

Why Sikhs win Battles but lose Wars

A Behavioral Study

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The main purpose of this paper is to examine the psycho-social functioning of Sikhs as a nation. Our enigmatic behaviour which enables us to "win battles but lose wars" will also be examined using various schools of radical, existential and spiritual psychology. It is hoped that this self-analysis will help Sikh psyche which is very important for national building and self-enhancement.

Most of our culture and personality get shaped into styles. In order to understand styles, I will attempt to apply psychological concepts of: observational learning; vicarious reinforcements; cognitive control; self-regulation; self-observation; judgmental process; self-reactive personality; self-efficiency (See Bandura, 1959, 1963, 1973, 1976, 1986) to understand the emergence of some of very useful and very troubled styles of Sikh psyche in the recent past.

First: some facts about Gurus and their teachings as it impacted the conscious, unconscious, and collective unconscious (psyche) of the Sikhs:

- a. The Sikh Gurus attempted to decrease the dichotomy between spiritual life and empirical life.
- b. They challenged the initial (Indian) structure dominated by *Manu-vad* and Brahmanic dehumanizing philosophy. They did that through "cultural-structural" inversion and negation of the negations (i.e. body should not be punished to gain *Nirvana*).
- c. They rejected the 'unreality' of life.
- d. They rejected indulgence in asceticism, *varnas*, caste system, ritualism, sati, *Purdah* and avatarhood.
- e. They brought in the concept of a mystical saint who is in touch with universal and cosmic consciousness (Brahmgyani) and is willing to play the 'game of love' (self-sacrifice) by "putting his head on his palm".
- f. Sikhs' concept of God is "The Sole One", The Creator, Self-existent, without fear, without enmity, timelessness, un-incarnated, gracious, ocean of virtues and inexpressible.

- g. Family is the centre of Khalsa centric living. The Gurus rejected celibacy and made the status of women equal to the men.
- h. Gurus believed in the sharing of wealth produced by hard work "done by both hands". They also depreciated the greed-based amassing of wealth. Here the Sikhs Gurus came very close to socialistic living.
- i. Gurus urged Sikhs to accept social responsibility. A tyrant who dehumanizes and hinders in the honest and righteous discharge of a family life has to be confronted. A Khalsa automatically takes up the role of the protector of people victimized by a tyrant.
- j. A Khalsa psyche is always at a "positively disintegrated" stage or at a "cognitive dissonance" stage and suffers from normalcy at the thought of what is and what could be.
- k. A good Khalsa shapes his inner and outer reality by *Naam Simran* and cleanses his doors of perception with Guru's Grace
- l. A Khalsa always challenges the *status quo* by using Gurus as models.
- m. A Khalsa is polite to friends and defiant to oppressors.
- n. Through social partnership and resistance against oppression, the Sikh Gurus made Khalsa an instrument of God's attributive will who fights to bring the Kingdom of God on Earth (Khalsa-Raj).
- o. Through transcendental operations (i.e. repeating his name) a Khalsa stops seeing lines in his reality.
- p. A Khalsa is cosmocentric and the pain of the whole universe becomes his pain. He kills egotism, "The Neurosis of the Soul through *Sahaj* and *Naam*" and replace it with Altruistic-Egotism.
- q. Remembering God in the company of *Sadh-Sangat* is his vehicle of evolution. *Naam* is his method of evolution to a higher cosmocentric living. *Naam* helps him in removing his I-am-ness.
- r. After evolution a pure person is born (Khalsa). This person is not chained to his cultural conditioning. He is the seer and the seen, and feels compulsion to empathy with the poor.
- s. He starts lighting a candle rather than cursing darkness. He becomes the vanguard of righteousness by defining himself in the image of the Guru. He becomes Guru's *Roop*. He is no more slave to appearance and bounded by dualities - a half-fixed, half-fluid mass of self-repeating desires and thoughts.

t. He becomes a *prakriti* - a cosmic force and thus he reaches a phoenix principle of Khalsa-centric living, a life affirming system.

It is a known historic fact that the Sikh Gurus attracted people of diverse background to become Khalsas with these personality traits:

1. realistic self-regard
2. have other-oriented assertive, extroverted personality
3. awareness, acceptance and mastery of the environment
4. integration and unity of personality
5. whole-hearted pursuit of life's goals understanding ways of "*Kudrat*", "*Hukum*", and *Bhana*
6. autonomy and self-reliance
7. perception of reality and social sensitivity and responsibility
8. self-control and social reliability
9. ability to envisage goals
10. continued growth towards self-actualization

Dr. Albert Bandura, a Canadian-born Psychologist who taught at Stanford University, U.S.A., has postulated the following psychological concepts to describe "how a personality is shaped".

