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Divine Unity in Sikhism and Islam: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The doctrine of Divine Unity stands as the metaphysical cornerstone of both Islamic theology and Sikh philosophy. In Islam, the concept of Tawḥīd represents the absolute oneness and uniqueness of God, forming the foundation of all theological, legal, and ethical structures. In Sikhism, the principle of Ik Onkar similarly affirms the unity, transcendence, and immanence of the Divine, rejecting all forms of multiplicity and idolatry. This article undertakes a comparative theological analysis of Divine Unity as articulated in the Holy Qur'ān and the Guru Granth Sahib, supplemented by insights from Islamic Sufi traditions. Through textual hermeneutics and philosophical inquiry, the study explores convergences and divergences in the conceptualization of God's unity, attributes, and relationship with creation. The findings reveal that while doctrinal formulations differ, both traditions converge on a monotheistic ethos that emphasizes divine singularity, moral accountability, and spiritual equality.

Keywords: *Divine Unity, Sikhism and Islam, A Comparative Study*

1. Introduction

The notion of Divine Unity constitutes the central axis of theological reflection in both Islam and Sikhism. The Islamic doctrine of Tawḥīd is not merely a metaphysical assertion but a comprehensive worldview shaping law (Sharī'ah), ethics, and social order. Similarly, Sikhism, emerging in the socio-religious context of medieval Punjab, articulated a radical affirmation of divine oneness through the concept of Ik Onkar, challenging both polytheistic practices and rigid ritualism. This study seeks to examine how these two traditions articulate divine unity through their primary scriptures and how these articulations inform broader

ethical and social frameworks. Additionally, the study integrates the Sufi perspective, which provides a deeply experiential understanding of divine unity.

2. Tawhīd in the Holy Qur’ān

2.1 Absolute Oneness of God

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ
(Qur’ān 112:1–4)

Analysis: This foundational passage (Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ) establishes the absolute unity, self-sufficiency, and incomparability of God. The term Aḥad denotes indivisible oneness, while Ṣamad implies absolute independence.

2.2 Rejection of Polytheism

وَالْهَيْكُمُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ (Qur’ān 2:163)

Explanation: This verse categorically affirms monotheism and rejects all forms of شرك (association of partners with God).

2.3 Divine Transcendence and Immanence

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ (Qur’ān 42:11)

Explanation: “God is absolutely transcendent (tanzīh), Yet aware and present through His attributes”

2.4 Divine Nearness

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ (Qur’ān 50:16)

Explanation: This verse introduces the concept of divine immanence, indicating God’s intimate proximity to human existence.

3. Divine Unity in the Guru Granth Sahib

3.1 Foundational Declaration: Ik Onkar

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ
ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ

Analysis: This opening verse of the Guru Granth Sahib encapsulates Sikh theology: “Ik Onkar: God is One, Sat Naam: Truth is His Name, Karta Purakh: Creator Being, Nirbhau, Nirvair: Without fear and enmity

3.2 Rejection of Idolatry and Multiplicity

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ

Explanation: "All share one Father; we are all His children, Emphasizes unity of humanity, Rejects division based on caste or creed"

3.3 Divine Immanence

ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਵਾਜੇ ਨਾਦ

Explanation: God resides within every being, reinforcing a deeply immanent understanding of the Divine.

4. Comparative Theological Analysis

Concept	Islam	Sikhism
Divine Unity	<i>Tawhīd</i> (Absolute Oneness of God)	<i>Ik Onkar</i> (One Supreme Reality)
Transcendence	Absolute and incomparable (beyond creation)	Affirmed; God is beyond full human comprehension
Immanence	Manifest through divine attributes (<i>Asmā' al-Husnā</i>)	Strongly emphasized; God present in all creation
Anti-Idolatry	Central doctrine; strict prohibition of shirk	Central principle; rejection of idol worship

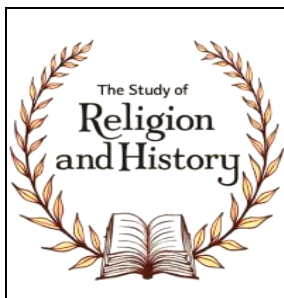
Insight: Both traditions reject multiplicity and affirm a singular, all-encompassing divine reality, though Sikhism emphasizes experiential spirituality more explicitly.

5. Sufi Perspectives on Divine Unity

Sufism offers a profound experiential understanding of divine unity, particularly through the doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Being).

5.1 Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics

- * Reality is a manifestation of divine existence

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- * Multiplicity is apparent, unity is real

5.2 Rūmī's Poetic Expression

- * The lamps are different, but the Light is the same

Analysis: This aligns closely with Sikh teachings on divine immanence and unity.

6. Convergence between Sufi and Sikh Thought

- * Emphasis on inner spirituality over ritualism
- * Recognition of divine presence in all beings
- * Rejection of rigid orthodoxy
- * Historical interactions between Sufi saints and Sikh Gurus further reinforce these parallels.

