

Guru Nanak'S War on Superstition

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SUPERSTITION DIES HARD. It is one thing to publicly denounce beliefs and postulates which are ridiculous and senseless, but in personal life, doubts arise whether ignoring superstitions is right or wrong. People generally compromise by just tolerating these self-deceptions for peace and common consent. The lurking fear of adverse effects halts many a stalwart in his tracks.

Superstition has universally enslaved Man everywhere. People in all climes are transfixed with blind beliefs without escape, just stepping aside, avoiding negative influences playing with their lives. They rather conform to avoid frightful effects of non-compliance. The core word is *fright*, which chains man's free will from soaring high.

Nearer home, Sikhs have a direct impact of their largely Hindu ancestry on their social behaviour. But Hinduism is replete with rituals and superstitions from birth to death. The common Indian Hindu is a prisoner of ancient fear of the unknown relying on omens and signs than on intellect. He is frightened and alarmed which make him timid and scared, or devious. He moves about in a daze awaiting ominous powers to strike him unless he engages priests to rescue him, calculating each move from getting up from bed (on the right side or left?) till he drops exhausted. Influenced by Hindu courtiers and consorts, Akbar the Great had engaged regular astrologers to advise him on his whole day's movements, which clothes were auspicious, which colours to wear, which gems to adorn himself with, which campaigns to undertake, and the time of their launch, when to meet visitors and councillors, etc.

This has been prevalent from ancient times and all Hindu princes had their own soothsayer. The virus had equally affected Muslims who consulted Muslim divines to interpret to good omens, or bad omens called '*faal*.' Aristocracy aped Royalty and commoners fell in line in imitation. To this day, the whole of Asia, Europe, Americas, in fact, the entire world continues to adhere to the influence of planets, ghosts, gods and ancestors, who are supposed to direct worldly aspirations of people and have to be placated, through quaint rituals and wearing of charms.

It was Guru Nanak who broke these shackles single-handedly and refused to compromise with such fear. He confronted his parents at a tender age denouncing ceremonies of *jenu* as well as auspicious timings: *Saha ganeh na kare bichar, sahe upar Ekonkar*, that is:

"Auspicious time is not to be calculated, nor considered. God is above such omens."

Guru Nanak preached to his followers that God was the Doer and man could not contend with natural powers by selecting 'auspicious' timings and dates as control of nature, indeed the galaxies were the prerogative of Lord God. Guru Nanak rejected the role of astrology in our lives; a man of faith in God cannot change God's Will. This suffocating and stifling routine made the man helpless and a prisoner of omens and the Brahmin. Our Master abolished castes, which restricted development of Man by denying him opportunity to acquire knowledge.

The Mission of Guru Nanak was to transform ordinary folks: artisans, farmers, workers and the *dalits* to aspire for leadership and to turn the meek into supermen. He resurrected Truth and adopted Truthfulness as true Religion. By this novel innovation, all superstitions fell away, leaving the path clear and straight. A Sikh is, significantly, doubly guilty and sinful if he, on solemn oaths of belonging to the Guru, retains any superstitions and abjures truthful conduct.

It is therefore ironical that Guru's Sikhs should indulge in such false rites of superstition and be helplessly chained to fear psychosis. Sticking to castes, sub-castes, to astrologers, for auspicious timings and omen, horoscopes, to keep bowing to the images of goddess Lakshmi, Durga, etc. for windfall of fortune, and offerings to Muslim tombs and Hindu cemeteries, employing Brahmins, even Sikh Babas to Tantric rituals and Vedic recitals, to the extent of using *Guru Bani* as *Vedic mantra* in a bid to pressurize God to accede to such exhortation, with *Sampat Paths*, *Akhand Paths*, numbered readings of *Japji*, *Sukhmani*, *Chopai* P: 10 on the strength of money power, for the sake of petty and small time manipulation, these Sikhs can stoop so low, is disgusting.

Some sections of Sikh women observe the drollery of *karva chauth*, to placate moon-god by fasting and glimpsing the moon in worship. Such absurd belief in powers of the of moon is a ridiculous imitation of orthodox Hindus who indeed worship all the heavenly planets. Similar is the case of *Rakhsha Bandhan*, popular among Sikh urbanites, and *shraadh*s and *navratras*, and so on.

A lady, herself a widow, was critical of my wife not observing *karva chauth* or *Rakhi* festivals and irascibly asked what was wrong in worshipping for the welfare of husbands and brothers who were indeed the most valuable possessions of a woman. Even if a little inconvenience was undertaken in this behalf, who could object to it.? When asked if she kept fasts of *karva chauth*, she asserted that she did so as long as her husband was alive! Why was she a widow, in spite of that? She fell back on God's Will. That is the right thing to say. It is all God's Will and when a Sikh addresses God as *Waheguru*, he accepts to live on God's Will, in happiness and adversity, and not apply pressure in futile efforts to try to change the course of God's ways.

