

PURSUIT OF WEALTH AND PATHOLOGY OF GREED

THE WISDOM OF HOLY GURU Granth Sahib seems to be lost on those in positions of power **ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਬਿਰਲੇ ਹੀ ਕੀ ਬੁਝੀ ਹੇ ॥੧॥** ॥ (SGGS: 213) is an axiomatic reflection of human nature. But when the Sikh image gets a beating, that too in India and in the Sikh homeland of Punjab, the pain is unconfined.

Shortly after the Public Service Commission scandal that led to discovery of bank lockers bulging with bundles of currency, the media came alive with pictures of a three-term chief minister being paraded as a prisoner. A hugely popular pop singer went underground to avoid arrest on charges of racketeering in visas for scores of desperate youngmen who had sold their farmland to emigrate to UK and USA.

For too long has the Punjab administration been run as a family fiefdom. No institution - government or gurdwara committee - has demonstrated the will to plan for the welfare of the youth, or of families impoverished by chronic indebtedness, or the victims of state repression or of the widows of massacre during the wake of the calamitous 1984. The alarming decline in female births over several decades puts a question mark as much on state health programmes as on the medical ethics that facilitates determination of sex of the unborn babies and the outrageous crime of female foeticide. In consequence, the district of Fatehgarh Sahib in Punjab has earned the dubious distinction of having only 770 females for every 1000 males - the lowest in India.

Is greed peculiar to Sikhs? The desire for living a good life is a universal phenomenon. While Guru Granth Sahib does not approve of ritualist austerities and fasting, the scripture also extols frugality and contentment; indeed humility is regarded as the highest virtue **ਗੁਣ ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ ਤਤੁ ॥** (SGGS: 470). On a practical plane the requirement of one's daily bread is elemental; fulfilment of basic human needs is a social imperative. It is admittedly the prerequisite for a life of piety and honesty. Only a discerning and disciplined mind can draw the line at contentment - where the need ends and indulgence begins. The Bhagat Bani illustrates: **"BuKy Bgiq n kljY"** and **"dwl sIDw mWgoN GIE"** - as basic needs.

Striving for excellence is one thing, yielding to greed is quite a different impulse that often overpowers prudence. Indeed greed is without a goal; it breeds on itself. As Guru Arjun Devji's *Sukhmani* teaches us: **"ਸਹਸ ਖਟੇ ਲਖ ਕਉ ਉਠਿ ਧਾਵੇ ॥ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੇ ਮਾਇਆ ਪਾਛੇ ਪਾਵੇ ॥** Moral discipline therefore most underpin our faith. Everyone is expected to exercise restraint and never to overstep the limit of contentment.

"Good life" generally connotes adequate food, good health and, at the mental level, a degree of freedom, including political freedom. The Sikh ethics also demands respect for others in society and, in return, being respected by friends and neighbours.

But ethics is the starting point for Sikh spirituality: **ਵਿਣੁ ਗੁਣ ਕੀਤੇ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥** Satisfying basic material needs is not the goal but simply the means. Trying to get

more than one needs, or more than one deserves, is not only self defeating, it is also demeaning and antisocial. No wonder Guru Nanak lays so much success on vMf Ckxw or sharing of one's honest earning.

Politicians of all persuasions, including Sikhs, have irreparably damaged the moral fibre and social norms. They have not only damaged their own reputation but also dishonoured the Sikh moral tradition.

It can be argued that, in a burgeoning economic setting, our natural sense of sufficiency is, by and large, vulnerable to social pressures. Temptation is an ancient vice. In a progressively material world, the desire to be rich in a hurry knows no boundaries. The five deadly sins, so vividly depicted in *Gurbani*, as ruinous robbers, apparently hold sway in these times. Greed has in fact been legitimized in the guise of "ambition". Sikhism is fast succumbing to this false rationalisation. To be rich has become an obsession.

Sukhmani's explicit advice is reduced to lip service. It is not just the banker, businessman or the bureaucrat whose greed breeds more greed; it is the preacher, the scholar and the *Gurbani* singer who wants more money and more recognition. *Siropas* have become dirt cheap. Remuneration for *Akhand Path* is a steady source of income. *Kirtan* is lucrative business. The message of *Gurbani* remains hidden under silky scarves. Few wish to learn what the Eternal Guru-Scripture teaches. People are willing to spend their lives achieving material goals. The majority of new generation - Sikh and non-Sikh - is hell-bent on making its happiness dependent on achieving something utterly unimportant and transient - a quest that only leads to great unhappiness. "Personal achievement" is foolishness in the eyes of God. Mortality awaits every millionaire. Today's celebrity is tomorrow's nonentity.

It is fortunately never too late to return to Guru's Path.

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