with the divine, is applauded as a means of moral and spiritual uplift: (*vich sangat har parabh varatda bujhahu sabad vichar*) "The Lord God prevails in the *Sangat*, the Holy Congregation; reflect upon the *Shabad* and

understand.”(SGGS 1314) The same experience and sentiments are carried along within the sharing of the meal in the *pangat*.

3. 1. 2. Ceremonial Aspects

Both the traditions have a similarity in the dual emphasis given to scriptures and to a meal shared. *Sangat* and *Pangat* bring about the aspects of prayer, reflections, meditation on scriptures and meals shared. Parallels shared in the Eucharist are the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the meal.²² Both of these parts are indispensable to the meals. These parts are also acknowledged to be the sources of enlightenment, to comprehend the mysteries of the divine and human living and for instilling dispositions of sharing and concern for fellow humans.

3. 1. 3. Human Elements

Both traditions emphasize **equality** and that there is no distinction before God and it should not be created by humans. The Bible stressed that the sacrifice of Jesus (which the meal commemorates) has done away with all that could separate us: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him.” (cf. Rom 10:12)²³ Thus it’s obvious to say that the commemoration of that very same sacrifice would definitely uphold and foster equality. The Guru Granth Sahib also echoes the same: (*jaanhu jot na poochhahu jaatee aagai jaat na hay*) “Recognize the Lord's Light (Spirit) within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter.” (SGGS 349)

Gender equality is a very significant approach in both the traditions. The Bible, right in the first book of Genesis and thus from times immemorial seems to have acknowledged equality and dignity to both the genders: “Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”” (Gen. 2: 23a).²⁴ Guru Nanak took note of the prevailing practices of *Sati*,²⁵ and how religion sort of legitimized inequality and injustice to women, despite the sublime identity and responsibility intrinsic to womanhood. Women in Sikhism are not viewed as an impediment and were never isolated as an antithesis to spiritual elevation. On the contrary, the inimitable feminine qualities and roles are extolled and recommended as well.²⁶ Sikhism bears testimony to this equality:

There is respect and participation for both the genders. Man is born from a woman; within woman, man is conceived; to a woman he is engaged and married. Man is friends with woman; through woman, the future generations exist. When his woman passes away, he seeks another woman; to a woman a man is bound. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From a woman, woman is born; without woman there would be no one at all (SGGS 473).

Thus this approach is well acknowledged in that women share important roles in the ceremonial meals and other aspects of religion and life.

3. 2. Some Dissimilarities

The Eucharistic meal celebrated in different parts of the world considers the prevailing customs and culture of the area and accordingly has variations in the rite. However there are

very limited variations within the *Langar* and a standard set of requisites in terms of dressing, postures and ceremonial procedures are maintained.

3. 2. 1. Within the Rite

The intensity of accommodation for the *Langar* is complete: anyone can come, participate in the *sangat*, sit in any *pangat*, consume the *prasaad*, share the *Langar* meal, etc. However, during the Eucharistic celebration participation of persons belonging to other religions and even at times, Christian inter-denominatory brothers and sisters may not have a spontaneous reception. Those not initiated in the Christian faith and with the actual reception of Baptism and the Eucharist would not be encouraged to receive the consecrated bread and wine. It's true that an appropriate initiation in understanding the depths of the mystery of the Eucharist and its accompanying and meaningful ritual actions are important. But a very important reflection would be if whether sufficient measures are employed to ensure that those not permitted the reception of the sacred species or certain privileges within the rite are given the experience of equality and importance²⁷

3. 2. 2. Beyond the Rite

One of the chief distinguishing aspects noted is, that the Eucharist sometimes could lack a real and tangible fellowship of a meal. The Eucharistic celebration is a memorial of Jesus' Last Supper indeed and the consumed food in the form of a piece of bread dipped in wine is received in faith as the real body and blood of Jesus. However this rite is not always followed with a meal or a get-together to sit, share, eat, talk, etc. There may be communities wherein there is a holistic or considerable social interaction. But having such interactions are not considered substantially or definitely required. On the other hand, in the case of the Sikh tradition, eating together in the *pangat* before, during or after the *sangat* is indispensable.²⁸

3. 3. Towards Mutual Enrichment

God inspires every human and intervenes in our lives. Much more we are expected to inculcate an incarnational theology of experiencing and extracting the versatility of the divine presence in our cultures. (cf. EN 18)²⁹ Jesus or Nanak did not totally discard great values, symbolism and principles enshrined within the contemporary religions then. They however extracted all that is beautiful and uplifting in and around them. Many Christians living in the North West of our country have drawn much inspiration from the Sikh culture and have truly made their faith an incarnational adventure without compromising the essential tenets.³⁰ This part of the presentation attempts for a similar effort of showcasing a mutual sharing, wherever possible, for an integrated and constructive exchange and growth.

