

The Moral Basis for spread of Sikhism: Empowerment of the Downtrodden

THE GLORIOUS GURU NANAK, the 15th Century Messiah, had the rare gift of articulating moral and social verities in disarmingly simple language. Observe his comforting message of hope for the marginalized:

“ਨੀਚਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨੀਚ ਜਾਤਿ ਨੀਚੀ ਹੁ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਚੁ ॥
ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਿਨ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਾਥਿ ਵਡਿਆ ਸਿਉ ਕਿਆ ਰੀਸੁ ॥
ਜਿਥੈ ਨੀਚ ਸਮਾਲੀਅਨਿ ਤਿਥੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਖਸੀਸੁ” [SGGS: 15]

The above Guru-bani verse is an exquisitely gentle appeal to the people of India to do away with the inequitable caste system.

After five hundred years, the Sikh faith still beckons to the so-called ‘scheduled’ castes to break away their shackles and join the fraternity of Guru-Khalsa.

The Sikhs may not have had much success in their homeland. But there is good news from distant Bihar. According to a despatch from Amitabh Srivastava, [published by *India Today*: August 03, 2009], **Sikhism is the ‘new destination’ for the residents of a Dalit village in Bihar’s Araria district.**

As if to establish the basic truth of Guru Nanak’s above pronouncement, those who embraced the faith predominantly belong to the Mushahar caste; [musa = mouse] the Hindu outcastes who are obliged to eat rat meat as the cheapest food, irrespective of the social ostracism.

Are you sickened? That was precisely the reason Guru Nanak identifies himself with the lowliest. Having been beneficiaries of the ‘Khalsa spirit that conquers’ we - as run-of-the-mill- Sikhs do not wish to embrace the ‘lonely and the lost’ - smug in our own cocoons!

Let us, however, recall the *miracle* of how Guru Amar Das embraced the lonesome orphan Bhai Jetha (Ram Das), as the match for his daughter Bibi Bhani, eventually adjudging him as the most suitable successor to the Divinely endowed *Guru-gaddi*, as the Fourth Nanak.

Now some of the most divinely inspiring verses in Guru Granth Sahib bear the signature: “Mahalla 4”, and Bhai Jetha is revered as the *Sodhi Sultan* on his enthronement as Guru Ram Das, the founder of Amritsar.

While there are, at present times, voluntary organisations in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh - and elsewhere - for the uplift (auQ`wn) of *Vanjaras* - a widely dispersed community of ‘itinerant pedlars - waiting to be ‘embraced’ into the Sikh fold, it is for the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee to mount a strong and sustained campaign of PRACHAR.

Any such endeavour need not be aimed at the “number of converts” in the demographical sense - but as a crusade for the upliftment of the people of India at the lowest rung of the social ladder.

Significantly, ‘Ramdasia’ has been classified as a ‘Scheduled Caste’ [equivalent to ‘chamar’ or a leather worker,] resulting in their segregation as Ravidasia, and compelling

them to set up the “Ravidasi Gurdwaras’ - which is the very antithesis of the Gurus’ egalitarian mission.

Vote-bank politics has driven the Akalis to fall in line with the divisive Hindu sociology. It has also isolated the backward sections among Sikhs from the mainstream Sikhism, caught in a vicious circle.

Time has come for the SGPC to opt - unequivocally - for the timeless spirit of the Sikh-Khalsa as envisaged and manifested by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and not compromise this essential mission at the altar of vote-bank politics driven by the Indian Constitution - which has been amended scores of times in 60 years.

Indeed, the mounting of such a campaign will be a tribute to the late Baba Sahib Ambedkar who, in early 1930’s, broke the shackles of ancient curse of caste discrimination, and sought refuge in the all-embracing Sikh faith. The fact that he was frustrated by the political squabbling among Sikh leaders, who feared that their constituents would be swamped by the influx of “Harijans” in the Sikh fold, seriously besmirched the “inclusive”

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

Caste politics in India has been aggravated (if not perpetuated) by the Constitutional provisions for reservations based on backwardness: ‘the lower the caste, the greater the benefits conferred on the particular section’. Reservations then tend to shackle growth of the people even as these undermine initiative and self-confidence.

The Sikhs must be emancipated from such enslaving caste mentality, simply by returning to the Scriptural Truth that God made all human beings equal (if different), that the Khalsa, as “Akal Purakh ki Fauj”, in all times and at all places, are children of one God, held equally dear by the everlasting spirit of Guru Gobind Singhji.

The village Halhalia in Bihar[#] has shown the way by *en masse* conversion to Sikh faith:

ਹਰਖ ਅਨੰਤ ਸੋਗ ਨਹੀ ਬੀਆ ॥

ਸੋ ਘਰੁ ਗੁਰਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਉ ਦੀਆ ॥ [SGGS: 186]