

DELAY CAN SPELL DISASTER

Dilution of a doctrine or its violation is the first step towards its rejection. We find that some basic Sikh doctrines are being violated with impunity by certain vested interests for their narrow selfish considerations. Glaring violations are:

- Challenge to *Rahit Maryada*
- Challenge to the Nanakshahi Calendar
- Challenge to supremacy of Sri Akal Takht Sahib
- Academic Challenges
- The *Dasam Granth* controversy

These challenges constitute a serious threat to the integrity and the very existence of the Panth. The doctrine of *Guru Granth - Guru Panth* authorises the Panth to take decisions, which become *gurmattas* and carry the authority of the Guru. No Sikh should dare to defy or ignore these *gurmattas*. The current approach to some recent *gurmattas* is, however, marked by apathy and indifference which is fraught with fatal consequences.

Leaders follow a policy of concentrating on politics alone; religious issues are not on their agenda. The doctrine of *Miri-Piri*, however, advocates a whole-life approach; it does not mean politics alone. Thus, the approach which concentrates only on politics is myopic, as it caters to an immediate need, such as an election. Akali leaders must realise that only Sikhs vote for them. Partnership with BJP or any other party might benefit them for the time being. In the long run, however, if the Panth disintegrates, nobody will vote for them. Interest of the Panth and its integrity should, therefore, be given a higher priority, even if it entails some temporary setback.

Sikhs often look to the SGPC to solve every problem. This expectation has been invariably belied. The reasons are not far to seek:

- i. The SGPC Act authorises them only to look after the Sikh shrines.
- ii. Not many among its elected members (or those who decorate the Teja Singh Samundri Hall at its General Meetings for a few hours in a whole year) have religious scholarship or knowledge of Sikhism as their strong point. The elections are fought by political parties, and extraneous considerations determine the award of party tickets. Resort to liquor distribution and other unfair means during elections are common knowledge. In these circumstances, the SGPC becomes only an extended arm of the majority political party (invariably the Akali party). They are not expected to annoy their potential vote bank including *deras* or even anti-Panth elements preaching personal guruship. So, the challenges referred to earlier are beyond their comprehension, or at least do not appear to bother them.
- iii. Council of High Priests: This council includes the Five Jathedars of the Takhts and Head Granthi of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. It has no sanction in history and no defined sphere of authority. Its meetings are convened, as and when our leaders consider it expedient. The recent bickerings among its members, have not only damaged the interests of the Panth but have also affected their own prestige and credibility.

The challenges, unless adequately resolved, constitute a serious threat to the integrity and future of the Sikhs. Before dealing with these issues, it is necessary to recall the basic position or bear in mind the authority competent to solve such issues. The Guru is the ultimate authority in every case. During their life time, the Sikh Gurus exercised this authority judiciously, and their word was accepted by one and all. Dissenters had no place in the Panth, and they, like '*minas*' '*Dhirmahyas*' and '*Ram Raiyas*', were excommunicated from the Panth. Guru Har Rai did not spare his own son. During the Sikh *Misl* period also, whatever *gurmatta* was passed in the assembly of the Khalsa at the Akal Takht, it was implemented by the Misl Chiefs and their contingents, in letter and spirit.

The Tenth Lord, before leaving this world, had delegated this authority to Guru Granth Sahib and Guru Panth. The Granth was to

be the spirit of the Guru, and the Panth the body of the Guru, under the doctrine of *Guru Granth – Guru Panth*. We are all familiar with the Guru's command:

Puja Akal ki

Parcha Shabad Ka

Didar Khalsey ka

The Guru trained his Sikhs to exercise this authority, and himself bowed before their verdict on well-documented occasions in Sikh history. One of the extant *Rahitnamas* also suggests that a Khalsa Panth decision taken collectively bears the stamp of the Guru*. It is beyond doubt, therefore, that after Guru Gobind Singh, the competent authority for all times is the Khalsa Panth, assembled in the presence of Guru Granth. After the Panth arrives at a collective decision, it becomes a *gurmatta*, a command of the Guru, to be followed by all Sikhs, individually as well as collectively. One can defy it only at the cost of one's excommunication from the Panth.

The current *Rahit Maryada* and Nanakshahi Calendar belong to this category. The *rahit maryada* was unanimously adopted by the Panth in 1945 after a prolonged discussion. Although it was published by the SGPC, it was a decision of the Panth. SGPC has been faithfully following this verdict of the Panth, and deserves full credit for it. Those who are criticizing it, should understand this position, and fall in line with the Panth. Failing that, the Panth should take notice of this defiance, and take a suitable action through the Akal Takht to ensure compliance.