Superstitions fall into various categories of rites: Rites of worship, bathing, selection of clothes and colours, ornaments, setting out from home, checking on omens of birds, animals and confronting different castes; eating; working, celebrating in the family/ friends; ancestor worship; auspicious dates, days and seasons, and timings; birth and death rites; crossing of one's path by cats, snakes, birds, especially the scheduled castes, to the ridiculous extent of breathing by right or left nostril, as an omen. It is unending. It has been incorporated into culture to which Hindus adhere with devotion and full faith. An interesting point in this regard is that Hindu system is bound by *karma* and *bhag*, and there is no *via media* to avoid events which are the result of past actions, and man has to reap what he sowed in the past or the present. Then how would omens and remedies be of help or change the course of events? Therefore superstitions are wasteful, of no use, but a futile attempt to interfere with God.

Guru Nanak swept away such cobwebs of superstition as useless. He ordained that there was only One God, Unborn, Self-existent, Fearless, without enmity. To

cancel such false efforts to influence the Deity, he held that God was not subject to man's efforts and formal modes of worship, but bestowed his Grace where and when He pleased.

*"Hukme uttam neech hukm likh dukh sukh paiye
Ik na hukme bakhshish ik hukme sada bhavaiye."*

"It is by His Will that there are superior and inferior, (beings)
It is by His Will that sorrow and happy tidings are received
It is by His Will that some are blessed by His Grace;
Others are endlessly circling in Fate's Orbit."

Once God, the Doer is fully comprehended by the Sikh, all such rites of the ancients appear in direct confrontation with God.

Guru Nanak, by establishing God as the Doer took the wind out of Hindu rituals and *karmkand*. He rejected castes, *yagnas*, austerities, celibacy and suggested a way out of the constant cycle of cause and effect and transmigration, by firm faith in efficacy of God and full faith in the Creator's Will.

Since magic and the supernatural are in direct clash with the doctrine of God the Doer, it was abandoned. Regarding Guru Nanak performing 'miracles', our Second Master, *Guru Angad* explained:

*"E kinehi dat apas te jo paiye
Nanak sa karmat Sahib tuthey jo miley."*

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"What is that proficiency which one performs oneself?"

"Nanak, miracle is that which is bestowed by Grace of God."

Ancient seers engaged in life-long struggle to attain a few miraculous powers, and yet could not attain much. A godly man who acknowledges God as not only the Creator, but the Doer of all action merges in God and such miraculous powers appear in his **normal** behaviour without undertaking any austerities and efforts. This can be attained by any one without distinction of class and creed, gender and situation. Such a person who has merged his self and ego in God may lead a normal life of a house holder. Mind is not won by tortures or acrobats, but by fusion of self with God- the Doer and being God-like.

Guru Nanak's famous quote clearly explains his mission:

"Kiv sachiara hoeay kiv kurey tutey pal"

How to be truthful? How to break the veil of falsehood?

Human mind, a prisoner of self delusion and gullibility has to be freed. His outlook and angle has to be altered by accepting God as the Doer, and eliminating his self-ego.

"Hukm rajai chalana"

To willingly accept God's Order and Will.

The life story of Guru Nanak shows him as a relentless crusader, questioning the blind faith of the people, be it in a mosque or temple, at Haridwar, Pilibhit, higher reaches of Himalayas, Varanasi, Jagan Nath Puri, Bidar, Rameshwaram, Ceylon, Sikkim, Assam, Baghdad, Mecca etc. The nine succeeding Masters continued his mission to demolish baseless presumptions and conjectures.

The strength of *Guru Nanak's Panth* was put to severe test as questions were raised by existing religious leaders to invoke state curtailment, as early as *Akbar*, holding an enquiry about what was felt objectionable in Sikhism. *Guru Arjun* was summoned on such complaints and was tortured to death, by *Jahangir* and his staunch advisers. *Guru Tegh Bahadur* refused to obey orders to embrace Islam under duress, or to perform miracles. He rather made fun of his tormentors by giving a slip of paper describing his martyrdom as an act to strengthen Truth. *Guru Gobind Singh* denounced all superstitions more vigorously - by logical and meaningful discussions - to teach growing fraternity of Sikhs, about the erroneous and fruitless rituals, as insisted upon by the Brahmins at Naina Devi, sermon to the *Ganga* pilgrim at Jaitu, creation of classless *Khalsa*, conversion of *Baba Banda Singh Bahadur* at Nanded, his indifference to the precious gems offered at Nagina Ghat at Nanded, and his parting bequest to *Guru Khalsa* to remain wedded to Truth as per *Guru Granth Sahib* and be fearless and truthful in their daily working and help the down-trodden.

The tradition grew strong and healthy to totally shun the dread of superstitions so that he was himself questioned about his dipping the arrow towards a cemetery, as mark of reverence which was against Sikh ethos.

Today Sikhs are talking of 'compromise' as a means to live peacefully at all costs, even by abandoning the basic tenets of their religion. Compromises are the tools of the unsteady and weaklings. Truth can never be diluted and can never be compromised with the false and fake.

It is a travesty of truth to argue that *Guru Nanak's* sweet demeanour and confident posture were a sign of his willingness to compromise with the untruth. People have gone to the extent of denying a New Order or idea emanating from *Guru Nanak* and that he only brought about synthesis of existing faiths. **It is necessary, therefore, to delineate *Guru's* denouncement of existing faiths and his pronouncement of new dimensions of thought based on Truth, and nothing but the truth.**

