

Sikhism has no place for Divisive Tribalism

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It can be noticed by a discerning mind, that there are various shades of differences between the interpretation of Sikh religion by the Western theologians and of that by our scholars. The Western writers have the benefit of their upbringing in a comparatively dispassionate social environments, amply exposed to education with a more scientific outlook. In consequence they perceive the Sikh doctrines with a more open and uncluttered mind. Eminent authorities on religious matters, like Arnold Toynbee, H.L. Bradshaw, J.D. Cunningham, MA Macauliffe, have held "Sikhism as a new revolutionary faith of the new age. It has the potential to add more dignity and purity to the modern civilization. Its scripture, the Adi Granth have something of a special value to the rest of the world. It is a universal world faith, a message for all men."

Regarding the Sikh race, Western writers saw in them a new hope for the mankind. "A new faith has been declared where all must become as one, the lowest equal with the highest. Caste must be forgotten and four classes must eat as one out of the same vessel. Guru Gobind Singh saw what was vital and he relit it with Promethean fire. A living spirit possess the whole Sikh people. The impress of Gobind has not only altered the constitution of their mind, but has operated materially to give amplitude to their physical frame. The features and external forms of Sikhs were modified. They were distinguishable by their free and manly bearings but also by their lofty thoughtfulness of looks, which marks the fervour of their souls and their persuasion of the near presence of Divinity." Such is a typical opinion of Western scholars about Sikhism and Sikhs.

On the other hand a majority of indigenous scholars have been brought up in a caste-ridden and ethnically divided society. Some could not free their mind totally from the be-clouded social practices of the surrounding environments. They could not perceive the Sikh doctrine at the free, enlightened and progressive level of the vision of the Gurus. Their perception remained mostly confined to the external changes, rituals and customs. They could not apprehend fully the revolutionary changes brought about by the Gurus in the chemistry of the minds, souls and spirits of persons. However a few writers, like Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, did a remarkable job in this respect. They rejected the Hindu formularies and explained the Guru's ethical system and standards which were opposed to the theological beliefs of traditional culture and society. But their number, being small, had only a marginal success.

After the era of Ten Gurus, Sikhs kept to their high standards and strict discipline for some time. By following the instructions of Gurus they became great, *swalakhis*. They rose ahead of their fellow citizens and by their noble deeds left a good mark on the history. All Sikhs narrate their actions with pride. However after a passage of time, the all providing and all surrounding Hinduism started making its inroads in the Sikh society slowly and invisibly. It was facilitated by the laxity of discipline which crept in the Sikh leadership and preachers. Some fallings of Brahminical culture affected the Sikh doctrine. One of them was the caste system and its wicked brother tribalism.

Tribalism was current in Sikh society when Maharaja Ranjit came on the scene of Sikh history. Maharaja saw the danger of tribalism to himself as well as to the state. He initiated some vital steps to control it. Persons with tribal tendencies were not allowed to man any powerful position in his government even if they belonged to his relations. The persons who held the power were outsiders i.e. Muslims, Hindus and Dogras. Some persons from

Jammu and Saharanpur; were made amritdharis to counter tribalism and man senior jobs. With the check of tribalism, Maharaja was able to accomplish incredible tasks. Afghanistan was conquered. A Sikh empire was established where social justice reached to everyone irrespective of religion, caste or creed. These good days lasted only as long as Maharaja was alive. Soon after his death tribal forces came back in Punjab with a vengeance. A internecine killing was started. Three generations of top Sikh royalty and aristocracy were wiped out. The glorious Sikh empire was shattered. Its requiem was performed by the ill advised Anglo- Sikh War.

The defeat in the Anglo-Sikh war was a great tragedy for the Sikhs and the Punjab. It is surprising that no Sikh scholar, leader or intellectual has lamented this event with the passion and intensity it deserves. This indicates that Sikh sensibilities have lost the edge. On the other hand a Muslim poet from rural Punjab realized the gravity of the tragedy that had befallen Punjab and the Sikhs. It was Shah Mohammad who wrote with genuine pathos about the Anglo-Sikh war. He described the evil machinations of some Sikh chiefs and the internecine killings by Sikh tribalist forces. He admired the courage of the Sikh soldier whose bravery almost won the war. He lamented the absence of proper leadership. "*Shah Mohammada Ek Sarkar Bajon, Faujan Jit Ke Anant Noon Harian Ne.*" Shah Mohammad blamed the inter-tribal rivalries, treachery and the incompetent leadership as the main causes of defeat. The Sikhs, instead of learning lessons from his writings, treated it as a ballad to be sung by the minstrels. All the failings, which he mentioned, are still present in the Sikh society.

The sub-standard Sikh leadership was also mentioned in his book on the subject by the then British Commander-in-Chief General Gough, who stated that he was surprised to notice that "the staunchest foes of British Empire so readily became the obedient subjects of Queen Empress soon after the war." This shows that tribal tendencies prevailed over the Sikh ethos in this crisis. As the tribalism has continued to be part of Sikh society, this actions was repeated by them in the 'eightys' when they soon became obedient servants of the same forces which heaped savage brutalities and humiliations o them.

Today the tribal ethos have become a part of our social and political set-ups. The core Sikh values are becoming mere empty slogans e.g. "*Manas Kee Jat Sabhe Eke Pechanbo*" and "*Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhalla*" have lost their relevance. As Sikh values are being diluted, our political and religious leaders look the other way because tribalism can widen vote banks for them. After partition, Sikh leaders for their selfish ends, have pushed Sikh religion, culture and language towards Brahmanvad. The divergence between the interpretation of Sikh religion, Sikh culture and Punjabi language of pre-partition days and those of present ones is now noticeable.

The present Sikh society is divided into castes and creed. The dominant castes are self satisfied with their empty bravado to keep their hedgemony over lower castes and lower castes have become complacent to their maimed life of shudras. Though following Sikh religion, they have lost their will to improve their social conditions. Such a situation has led to a lower culture.

It is also obvious that at times of crisis, Sikh decisions on Panthic matters are often based upon at randomness and tribal emotions. Gurbani has indicated the method of finding solutions at the time of crisis.

“ਹੋਇ ਇਕਤ੍ਰ ਮਿਲਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਭਾਈ ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਦੂਰਿ ਕਰਹੁ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਇ ॥” ‘The matter should be discussed jointly among themselves and solution should be found by the application of deep reflection and informed mind’. Decision taken in accordance with the instructions of this Guruvak will never falter or fail.

An important requirement is to understand the Sikh religion more deeply with a free and pure mind. “*Jaka Hirda Shud Hai, Khoj Shabad Mein Le.*” Guru expects that every Sikh should work diligently to become *Swalakhi* (Superman) and try to elevate his mind, soul and spirit to the level of vision indicated in Gurbani. He should perform noble tasks which “add more dignity and purity to the civilization.” Sikhism is a religion with enlightened beliefs. It has no place for tribalism.