The case of Nanakshahi Calendar is no different. This is an independent calendar, but in the earlier stages it was erroneously linked with Bikrami Samvat, which has several flaws and has been rejected even by the Government of India in favour of a solar calendar, the Shak Samvat. The Bikrami Samvat is not a solar calendar; it follows a constellation of stars, so that its year is longer than the solar year by a few minutes. As a result, it is constantly getting out of step with seasons, which follow the solar cycle. We all know that Baisakhi, during 1469 AD when Guru Nanak was born, fell on the 27th March. In 1699, it fell on the 29th March. In 2008, it falls on 14th April. This

* ਗੁਰੂ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਮਾਨੀਅਹਿ ਪਰਗਟ ਗੁਰੂ ਕੀ ਦੋਹ ॥ ਜੋ ਸਿਖ ਮੇਂ ਮਿਲਬੇ ਚਹਿਹ, ਖੋਜ ਇਨ੍ਹਾ ਮਹਿ ਲੇਹੁ ॥

ਰਹਿਤਨਾਮਾ ਭਾਈ ਪ੍ਰਹਿਲਾਦ ਸਿੰਘ

gap between seasons and the months will continue to widen, and a time will come when we will have the Baisakhi in the month of December. Chet, the spring month, would fall in the extremely hot month of June. As a result, the wonderful description of the month of Chet in the holy *Baranmahn* by Guru Nanak as well as Guru Arjun would appear odd, to say the least. It was, therefore, considered necessary to delink the Nanakshahi Samvat from the Bikrami Samvat. All civilized states have switched over to solar calendars. The Common Era (CE) calendar is now followed in the whole world. There is no reason why Nanakshahi Calendar, named after the most progressive among the prophets, should follow an out-dated calendar. Nanakshahi is not a new Calendar. Only some serious shortcomings have been removed to give it a scientific and independent character. Those who oppose it, obviously do not understand the requirements of an ideal calendar. By opposing the recent reform adopted by the Panth, they are doing no service to the Panth.

Similarly, the controversy regarding the *Dasam Granth* is becoming murkier day by day. The whole Sikh Panth seems to have been divided into two warring camps. While one school of thought regards the existing version of *Dasam Granth* as sacrosanct and is as such against any deletion from its text, the other school is out to reject either the whole of its text or deleting major portions of it. Both the camps are quite vocal about the authenticity of their claims and counterclaims. While one camp is out to throw the baby with the bath water, the other is adamant to keep the waters muddy. Unless, the Sikh Panth takes a collective decision after a thorough deliberation on this issue, preferably based on the recommendations of a committee of expert scholars appointed by the Sikh Panth through the authority of the Akal Takht, this controversy cannot be resolved. In fact, a few years ago, SGPC, under the instruction from the Jathedar of Akal Takht, had convened a meeting of the representatives of the major Sikh organisation and eminent Sikh scholars to resolve this controversy. In this meeting, a resolution moved by the author of these lines was unanimously passed. The resolution proposed that a committee of Sikh scholars should be appointed to look into this controversy. These scholars should thoroughly analyse the contents of the *Dasam Granth* and, on the basis of their findings, they should make recommendations

to the SGPC. After a further scrutiny, the SGPC should get these recommendations finally implemented through an edict issued from the Akal Takht. This edict of the Akal Takht should be binding on the whole Sikh Panth as the final verdict on the *Dasam Granth*. The Akal Takht should also put a ban on all individuals as well as Sikh organisations on any statement in the press regarding the *Dasam Granth*. However, everyone should be free to submit their views on *Dasam Granth* to this committee of experts before it submits its final recommendations. Unfortunately, this committee was never constituted by the SGPC and this controversy remains unsolved till today. It reflects a lack of will on the part of Sikh Panth to confront the burning issues concerning Sikh religion and Sikh ethos.

All these challenges have to be met and resolved without any delay. Only those nations, societies and religious entities grow, evolve and climb up the civilizational ladder which take timely decisions on the emerging conflicts and issues. Societies which fail to resolve their religious and cultural conflicts in the light of its fundamental doctrines disintegrate and get wiped out from the civilizational map. The Akal Takht and the SGPC seem to be incapable of resolving some of these issues on their own. It would be better if they seek assistance from some of the Sikh organisations, such as, the newly-formed International Sikh Confederation. This Sikh body, which consists of eminent Sikh scholars and other expert professionals and is completely apolitical, and is capable of giving an unbiased, crystallized opinion on these controversial issues confronting the Sikh Panth.

To conclude, all these above-mentioned challenges demand an urgent and immediate resolution. Otherwise both history and the coming generations will hold the present leadership guilty for the drift. The Sikh masses look up to their religious and political leaders and the Sikh academicians to resolve these issues as they have been doing in the past to uphold the primacy of Guru Granth and the Guru Panth. It is only in this way that the Sikh Panth can preserve the uniqueness and distinctiveness of its religion, which aims at *sarbat da bhalla*, peace and prosperity for all. It is rather a responsibility enjoined on the followers of Gurus. Let us not waste time. Let us act now, immediately and decisively. Delay can spell disaster.