3. 3. 1. Formation of the Mind

Formation of the mind would imply a basic attitudinal shift from expecting the presence of God and spirituality in mere doing or following procedures, to acknowledging God's presence in his creation, primarily in oneself and one's fellow human beings.

Desacralization was one of the chief tasks Guru Nanak took up. He sensed the futility of humans seeking to appease gods by rituals, instead of seeking God within and with others. Guru Nanak fearlessly explicits:

Someone may go to Ganges, Godavari, Kumbha festival, or bathe at Kaydaar Naat'h, or make donations of thousands of cows at Gomti; he may make millions of pilgrimages to sacred shrines, or freeze his body in the Himalayas; still, none of these is equal to the worship of God (SGGS 973).

He realized that the divine is so vast a reality, yet so much within the reach of our inner selves:

Burnt offerings, sacred feasts, intense meditations with the body upside-down, *pooja*, and taking millions of cleansing baths at sacred shrines of pilgrimage: the merits of all these can be obtained by enshrining the Lord within your heart for a fraction of a second (SGGS 1349).

Jesus conveyed the same necessity of **awakening one's inner spirit** and avoid blind recourse to practices, rituals and irrational beliefs. He announced: "the hour is coming when neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." (Jn. 4:21b, 23b). However Jesus was actually echoing the ancient wisdom articulated by Prophets who lived prior to his coming: "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." (Hos. 6:6).³¹

Our minds in the contemporary era are facing an outburst of media options, where we seem to be constantly fed with information. We need new horizons of the spirit to impact our minds and our very being itself. Jesus and Nanak were great communicators and the ceremonies inherited from their inspiration have the proclamation of the scriptures to be an intrinsic aspect of the same. Thus these ceremonies as mediums of storytelling must be invigorated to garner more interest, especially in the young and distracted minds. Sharing a common meal in our land (and in the Asian context at large) may seem challenging given the plethora of ideologies, religious and cultural diversity and the social pain of poverty, injustice and corruption. However these very characteristics, coupled with the propensity of wanting to listen to life experiences, stories, parables, etc. will reveal to us the need to **revitalize the intuitive character** of Indians who would favor the frequent use of stories rather than straight propositions, parables rather than discourses. And surely the medium of the meal would be very facilitating.³²

3. 3. 2. Formation of the Heart

When we shift focus in searching God within, we realize that He is found in his creation and primarily in fellow humans. The Bible articulates the same: "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1Jn 4:20) Knowing that **God dwells in our fellow human beings** would now shift emphasis in seeking him there. And what could be a better expression than service. The Eucharistic meal each time celebrated reminds the gathering of the joyful hope we wait to celebrate a meal in eternity and the chief decisive criteria during our judgment after death would be whether we served Jesus present in others, especially those in need of our care and concern (cf. Mt. 25:31-46).³³

Without doubts, Christianity is well acknowledged for the unparalleled quantum of service rendered to humanity through charity and mediums of social service. Sikhism *via* the establishment of *sangats* has as well done yeomen service to humanity-social projects for the benefit of the masses, looking after the needs of the poor, the pilgrims, the hungry and the disabled. *Langar* is an institution basically **fostering service to Humanity**. Being acknowledged as a divine service, it is undertaken with a sense of humility. According to certain Sikh schools of thought, the word ‘charity’ would not exactly suffice; since it would imply a donor and a recipient and correspondingly a sense of arrogance of the part of donor, which in a way, demeans the one receiving it.³⁴ The act of *seva* is reckoned as one of being submitted before others and as the path towards salvation: “In the midst of this world, do *seva*, and you shall be given a place of honor in the Court of the Lord.” (SGGS 26)³⁵

