

Rehat – The Sikh Way of Living

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There is an important *Gurwaak*: "*Rehat Pyari mujh fo, Sikh pyara nahin.*"

This stanza is frequently quoted in Sikh Gurdwaras. By becoming a common talk, its real significance has been overlooked. However its relevance needs to be grasped in the present day Sikh society.

The word "*Rehat*", in its wider conception, comprises the whole province of the life of a seeker and the full range of his actions. It includes the manner and type of his living, his behaviour, his attitudes and his reactions to all situation. All actions performed by a person and values exercised by him, which produce goodness are dear to the Guru. Unfortunately *Rehat* is taken today in a narrow sense. It is limited to some outward appearance and a few accoutrements. Though this aspect is highly important and should not be ignored, but it is a stepping stone to remind the person about the real object of practicing core values and perform the noble deeds, without which Sikh is not dear to Him.

In accordance with *Gurmat*, human life is attained by the blessing of God. It provides a person an opportunity to perfect his soul by good performance and reach God:

"Bhai prapat manukh deh-huria, Gobind milan ki ehe teri baria."

In Guru Granth Sahib, almost every hymn deals with some aspect of noble virtues and ethical living. Here, only two instructions are taken from every day prayer with which all Sikhs are familiar. They are explained to make a start in the right direction. Higher stages of developments can be achieved by following higher instructions from *Gurbani*.

In the morning prayer Japji Sahib, Pauri 38 states:-

"Jat Pahara, dhiraj suniyar

Ahran matt, Ved hathyar

Bhau khala, agan tap-tau

Bhanda bhau, Amrit tit dhal

Ghariey Shabad sachi taksal....."

Self disciplins Equanimity, Wisdom, Knowledge, Belief, Meditation are essential values for good living. The qualities of wisdom and knowledge play a dominant role in the fabrication of a noble life.

The second example is taken from the evening prayer, i.e. *Rehras*.

"Dhiraj dham binae ehe tan

Budh so deepak jio ujiare

Gyane ki badni mano hath le

kattarta kuttwar buharee."

Make your body a home of equanimity

Acquire the Shining intellect and insight

Equip your mind with proper knowledge

Thus work for emancipation.

From the above two examples, it is apparent that a good Sikh should have the following noble virtues.

- a) Possess a sound practical mind.
- b) Be free from social and mental prejudices.
- c) Be unfettered by ancient rigmaroles, doubts and superstition.
- d) Possess control over his thoughts and action.

It is obvious that Guru laid great emphasis on the development of mental and moral qualities of Sikhs. Where these qualities have been essential for understanding the full significance of the new faith, they also form the bedrock of Khalsa trait of valour which flourishes along with mental progress.

"Valour, when preys on reason; it eats the sword it fight with." So said Shakespeare.

Guru Gobind Singh declared that without "thinking" a person cannot understand knowledge, be it moral, Spiritual or relating to worldly matters.

"Bichar Bhavna-behin, kaise Gyan ko Bichar hai."

Thinking has been classified as a core quality but Sikhs have not given it its due importance.

As old Brahminical culture made the society feeble and powerless, Guru advised Sikhs to abstain from it. A constant guard against its influence is also required as it has a tendency to spread where there is no resistance to it. The frequent repetition of slogan: "*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa,*

Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" is one example for the Sikhs to keep their guard. The Sikhs have now lowered the guard, due to their ignorance and weakness. Its result is that old *Manuwad* Culture has made major inroads into their religion, society and thoughts. An overlay of this culture has covered the minds of majority, making it difficult of Khalsa principles to enter into their consciousness. Consequently, some important Sikh traditions have become empty ceremonies. The institution of "*Amrit Chakna*" has lost its past power. Now person, after taking *Amrit* even from Akal Takht continue to behave and act like Jats, Khattris, Mazabis, etc. They do not rise to the high level of Khalsa because the solemn rite of "transplanting the existing head with the head of Guru" is not performed sincerely. Their thoughts continue to be dominated by the old culture and caste.

A majority of Sikhs have been converted from the mass of Hinduism, including OBC and Scheduled Castes. Over a period of time many have failed to sustain the discipline or pay the price of walking on the edge of the sword: *Khanio Tikhi*, *Walon nikki*, and maintaining the moral of *Sawa Lakh* the dauntless legion. They have lost the Khalsa spirit and have come under caste syndrome again. Some have shifted to primitive tribal ethos, other have tilted towards *Shudra* values. The petty caste prejudices and behaviour have created mutual antagonism and a lasting rift in the society. A religion with a sublime theological philosophy and capacity to make supermen out of ordinary persons, is made to look like a tribal cult.

One good example of *Rehat* is that of Sant Attar Singh. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a person of very high caliber, was in search of a great person to lay down the foundation stone of his dream project, Banaras Hindu University. He met Sant Attar Singh and was greatly impressed by his way of life and actions-*Rehat*. He requested Santji to lay the foundation stone of B.H.U. Through Sant Attar Singh, Malaviya perceived the need for character building. He proclaimed that if India wants to be a strong, secure and progressive nation, then the elder son of each Hindu family should become and live the life of a true Sikh. This was a great proclamation for the propagation of Sikh faith and for changing the destiny of the country for the better. However, it is a different story that Sikhs due to their insularity and ignorance could not draw much benefit from it.

