

Let us Re-assert Sikhism's Moral Authority

IN RECENT TIMES, rationalists and academicians have been inclined to consider religion - in its impact on people's minds as a source of conflict, rather than as the key to peace and happiness.

In the historical context of the Indian subcontinent, monarchs and dynasts have been known to use the resources and machinery of their kingdoms for repression and conversion by coercion. In order to perpetuate their rule, the later Mughal rulers notoriously used the state power to woo and win over the people. In particular, their provincial satraps focussed on bringing the elite Brahmin caste into the Islamic fold.

Typical example of such coercion is found in the late 17th Century rule of emperor Aurangzeb, when the desperate Kashmiri Pandit community rushed a delegation to Guru Tegh Bahadur in Anandpur Sahib for intercession with the Mughal king. The brutal public execution of the Guru, in Delhi's Chandni Chowk, in November 1675, not only stunned the people but had the effect of transforming the peace-loving Sikh religion into a powerful movement against tyranny. The nascent Khalsa militancy, initiated in 1699 hastened the end of the Mughal rule, even as it reversed the tide of the invasions from the North-West by Nadir Shah Durani (1739) and Ahmed Shah Abdali in February 1748, and again in December 1756.

The Sikhs not only survived the brutality of alien invasions but consolidated their prowess and resources sufficiently to establish the Khalsa Raj in 1799 under the leadership of the youthful Maharaja Ranjit Singh. **For the first time in a thousand years, an indigenous and truly secular state came into being on the soil of India. Indeed the Sikh Maharaja pioneered a truly 'Secular' state where Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs lived in a spirit of harmony.** This essential unity could not be breached even by the subsequent British policy of Divide and Rule.

The harmonious reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the Punjab must have been one of reasons why the framers of Indian Constitution, in 1947, chose **secularism as the cornerstone of State policy**, while affirming the free profession, practice and propagation of religion as a fundamental right.

The Sikh faith, in the best tradition of Guru Granth Sahib, encourages self-understanding: ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥ [SGGS: 441] knowing one's true nature, rooted in the Divine, provides inspiration to regard all humanity as a brotherhood:

mwns kl jwq sBY eykY pihcwnbo,...

eyk hl srUp sBY eyk joq jwnbo [Akwl ausq~q, AMK 85]

For a true Sikh, there is no rival nor a stranger, all become brothers in goodwill:

ਨਾ ਕੇ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥ [SGGS: 1299]

In the context of the modern welfare state, let us also recall how the Guru Granth Sahib has contributed to the evolution of an egalitarian and democratic India that prizes non-discriminatory laws, social justice, and cherishes the concept of welfare for all, with a sense of humility - both in theory and in practice. Here is what Bhakta Naamdev, the saint from Maharashtra, declares in Guru Granth sahib:

ਬੇਗਮ ਪੁਰਾ ਸਗਰ ਕੇ ਨਾਉ ॥ ਦੁਖ ਅੰਦੋਹੁ ਨਹੀ ਤਿਹਿ ਠਾਉ ॥

ਨਾਂ ਤਸਵੀਸ ਖਿਰਾਜੁ ਨ ਮਾਲੁ ॥ ਖਉਫੁ ਨ ਖਤਾ ਨ ਤਰਸੁ ਜਵਾਲੁ ॥੧॥

ਅਬ ਮੋਹਿ ਖੂਬ ਵਤਨ ਗਹ ਪਾਈ ॥ ਉਹਾਂ ਖੈਰਿ ਸਦਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਭਾਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ [SGGS: 694]

This could well have been adopted as a Preamble of the Indian Constitution. Everytime the people suffer deprivation - whether in consequence of a natural calamity or societal imbalances - one is reminded of Guru Nanak's agonized outcry: ਏਤੀ ਮਾਰ ਪਈ ਕਰਲਾਣੇ ਤੈ ਕੀ ਦਰਦੁ ਨ ਆਇਆ ॥੧॥ [SGGS: 360]

Governments at the local level, right down to the village, must provide succour while reaching out to the poor.

We often hear about the state-run poverty alleviation programmes that fail to deliver services. Every activity is riddled with middlemen. Guru Nanak tells us the truth about the 'poverty of mind and the petty-foggery:

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਨਿਰਧਨੁ ਤਿਤੁ ਦਿਨਿ ਜਿਤੁ ਦਿਨਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਨਾਉ ॥ [SGGS: 1244]

In the context of resource management, Gurbani lays down the axiomatic truth about the wealth of the nations:

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਭ ਪਵਿਤੁ ਹੈ ਧਨੁ ਸੰਪੈ ਮਾਇਆ ॥

ਹਰਿ ਅਰਥਿ ਜੋ ਖਰਚਦੇ ਦੇਵੇ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥ [SGGS: 1246]

Here, then, is a treasure trove of practical wisdom, above and beyond the barriers of any denominational religion, that is - and must be - the guidepost of our state policy - if not in India as a whole, at least in the Punjab which needs to set an example of **prosperity for all**, rooted in piety and charity.

Guru Granth Sahib belongs to all humanity: it offers the most universal method of resolving social and economic conflicts across societies, states and continents. Let us reassert the moral authority of the Guru-eternal, for the Good of all, or *Sarbat da bhala*.