3. 3. 3. Formation of a New Humanity

Love, service, respect and concern for the spiritual and temporal good of fellow human beings was the indispensable agenda of Jesus and Guru Nanak. Our sincere approach to this ideal would primarily require accepting an ever pervading sense of **equality** among humankind. However can we deny the fact that discriminatory demarcations like the caste system and other dividing mechanisms are still rooted in the psyche and social fabric of this land? Religious sanctions at times have legitimized some unequal systems, giving it permanence, thereby perpetuating the stain and stink of injustice to fellow and equal beings. Reflecting on the Eucharist and the *Langar*, our inability to contribute against this and similar dividing factors would entail that we have not understood and lived the spirit of these ceremonies.³⁶

We are to remind ourselves and understand that the Eucharist and the *Langar* is a **family meal**. A family meal is an excellent example of communion and dialogue. In the family meal, the parents continue to give themselves *via* their daily labor, their intensity of love and concern and thus nourishing the same life which sprang from their body; with the same body now transformed thorough love and love’s labor. With every meal the child’s life sinks deeper into the parent’s soil and into every sphere of life that is related and rooted in it. In eating the family meal, one’s filiation with the family is strengthened.³⁷ The Eucharist and *Langar* share the great parallel of having the tremendous potential for giving a **new identity to humanity as one family**, despite the shadows of distinctions, discriminations and insecurities looming over.

The Eucharist carries with it, the call to *metanoia* for individuals, for the community and from the community unto others. *Langar* extolling equality has the inherent capacity to each time remind the participants that the sublime **responsibility of building community** is going to be a perennial necessity to the fragmented humanity. Guru Nanak had then suggested a socio-economic formula for the re-organization of social relations in the community in the form: *Kirat karo, Wand Chhako, Nam Japo* (Contemplating on God’s name, work diligently and share with others, specially with the needy).³⁸ Thus both these communitarian meals remind the partakers of the accompanying and ongoing communal obligation.

The spirit of **true socialism** at *Langar* must be understood and allowed to flourish even beyond the socio-religious field. This aspect is indeed essential in society, religion, politics, and the government; often which reveal separatist tendencies. It needs to be encouraged by the Sikhs themselves, that members of their faith will prove to be a guiding example to other

communities in India.³⁹ Equally edifying are the efforts of Christian spiritual leaders calling forth for a progressive growth of community awareness – from forming ‘Basic Christian Communities’ to ‘Basic Human Communities’; recognizing, that embracing each person, irrespective of religious affiliations, is indeed sublime and truly being spiritually mature.⁴⁰

Jesus washing the feet of his disciple before his Last Supper and his primary commandment to love one another and ultimately his self-sacrifice for humanity was a total unfathomable paradigm shift towards the understanding of God, humanity and our approach to life as a whole. Guru Nanak in the 15th century was revolutionary in combating a status quo of oppression and inequality in the legitimization of religious rites, rituals, traditions, irrational beliefs and customs. Both these icons among humans have left before us a legacy and **a challenge to transform the face and identity of humankind itself.**⁴¹ And to humanity that carries along the scars of wars, terrorism, socio-cultural biases, caste and class discriminations, economic disparity, unemployment, injustice, etc. these community meals have a challenge to perennially remind its part-takers to be **messengers of harmony, reconciliation and peace.**⁴²

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

S. Radhakrishna in his work, ‘The Principal Upanishads’ notes that Mahatma Gandhi was inspired from Guru Govind Singh’s writings in framing his public prayer: *Ishvara Allah tere nama mandira masjid tere dhama sabko sanmati de bhagavana* (Isvara and Allah are Thy names, temples and mosques Thy abode. Grant to all the right understanding)⁴³ Gandhi also accounts that he stood in awe at the principles of Christianity, but was taken aback with many Christians not practicing the same. He specifically notes the deep inspiration he received from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁴ Without hesitation we can deduce that **Gandhi was enriched with and inculcated the universal and eternal treasures of his milieu.** Gandhi’s signal service to Hinduism, as also to every other religion, lay in his efforts to shift individualistic and idealistic moorings unto a realistic and universal embrace. Thus in reference to the ongoing considerations on ‘embracing the other’, we would need to acknowledge, that like Gandhi, we primarily ought to have a deep sense of awareness and openness to learn, adapt and personalize the basic human values and all that would enhance life and human well-being.⁴⁵

