

Sikhism and Dogma - Dilemma outlined

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The whole world watched in horror, last July, as the scenes of the London bombings were displayed on television. Not many waited for the official placement of blame. The answer was already on their tongues: Al Qaeda. As the week progressed, we were told what we already knew. Fundamentalist Islamic terrorists linked to Al Qaeda had planted the bombs. What we didn't expect was how apparently "Normal" these so-called terrorists were. What made them become so extreme? Where did all this radicalism come from?

We learn that there was even a callow youth, hardly an adult, who was a suicide bomber. What could have possessed this young man to do such a thing? It was the constant bombardment by local imams that Britain is an evil country. Infidels are attacking the holy land. All these *kafirs* are breaking the "laws" of Allah.

Is this true Islam? No. Actions of a miniscule minority has made it so.

What has allowed this to happen? When answering this question we must realize that this extreme nature does not come from nowhere. There are laws in Islam. There is no doubt about that. Some Sharia Laws, Hadiths and isolated verses in the Qur'an have been interpreted controversially throughout history. Many claim that the laws themselves are not controversial but rather the perverted interpretation makes them so. But regardless of the different interpretations, it is these very dogmas that are used as the building blocks of extremists who are trying to recruit young men and women into the fold of terrorism.

While thinking of these laws, my mind naturally wonders what Sikhism's take is on all this. What do Sikhism's "laws" say? Are they also controversial? But first of all – What is Dogma?

A general definition of dogma would be authoritative religious laws, deemed to be absolutely true, without any sort of proof. An example would be that all non-believers are going to hell in the after life. Many would say that one "dogma" that all religions believe in is that of a god(s), or some supernatural power. I disagree. I do not believe that a belief in God could be considered a religious *law*, as it is actually the *foundation* of these religions, and cannot be clumped together with religious laws. Seeing as most of these laws come from sacred scriptures and texts, it is only fitting to first search the Guru Granth Sahib for any "laws". Yet when one does read the Guru Granth, (which unfortunately is not too common an occurrence) we realize that that such a search would be in vain. While one is likely to find the praise and glorification of God, a call for *Simran* and *Kirtan*, and even some words of a morale boosting nature, we cannot find any sort of "laws". Why is this so?

The Gurus' goal was not to set out how many times to pray, what to eat, or even how to eat it, but rather to create humans of such high moral character and thinking that they would be considered model citizens for any country. If there are any laws in Sikhism, they are ones of such universal nature that most, if not all of them would be found or represented in the International Declaration of Human Rights ,or any other such charter.

I specifically mention the idea of the *Good Samaritans* because of what some of these Islamic groups of terrorists propagate: viz. It is good to kill *kafirs* (non-believers), it is right to hate the country that you have grown up in, all in the west are deserving of death and devastation. As if this wasn't enough, the extremists use readily available religious dogma

to back up their calls for violence! What would an extremist use to back up violence by Sikhs? Guru Gobind Singh befriended all humanity. There is no sanction for such an act as a suicide bomb, much less for any other form of senseless violence.

And yet, as I grew up in Canada it was not uncommon for me to hear of so-called, "Sikh Terrorists". This makes me wonder how one could be Sikh and commit the atrocities that a terrorist is known to do? **The phrase 'Sikh terrorist' is not just descriptive, but rather a sign to show that the terrorism is being done in the name of Sikhism. What part of Sikhism would condone terrorist attack, or even permit them?** None. The reason for this is that there are No "Laws" of any sort which could possibly even allow some one to say that the "west is evil", or that "all non Sikhs should - or can - be killed".

So where did these "Sikhs terrorists come from? It was later on that I found out that these Sikhs were not terrorists by nature, but rather by label. Government abuse, murder, and other such horrible acts have lead young Sikhs bursting with frustration to also commit some violent acts. Are these people terrorists? Was their goal to scare and terrorize the public? No. There was simply pain and anguish, and the understandable thirst for revenge. Revenge on one person. Not on a whole hemisphere. Though Sikhism may not condone blind revenge as a means of justice, these youths were driven by blind passion and emotion, and hardly ever had much logic and reason left in themselves. Even in this state of being, they chose only to persecute the doers of the act; not a whole society.