It is significant that Malaviya with his superior intelligence could comprehend the greatness and power which Gurus enshrined in Sikhism. Guru Nanak travelled across the world to spread the divine message. Guru Gobind Singh established four Takhts in all corners of India so that the whole country should become enlightened, strong and united. Malaviya saw that vision of the faith which could transform India. He also realized that old Hindu culture was not equipped to achieve this goal, a fact which was stated by Guru Gobind Singh in his Anandpur speech. It is a pity that Sikh leaders and Jathedars have failed to comprehend this important trait of their own religion. They have continued to be confined to their self-made insularity. At present the top Sikh religious organisations are inclined to consider this universal religion as faith of only a few districts of Punjab and that, too, limited to still fewer castes. They have allowed themselves to come under the influence of Brahmanvad. Following Vedantic tenets, wearing Tilks and Worshiping idols in temples (to get a few Hindu Votes) by the Sikh front men can now be seen in T.V. pictures. The spirit and *Rehat* of great Sikhs, which moved Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya is hardly noticeable now.

Another vital principle of Sikh *Rehat* and living is that it generates courage and independent spirit. Guru expected that his Sikhs will be leaders in blazing new paths for the uplift progress and enlightenment of the common man. However, gradually Sikhs have slid down to the level of followers. In recent years, thousands of Sikhs were savagely murdered and brutally treated in their own country by the ruling party and its henchmen. The Sikh spirit should have effectively reacted against these cruelties and re-asserted for their liberty and Justice. But on account of the mutual fights and political selfishness of their front men, they chose the path of followers. Now half of them are the underlings of those who sponsored 'Blue Star' and Massacres. The other half is playing second fiddle to those who were dubbed as communalist by Master Tara Singh.

The dangers which loomed over this country at the time of creation of Khalsa has not disappeared entirely. The circumstances which urged Pt. Maalviya to bring Sikhism in each Hindu family have not vanished fully. The need to make India united, strong and progressive will be there as long as its borders are subjected to hostility. It is not possible to wish away a hostile neighbour. Under these circumstances, there is a need to spread the messages of true universal Sikh brotherhood in the whole country. Punjab leaders and their followers, through their ignorance, mutual rivalries and tilt towards tribalism, have failed to keep Sikhism on its high pedestal. There is the necessity that visionaries, like Malaviya, should come up all over the country to rekindle the vibrant spirit of this faith to make India secure, strong and progressive. The indomitable spirit originated at the time of creation of Khalsa in April, 1699 must not be allowed to fade away.



Gurdwara: Heart of Sikh Sangat

Travails of Diasporan Sikhs

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Since coming to USA, I found our community in a state of shock over the happenings in India in 1984. There was frustration, disillusionment, anger and confusion all around. There was a flux of immigrants from Punjab who demanded control of the main Gurdwara and use it as base for redress of their anger and humiliation suffered at home. The management was controlled by earlier immigrants who were mostly conservative and professionals and not much involved in politics. There was a great tussle in accepting the new comers as full-fledged members of the Gurdwara management.

This led to many violent battles in the holy premises and ultimately original management had to leave the holy places and assemble once weekly in a hired hall of a club. This went for a year and a half before they were able to hire an old church building on lease. This was a period of great emotional stress for all of us. I served the congregation by the grace of the Satguru, in sharing Guru's message through '*Shabad Vichar*' which helped in achieving peace of mind and putting balm on the lacerated hearts.

The younger generation was seized with the idea of supremacy of MIRI over PIRI and the only goal of Sikhism was thought to be creation of Khalistan. I emphasized the balancing of MIRI and PIRI as the true philosophy before anything can be achieved by the grace of SATGURU. In my humble view, we suffered because of having fallen short in practicing Guru's teaching because of lure of mammon and worldly possessions. It was true that Sikhs suffered injustices at the hands of National leaders who betrayed them by forgetting all the promises made to them before achieving the freedom.

During this period of our history it was natural that our minds were predominantly preoccupied in achieving social and political justice, yet the way the struggle was fought had shortcomings of leadership, which was divided amongst the old and the younger groups. Accepting the situation as a Will of Akal Purakh the, only course open was to practice PIRI. Uttamjeet, my wife also shared these views and we worked on that jointly and hoped for the better times to come.

A small group of Gursikhs who shared with my views of balancing the MIRI and PIRI doctrine of Sikhism, forced me to take active part in the Gurdwara politics and I became one of the trustees of the Sikh cultural society of Richmond Hill Gurdwara. During the period I came to know that our community here as well as in Punjab is divided on caste basis and there is an intense rivalry and jealousy amongst different castes and it was the main cause of their internal bickering and infights. The draft of the old constitution of the Gurdwara had loopholes on many legal issues that could not be resolved amicably. I attended some of the legal debates pertaining to Gurdwara management, where I heard the comments of the Supreme Court Judge that our constitution was unclear on many details of the rules and regulations and no judgements can be passed based on this combination.

I felt that unless the constitution was amended, all the Gurdwara funds would be spent on legal battles. By the grace of Akal Purakh the amended constitution was passed by a small margin of two-thirds majority votes. Under the impact of this new constitution, all the trustees and executive committee members had to be only *Amritdhari* Gursikhs.

