

EDITORIAL FROM ACROSS THE WORLD

LEADERSHIP WITHOUT VISION

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The negative media attention in the dreadful decade of 1980's had been mainly master minded by the Central Government Agencies under the Congress rule. It did immense harm to the Sikh image in India and overseas. It was, therefore, natural for the intelligentsia to yearn for a fair representation, for sympathetic publicity and for the community's own press and television channel.

But just when the Tercentenary of the Khalsa Panth began attracting favorable attention world-wide, and Sikhism - as a major religion - itself became the object of curiosity, when the "Punjabi World" television started relaying soulful *kirtan* from the holy city of Amritsar over satellite - to the delight of millions of Sikhs and non-Sikhs across the globe the Sikh leadership split down the middle into two warring factions, both blinded by power politics and mired in personal ambition.

Not long ago the late Sirdar Kapur Singh, who was perhaps Sikhism's foremost thinker - philosopher, conscience-keeper and intellectual impresario, had deplored such bankruptcy of leadership and warned

against the obscurantist coteries who controlled the historical Sikh shrines in Punjab and the rest of India. No one heeded the aging Sikh statesman scholar. It is an irony of the historic process that the legacy of a glorious past often remains a prisoner in the hands of an incompetent leadership. Even the more recent electoral gain of 1997 and 1998 under Shiromani Akali Dal have been willfully frittered away, conceding gratuitous and wholly undeserved advantage to Congress - the arch enemy of Sikh interests in Punjab. The opportunity created by the Tercentenary celebration thus lies in a shambles in the Sikh homeland.

Has the Sikh society in Punjab lost its élan or become so demoralized as to be incapable of producing great

leaders of vision, like Baba Kharak Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, and Master Tara Singh? Where are the savant-poets, artists, planners, and visionaries native to the Land of Five Rivers? Or, for that matter, where are the honest-to-goodness MP's, MLA's and ethically alert members of SGPC - erroneously dubbed the Sikh Parliament?

To make the Sikhs a disciplined people endowed with moral power. Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed his entire family. He charged the Khalsa with the spirit of liberty and a sense of dedications, to serve as all humanity's saint-warriors. At Anandpur, in 1699, the charismatic Guru-Prophet released the people's creative energies to launch a brave new society, whose achievements in the 18th and 19th centuries had been characterized by historians in superlative terms. Yet, since the passing of the splendid Maharaja Ranjit Singh, we took in

vain for an outstanding genius possessed of practical wisdom and foresight whose vision would carry the Sikhs across the threshold into 21st century with honor and dignity.

Crisis is known to project good leadership.

Collective sacrifices in the 1920's ushered in the Gurdwara reform, restoring to the Sikhs their holy shrines that had been deceitfully usurped by brahmanized mahants. Partition saved half of the Punjab of India - only to make Sikhs subservient to the majoritarian rulers of Delhi, our leaders either manipulated by lure of office (Baldev Singh, Hukam Singh, Zail Singh), or undermined (Master Tara Singh, Gyani Kartar Singh) or simply liquidated (Kairon, Longowal, Jarnail Singh Bhindrawalae). Every time the leaders failed, the interests of the Punjab and the Sikhs were sorely compromised. A crop of semi-educated sycophantic, second-rate politicians has - over five decades - systematically bartered away Panthic interests for petty pelf, unmindful of welfare of the futurist generation.

True, there are thousands of good men and women of great resolve and noble intent. But Sikhs at this time desperately need dedicated public servants, social workers, missionaries, farmers, technicians, defense servicemen and, above all, Gursikhs of *chardi-kala*.

Let us leave aside politics. We need high moral and aesthetic values to be demonstrated in schools and colleges, hospitals and offices, in the Gurdwara precincts and in environment. Standards of personal behavior in these key community centers are simply pathetic. Mere lip service to Gurbani ideals is not enough. Ritualism is the opium of the masses: It stifles the essential message and kills the urge to truthful living. Hence the paradox of Jathedars and religious leaders who venerate Guru Granth, but do not care to live by Gurus' dictates. Quality of *Kirtan* is judged by high decibel *jaikaras* and cash offerings. Indeed *Guru-ki-golak* has become the bone of contention in most Gurdwara management.

The decay in art, aesthetics and hygiene is palpable in Punjab cities and towns. Open sewers overflow with

garbage and stink not for from Darbar Sahib's ghanta-ghar entrance. There is no city with manicured gardens and hedges and flowering shrubs. Ugly, congestive and haphazard architecture makes a mockery of *Guru-ki-nagari*. Is it deliberate - because Sikhs are a minority in Amritsar? Or is it because SGPC needs schooling in administrative skills?

At the least, one would expect the educated class of Sikhs - teachers, lawyers, doctors, civil servants - to set an example in their respective spheres. Why, for instance, can Sikh policeman not be more humane than ham-handed, the Sikh civil servant a model of *Gursikhi*, the teacher more wedded to *Vidya veechari-ta-paropkari*, than to his emoluments and tuition fees?

While most of India is in a mess, Punjab in particular is in dire need of radical reform. With their glorious history Sikhs deserve a leadership with a vision. A leadership that is imbued with a sense of mission and an understanding of the aspirational needs of a whole new generation of Sikhs who - on global scale - look up to Punjab as their hallowed homeland.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Please send your articles dealing with any aspect of the
Aad Guru Granth Sahib
by the end of April 2000 for the second issue of the Journal

Seminar on Gurdwara

Sikh Gurdwara is such a unique institute of learning where the Sikhs and others can go without any discrimination of religion, caste, creed, sex, and social status to deliberate (*vichaar*) on the Gurbani to improve their spirituality, morality, integrity, etc., to be a good citizen of this planet, the Earth. Keeping in view the importance of Gurdwara in Sikhism the *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* is planning to deliberate on:

INSTITUTION OF GURDWARA MEANING, WORKING, and FUNCTIONING During September 2000

Please send your abstracts and suggestions by the end of April 2000
To

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