

“Panth is in Danger” Is it? From Whom?

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AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, WE ALL have been exposed to this oft-repeated slogan by the leadership of the Sikhs “*Khalsa Ji! Panth Khatray wich hai*”, meaning that the “Order of the Khalsa” is in imminent danger” It is through such pronouncements that the Sikh leadership of the past had tried to get political mileage. This was so because these slogans often touched the raw nerves of the ordinary - but concerned - often naive - Sikh majority. They pried upon a genuine concern in the minds of ordinary Sikh people about an impending danger to their faith by making them believe that such a catastrophe was just lurking around the corner, and that too in an epidemic proportion. To some extent this belief system of the Sikh leaders in the past in relation to a prevalent and progressive deterioration in the religio-political landscape was not entirely misplaced and indeed carried some weight. But with the passage of time as we entered into the modern era, the extraneous forces, after having inflicted a significant amount of damage, started to lose their wind and gradually began dying down. Times moved on but the leadership kept on harping upon the same tunes, much akin to a broken record, hoping against hope that such renderings will ultimately play music to the ears of their audience. In this ever-changing environment, it was conveniently forgotten however that the source of such danger also changed. Yet no one ever tried to go to the bottom of this issue to understand this drastic change that had taken place in the perceived villain and if they did, they certainly didn’t share it with public at large. No one wished to elaborate as to where exactly this modern day danger is springing from.

Self-Analysis:

There happens to be an urgent need to undertake a root-cause analysis to determine the nature, extent and source of this danger. To separate fact from fiction, it is also necessary to figure out whether the danger is still a consequence of the extrinsic forces of the past, or it is a sole manifestation of a creeping weakness from within the Sikh society itself. This analysis will be of a great significance as not only will it clarify the issue but will help abate blaming others who could have been perceived falsely as the culprits for no fault of theirs. It could then re-focus the attention towards the genuine source of such phenomenon where it truly belongs. Here, it should also be kept in mind that the real motives of complex-minded politicians are usually self-centered and difficult to comprehend. Having said so, I must qualify quickly that all politicians are not worthless and could not always be painted with same brush or even clumped together in one bundle.

Basic Principles: The Ten Gurus always stood for - and encouraged the Sikh community to stand ready against any kind of injustice not only against itself but for humanity at large. Our history is replete with instances where Sikhs, staying true to the real Spirit of the Khalsa, did not hesitate to sacrifice themselves to help others regardless of the personal consequences.

The martyrdom, in 1675, of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, our Ninth Guru for the protection of Kashmiri Pundits stands as a shining example in this regard. With the passage of time, however, the Sikh leadership started not only to ignore the practice

of the true principles of Sikh faith but also forgot its responsibility to emphasize and disseminate such principles to their progeny and the world at large. The basic principles entrusted to us in good faith by our Gurus were chipped away slowly, not necessarily by extraneous forces, but perhaps by our own actions and directions under the garb of 'modernity'. Having gotten the wind of what it takes to squeeze the political expediency out of the ordinary Sikh men and women, our leaders primed themselves to go with the flow and did nothing to put halt to such a trend. Thus, over a period of time, an easy life-style without any concern for the preservation of the basic fundamentals of Sikh faith began to take hold. Our religious preachers and leaders failed miserably in creating a model for Sikh youth that could have emphasized a true path of a pious life within the scope of fundamental principles of Sikh faith while staying in sync with the modern world.

Take, for instance, the principle of freedom and equality for women prescribed by our first Guru, Guru Nanak Devji, and further reinforced by the succeeding Gurus. I need not recapitulate the well-known Shabad spoken by Guru Nanak Dev Ji "Bhund Jameeaiye Bhund Nimeeaei.....So kio Manda Akheeaeie, Jit Jamaiye Rajaan....." This is an ordained dictum for the Sikhs sung daily in *Asa Di Vaar* in every Gurdwara. Herein Guru Ji clearly states that it is from a woman that man has sprung up, who is nurtured by her..... How could then she be called inferior to man when she gives birth to Royalty and great men? We, the Sikhs feel greatly proud about such stipulations in our faith that confer equality upon our women folks and we take immense pleasure in explaining this to the others. Yet our actions and attitudes often fail us in the so-called "litmus test" because we behave differently when it comes to real practice in daily life. For example our religio-political leadership and clergy thus far did not allow our women to perform the most sacred Seva of cleaning the center Sanctum at Hari Mandir in the early ambrosial hours. Sikh women cannot perform Kirtan Seva at Golden Temple and we have no Sikh female Granthis to speak of in our historical Gurdwaras. The equality for women we talk about only remains on our lips. The widely practiced shameful custom of female infanticide, prevalent amongst the Sikh population of Punjab much more than anywhere else in the country, is all too obvious and speaks volumes about the dichotomy between our words and actions.

Caste Divisions:

Caste system is taboo in our faith, at least so we declare. Any one of us could stand up and impress others about this great principle of ours, but only if one turns a blind eye to the prevailing facts of our life styles. Where it matters the most, i.e. at the time of looking for a match for our children, no one (and I mean no one) among us dare go beyond the caste and try to cross the boundaries. Open any news paper in India, or elsewhere, and look at matrimonial section. One after the other, one comes across thousands of advertisements by Sikh parents for eligible boys and girls where the emphasis happens to be more on the caste.

