

Undesirable Ritualist Practices

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One of my favorite cousins residing in USA "requisitioned" Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi, to arrange an *Akhand Path* for which she deposited prescribed fees in advance. She asked me to be present at its conclusion and *Ardas* on her behalf. She had no qualms about the merit of such paid *karamkand*. *Gurdwaras* instead of leading Sikhs into *gurmat*, are increasingly encouraging them to adopt such vain methods for sheer profiteering. There is a curse in *gurbani* on those who sell God's Name, whether in such Sikh type *mantras* and *yantras* and *yagnas*, or wearing of charms like our Muslim neighbors. For this lady it was an act of piety as if money paid required her of any further obligation. And, of course, rewards and boons must happen after so much expense!

In another case, a close relative paid for *Akhand Path* at the local *Gurdwara* and informed me of the date of its completion. On a visit to his house, I found him having his constitutional, a whisky and soda for the sake of good health, while paid priests chanted away the scriptures at the *Gurdwara* for his benefit.

Ironical: Does it not read like the ancient *karamkand* of *Vedic* sanction where the lay men leave these celestial matters in the hands of qualified Brahmins to intercede on their behalf with the heavenly powers, leaving the laity to tend to the daily chores, having engaged the Brahmin to chant *mantras* sufficient to snare gods and goddesses to placate their whims and fancies, to let the man live in peace, having duly paid for it? Perhaps the common Sikh has started liking this easy solution of *Vedic karmkand* fit to follow even if by replacing the *vedic mantras* with *gurbani*! In the Hindu practice, if the Brahmin sensed strong adverse vibes lurking, he always had a solution, *upaya*, to demolish the evil forces and there remained nothing more to be done about it. It cured the malady, so they say, and put the planets in their right places.

Mythology: Some Sikhs have admitted that it is rather satisfying to find gods and goddesses as fickle as ordinary human beings, and it is reassuring. One feels the episodes and exploits of gods very akin to human failings instead of the infallible Supreme God submerged in total Truth and wanting every one to attain that state of godly attributes. It seems that with the *gurdwaras* themselves introducing and expanding the salvation-on-payment syndrome, the quality of Sikh thought and practice to raise common folks to the level of super-men will be affected.

Likewise, Muslim clergy and caretakers of tombs and *khanqahs* have identical solutions to all human problems. Repeated chanting of certain *surahs* of Holy *Quran* is an assured panacea to bring relief as effective as a course of modern medicine! Wearing the *surahs* as charms on the arm or neck has magical properties, whether it is to beget a child, to win a court case, overcoming fevers, charming ladies, influencing officers, et al. Tying the threads at tombs is a popular practice to get favors granted, and you can see Sikhs queuing up for the purpose as an instant remedy over efforts to become supermen! Christians do not lag behind. At specific alters and churches and monasteries, burning of candles surely induces the Holy Spirit to yield boons

and wishes. It seems that all people everywhere seek a magic wand to fulfill their hearts' desires. This is rejected by our Gurus as not only futile but superfluous.

Bura bhala kichh apas te jania ehee sagal vikara

SGGS - 993

And, similarly,

Saha ganeh n kareh bichar

Sahe upper Ekonkar.

SGGS-904

Self-deception: In imitation of other ritualist faiths, Sikhs have plunged head over heels to steal the initiative in such tabooed exercises. In direct contravention of Guru's instructions, it has become practice of the pseudo saints to issue charms containing verses from *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* to wear as amulet on the pattern of *quranic surah* or *aiyet*. There are *sampat paths* organized by such *deras* as means of amassing money *akhand paths* as the magical remedy to ward off evil. Many *Gurdwaras*, like the famous *Bangla Sahib* in New Delhi assure relief on visiting continuously for forty days in early morning (mark it, neither thirtynine nor fortyone days) and bathing there as well as carrying tapped water to assuredly get wishes fulfilled. The alarming thing is that it is beyond the respectful meditation of *Sri Guru Granth sahib* and beyond Sikh ethos, but the miracle of the very site which has gained the upper hand. Visitors do not have necessarily the love or regard for the *gurnat*, but the very act of bathing (the *sarover* is a very recent innovation there) or carrying the tapped water is important. So whether it remains a *Gurdwara* or temple, a mosque or church is not of major consequence so far the wishes are granted. The number forty smacks of Muslim *chaliha*.

Sabh nagri main eko raja

sabhe pavit hae thawan

SGGS-993

Ritualism decried: *Gurbani* is firmly against pilgrimages to achieve fulfillment of wishes. Yet we blindly follow those who believe that, by bathing on specific spots, at specific occasions and by mere chanting of *gurbani* as *vedic mantras*, without contemplation, like the 84 steps of the *baoli* at *Goindwal Sahib* to get *mokhsha* or seek a boon, forgetting that the purpose of devotion is love of God:

Raj n chahobn mukti n chahon, man prit charn kamalare.

