

Arrogance - Concealed Weapon of Mass Destruction

As we write these lines a grievous militarist misadventure looms large over West Asia. It threatens to disrupt the already tenuous peace on earth and perhaps redefine the future of civilization. As to the root cause of this simmering crisis we are reminded of cynical remark not long ago of a Western analyst: "Did God invent nuclear weapons, if so, who are we to oppose the divine will?"

Inherent in this dismal scenario is the fact that human beings in general, and institutions of the government in particular are being manipulated by powerful coterie of politicians, and even by clergymen, to serve narrow purposes and to assert cultural and political supremacy.

How else can one explain the suicide terrorists who flew hijacked planes into the World Trade Centre twin towers in New York one September morning in 2001? There is ample evidence that they were a fiercely motivated and intelligent group of people manipulated by arrogant, self-righteous clerics of a particular religious persuasion? The grim events seem to have set a chain reaction: Afghanistan, Iraq and, possibly, N. Korea. **Whether it is fanatical groups, or governments, the driving force is intolerance, arrogance and a false sense of superiority.** In an earlier manifestation nearer home, an autocratic ruler possessed of monumental arrogance launched a surprise attack on the holy city of Amritsar to crush a community striving for a degree of autonomy pledged to them in 1947 in their own homeland. 1984 witnessed the majority community "celebrate" the brutal Operation Bluestar, pouring salt on the raw wounds of a struggling minority. The resultant anguish among ordinary people exploded in the tragic assassination of the prime minister who had ordered the army assault, unbeknownst to the supreme commander, namely, the President of India. Instead of restoring a semblance of peace and justice, the successor PM allowed the armed mobs to wreak revenge against innocent in the capital city and across the swathe of what has come to be known as 'cowbelt'. Since the same police, who was mute spectators to the massacre, was asked to go through legal motions of prosecuting the killers, no one (but no one) has been punished for the barbarous crimes after nearly two decades of a plethora of judicial inquiries.

How much of religion is good for humanity if it does not teach harmony and forbearance? When does religious fervour turn into fanatical morbidity? This was demonstrated on December 6, 1992 when organised mob of majority community reduced Babri mosque in Ayodhya to rubble in full view of a stunned populace. The communal strife that followed continues to smoulder across the subcontinent. Arrogance breeds brutality and revenge. It was in 1999 that the fanatical Taliban of Afghanistan directed their wrath against the ancient giant Buddha statues sculpted into the Bamiyan range of mountains. A more bizarre demolition job could not be imagined. Except what happened on Nine-eleven, that triggered the war on Taliban and, now, against Iraq. Terrorism, whether of the political or religious variety, has its roots either in deprivation or in hatred. It is blind and irrational. Its overpowering impulse is to destroy and kill even if it means self-immolation. Traces of self-righteousness can, likewise, be

found in the current craze for conversion whether by Christian missionaries, or by terrorist groups or even reconversion by the Hindutva enthusiasts. The national commission for minorities recently intervened to call for restraint of overzealous evangelical elements trying to wean away (the so-called) Dalit Sikhs. Such misguided attempts cast a shadow on the multicultural heritage of India's mosaic.

It was, again, the national commission for minorities that sounded an alarm against the hazards of distorting history of religious struggles. Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675 is a case in point. Relying on the court records of perpetrators of the Guru's execution would be as risky as, for instance, accepting the Government of India's White Paper on Operation Bluestar issued by Home Ministry in July 1984: the ultimate examples of suppression of truth. History of the Sikhs has its own text and context - often buttressed by authentic scriptural references to events, and demands careful study of Gurubani and contemporary sources.

The coherence and relevance of the Sikh doctrine are important in the present context as guideposts for the world, especially its belief in one Just and almighty God, above and beyond divisive religions, its twin ideal of saint-soldier, its loyalty to truth, recognition of diversity as a divine dispensation but, above all, the commonality of whole human race.

In final analysis, the first step for harmony is that we must accept the *plurality* of faiths, in God's multitudinous world; as well as the *validity* of belief systems other than one's own. Guru Granth says: "*Tudhu dhyayas bed - kateban sankhaney*" (518) countless millions worship thee, O God, some through the Vedas, other through Semitic Scriptures.

At a time when there is a virtual collapse of religious discourse, when the family is fast becoming dysfunctional, and the society cynical, when technology threatens to upsets Nature's bio-stability, and the political institutions are losing credibility, we need more - not less - of religious verities. We need a reassertion of Guru Nanak's message of love and harmony. That message needs to be integrated with our daily lives, and into our educational systems.

