

## Earth bound Sikhs and their soaring Spirit: A Futurist Vision

An esteemed friend in Canada, a psychoanalyst at that, has come up with the suggestion that *The Sikh Review* devote one whole issue to the subject: "The Futurist view of Sikhism: 2050."

In so far as planning such a challenging – if fascinating – debate requires inputs from thinkers and visionaries of many hues, we regard this as an opportune time to throw the gauntlet, as it were, and set the sympathetic scholars thinking, with the following flights of fancy.

It is easy to be an optimist: 'ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥' [SGGS:1299] is our motto. But optimism has its inherent risks. The Sikh is a saint soldier. The perfect soldier is – as Tolstoy remarks – The most idle! He deters hostilities merely by being there. But this must not delude us that he is not needed. Sikhism – as an institution – like democracies everywhere, must remain alert and on their guard.

It is not for nothing that Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1666-1708) sanctified the basic code with the tough test of *Amrit*. He knew how Guru Nanak (1469-1539) had agonized for peace and justice: 'ਹਉ ਭਾਲਿ ਵਿਕ੍ਰਿਨੀ ਹੋਈ ॥ ਆਧੇਰੇ ਰਾਹੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ ॥' [SGGS:145]. Aggression and oppression remain deeply ingrained in collective human nature.

The Sikh farmers in Punjab who, in 1966-75, had ushered in the Green Revolution, not only faced crushing political repression in 1980's, to the point of genocide, but also felt trapped in heavy debts in 1990's to the extent of being driven to suicide – an unheard of phenomenon. This is even more bewildering when one recalls that, in 1946-47, the Sikhs made the critical decision of fighting for a united India. Thereby they suffered double devastation – losing half-a-million men and women in the Partition riots, and vast tracts of irrigated lands left in Pakistan. The struggle for so-called Punjabi Suba also back-fired, even as the new capital city of Chandigarh was deftly 'appropriated' as a 'Union Territory'.

It is, however, not territory that Guru Nanak had sought. Throughout his life he gave his all to bring dignity, honour and freedom to Asia's teeming masses, wrapped up in prayer and Divine Grace. He taught the Indians to practice social equality and showed the way as to how one could discover one's true self within: 'ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥' [SGGS:441]. His triumph was that he succeeded in kindling the INNER FLAME among the most robust outward looking people.

The reason why Guru Nanak wants us to repose full trust in God is that God alone is the arbiter of our fate: beyond fear and above rancour, the ultimate Power in the universe whose law (ਹੁਕਮ) transcends all human wisdom. The only pattern that exists in life is the domain of God's Will. A Sikh is, therefore a realist who is comfortable with mysticism; he has faith in God and is therefore free from the fear of the unknown.

No wonder the tyranny of medieval India's rulers failed to conquer the Sikh spirit. Indeed it only strengthened their steely determination, leading to the founding of the kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799 - significantly a hundred years after Guru Gobind Singh Ji instituted the Khalsa Panth as the culmination of Guru Nanak's divine mission.

The eventful century blazed a new trail of glory that witnessed the compassionate rule (ਹਲੇਖੀ ਰਾਜ) - which Guru Arjun had envisioned before he embraced martyrdom in 1606. The coincidence of a quatercentennial, today, is yet another reminder that freedom comes with a price tag, and that vigilance is an integral part of high moral principles we wish to uphold

during the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century is remembered mainly for the struggle for survival, the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century rekindled the spirit of classical Sikhism: an upsurge of profound scholarship: (ਗਿਆਨ ਕੀ ਆਧੀ) came with Bhai Vir Singh Giani, Ditt Singh, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, followed by Bhai Jodh Singh, Principal Teja Singh, Sirdar Kapur Singh, Mohan Singh (Panj Darya) Nanak Singh novelist, and a dozen others. The twentieth century also witnessed a spectacular dispersal of the Sikhs who have since registered their presence in all continents. Recent issues of *The Sikh Review* give graphic accounts of the Sikh Diaspora in the non-English speaking South and Central Americas by our unstoppable enterprising friend, Swarn Singh Kahlon [SR Dec. 2005, Jan. & Feb. 2006].

Which brings us to the demographic distribution of the Sikhs across the globe. We owe a debt of gratitude to the indefatigable Sr. Gurmit Singh of Australia\*. While exhorting fellow Sikhs to stand tall in their distinct identity and to take pride in tradition of 'Gurbani and Qurbani', i.e. the Holy Scripture and Passion for Sacrifice – he discloses such nuggets as the fact that Punjabi language is spoken in 18 Countries, by 87 million people – 10<sup>th</sup> in ranks of world's major language.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the year 2005 [p. 721] and The World Almanac Book of Facts, 2006, the world population of Sikhs is 24.989 million. The bulk, - i.e. 24 million is concentrated in Punjab (India) Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. North America has Sikhs in excess of 583,000, Europe 2,38,000 and the African Continent (notably Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, etc) around 60,000. In the religion-wise world ranking, the Sikhs rank sixth, after Christian, Muslims, Hindus, Chinese and Buddhists. Australia has scheduled a census for August 8, 2006.

As long as the people follow the Gospel of Guru Granth Sahib, retain and cherish the God given *persona* and identity, free of superstition and cant, inspired by the great heritage of Gurbani and *Qurbani*, the 21<sup>st</sup> century holds bright future for the Sikhs. It is the religion for all humanity, imbued with compassion,, with an accent on practical living and egalitarian principle of sharing, with faith in Almighty God - the Timeless One. The key is to bring the younger generation into a loving realisation that the values embedded in Guru Granth Sahib can bring peace, power and joy into their lives. We must establish a 're-connect' with our heritage.

This prognostication doubtless assumes that humanity as a whole will be wise enough to preserve the environment and slow down, if not reverse, the global warming which threatens to engulf the continental shelf, drastically reducing the land mass suitable for human habitation.

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