

# The 'Difference' of Sikhism

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The advent of globalization has deterritorialized capital. As the theorists of globalization like Roland Robertson, Zygmunt Bauman, Mike Featherstone, Rob Wilson, Wimal Dissanayake believe, globalization is a homogenizing threat as well an opportunity for local or small cultures to open up and transnationalize themselves. An "interface of global forces" (Dissanayake & Wilson (eds.) 1996: 1) is occurring. A culture theorist Homi Bhabha has suggested that communities or cultures mediated by specific historical moments have come to pints of disjunction; a new meeting or hybridity of the "disjunctive" temporalities (Bhabha, 1994: 193) is taking shape. There is an "interstitial" change. All these theorists swear by the flexibility of globalization in which multinational capital has re-defined the small narratives and their relationship; but still without exception, they recognize the real homogenizing danger of the global capital.

The Unitarian threat of globalization is concealed in what has been called by Anthony Giddens and David Harvey as "time/space compression". It means that with fast space travel and accelerated information technology, various cultures belonging to different historical moments can be brought together and experienced simultaneously. But this togetherness, meeting or simultaneity is not innocent. It is organized within a paradigm that is situated in a political economy. What needs to be understood is that in the flow of capital, blockades can occur if the global paradigm does not interface with the local or small cultures, and the cultures can also stagnate if they do not resituate themselves in the global. In the case of India where diverse regions with their own philosophical and linguistic traditions have different cultural ontologies, the flow of global capital cannot be smooth. The deterritorialization occurring or likely to occur in the future has to negotiate the distinct ontologies. In this process of negotiation, of course, the regional cultures and regions will also rearticulate themselves.

Sikhism as a way of life with its related substructures evolved with the writings and lives of ten Gurus. The first Guru, Nanak Dev, was born in 1469 A.D. and the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh breathed his last in 1708 A.D. Their sacred writings are included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and the Dasam Granth. The Guru Granth also has in it the writings of some 15 *bhagat* poets belonging to the Punjab, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh. The writings of the *bhagat* poets are regarded as *bani* (revealed poetry) like the *bani* of the Gurus.

The quintessential paradigm of Sri Guru Granth Sahib around which the Sikh way of life took shape can be called as *Vismad*, the word that the Gurus themselves use. *Vismad* literally means Joyous Wonder. In Rag Sarang, Guru Arjun Dev says that God or Waheguru, that literally means the Guru of wonder, is "*bismad*" (Shabdarth Sri Guru Granth Sahib, 1987: 1205). He is kind in His Joyous Wonder. Knowing and experiencing Him is drinking the nectar of *Nam* or quintessence.

In his very powerful composition *Asa di Var* or the divine Ballad in Rag Asa, Guru Nanak Dev envisions and articulates God's creation in differential *Vismad*. The diversity itself is presented as Vismadic, causing Joyous Wonder. The Guru himself is watching the beauty of this creation as "**wonder-struck**:"

*Vismad* sound, *Vismad* learning

*Vismad* beings, *Vismad* differences

*Vismad* form, *Vismad* colour  
*Vismad* roaming naked creatures  
*Vismad* air, *Vismad* water  
*Vismad* fire that plays diverse games  
*Vismad* earth, *Vismad* species  
*Vismad* your Beholding Presence.  
*Vismad* struck am I watching your sublime play.  
Says Nanak, perfectly fortunate are those who realize the Marvel.

(Shabdarth SGGS, 468)

The divine “Marvel” of diverse colours, forms, species games, is to be realized at the personal and social levels. In simple words, the Guru envisions a *Vismadic* society for human beings where politics, economics and consciousness accord to the Joyous Wonder. Two major obstacles in the way are ego and power-seeking. Ego or *haumai* is to see life as determined by the ultimately of individual consciousness. But to overcome ego, in Sikhism, an intuitive grasp of “co-dependent origination” (*Paratityasamutpada*) is not enough, as Nagarajuna suggests. One has to burst into song in praise of Waheguru: the Guru of Wonder, says Guru Nanak Dev in *Japuji*. “*Gavaih\** is the word that he uses in stanza 3 (Ibid., 1). But the strength to sing is a gift. The song, therefore, is blessing that happens in the universe without calculates, on which presides the Creator-Supreme Person, *Karta Purakh*. Losing ego or filling one’s identity with the wholeness of *Karta Purakh* and His Quintessence alters one’s perception, consciousness and relationships. It is being “dust”. In Rag Asa Guru Arjun Dev says:

Oh mind if you remain the dust of all.

They will look as beloveds to you (Ibid., 379).