The just articulated **ideal finds a praxis in the unbiased religious meal services.** The significance of meals and the food symbolism in the Indian tradition as a whole is an unfathomable reservoir of inspiration and wisdom. On a personal front, the food symbolism of Sant Tukaram serves for me a perennial source of inspiration.⁴⁶ A deeper introspection on the already elaborated Eucharistic meal and *Langar*, will make us realize that it was indeed so very insightful that both Jesus Christ and Guru Nanak have utilized the simple, every day, yet deeply significant medium of a meal to perpetuate principles of human fellowship and divine experience. The ceremonies of the *Langar* and the Holy Eucharist are inseparable for Sikhs and Christians. For the Sikh, participating in the *sangat* and joining the *pangat* accounts to be the most humane and sacred means for being connected with God and fellow humans. For Christians the Eucharist is given the pivotal place and the Church articulates that the meal (Eucharist) is “the source and summit” of Christian life.

Thus the effort in this presentation (after an initial briefing on the two meals) is to facilitate a **mutual enrichment from the insights of the *Langar* and the Eucharist in a bid to arrive at a praxis-orientation of truly ‘embracing the other’**. Few aspects were highlighted; however these are not exhaustible. In-depth understanding of the intrinsic principles encapsulated within the meals, will but open up horizons to bring hope to build a new humanity of equality, fellowship and peace. Jesus and Nanak have epitomized the possibility of human fellowship via the medium of a meal. And upon understanding and part-taking of the same, we are left with the vocation of doing what they wished and willed ‘in their memory’.

END NOTES

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- ¹*Gurdwara Sahib* is the place of worship for Sikhs. *Gurdwara Sahib* is a compound word created by combining *Gur*, meaning *Guru* and *Dwara*, meaning door or house. Thus the word *Gurdwara* means the door or house of the *Guru*. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is always present in the *Gurdwara Sahib*. Cf. Frank A. Salomone, ed., “Sikhism”, in *Encyclopedia of Religious Rites, Rituals and Festivals* (London: Routledge, 2004), 403.
- ²Guru Nanak (1469-1539) is the founder of the religion of Sikhism and is the first of the ten Sikh Gurus. Born to a Hindu family, (in Rai Bhoi Ki Talvandi, Delhi Sultanate, now Nankana Sahib, Punjab, Pakistan) he showed a deep spiritual nature from early childhood. As he matured and became absorbed in meditation, he questioned rituals, idolatry and the rigidity of the caste system. He set up a unique spiritual, social and political platform based on equality, fraternity, love, goodness and virtue. Cf. Gurinder Singh Mann, “Sikhism,” in *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade Clark Roof (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2012), 1174-1175.
- ³ Cf. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, *Sewa Langar Sangat & Pangat The Sikh Red Cross* (accessed 18 September, 2014); available from <http://hsdilgeer.com/sewa.htm>
- ⁴*Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is the Holy Scripture of Sikhs compiled by Sikh Gurus and some devotees. *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* shows the path to attain salvation and to be one with God. *Shabad* refers to any single hymn from the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* or more abstractly the divine Word or the command of God. *Shabads* are sung in the *Gurdwara Sahib* and in holy congregations. Cf. Pashaura Singh, “Sikhism: Practicing Tradition Today” in *South Asian Religions Tradition and Today*, ed. Karen Pechilis and Selva J. Raj (New York: Routledge, 2013), 229-232.
- ⁵*Moksha* a Sanskrit term implying liberation or release from the cycle of birth and death. It has different connotations in the various philosophical schools of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Sikhism also believes in reincarnation and accepts the aspect of *moksha* as a spiritual and temporal liberation. Cf. Roshen Dalal, *The Penguin Dictionary of Religion in India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2006), 311.
- ⁶The concept of *Guru* in Sikhism stands on two pillars, i.e., *Miri-Piri*. *Piri* means spiritual authority and *Miri* means temporal authority. Therefore, *Guru* in Sikhism is a teacher-leader. The word etymologically means: *Gu*: darkness, *ru*: Light or revelation. *Guru* is thus the dispeller of darkness and the revealer of light. At times it is referred to God, other times impersonally and at other times to a spiritually mature person. Cf. C. L. Datta, “The Concept of Guru in Nanak’s Philosophy” in *Papers on Guru Nanak: Punjab History Conference*, ed. Fauja Singh and A. C. Arora (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1970), 199-201.
- ⁷Harnam Singh Shan, *Sayings of Guru Nanak: A Dictionary of the Thought of the Founder of Sikhism* (Amritsar: Dharam Parchar Committee, SGPC, 2003), 358.
- ⁸The corresponding numbers refers to the page number on the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* abbreviated as SGGS. Hereafter the abbreviation and page number will be cited as such. All references to the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* are from - Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, In English Translation, Volume One and Two (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1984 and 1985).
- ⁹Taran Singh, “Guru Nanak’s Spiritual Thought,” *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 18, No. 197 (February-March, 1970): 44.
- ¹⁰Cf. H. S. Bhatia and S. B. Bakshi, ed., *The Sikh Gurus and Sikhism* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 2000), 24.
- ¹¹Several directives for the pangat were well prescribed to ensure the sublime service during the Langar. Cf. Daljeet Singh, *Sikhism: A Complete Study of its Theology and Mysticism* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1979), 282-283.