There is yet another special category that has been gradually propping its ugly head in Sikh psyche and social behavior, thanks to the apathy of our leaders. In fact it has become a most respectful and highly sought-after phenomenon amongst our young Sikh men and women, and that too at the expense of the loss of Sikh Identity. I am referring to the great demand for the most popular type of category of eligible

young Sikh candidates, the so called “clean-shaven” Sikh boys. Here, I am truly at a loss to fully comprehend such a qualification. We have never heard about a “clean-shaven” Hindu, Muslim, a Christian or a Jew for that matter, rather this peculiarity seems limited only to the Sikhs. If by shaving hair and shunning Sikh identity one becomes ‘clean’ then it must imply indirectly that by keeping full beard and turban automatically will make one unclean? Unfortunately this phenomenon of clean-shaven Sikhs has not merely afflicted the ordinary Sikhs, rather this virulent and contagious disease has aggressively attacked and destroyed the families of our religious and political leadership. Being in the positions of the role models, such children of high status leaders are causing more harm to the Sikh cause and identity. It is here that one needs to take a strong stand and say no more to those amongst us who try to take upon the reigns of various Sikh religious leadership positions in India and abroad yet do not themselves have the motivation, strength and guts to stand true to the basic fundamental principle of Sikh identity.

Role Models:

Moreover, there is a need to be watchful towards high profile young Sikh players or coaches in state, national and international teams who were originally inducted, at least in part, on the basis of being Sikhs and yet for one or the other reason decide not to maintain Sikh identity with a Sikh turban and full beard, and instead try to promote wearing a cap or trimming hair. Obviously, freedom for personal choice is a fundamental human right and cannot and should not - be denied. It is imperative and appropriate however that such individuals be approached by effective Sikh leadership to educate them about the basic requirements of Sikh faith. They should be made fully aware about the harmful consequences of their actions in their capacity of role models for the Sikh youth. Additionally, our Sikh religio-social leadership should make extra efforts in honoring ‘Saabat Surat’ young Sikh players of repute who appear on national scenes with their identities intact, in accordance with the established guidelines of Sikh faith. They should be bestowed with generous packages of monetary prizes and retirement benefits so that they in turn could motivate others standing at the fence to join into the foray of true Sikh order.

Drug Addiction:

We talk of being the first religion that takes an official stand against the intoxicants and smoking, yet alcohol has become synonymous with the identity of a ‘Sardar Ji’. We try to emphasize time and again that such habits are disallowed in our faith as part of fundamental principle but when it comes to drinking we seem to turn a blind eye as if it were none of our concern. Some members of SGPC and Sikh leaders of Gurdwaras, especially in the western world, are often deep into drinking. Rules are bent under the garb of pseudo-science and modernity to suite our needs and desires. This laxity and loophole must be stopped vigorously. Sikhs were supposed to learn and teach the language of Punjabi in Gurmukhi script to their children so that they could read and understand Gurbani and thus be closer to the Guru. Yet it is shameful to note that our leaders are the first in line to seek admissions for their children in school where Punjabi does not exist and, if it does, it is rather relegated to the lowest position and status. Charity was supposed to begin at home, but alas!

Identity:

The concept of 'Saabat Surat' in the form of a Khalsa as laid by Guru Gobind Singh Ji is being put to rest gradually and permanently by modern Sikhs and their leaders. Unfortunately, the protective fence itself now seems to be gradually dismantling and hurting the crop. It is here that I must remind ourselves about the clear and precise warning given to us by Guru Gobind Singh Ji and that too in no uncertain terms "*Jub lug Khalsa rahe niara, tub tuk tej deo Mai Saara*". Our destiny, our aura as provided by God-Guru as well as our very survival as "Panth" or "the Order of Khalsa" is tied to our unique identity, so says this Dictum. "*Jub aie karai bipran kee reet, mai naa karoon inkee parteef*". When the Order of Khalsa Panth starts imitating the wrong path of others, Guru's blessings will wither away and the imminent danger to the Sikh Panth, so often talked about by our leaders, will certainly become a reality. Unless Sikh leaders wake up and once again start following the dictum of our Gurus in its true spirit and lead the Sikh youth to such a path, we the Sikhs, in the shape and form as we happen to exist today and become recognized, are bound to disappear from the face of this earth for ever.

The response to the question posed in the title of this essay unfortunately happens to be in the affirmative. Yes "Panth" is in danger no doubt, but it needs to be qualified further without any reservation or hesitation that such a danger is from within. Furthermore, the danger is truly from those who were supposed to protect and defend by living it the way our Gurus ordained us to live. It is therefore, imperative that we must try to put our house in order first. Once done, no one would ever be in a position to harm Guru's Khalsa and the danger to it will evaporate and dissipate once and for all. There is no space, even a teeny-weeny bit, to doubt this truth. But whether we decide to believe and follow this truth or not, the choice now lies with us.

