

# Concept of martyrdom in islam and sikhism religion essay



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## **Introduction**

The idea of martyrdom can be traced back to the dates of Judeo Christian era, even before that period people sacrificed their lives for their beliefs. However the respect got associated with the concept of martyrdom only after the establishment of the religions in an organised form. That is, when the idea of Heaven and Hell emerged as the reward or punishment for a person's deeds (after his death). The concept was first adopted by the Semitic faiths like Judaism, Christianity and Islam. And in each faith the concept was modified accordingly, in order to suit the respective doctrines of the particular faith. On the other hand the old religions of the east: Hinduism and Buddhism, does not seem to have adopted the concept of martyrdom while as Sikhism being one of the youngest religions in the world, originating in India has adopted the idea of martyrdom.

Both Islam and Sikhism are monotheistic religions and put emphasis on one supreme God. In Guru Granth Sahib (sacred text of Sikhs), in the very first verse it is mentioned,

“ There exists but one God, who is called The True, The Creator, Free from fear and hate, Immortal, Not begotten, Self-Existent, Great and Compassionate.”

And in Quran (the Holy Book of Muslims) it is clearly mentioned,

“ Say, ‘ He is God, the One, God, the Self-Sufficient One. He does not give birth, nor was He born, and there is nothing like Him.” (112: 1-4)

## **Martyrdom in Islam**

The concept of martyrdom in Islam has originated from the basic literature of Islam i. e. Quran and Hadith. The Qur’an says:

“ Do not say that those who are killed in God’s cause are dead; they are alive, but you are not aware of it.” (Quran 2: 154)

“ If you are killed or die in God’s cause, then surely forgiveness from God and His grace are better than all one could amass.” (Quran 3: 157)

And there are numerous other verses in Quran where the reward and value of martyrdom is discussed. These verses give a clear message that a martyr receives a reward which no other person can enjoy. For example, a dead body of ordinary person is bathed before being buried, but the body of a martyr is not bathed before being buried as it is considered to be purified by martyrdom. The martyr by giving away his life, in the cause of Allah, purifies himself and all his sins are erased.

In Islam, martyrs are broadly classified into two groups. First, the ones who die while fighting for the cause of Allah that is ‘ Jihad’ and second, the ones

who die because of natural calamities or due to certain types of diseases. Although the later not getting the recognition and treatment in this world, like the ones who die while fighting for the cause of Allah, are promised the rewards of Martyrdom in the hereafter.

To understand the concept of Martyrdom it is essential to be aware of the concept of Jihad in Islam, which in turn can only be understood if the concept of making distinction between right and wrong, good and evil is understood. The concept or the idea of martyrdom in Islam is completely linked with the whole religion of Islam, and therefore it is important to understand the meaning of Islam. The word 'Islam' has been derived from Arabic word 'Salama' which literally means 'Surrender' and 'Peace'. Thus Islam means complete and peaceful submission to Allah (the Lord of the Universe), which means a Muslim (who follows the teachings of Islam) should always be prepared to die for the cause of Allah. The concept of Jihad emerged after Muslims in Mecca were forced by the idolaters to leave their homes which marked the historic migration of Muslims from Mecca to Medina. And when Muslims were taking refuge in Medina the idolaters of Mecca jealous of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH), planned to attack and finish Muslims once for all and the first battle took place at Badr in which the idolaters were badly defeated. In order to take the revenge, the idolaters of Mecca prepared for the next war which took place in Uhud, in which Muslims again won but suffered good amount of losses. While seeing a number of companions of Prophet (PBUH) lying on the ground, Zaid Bin Haris (RA) 'Adopted son of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)', said, " Listen idolaters your

men will burn in hell fire and our brothers who achieved martyrdom for the cause of Allah will enter the promised Paradise”.

The martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA), Grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and other companions of Prophet (PBUH) have strengthened the value of Quranic verses and had emotional implication on the minds and hearts of Muslims. For a person martyrdom becomes acceptable only when he breaks all the relation with the material world as it would not be possible to give away life when you value it most. Extreme hatred or desire for revenge can also motivate a person to give away his life to hurt his enemy, but the concept of martyrdom in Islam is in total contrast with it. In later category, a person attains martyrdom to get the reward in the hereafter and to free himself from the world of compulsions and desires.

The Martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA), became a symbol of good and evil for the Muslim world. Muslims all over the world has taken inspiration from the Martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) in fighting oppression. One such event being the Islamic Revolution of Iran, in which the participants aligned themselves with the symbol of Imam Hussain (RA). It was Imam Hussain (RA), who formed the basis of the concept of fighting against oppressive forces, even if one has to sacrifice his life for it. In this way, like we have seen in the Iranian revolution, the concept of Martyrdom gives an impetus in mobilising people for a mass movement against oppression.

Many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars and theologians have misunderstood the concept of Martyrdom in Islam. Since Martyrdom and Jihad are closely associated with each other, most of the non-Muslim scholars define Jihad as

Holy war due to which they neither understand Jihad nor Martyrdom in Islam. It is important to understand the concept of martyrdom within the fabric of Islam because Islam has introduced its own idea of Martyrdom. Struggle for holy cause and the concept of Martyrdom are interrelated as both of the words have been repeatedly used in the Holy Quran. In fact, without the struggle for the cause of truth and for Allah's cause there is no Martyrdom in Islam. The important keyword here is ' truth', the struggle and fight for it, its recognition and the declaration as well as the readiness to die for the sake of truth. The goal or the main objective is the formation of truth and Jihad is one of the means for establishing the truth which may lead to martyrdom. It is important to note here that Jihad does not inevitably lead to being killed in a battle.

Thus it is clear that there can be no Jihad and Martyrdom outside the domain of truth. Shahada (martyrdom) is only applied when it is introduced by Jihad and this Jihad is the inclusive struggle for the truth which is obvious from the fact, that a person is considered a martyr, no matter if he does not die in a battle field. This status is given to him on the condition that he stays very loyal to the truth and remains always ready to defend and fight for it, without worrying about his life.

## **Martyrdom and Suicide Bombing**

Martyrdom in the cause of Allah is considered one of the greatest deeds and the martyr destined to paradise, while as the suicide is considered one of the worst deeds, the punishment for which is the hellfire. In the Islamic history, the learned scholars of Islam never confused the two terms. But with the advent of suicide bombing in the modern times, it has become difficult to

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distinguish the two, as the suicide bombing is justified with the textual support for being martyrdom. However, before this new phenomenon of suicide bombing, there is no evidence in the Islamic history, where a person is praised for wilfully taking his life while fighting an enemy either on or off the battle field.

Most of the Islamic scholars differ with the interpretations, of Quran and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Hadith), which justify suicide bombing. For example a senior orthodox Sunni Muslim scholar, Imam ibn Uthaymeen, hold suicide bombing to be against the teachings of Islam and is hence forbidden. Apart from a few Islamic Scholars most consider suicide bombing Haram. However, none of the Islamic scholars permit any suicidal action against the non-military (civilian) targets. The arguments put forth by the supporters of the so called martyrdom operations (suicide bombing), when compared with the basic Islamic literature (Quran and Hadith) prove to be extremely weak. However as can be seen in Pakistan, Palestine, Iraq etc were suicide bombing has become a routine is the result of false interpretation of Quran and Hadith. It becomes easy for the masters of so called Jihad to exploit youngsters/teenagers by buying them a dream for paradise in which they are promised all kinds of pleasures. For example, if a man is martyred he will receive 72 virgins (Hur) in heaven as a reward, while as a women martyr is promised that she will become more beautiful than a Hur apart from other innumerable rewards.

## **Martyrdom in Sikhism**

Guru Nanak, being the founder of the religion (Sikhism) also laid the foundation of the concept of Martyrdom in Sikhism. It is considered as one of <https://assignbuster.com/concept-of-martyrdom-in-islam-and-sikhism-religion-essay/>

the most fundamental idea which represents an important pillar of Sikhism. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism mentions in the beginning of his hymn “JAPUJI” that the goal of the man is to live according to the will of God. He further mentions that to adopt truth and destroy the falsehood is only possible if a person follows the will of God. Guru Nanak says that “ life is a game of love” and suggests all humans to follow this path. In order to follow this path, Guru Nanak has stressed that the institution of martyrdom is a very important tool.

The concept of Martyrdom in Sikhism is completely different from other religions which laid down emphasis on the sacrifice of animals in order attain personal salvation and to appease other gods. While as in Guru Granth Sahib (the sacred text of Sikhs) the sacrifice of animals to appease gods or for personal salvation is highly abominable. More emphasis has been laid to live a life for the cause of love to fight the oppression. Guru Nanak says that if a person is fond of God he does not need to care about “ MUKTI” (personal salvation) and paradise. Guru ARJUN (The fifth Guru of Sikhs) sacrificed his life for the truth of his faith. When the Guru was in prison, he told Pir Mian Mir (a Sufi saint, when he had come to meet him), that he had gone through the torture and misery only to set himself as an ideal for the ordinary person so that they would be able to deal with the suffering if they had to confront it because, a person having power to deal with the suffering but he does not shows it and leaves his religion in order to save himself from the torture becomes an enemy of the religion.