- ¹²*Karah Parsaad* is the sacramental food served at religious ceremonies in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. It is a symbol of equality of all members of the congregation. *Karah Prasaad* is made of flour, sugar and ghee (clarified butter). Cf. Frank A. Salomone, ed., “Sikhism”, in *Encyclopedia of Religious Rites, Rituals and Festivals*, 404.
- ¹³ Cf. Harsh Mander, *From Langar with Love* (accessed 18 September, 2014); available from http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/Harsh_Mander/from-langar-with-love/article4294049.ece
- ¹⁴ Cf. Harpreet Singh Soorae, *Seva: The essence of Sikhism* (accessed 18 September, 2014); available from <http://www.sikhspirit.com/khalsa/news58.htm>
- ¹⁵ (Mt 4:4) refers to the text from the Bible. In the New Testament, Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 4, verse 4.
- ¹⁶ (Please Note: Being a Roman Catholic Christian, my views and other references presented are not about all the Christians, but from the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Christian Church). Cf. Raymond Moloney, *Our Splendid Eucharist* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2005), 22.
- ¹⁷ (SC 7) refers to point number 7 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Catholic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963. The Constitution attempted to foster greater lay participation in the liturgy of the Catholic Church. Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (accessed 19 September, 2014); available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html
- ¹⁸ Cf. Desmond Rebello, “Eucharistic Spirituality Today,” *Dhyana*, Vol. 4 (April 1995): 7. Please also refer to the Biblical texts: From the New Testament: (1Thes. 2:13) Paul’s 1st Letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 13 and (Heb 4:12) the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12.
- ¹⁹ Johannes H. Emminghaus, *The Eucharist Essence Form Celebration*, Trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1978), 28-31.
- ²⁰ Ramon Nubiola, *Union with God through the Eucharist* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1987), 49.
Could also refer:
(AA 4) In the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Number 4) Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (accessed 19 September, 2014); available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html
(GS 38) The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World called *Gaudium et Spes* (Number 38) Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (accessed 19 September, 2014); available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html
- ²¹ (SC 7) refers to point number 7 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (accessed 19 September, 2014); available from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html
- ²² Refer to Chapter 1 (of this paper) on the elaboration on *Sangat* and *Pangat* and Chapter 2 for the description of the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist.
- ²³ (Rom 10:12) refers to the text from the New Testament of the Bible. Letter of Paul to the Romans, chapter 10, verse 12.
- ²⁴ (Gen 2:23a) refers to the book of Genesis of the Old Testament in the Bible, chapter 2, verses 23a.
- ²⁵ *Sati* refers to a custom within some Asian communities in which a recently widowed woman immolates herself, typically on the husband’s funeral pyre.
- ²⁶ Cf. Chhanda Chatterji, “Allusions of Gender Equality in the Verses of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.” *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2 (July – December, 2008): 111-112.
- ²⁷ Cf. George Keerankeri, “The Eucharist and India’s Quest for Community” in *Body, Bread, Blood: Eucharistic Perspectives from the Indian Church*, ed. Francis Gonsalves (Delhi: ISPCK and Vidyajyoti, 2000), 28-29.
- ²⁸ The reception and understanding of the identification of the species of bread and wine may differ in different denominations, Churches, etc. Cf. Vidya Sagar, “The Christian Community in Punjab: An Analogy.” *Religion and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (June, 1991): 12-13.
- ²⁹ (EN 18) refers to point number 18 of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World) issued by Pope Paul VI on the theme of Catholic evangelization. Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (accessed 19 September, 2014); available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html
- ³⁰ Cf. Vidya Sagar, “A Study of the Christian Community in North-West India.” *Religion and Society*, Vol. 42 (June, 1995): 52-56.
- ³¹ (Jn. 4:21b, 23b) refers to the Biblical text in the New Testament, Gospel of John, chapter 4, verses 21b and 23b. (Hos. 6:6) refers to the text in the Old Testament, Prophet Hosea, chapter 6 and verse 6.

