

# Stand up and be Counted: As Kaur and Singhs

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WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY THERE is serious concern regarding the present situation. Our youth - and the Sikh society in general - are showing lack of feelings for the Sikh values, traditions and identity. We are all aware of the situation and we are all talking about it, but little is done. Everyone has a theory to enlighten us with and a commandment to give about this. Park yourself with a person who is concerned and, in moments, you would have traversed through series of specific actions we can take for improving our predicament. You will be able to guess, from the way the person speaks to you, that the individual has gone through this monologue many times, maybe often talking to oneself. Trying to convince oneself, by mere talking.

When we go wrong in religion we “blame” others, the *SGPC*, the *DGPC*, the leaders and the *Parcharaks*, thus absolving ourselves of our own responsibility. It makes us feel that we are a part of the solution and not the problem. While all this is happening water is running down the stream. The effect is being felt and the results are already there. I am reminded of what the German humorist who once said:

“The clue to our destiny, wander where we will, lies at the foot of the cradle.”

The present is the result of what our past was and tomorrow is what today will bloom into. Guru Nanak in the Japji says,

ਆਪੇ ਬੀਜ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਖਾਹੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਆਵਹੁ ਜਾਹੁ ॥੨੦॥ (Japji)

As we sow, so shall the results be for us. God ordained, we live in transmigration.

## Youth - “The Critical Mass”

There are two important energies which are needed to build a vibrant community: youth and women. ***Women are the torch in which the flame of youth is lit.*** To neglect or ignore their importance for us, as Sikhs, is disastrous and dangerous, but that is what we do today. It is not a secret how much disregard we show our women. Our youth are actually no better off. We don't want to give room to our youth; we want to hold on to everything till the grave snatches it from us.

## The Privileged Priest?

I was witness to a program in one of the local Gurudwaras where the children were organizing the “Diwan” for the evening. They were doing the Kirtan, Paath, the Ardaas, and also gave talks on important topics. The Gurudwara Management, despite effort, did not agree to children sitting at the “*tabya*”, in service of The Guru Granth Sahib, and doing the *Ardaas*. Mere children from 4 to 14 years of age, and we are scared! This is how we want to hold on to power, as though the children will take away the *Golak* and snatch the Gurudwara Management?

How do we then expect the youth to be proud of their heritage, or be ready for tomorrow? Actually we don't care about religion or about the Sikh way; we care about ourselves and what we can hold on to, at all costs. The present state of Gurudwara affairs is an apt reflection of our emptiness. ***We are a little people, with small hearts, expecting big results.***

This is not how we were, this is not what our past attitude was, and this is not what made the Khalsa what he became and what he is? **Failure to respect our legacy and acknowledge our debt to yesterday is not going unpunished. We have to equip and allow the youth to live their religion, to experience it and live comfortably in it- to be connected with its inner reality and abundance.** If we can do this, then to sustain the Khalsa approach is not a conflict between that which is happening and what *should* happen. The friction is gone and harmony lives.

### Youth is energy personified:

A Sikh is a natural being. What ever Guru Sahib tells us in the Guru Granth are universal truths and not relative laws, connecting us to the Universal- to nature and its Creator. In my opinion although people of all ages can experience nature, children and the youth are the best equipped to experience “Sikhi” and live it. It comes naturally to them as they are not far removed from it; the younger they are the more easily they can live “Sikhi”. Youth has all the energy needed for dedicating themselves to search and to enquire and realize life in its entirety. It is the time when the tank of the car is “full” and where ever the car is directed it will move swiftly and surely. **The momentum of youth can override the entire life pattern and dictate to it, on its terms.** Youthful energy can be “very” productive in the search for truth.

It needs to be understood that *Gurmukh marg* has to do with complete acceptance, total submission to Guru; it deals with searching for truth, seeking it with untiring zeal and dedication. To question, to ask is the fundamental pillar on which the Sikh way of life exists. A Sikh is born out of questioning, out of enquiry. Guru Nanak in the Japji puts forth some of the most potent questions of life, to live in those questions is to live in an inner enquiry of reality, it is to live in the awareness of **“Guru Nanak- Guru Gobind Singh”**. All this can be done only when one is willing to put at stake what one has. It is relatively easier to do this in the time of youth and in the prime of life. Says Sheik Farid:

ਤੇ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੀ ਮੈ ਸਾਰ ਨ ਜਾਨੀ ॥ ਜੋਬਨੁ ਖੋਇ ਪਾਛੈ ਪਛੁਤਾਨੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

[SGGS:794]

I have not realized my master, if I lose the youth, I will regret it in hindsight.

[SGGS:794]

The importance of youth can never be underestimated.

ਜਬ ਕਿਸਤੀ ਸਾਬੱਤ ਔਰ ਸਾਲਿਮ ਥੀ, ਤਬ ਸਾਹਿਲ ਕੀ ਤਮੰਨਾ ਕਿਸਕੋ ਥੀ,  
ਅਬ ਐਸੀ ਸ਼ਿਕਸਤਾਂ ਕਿਸਤੀ ਪਰ ਸਾਹਿਲ ਕੀ ਤਮੰਨਾ ਕੌਨ ਕਰੇ ।

When the ship was intact and complete , there was no wish to cross the sea. When the ship is old and broken who will want to go across in it?