- a. social learning and shaping one's personality using valued persons as models.
- b. models can be persons as well as symbolic (as Guru Granth Sahib - living Guru of the Sikhs)
- c. learning to imitate models by socially reinforced behaviours
- d. by using intentional retentional motto reproduction and motivational processes, the person internalizes the behaviour of the models
- e. other sources of reinforcements are:
 1. direct reinforcement from the model (Guru)
 2. consequences of behaviour

3. vicarious reinforcement

Dr. Bandura has also postulated constructions entitled:

- a. personal agent
- b. self-regulation
- c. self-observation
- d. judgmental processes
- e. self-reaction

Sikh Gurus expected Khalsa to "internalize" *Gurbani* so as to develop a personal agent to monitor his/her behaviour and make decisions without relying on the instruction of others. They also expected that Khalsa would be motivated by the interaction of self-generated extrinsic factors to shape his personality. Khalsa would also have the capacity to self regulate through self-observation and self-monitoring.

Self-Efficacy and the Sikhs

Self-efficacy bring to people the ability to understand that what you do has an effect on yours and other's social life. With self-efficacy the Khalsas were supposed to organize and integrate cognitive, social and behavioural skills to function in many situations.

Writing for his recent book entitled *New Personality, Self Portrait* (Bantam Books 1995), Dr. John Oldham has postulated many personality styles. According to psychological understanding of the present author who happens to be a Sikh, the majority of the Sikhs have evolved into the following personality styles:

a. **Self-confident style** in Sikhs makes them "star quality" persons. The star quality is born of self-regard, self-respect and self-certainty. Self-confident Sikhs could challenge the British and Mughal empire. They displayed ambition, self-regard, self-awareness, poise, dreams, stature and expected "red carpet" treatment. Using this style the Sikh psyche felt "the joy of being me" and "the world is me". Their self was self-made, self-possessed, self-propelled, self-assertive and self-starter. But, abnormal development of this style has brought to some Sikhs self-aggrandizing, self-preoccupation with power, which leads to power psychosis and selfishness.

Behaviour of some Sikh military officers Lt. Gens. Dayal, Brar who attacked the Golden Temple, and the obnoxious behaviour of police officers like Mr KPS Gill, alleged killer of thousands of Panjabi youth, are cases in point). Some self-confident individuals develop pathology which makes them narcissistic. These narcissistic Sikhs have been responsible for Sikh defeats (1839-1849) . During post independence India, some Sikh officers (military and police) displayed adventurous-self-confidence. The narcissistic

styles were used by the government of India to "tame the Sikhs by the Sikhs". Sikh leaders or officers appear to develop a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g. exaggerated fantasies of unlimited power).

Suffering from narcissistic personality disorder, some Sikhs start considering themselves special and unique, requiring excessive admiration and a sense of entitlement and display arrogant, haughty behaviour or attitudes. In reality Guru Gobind Singh created Khalsa to fight the oppressors. Guru Gobind Singh named Sikhs as Singhs (lions). These lions of Panjab lived by their codes of values, loved the thrill of risk, non-conformism and wanderlust, and were high-spirited individuals who also displayed humility by sitting at the feet of Sat Guru.

Sikh became action-oriented extrovert, hungry for peak experiences. Danger to them was challenge, not fear. They did not mind sailing into the storm.

b. Self-sacrificing style (the altruist). By following the models of Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh and his *Sarbans*, some Sikhs still display a peak altruist behaviour. In recent Sikh history, Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sardar Beant Singh, Satwant Singh and many Sikh youth gave their lives because Sikh nation's "*Izzat*" was at stake.

c. Other styles which cause Sikhs to lose wars is the extreme aggressive style (top dogs without being realistic), mercurial style (fire on ice), idiosyncratic style (the different drummer - human rights activist). Unfortunately, these styles are not kept in balance by the conscientious style (the right stuff at the right time), vigilant style (the survivor), and serious style (the realist-academic).

Summary: It is the belief of the present author that Sikhs after 1839 (death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) have won battles but lost wars because they have not modified themselves even though the paradigm has shifted. From Khalsa Raj to British Raj to Hindu majority (82%) Raj, they have been used by the British (1857, 1914, 1939) and by the leaders of Indian independent movements (Gandhi, Patel, Nehru) who in their "philosophical" writings and actions were anti-Sikhs.

Sikhs' contribution to free India from the chains of British Imperialism was the highest, considering they represent two percent of the Indian population. However, before or after Partition, Sikhs were the least consulted minority group on any matter of importance to them. Whereas Muslims were represented by Mohammed Ali Jinnah (Bar-at-Law) and Hindus were represented by Mr. Nehru and Mr Gandhi (Bar-at-Law), Sikhs were represented by a "yes man" of Mr. Nehru i.e. Mr Baldev Singh. Consequently during the Partition of India, they were economically ruined and suffered untold loss of life and property. Furthermore, to add insult to injury, they were publicly humiliated, when in 1952, under the directions of the Home Ministry, Government of India, Mr. Patel sent a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioners of all Districts of Panjab to 'treat Sikhs as criminals'.