- ³² Cf. Santos Yao, "Table Fellowship of Jesus with the Marginalized: A Radical Inclusiveness." *Journal of Asian Mission*, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2001): 36-37.
- ³³ (1Jn 4:20) refers to the biblical text of the New Testament, the first Letter of John, chapter 4, verse 20. (Mt 25:31-46) refers to the text in the New Testament, The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25 and verses 31-46.
- ³⁴ Cf. H. S. Bhatia and S. B. Bakshi, ed., *The Sikh Gurus and Sikhism* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 2000), 117.
- ³⁵ Harnam Singh Shan, *Sayings of Guru Nanak: A Dictionary of the Thought of the Founder of Sikhism* (Amritsar: Dharam Parchar Committee, SGPC, 2003), 358.
- ³⁶ George Keerankeri, "The Eucharist and India's Quest for Community" in *Body, Bread, Blood: Eucharistic Perspectives from The Indian Church*, ed. Francis Gonsalves (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 25 – 28.
- ³⁷ Samuel Rayan, "The Eucharist and a New Personalism for India" in *India and the Eucharist*, ed. Bede Griffiths and others (Ernakulam: Lumen Institute, 1964), 36 – 40.
- ³⁸ Kirat karo, Wand Chhako, Nam Japo are considered to be the three Pillars of Sikhism. Wazir Singh, *Humanism of Guru Nanak: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 1977), 167-168.
- ³⁹ Cf. Harsh Mander, *From Langar with Love* (accessed 18 September, 2014); available from http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/Harsh_Mander/from-langar-with-love/article4294049.ece
- ⁴⁰ I have taken note here of the insights of Alphonse Thainese in his book 'Participatory Communion' which reviewed the FABC documents from 1970-2006. The author recalls late Pope John Paul II's address at Assisi, Italy some years ago wherein the prelate emphasized that the social teaching is a clarion call for the Church to move out of the sacristy. The author devotes the last section of the book (like a sort of a culminating note) to impress the need of the 'Small Christian Communities' to gradually form into 'Small Human Communities'. He presents practical suggestions and attempts to arrive at a **participatory communion** and a **praxis oriented community** which would extend the social horizons to all humans and to every concern of the land. Cf. Alphonse Thainese, *Participatory Communion: An Ecclesiological Inquiry on Lay Participation in the Local Church Based on the Documents of the FABC (1970-2006)* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 290-293.
- ⁴¹ Cf. R. V. De Smet, "Affinities between Guru Nanak and Jesus Christ." *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 19, No. 207 (February, 1971): 9 - 10.
- ⁴² Cf. S. Arokiasamy, "The Eucharistic Community: Oneness and Otherness" in *Body, Bread, Blood: Eucharistic Perspectives from The Indian Church*, ed. Francis Gonsalves (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 49 – 50.
- ⁴³ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upanishads* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953), 139.
- ⁴⁴ The Sermon on the Mount is found in the New Testament of the Bible, in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5 to 7. A. Jayabalan, "Gandhi and Christianity: A Critical Perspective." *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (January-March, 2005): 447-448.
- ⁴⁵ Cyriac Vazhayil, "Theologizing from a Gandhian Perspective." *Vijnanadeepti*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (2001): 95-96.
- ⁴⁶ Sant Tukaram (1577–1650) from Dehu, a town close to Pune in Mahārāshtra, India was a prominent spiritual poet of the *Bhakti* movement in India. He was a great devotee of *Vitthala* or *Vithoba*, a form of God Vishnu and had numerous devotional compositions in Marathi. Although being from the lower caste, he was well versed with Hindu philosophy and was highly influential. He promoted social equality and had many miracles attributed to him. Cf. Thomas Dabre, *The God-Experience of Tukaram: A Study in Religious Symbolism* (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1987), 1ff.