

# Some Self-imposed Failings of the Sikh Society

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It is well known that Guru Amar Das started the great social reforming institution of *Guru ka Langar* at Goindwal. He made it obligatory for all persons who wanted to have his audience to eat common food of *langar* sitting along with common persons. When Akbar, the emperor of India, desired to see the Guru, he was asked to partake in the langar first. Akbar agreed and ate the common food sitting along with ordinary people. It dawned on the mind of the great emperor that here is a saint, who is telling him that, in the eyes of God, he is equal to other common persons. His soul was stirred. He was so impressed by this act that he started a new religion Deen Elahi, where all persons were equal. They were made free from caste, social and religious prejudices. It was a different story that this movement did not make much headway due to the opposition from fundamentalist Muslims and casteist Hindus.

## **Conduct:**

Since then '*Guru ka langar*' is eaten by thousands every day in the Punjab and elsewhere. Sikhs go inside the *langar* building often by pushing aside children and women. After having their fill, they come out without any dent in their caste perception. Any thought about the equality of mankind does not occur to them. Recently, there was a controversy about *langar* serving on mats or tables. Arguments, mostly hazy ones, were exchanged by the so-called intellectuals and so-called Jathedars. The fact is that Sikhs have not been able to see the real spirit of *langar* as Akbar saw it. They have failed to act on the divine message of this institution and continue to be a caste ridden society.

## **Moral Virtues:**

Similar is the story of *Pahul*. Guru Gobind Singh gifted *Pahul* to Sikhs to transform them into supermen. This was taken from one vessel by every participant to eradicate the caste and other divisive prejudices. Thus *Pahul* revolutionised the old weak society. A new set of persons with higher values and super qualities was created. However, with slackness coming in Sikh discipline, some evil practices of old Brahmanvad culture crept in their society. Slowly the sterling values, like impeccable character, fearlessness, sacrifice and universalism, were replaced by tribal values, like caste and social divisions, mutual rivalries, enmities, selfishness and ignorance. Its result was that even some persons taking Amrit did not shed their caste prejudices and did not adopt the high Khalsa character. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the first great leader who noticed that Sikh society was being polluted by tribal trends. He tried to check them. After his death these damaging practices became active again.

## **Insularity:**

In due course the Sikh Raj was lost and Sikhs became subjects of British Imperialism. No other nation had watched the Sikhs so closely as the British: whether as rulers or scholars. They proudly enlisted them into the armed forces as well as the civil administration. While appreciating their good fighting qualities and loyalty, Britishers noticed a streak of tribalism in their behaviour. It was common practice in the British Indian Army, that **when an officer was posted to a unit, he was informed about the characteristics of the troops he was going to command.** Those who were posted to Sikh units were confidentially advised, '**keep them busy, otherwise they will keep you busy.**' It implied

that do not give much free time to them to indulge in tribal habits of mutual and destructive rivalries which may result in disciplinary cases.

### **Tribalism:**

The traits of tribal values continued in the Sikh society even after independence. The present Sikh leadership and the political parties often work at cross purposes, mostly for selfish ends. They seldom unite. Punjab is a place from where Sikh leaders and Sikh movements emerge. An intelligent look at rural Punjab will show that Sikh society is broadly divided into Jats and Kamins. The dominant castes are somewhat influenced by tribal ethos. The Kamins are living a subdued life due to caste discrimination. They have not developed in them even the basic Khalsa values, e.g. equality, confidence and courage.

Another great quality '*Guru ka Simran*' is an essential part of Sikh way of living. It is the mother quality. It gives a basis, balance and stability to other Sikh attributes. *Guru ka simran* joins the soul of man with power of God.

*"Kae kot Prabh ko khojante*

*Atam mein parbrahm lahente."*

Guru Gobind Singh exhorted the Khalsa to draw extensively from the power of God and make it run through their minds in order to develop God-like and super qualities in them:

*"Puran jot jage ghat main*

*Tab Khalsa Tahin khalas jano."*

*Guru ka simran* has produced miracles. It transformed Madho Bairagi into Banda Singh Bahadur, who rooted out the centuries-old cruel Moghul empire from east Punjab and established Sikh Raj there. Sikh history is full with such shining examples of super actions.

### **Trading in Faith:**

Earlier, Sikh saints, like Sant Attar Singh used to give guidance for following the spiritual path. Now there is hardly any one capable to do this pious service. The so-called holy men of now-a-days have commercialised their profession. They grant male children on cash considerations and give financial benefits on offerings of costly cars and foreign trips. Thus they have joined some leaders and jathedars in the exploitation of gullible Sikhs. The correct guidance on this vital character-building practice is not available to the common Sikh. They are drifting away from this important aspect of Sikh discipline.

These are some social and spiritual problems created by the Sikhs themselves. These shortcomings have started showing effect. The refusal of their demands and the barbaric Sikh holocaust of the eighties indicate some basic weaknesses of Sikhs. It appears that Sikhs have failed to raise themselves to the higher level from where they can see the glorious values laid down by Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. They visualised Sikhs as a race of supermen. They will work as **Akal Purakh ka Fauj** to take the destiny of common humanity to a higher level of civilization. This has not happened, because the thinking of Sikh front men remained stuck with medieval standards and their vision of Sikhs remained upto the level of an ordinary Jat, Khatri, Ramgarhis, *ad nauseam*.