How can Sikhism based on divine *hukum*, not have any laws? What do the followers follow? Moral values, of trust, honesty, hard work, and many more are told to be means of reaching the ultimate goal of oneness with God, but there are no commands or orders. And yet if there is really no *Dogma* in Sikhism, then what is with the different, *rules* and *customs* that Sikhs must follow?

As I read articles or meet different people, I see that belonging to a certain group or *Jathaa* has become quite the trend. A book by so and so 'Akhand Kirtani Jatha'. Or being introduced to so and so, 'Tapoban' walle. Belonging to a certain group means following their rules. So with all these different Jathas we have many different rules to follow. Which ones are right and which wrong?

Well, if we are to continue with the above scenario, we see that the AKJ believes, among other things, that all food must be prepared by *amritdharis* in order to be fit to eat. Tapoban on the other hand believes that not only must it be prepared by *amritdharis*, but it must also be prepared using ONLY Sarbh Loh utensils.

Now if one were to question, they could ask if the AKJ or Tapoban Group has heard of the story of the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's two younger Sahibzadas. Mata Gujri and the young children were taken to shelter when they were lost by a Hindu man named Gangu. This Gangu was considered trustworthy because he was a *cook* in the Guru's kitchen.

Given that this is just a *saakhi*, it is still a prominent one in which not many would question. Is this not proof enough that the Guru didn't care who prepared his food? As long as the food did not cause discomfort to the body, and provided nourishment, then there was no harm in it.

The same idea continues when it comes to Sarbh Loh (all steel) utensils, or Sarbloh Bibek. There is no doubt that iron is a powerful mineral which is extremely good for the body, however to suggest that all food must be prepared in this manner seems almost superstitious. It seems as if iron is given a special status amongst metals, which I'm sure was not the Guru's aim.

There are many practical reasons that the Guru used Sarbh Loh on many occasions. One example is our *Karaa* (steel bracelet). It is meant to be made of Sarbh Loh. Why? One of

the most prevalent reasons that is used is because it is a substance that all can afford. It is humble by nature. Similarly there is no reason for Sikhs to eat using or even own, outrageously expensive plates or spoons. Hence, in order to continue with the spirit of equality and practicality, iron plates, spoons, bowls, etc were used. Similarly the original reason why *amritdharis* were commonly preferred to make the food was because one could be assured of their cleanliness, and therefore did not worry about any sickness resulting after eating the food. Today there is so much cleanliness in everything we do, that this is not a problem whatsoever.

The reader would forgive me for just picking on these two groups who in no way whatsoever are doing wrong but are just trying to promote a Sikhi way of life. There are many other *Jathaas* with their own personal *maryadas*. To their credit, they have pulled many youth who was straying away from the Gurus path, back on the right track. And yet we hope that these youth don't get caught up in supposed laws, or dogmas.

The problem is that these "rules", have been carried on as rituals and has become an almost Brahminical influence on our Sikhi. When a Brahmin was touched by or even fell in the shadow of a lower caste person, it was considered that '*Janam bhrisht ho gayaa*', or their life had gone to waste unless some necessary rituals were performed. Similarly, most Sikhs are getting too caught up in minor details and small laws or rules, which we consider the one and only path to becoming good Sikhs.

The other day I read an article by Salman Rushdie titled "Its' time for a Muslim Reformation". In it, Rushdie contends that the laws of the Qu'ran were made in the 7th century, and that they have become outdated by today's standards.

In the name of modernization let us not cast doubt on basic truth. Let us not start adding new rules to our religion, as was exemplified above. What we fail to realize is that our Guru has shown us that there is no need for unnecessary complications, rituals and laws. All we need is to follow universal and

timeless philosophies of Guru Granth Sahib.

In other words Sikhism was made as a way of life. A philosophy of hard work, praise of the one and only Lord, and service to humanity. This is the beauty of Sikhism. Through Gurus' infinite knowledge, they gave us neither laws nor orders, but rather extremely beautiful and universal poetry. Poetry which tells us how to be good human beings. Dogma, in every sense of the word, is contrary to the Sikh belief.

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