### “Becoming” and “Being”

Times are changing, the language, the attitudes and the pressures on man are also changing. The need to adapt to this change, while keeping our external form and inner inspiration, is critical. The inner inspiration is perfection and our outer form is transcending time. **Change or “becoming” is related to permanence or “being”**. In the material World everything changes and nothing is permanently the same, in fact the only thing permanent in the physical World is change. We, the Khalsa, have change around us, we need to *adapt* to this change while remaining

what we are. Like wood which, when changing from hot to cold, does not cease to be wood. A stone remains a stone when it traverses a distance; steel change its shape and yet remains steel. **Change takes place through us and not in us.** This is what we need to adapt to and be able to mould into with ease and dexterity. Like, from riding a horse now Khalsa has moved into driving a car; from using oil lamps we have adapted to the use of modern lights. Not to be ready for change, and to not adapt to this is something which will lead to wastage of energy and resource. **We need to identify that which is an eternal part of us and will not change and that which is not, this is the art of religious existence.** We have already adapted to this, in a way. **“Being”, on the other hand, is permanent. The Jyoti of the Khalsa, the attitude of acceptance of life and the form of the Khalsa is our being.** Guiding life through its changes and inspiring movement while remaining eternally unchanged, that is the Guru in us.

### **Diagnosis:**

It does become a problem when an individual does not adapt to change and suffers then from a source of insecurity and complex. Here, then, the person tries to “show” , as much as possible that there is change and in doing so loses his or her sense of identity and character. Then there is no comfort in such an existence but pressure, and it takes its toll in the awareness of that which is eternal in an individual. The attitude is no more what is natural but what we try and make of it, “editing” God and Guru. The result is a person with guilt trying to justify what has happened. This stems from not knowing one’s identity, not being rooted in the self, someone who is unaware of his or her being. The understanding of religion and the fact that an individual benefits from it is to be recognized. This will make us total in our approach , not living half truths, there are none.

### **Sweep of Time:**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century India was being swept by changes through modern education and logical thinking, among other things. It was important and critical for us to prepare for this. Sant Attar Singh (Mustuana Sangrur) understood this more than others and he prepared to give an option to the community. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century an institution was created where modern education and spiritual living could be lived, together and in Harmony. **His aim was to create an awakened Khalsa who would and could interact with and influence modern society.** This is the only way we can bring change in attitudes of life.

Sant Teja Singh was sent to Harvard for learning child psychology and child education. In that day and age, professors came from England to teach Physics and the sciences. A huge infrastructure was created and a self sustaining organization was established. Everything was in place, yet, for a very frivolous reason the attempt failed and Sant Attar Singh abandoned the organization. I think in this way Sant Attar Singhji is exceptional and his insight is so apt, I bow to the effort. A major opportunity was lost, no where else was such a huge attempt made. There was not as much resource available anywhere else. Our present state would have been different had such a program been successful. We would have had young Khalsas inspired by the spirit, inspiring and waking others around us. A revolution of light, a whiff of freedom.

### **Education at the Roots:**

This is the need of the hour. An education program which addresses the requirements of the Khalsa is not possible within the present structure of education and wherever it has been included in the program it has been poorly implemented. The present schools run by the D.G.P.C. have the infrastructure, but teachers there are doing a “job” teaching “divinity” and, I guess, the pressures of a school do not let this all-important issue surface and get addressed, as it should be.

### **Sangat-as Oasis in Desert:**

We need to give our children Sangat, but why not in Gurdwaras? I have a 12 year old son and I know that I can take him to a Gurdwara and he will go, because I tell him to, but he relates to very little there, his present “life culture” is far removed from the present Gurdwara culture, specially when the Gurdwara is not “evolving” to address the times. Sikhi is love for Guru, Sikhi is bliss and its living, but how do these children get an expression to themselves, to them being Sikhs and little Khalsas?

### **Culture:**

**Our children grow up in an environment where their language is not spoken and most of the majority community around does not know them. Even as toddlers they are exposed to maids and attendants who do not speak or know their language and culture.** As parents, we are so far removed that we don’t speak “Punjabi”, at home. The children see movies and TV serials which laugh at their identity and give a poor picture of the “Sikhs”. We the parents do not have enough time to teach them and, even if we do, how do we get them to meet their peer group comprising of Sikh children? We expect children to be better Sikhs than we are, even in this environment? Where is the one place a child can go, ask, talk, see and know what is his or her religious identity? It is not happening in the Gurdwara, nor is it happening in the schools or at home? When we took up this issue in the *Sangat*, this was a common concern and it was voiced by others. Friends would call and discuss this aspect. One could often hear troubled voices: as to what are we doing about the kids?

### **Provide the Platform:**

One possibility is to run parallel programs, locally, where young adults and children can feel the presence of “*Sangat*” and know who they are. Where, in a carefree atmosphere, they can question and ask without being afraid. Exposure to their religion, in a comfortable environment is the first step to becoming familiar with their “being”. This is how “*Kaurs and Singhs*” were born, a “Sikh culture” workshop for children from 4- 16 years of age. A local activity where the kids feel at home. The program must have an enrollment and annual curriculum which includes *Sangat*, camps and other activities like *Kirtan* classes, *Gatka* programs, exposure to handicrafts and horticulture of Punjab, arts, open discussions, lectures, and exposure to personalities amongst other things. Audio visual presentations and computers are used in a way that the children can absorb them easily.

In time, it is expected that the youth will be able to run such workshop programs on their own, building bridges within the community and connecting to their Guru and themselves.

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