

# **Raj Karega Khalsa: its historical Significance**

*Brig. (Retd.) Tarlochan Singh\**

\* 111, Sector 28-A, Chandigarh 160 002.

The rousing call, 'Raj Karega Khalsa' is recited everyday across the Sikh world. In every Gurdwara congregation's, ceremonies or social functions, its recitation is obligatory after Ardas. This practice is intended to remind Sikhs that days of slavery - Mughal, British or another - are over. The Khalsa movement is a sovereign, socially autonomous entity. The down-trodden and unprivileged of India – riven by caste system – will get their liberty and equality. The Khalsa values of courage should usher in an egalitarian, enlightened civilization everywhere.

It took a century and more for the Sikhs to reverse the invasions from the North Western foreign lands, and then to establish a Sikh Commonwealth under the dauntless Maharaja Ranjit Singh. But the Sikh Raj had a brief tenure and a treacherous end. It started with the coming to power of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who ascended to power by effectively curbing tribalism which gained root in the Panth due to the influence of Brahamanvad. After the death of Maharaja, Punjab was conquered by the wily British. Sikhs became their subjects, like the rest of Indians. "Raj Karega Khalsa" became simply a slogan.

The British who had fought the Khalsa army in 1840's, noticed the martial qualities of Sikh soldiery and, consequently, used the them to expand their empire in the South-East Asia. They were astute enough to realise that the fighting qualities of Sikh soldiers were rooted in their belief system and moral tradition, they encouraged observances of Sikh tradition's amongst the troops. To an extent they also encouraged 'tribalism' to the keep Sikhs divided and under subjugation. The Sikh soldiers fought successfully and with valour in World War I & II.

After the end of World War II, in 1945, the independence of India became inevitable. For the transfer of power the three main communities, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, were recognised. While Hindus and Muslims in 1947 became free in their respective territories, a Sikh state was not considered a viable proposition. At any rate, the Sikhs cast their destiny with India and joined hands with Indian National Congress. After independence, the Congress government in 1956 divided India into linguistic states. But the Sikhs were denied a Punjabi speaking state. Against this discrimination, a prolonged struggle was launched under the leadership of Master Tara Singh. Lakhs of Sikhs participated in it. Some, like Jathedar Darshan Singh Pheruman sacrificed their lives. The extent and proportion of this peaceful agitation shook the central government, which decided to tackle the situation by exploiting the ethnicity and divisive tribalism, and they succeeded.

The post-1947 history of Sikh struggle is marred by divisive politics and tribal ethos that seemed to take precedence over the Khalsa spirit. Mutual rivalries and ego did not allow the leadership to cooperate and put up a united, strong and intelligent front. With the exception of one or two minor concession, no major demand was conceded. While Central Government was in no way friendly to their aspirations, the leadership weighed down by their personal ego, gave the authority a handle to bypass and overlook their genuine demands.

The Punjabi suba slogan had been raised by Master Tara Singh, who felt compelled to do so, after communally inspired Hindus renounced Punjabi as their mother tongue. His firm stand on this issue and his tall stature among the masses irked the ruling Congress Party. By a clever manoeuvre, a pliable Chief Minister in Punjab arranged the ouster of Masterji from Sikh politics, using SGPC as the battle ground. With the removal of Tara Singh, their

demand for Punjabi suba was lost. The demand for Chandigarh was as good as lost when Sant Fateh Singh, in order to gain personal importance, sat on a *Dharna* after the ultimate sacrifice of Darshan Singh Pheruman. In the turmoil, the demands for river waters and territorial adjustments were lost, when the naivety of the Sants was exploited by government who appointed pliable commissions to offer convenient award. The Rajiv Gandhi-Longwal Agreement was consigned to the dustbin of history, when Congress Sikh MPs/MLAs staged a mock breast-beating in order not to accept any demand of S.S. Barnala government as they will lose their relevance in Punjab. Such actions convinced the Centre that Sikh 'front men' place their own ego and selfish benefits higher than the community goals.

During the Anglo-Sikh wars (1844-48) Sikh soldiers fought valiantly, but were let down by their leaders. Similarly, in 1980's Sikh Youth came forward in thousands for the struggle of Sikh demands, but there was no leadership to properly canalise their zeal and direct it effectively. A large number perished or were eliminated. In the Sikh holocausts after the death of Indira Gandhi, thousands of innocent Sikhs were brutally and systematically killed under the nose (and with connivance) of the law and order machinery. The Sikh Community was driven to the wall. What was the result of this devastation? The common Sikhs were totally disillusioned; their pride was shattered and their faith in leadership received a severe jolt. The few persons who benefited were those who did damage to the Sikh cause. They were honoured and even monuments were raised in their names. Of course almost all Sikh leaders kept their leadership intact.

Two decades later, the general health of the Sikh community is no better. It is a rule at present that, at major Gurburb celebrations, each party holds its separate Diwan. Sikhs gather in thousands with religious fervour in these congregations. They like to listen to the divine message of their Guru and explanatory discourse on faith and philosophy. Instead of getting spiritual solace, they find leaders exchange invectives and charges against their rivals. It is regrettable that our leaders do not get united even on these sacred occasions. They draw daggers at one another at the holy places. In contrast to this, it was noticed recently that all parties got together at the *Bhog* ceremony of a gang leader killed in an inter rivalry shoot-out. This indicates how far the tribalist loyalty persists.

The way to stop this decline in the Sikh society is to return to the pristine teachings of the Gurus. There is a need to reassert intelligently the true basics of our religion. They are inherent in Gurbani. They should be sincerely practiced in our daily life. It should be clearly understood that Sikh religion is a sovereign religion distinct from other religions while respecting all faiths. Sikhism is a universal religion open to every citizen in the world. Guru Baba Nanak preached it to everyone all over the world. "Charia sodhan Dharat Lokai." Guru Gobind Singh invoked the blessings of Akal Purusha for spreading the new Panth in the whole world. Pandit Madan Mohan Malvya, the tallest Hindu of twentieth century declared that if India wants remain free, united and progressive, then one member of every Hindu family should embrace Sikhism. The current narrow conception of Sikhism based on caste, and tribe is misplaced. It is necessary that Sikhs globalize their thinking, behaviour and religious preaching. All our religious institutions should discard their present insular mindset and adopt an international and universal outlook.

The Sikhs should start a mass campaign to propagate their religion both in India and abroad. Sikh religion has the appeal, vision and high values to become a world faith. It only requires high caliber preachers with wide knowledge, great intelligence and dedication. There is a shortage of such persons in the Punjab. It is, therefore, suggested that in order to start the work in this direction, a Jatha of devoted American Sikhs be invited to organise this campaign. Being free from caste consideration and discrimination they will have better

appeal to the common man, especially among the Dalits. Internationalization of Sikh religious institutions and propagation will go a long way to consolidate the Sikh society. By returning to the enlightened and noble path of Gursikhi, we can reach the objective laid down for them by the peerless Guru Gobind Singh Ji at Anandpur on Vaisakhi of 1699.