Egocentricity is not a flaw of individuals alone; cultures and administrators/ kings can also suffer from it. As a result they invade and transgress. Using his metaphor of transmigration, Guru Nanak Dev says in Rag Gauri, that such egoic transgressors remain in the cycle of birth and death:

Assuming ego kings invade countlessly

*Haumai* obliterates and keeps one in the cycle of birth and death. (Ibid., 226)

Egotistical action or conduct becomes power-seeking in social and political terms. The Guru’s word for a power-seeker is *Sakat*. In Rag Maru, Guru Nanak Dev says very strongly that a power-seeker takes shelter in falsehood and deception, he is overwhelmed by death and darkness, and is finally left alone when hanged. (Ibid., 1030, 1031) a power-seeker is not allowed into the “High Temple of God” and remains in pain/*dukha*.

The point to be understood is that egotism and power-seeking disrupt the *Vismadic* universe of Joyous Wonder, therefore, they are not within the principle of *Vismad*, they need to be discarded. Since *Vismad* is the Joy that springs from the diversity of colours, forms and species, any act of egotism or power, manipulation will be violation of *Vismad*. This violation does not occur simply in the operation of the State, through its various apparatuses, but also in knowledge. We now know from Nietzsche through Foucault, Deleuze and Edward that knowledge is hijacked by the willed frameworks and metaphors of the classes. The Guru liberates knowledge also when he says: “Recognize truth only when it relies on love” (Ibid., 468).

“Truth and Love” are intertwined in Sikhism. This definition of Truth or knowledge, counter to the imitation of abstract ideas (eidos) in the Socratic-Platonic tradition, accepts loving relationship with the other as primary. The *Vismadic* universe and knowledge of it are based on I-Thou relationship at all levels.

The Gurus severely criticized the freezing of woman into Ithood by the Brahmanical priesthood for the birth-time bodily flows or *Sutak*. In *Asa di Var / the Divine Ballad of Rag Asa*, the guru says that birth and death are within the divine commandment, womankind cannot be downgraded for *Sutak*. She gives birth to the noblest of humankind and proliferates relationships. As an all-time tribute to womankind, the Gurus make the bride-groom-bride metaphor for articulating the human-Waheguru relationship as the primary metaphor of their entire *bani* in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The whole mystery and burden of the relationship can be experienced and communicated only if one transforms oneself into a loving or creative being like the woman. The Guru's metaphor exceeds all our contemporary frameworks of feminists.

The Guru says very empathetically and repeatedly that the role of capital is very important in transforming the person and society. To create a society that accords to the cosmic *Vismad*, capital has also to operate to the pleasure of the Radiant Lord who is the Guru of Joyous Wonder. We now know from Marx that capital is not just money, it is the total network of production relationships (Marx, 1977: 814). The Guru says that capital has to be holistic or *Poonji Sabat* (SSGGS, 1987: 1032). It means that capital has to be integrated with the Guru of Wonder. In simple words, the operation of capital and its resulting relationships cannot violate relationships, cannot violate the I-Thou nature of life. Any Oedipalization and exploitation will be outside the principle of *Vismad*. The notion of holistic capital makes the capitalistic capital and socialistic capital appear as alienated and imbalanced. The presence of "surplus value" in the pricing of a commodity, that denies the worker his full wage, and creates a parasitic and manipulative class of profiteers, will not be approved by the Gurus. In *Rag Majh*, Guru Nanak Dev says very candidly: "Those who suck human blood cannot be called pure minds" (SSGGS, 140). And purity is necessary for creating a *Vismadic* society. The singular intention to expand capital through multi-investment or a nation's thrust to increase its GNP will lead only to "distress" or "*khuahi*" according to the Guru as he implies in *Rag Asa* (Ibid., 117). A person or a culture has to become a "trader of Ram" which means it has to integrate its trade with the Joyous Wonder of the Divine. Can capital be holistic and integrated with the Guru of Wonder or just be competitive and market capital? This is a very vital question that Sikhism has raised and also positively answered.

The *Vismadic* universe as envisioned in Sikhism is the universe of justice. When its evolution is blocked, Akal Purakh or the Timeless Person, i.e., God, intervenes as the Sacred Sword/ *Sri Kharag*. In his dynamic creation

*Bachitra Natak/The Resplendent Drama*, Guru Gobind Singh salutes *Sri Kharag* and asserts that its action comforts saints and crushes demonic intelligence (*durmati*). This action liberates the blocked universe and places it on the path of evolution again (1995: 53).