7. Philosophical Implications

- * The doctrine of divine unity has far-reaching implications:
- * Ethical Equality: All humans share the same divine origin
- * Social Justice: No basis for discrimination
- * Interfaith Harmony: Recognition of shared metaphysical truth

8. Ontological Dimensions of Divine Unity

The doctrine of Divine Unity in both Islam and Sikhism extends beyond theological assertion into ontological inquiry. In Islamic metaphysics, Tawḥīd is not merely the oneness of God but the unity of all existence under divine sovereignty. This is articulated in the Qur'ān:

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ (Qur'ān 39:62)

This verse establishes God as the sole creator and sustainer of all existence, thereby negating any independent ontological reality outside divine will.

In Sikh ontology, a similar assertion is made:

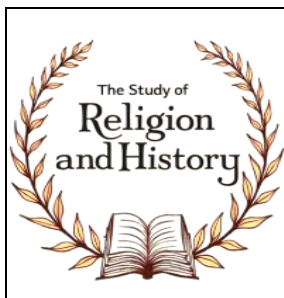
ਸਭੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਭੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ਹੈ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ

Analysis: This statement reflects the permeation of divine presence across all existence, suggesting that multiplicity is subsumed within divine unity.

9. Epistemological Pathways to Divine Unity

9.1 Islamic Epistemology: Islam recognizes multiple epistemic sources:

“Wahy (Revelation), Aql (Reason), Tajribah (Experience)”

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The Qur'ān repeatedly invites reflection:

أَفَلَا يَتَدَبَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ (Qur'ān 4:82)

This indicates that understanding divine unity requires both revelation and intellectual engagement.

9.2 Sikh Epistemology

Sikhism emphasizes: Naam Simran (Remembrance of God), Guru's guidance, Inner spiritual realization "ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦਿ" Knowledge of God is attained through divine grace and inner purification.

10. Ethical Consequences of Divine Unity

The affirmation of divine unity has direct ethical implications in both traditions.

10.1 In Islam

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ (Qur'ān 49:13)

Moral superiority is based on righteousness, not lineage Establishes ethical egalitarianism

10.2 In Sikhism

ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਭੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਬੇ

All humanity is one, Social hierarchies are rejected

11. Socio-Political Implications

Divine unity translates into social justice frameworks: "Islamic Context, Equality before law, Protection of minorities, Ethical governance, Sikh Context, Langar system (communal equality), Rejection of caste hierarchy, Collective welfare (Sarbat da Bhala).

12. Intersections with Sufi Metaphysics

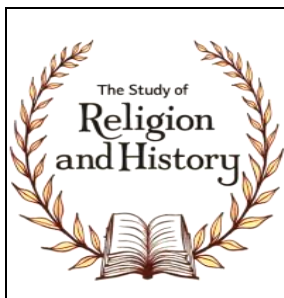
Sufi thought deepens the experiential dimension of divine unity.

12.1 Wahdat al-Wujūd:

- * Unity of Being,
- * All existence reflects divine reality

12.2 Qur'ānic Foundation

فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُوْا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ (Qur'ān 2:115)

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God's presence encompasses all directions and realities.

13. Sikh Mysticism and Sufi Parallels

- * Sikh thought shares notable parallels with Sufi spirituality:
- * Emphasis on love (Ishq)
- * Inner purification
- * Direct experience of divine presence
- * ਹਰਿ ਜਨ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵੈ

This reflects a devotional engagement similar to Sufi practices.

14. Contemporary Relevance

In an era marked by religious polarization, the shared doctrine of divine unity offers a framework for:

- * Interfaith dialogue
- * Social cohesion
- * Ethical pluralism

Both traditions provide resources for countering extremism and promoting peaceful coexistence.

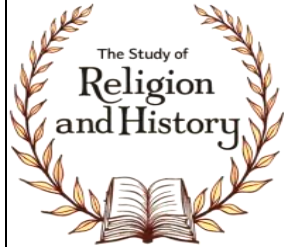
15. Challenges in Interpretation

Despite their rich theological heritage:

- * Misinterpretation of texts
- * Politicization of religion
- * Sectarian divisions
- * These challenges hinder the practical realization of divine unity's ethical implications.
- * Scholars emphasize the need for contextual reinterpretation and inclusive hermeneutics.

16. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the concept of Divine Unity occupies a central and transformative role in both Islamic and Sikh theological frameworks. While Islam articulates Tawḥīd through a structured theological doctrine grounded in

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revelation, Sikhism expresses Ik Onkar through a spiritually experiential and egalitarian paradigm. Both traditions converge on:

- * The absolute oneness of God
- * The unity of humanity
- * Ethical responsibility
- * Rejection of discrimination

These shared principles offer a powerful foundation for advancing interfaith harmony and human dignity in contemporary societies.

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