And Guru Amar Dasji's specific injunction:

Sa sidhi sa karamat hae achint kare jis dat

Nanak gurmukh har man vase eha sidhi eha karmat

Also refer to *Asa di Var* sung every morning in *Gurdwaras*:

E kinehi dat apas te jo paiye

Nanak sa karmat Sahib tathe jo miley

Irrational: One is struck dumb while watching such empty rituals. We have no reaction to such wide spread maladies since the general cadre of Sikhs is led by unSikh masqueraders roaming in the garb of holiness. Our highest theological seats are mute spectators before this metamorphosis which is pulling the community to the old rut of ancient cults.

Human endeavor has been to find a magical solution to all its ills and limitations. Sikh Gurus waged a war exactly about this wishful thinking. The full moons, the no-moons, the Indian new month- *sangrand* are taken as the main auspicious occasions to offer prayers, by bathing at the *Gurdwaras*, offerings made. Our fore-fathers considerably called the last rites of the dead as *antim ardas*. By conjoining the term *Antim*, it should have been the last, the ultimate, the final rite to a meaningful life, But *Gurdwaras* have prospered by the donations of mattresses, quilts, blankets, bed sheets and utensils ‘dedicated to the dead,’ not for communal weal as such. It is reminiscent of the Egyptian, Chinese or Hindu rites like *shradha* ceremonies. Instead of the Brahmin, the Mullah or church priest, we call in the Sikh *Bhaiji* whom we feed choicest dishes to convey the aroma and stomach-ful food to Heaven for the benefit of the departed souls, as if they are kept willy-nilly in Heaven due to these rituals or otherwise they may be evicted by the guardians of Heavens. Even though Guru Nanak himself mocked the servers of Ganges water to Sun and ancestors.

More than the Hindu, our Muslim counselors have planted the fear of Hell with its fires, boiling waters, crushed bones and wailings which shall be the lot of all non-Muslims, whether pious or not, unless the soul is saved for ever by reciting the vows of *Allah* and his sole prophet, whereafter nothing more stands in the way of gazelle-eyed *houries*, the streams of wine and honey and velvety cushions in Heavens for ever hereafter.

Farcial Monkey Tricks: Where are we heading? Each town, village and hamlet is being touted as the magical destination to get one’s heart’s desires fulfilled; no matter that the supplicant is criminal or corrupt. Unless we engage in Herculean effort to rid ourselves of these short-cut therapies, we will be totally lost in the mire of old religious practices and rituals. Guru Gobind Singh termed it all as *natak chetak* in *Bachitra Natak*, not fit for men of God to indulge in.

Guru Arjun Dev ji did not agree to bless his wife with the boon of a son. He directed her to the aged saint Bhai Budha ji for prayers. Guru Har Krishan Ji refused to meet Aurangzeb since he was being summoned to display miracles just like his elder brother Ram Rai who was cursed by his father Guru Har Rai ji for displaying supernatural powers and misinterpreting scriptures at Delhi Court. Guru Teg Bahadur chose to die rather than engage in cheap *natak chetak*. With such hoary traditions why are we sliding back into dark ages of *karmkand*?

Karmdharm pakhand jo deeseh tin jam jagati loote

Nirban kirtan gavoh karte ka nimakh simrat jit chute

SGGS-747

Again,

Bikh main amrit sanchai bikh ka phal paya

SGGS-1244

Be Emancipated: We are freed souls of Sikhism. We should not get entangled in fixed rituals.

Sagan apsagan tis ko lageh jis chit n avai

Tis jam ner n avai johar prabh bhave

Some lay brothers get confused about the holy dip prescribed in Sikh prayer, *Sri Amritsarji ke ashnan*. This is a historical statement as in the eighteenth century, the state prohibited visiting and bathing at *Darbar Sahib*, Amritsar, taking it as the fountain-head of Sikh insurgency. At that time it became a challenge for any true votary of Sikhism to *dare* visit Amritsar and openly take a dip in the holy waters, that too, without covering the head, so that all may see the man with his *keshas* in a top knot and flowing beard, daring to beat the ban. But now, Sikhs are seen with heads covered taking a ritualistic dip like the bath at Holy Ganges. At Jaito, Guru Gobind Singh mocked at the pilgrim going to Ganges. But now it is not Guru's way, rather it is emphasized to please one's mind and peace achieved by performing a ritual and drugging the senses *a la karamkand* rules.

God is pure Truth and it is necessary to imbibe godly attributes to merge into godly purity. Sikhism is indeed a practicing religion; lip service is unacceptable. A Sikh has to shed fear psychosis of all types, as also enmity against anyone, even those who oppose his ideals. He maintains his equipoise in any adverse situation, and must stand up against injustice and combat deceit and chicanery.