The Sacred Sword is "eternally self-lighted" and "radiant like the sun" (Ibid., 53). All these metaphors, and signifieds that the Guru attaches to the sign of Sword, indicate that the just operation of a human society is very important, only then can it reflect and perpetuate *Vismad*. Conflict between the saintly and the demonic is part of life although within the commandment of Akal Purakh. The commandment is the *Vismadic Hukm* in which diversity exists and interrelates to cause Joy. In our times, influenced by Hegel and Marx, George Simmel in his work published under the title *Conflict*, has suggested that conflict is "sociation" (Simmel, 1955: 25). In simple words, conflict points out negative elements, helps in their elimination and further civilizes the society. Eventually conflict is "unifying". The difference between Simmel's approach and the Guru's approach is that whereas the former is limited to a sociological perspective the latter extends to the cosmic and divine given or to

an essential component of life's functioning.

After the publication of John Rawl's work entitled *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, the international world has been overwhelmed by his notion of justice as "fairness" or the rational balance of competing claims (Rawls, 1971/1999: 10). It is not impossible to figure out even with an ordinary grasp that John Rawl's justice has inherited the Western dichotomy between what is called "rational" and "irrational" or Apollo and Dionysus. This dichotomy will keep life blocked. In other words, Apollonian justice will neglect some creative faculties of human beings whose full opening only can lead to fulfillment. These faculties are Oedipalized or subordinated under the guise of rationality to organize the political economy of "surplus value". The Guru's most favoured notion and realization of balance is *Sahaj* which literally means cosmic equilibrium. Freedom/liberation/transformation occurs in *Sahaj*, when a person, a society or entire humankind begins to act or relate in cosmic balance, when all the faculties, Apollonian and Dionysian, begin to function together, with absolutely no Oedipalization. That is why Akal Purakh in Sikhism is non-Oedipal, He is the source of *Anhad Nad*, ceaseless Melody. It is only His realization or reception as song that liberates. A person has to be a poet, has to explode into music. No wonder that Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been composed in poetry and music.

In another powerful creation of Guru Gobind Singh *Sri Shastra Nam Mala Puran* or the Revered Rosary of the Names of Arms, included in the Dasam Granth, the Guru calls, the gun, sword, noose, as *pirs* or saints. The arms have been elevated to divinity. The gun there, like the other battlefield arms, is called as the enemy of the "lion" who kill the deer living on the forested green banks of Jamuna, Ganga, Satluj, Beas, and other rivers. The rivers are remembered with the different feminine names given by local cultures. In this poetical composition, the major signs developed: the gun, the sword, the lion, the deer and the effeminated rivers, suggest that the arms, in killing the Oedipal lion actually act within the principle of justice. The force that negates the innocent deer living with the primary source of life needs to be negated. In our known Marxist expression, it is negation of negation. To live on the forested green banks of the rivers, reminding of Krishna's romance, is to live in the Vismadic universe. Negating the enemy of this life is enacting justice.

In order to create the Vismadic society of the Sikh vision that perpetuates the Joyous Wonder of the Timeless Person, one has to be struck by the ceaseless Divine Melody under the guidance of a Sat Guru, the Truth realized Guru, who finally is Akal Purakh Himself or His Representation in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh had transferred the Guruship to the Granth. Attainment of the True Guru is also a state of *Anand* or Divine Jouissance. In his *Anand Sahib* composed in Rag Ram Kali, Guru Amar Das articulates this moment as follows:

*Anand*/Divine Jouissance has occurred oh my mother.

I have attained to the *Sat Guru*/True Guru.

*Sat Guru* I have attained in *Sahaj*/Cosmic Poise.

The symphony of celebration has struck the mind.

(SGGS: 917)

This radical or Vismadic society reflecting and extending the divine cosmic wonder can be created only by those who are both bodily and mentally filled with the cosmic music and beauty. In our times Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, in their various writings have pointed out the need for this aesthetic fullness prior to one's launching the radical effort to reconstruct the utopian society of beauty.

In brief, I have proposed in this paper that the original contribution of Sikhism to humankind

is in giving a map of *Vismadic* society based on the joy-giving multiplicity and difference of forms, colours, and species. This has been modeled on the nomadic Being of Akal Purakh, called *Adesam* by Guru Gobind Singh in his *Jap Sahib* and *Akal-Ustat*. Only those are competent to organize or create this *Vismadic* society who excel in poetry and music. Only they can reinvent politics economics and social relationship to accord to the cosmic Joyous Wonder. The dynamic radical action to reinvent sanctioned in Sikhism is to be understood within the *Vismad*. To stay futuristic and fulfilling both India and Sikhism have to negotiate the vision ceaselessly.

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