It is amazing that at a very critical moment of history (1947), we could not get any "solid" homeland where we could "breathe air of freedom", even though our departing masters were willing to give it to us (in our arousals and hyperactive state we became very non-reflective). It is possible that a death wish wanted us to undergo more humiliations from 1947 to 1965 to 1975 to 1982, 1984, 1990-1998).

Death wish and the Sikhs: The concept of a death wish (Freud) can be used to explain the present Sikh situation. In recent times, our leaders, who happen to be non-spiritual *sants* raise slogans that "Panth" is in danger and sacrifices are needed". These slogans attract Sikhs with aggressive, self-sacrificing, mercurial, idiosyncratic, adventurous, and dramatic styles. Then a *morcha* is started. Even objectives of the *morcha* are not clear. So when *morcha* is started, or one *sant* is pitched against another *sant* along with the President of S.G.P.C., the whole community is taken for a "trap trip" and has to undergo series of humiliations. It is sad that power and unholy motives of non-academic Sikh leaders have inflicted on this brilliant community humiliation, resulting in negative rumination.

Consequently, this has produced in the Sikh youth, a sense of disbelief and disorientation. They either want to leave India or want to leave Sikh symbols so as to reduce the cues which makes targets of Sikh police officers. The Sikh youth have been systematically humiliated by their leaders and are suffering from serious 'identity crisis' and symptoms of derealization and depersonalization. Their heightened awareness about what happened in Panjab due to power motives of Sikh leaders leaves them in a state of helplessness, hopelessness and worthlessness. So removal of turbans and shaving of the beards may be their way of saying to 'Sants Inc.': "have it and stuff it!" It may be their way of identifying with the aggressive, dominant Hindu culture, who has been dying to assimilate the Sikhs because the Muslims threat is gone and paradigm has shifted.

Sikh psyche is in a sad state. Pessimism, sense of failure, self-dislike and social withdrawal is taking place through the removal of the symbols. Self-image change in Sikh youths rampant. Sikh youth have become anxiety-ridden, created by low self-esteem and identity crisis. They have been crushed by life's wounds inflicted by self-serving leaders. They are passing through times of intense self-doubt. They feel they have been used and victimized because of their gullibility, and their self-image is producing in them a feeling of inferiority and self-consciousness.

What can be done! The present writer is not in favour of weepy sentimentalism. *Sikhs in History* (by Sangat Singh, 1994) sums up many such periods where attempt were made to finish "the-evolved Khalsa". We should not ignore the fact that "figure ground relationship has changed, paradigm has shifted and old methods of doing things as suggested by semi-educated Sants can land the community in deep crisis which it is experiencing at the present time. We may have to introspect and look within to find out the enemy within us. We may have to use Chanakiya philosophy, i.e. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend".

We may have to liberate Sikhs from the clutches of various Gurdwaras in India and abroad, who have a myopic and self-centred view of life and who use Gurdwara and its funds for satisfying their power motives. We have to make sure that psychotic behaviour is not allowed to be created in the community by planting psychotic leaders.

We have to struggle to create Sikh institutes where Sikh leaders bring problems for discussion and analysis and directions. We have to produce counter action against modernization through the production of audio-visual material for free distribution. To tap the economic and spiritual power of 22 million Sikhs, we may produce a world Sikh directory of all Sikhs living in India and abroad. Lists of members from Gurdwaras can come in handy. These lists can be used for generating power and wealth to bring the glory to Khalsa - an evolved person of Guru Gobind Singh - representing:

- a. the realistic self-regard
- b. fearlessness
- c. civic action
- d. having a philosophy of life and living
- e. social service to others
- f. health, happiness ideas
- g. work ethics
- h. creativity through Khalsa-centric research
- i. mastery of the environment
- j. desired to meet demands of life in a positive manner
- k. get autonomy
- l. self-surrender
- m. perception off reality and social sensitivity
- n. growth and self-actulization
- o. aptitude for capitalizing on past experience
- p. action produced through reflection
- q. self-control

- r. ability to envisage ideals
- s. social reliability
- t. capacity to act independently while still acknowledging need for relationship and diplomacy
- u. using *Naam* to evolve to higher consciousness
- v. using Guru's grace as guidance
- w. willing to accept *Bhava* - in the spirit of Guru Gobind Singh
- x. non-acceptance of oppressive status quo
- y. defining life through His *Kudrat*, *Hukam* and Prayer of Faith.



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