Sikhism

The Sikh religion lays great stress on the divine dignity of human beings.

"In every heart there is light:
That light are Thou,
By the light that is of God Himself
Is every soul illumined."

There is no clear instruction on capital punishment in the scriptures. Sikhs, like many other people, have lived mostly in States where the death penalty is part of the legal system.

Sikhism gives guidance in principles of behaviour and looks to the historical interpretation of the way of life of the Gurus. The Sikh view of capital punishment comes from their view on the use of violence in general. For Sikhs, the resort to arms is only justified under clear conditions. For example, it is permitted to fight against oppression or injustice - and not only injustice towards Sikhs but towards others too. But in the words of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, only after all other means of righting the injustice have failed.

It follows from this that killing is justified under certain circumstances. That is, it is justified when fighting in the heat of combat in a situation as already described. But if the enemy surrenders he must not be put to death. He must be allowed to go. Killing in cold blood can never be justified, except possibly of a tyrant intent on continuing to behave in an unjust way.

Executing a prisoner, on the other hand, is without excuse, and would be 'killing in cold blood'. Therefore Sikhs would oppose capital punishment.

During the time of Ranjit Singh - which is the only time Sikhs have formed an independent nation - the death penalty was not used. That is, when Sikhs were able to make laws, capital punishment was not used.

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