Guru Arjun’s martyrdom is treated as a landmark in Sikhism. Many historians like Mohsin Fani and H R Gupta stressed that at the time of Mughal Empire, <https://assignbuster.com/concept-of-martyrdom-in-islam-and-sikhism-religion-essay/>



the military of Mughals believed that the Sikh Gurus were running their own community within the state. Beni Prasad, who worked as a historian of Jahangir stated that Guru Arjun was supporting Khusro to fight against Emperor Jahangir economically. The emperor knew about it and thus decided to execute guru and to take all his property under his control. Now, the question arises what made Guru to take such a step against the Emperor. It could be answered by the facts that the Guru collected money by the system of ' Daswandh' (10% of one's income to charity). He decided not to pay the fine which was imposed on him by the Emperor, instead gave all the money to Khusro. He died for the truth of his faith and from that onwards militancy found a place in Sikhism. The preparation for the armed resistance became a normal routine when the time of sixth guru came. He believed that sacrificing life for the sack of religion is a duty which a religious person must perform because it will open the doors of heaven for him. Those who are the disciples of Guru are considered pure and any explanation for their deeds would not be demanded on the day of judgement. Dying for the faith is considered as an act of heroism and martyrdom which attracted thousands of the Sikhs to sacrifice their lives in the path of religion.

Guru Tej Bahadur, who is considered as the ninth Guru of Sikhs, prepared his military and started a fight against the Emperor to form a new nation. When the Emperor came to know about it, he gave him the choice that if he does ceasefire and reorient his mission for praying and giving preaching of Sikhism only then his demand will be accepted. But the Guru bluntly rejected the offer inspite of knowing the dire consequences. Guru Tej Bahadur, along with Bahi Mati Das and Dayal Das became martyrs while they were trying to

fight against the forced conversion of Hindus in Kashmir. Other Gurus like Guru Gobind Singh and Banda are also famous for their struggle. In the Sikh tradition those men who were killed in any battle like at Chamkor Sahib and at Muktsar are considered as Sikh martyrs.

The contemporary Sikh community has taken inspiration from these brave and heroic martyrdom stories. During early eighties the uprising of Sikhs in Punjab against Indian state is considered as the fight for the cause of truth by many radical Sikhs. A number of youth killed while fighting against Indian Military are being termed as martyrs. The most tragic of all the events was of June-4th 1984, when the Sikh militants were hiding in the Golden Temple and Indian military, on the orders of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, entered the sacred temple and killed all the militants hiding inside including Sant Bindranwale. The operation not only killed the militants inside the temple but lead to the destruction of Golden Temple as well. Binranwale and his Companions were termed as martyrs by their followers and was perceived by them as if Bindranwale and company were fighting for the sanctity of their religion.

## Conclusion

From the above summaries of the concept of martyrdom in Islam and Sikhism we can see a number of similarities. Sikhism on one side had laid emphasis on fighting for the will of God and for the cause of truth, even if one has to sacrifice his life for the same and Islam also stresses, Muslims to fight against the oppressor for the cause of Allah. In Islam a person can be a Martyr even if he does not die in fighting while as in Sikhism a person can be

Martyr only if he dies in a fight against oppressor, inequality or injustice. The sixth Guru in Sikhism has explained the religious responsibility of Sikh as helping and protecting the weak and oppressed people by confronting the oppressive and unjust powers, even if they have to give their lives for the cause. The fifth Guru (Guru Arjun), was the first to sacrifice his life for the truth of his faith, strengthening the very institution of Martyrdom. Ninth and the tenth Gurus had also sacrificed their all for the faith. The Sikh Gurus by sacrificing their lives have not only showed that martyrdom is the essential and the most important institution of Sikhism but have educated people for sacrificing their lives for the truth and justice.

In Islam the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) is seen as the symbol of righteousness and resistance against the oppressor. The early martyrs of Islam are the ones who have shown courage, endurance and tenacity against the tyrants. They continued their actions even if they had to face the death, the driving force being the assurance of the reward in the hereafter.