

SIKHISM INDIANIZED

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Sikhs are doing well in most fields in India today. Also, turban wearing Sikhs hold high positions in the government, the armed forces and some other fields such as economics. Yet, Sikh prosperity belies compromises in the areas of Sikh ideological identity and their *miri-piri* (Sikhi spiritual and temporal) aspirations as a people. The post 1984 events have been conveniently forgotten or glossed over and the Sikh Prime Minister has apologized for the 1984 pogroms. Most Sikhs find it convenient to “forgive and forget” or to re-interpret post 1984 events. Some even suffer from total amnesia regarding the human rights abuses in Punjab. Land prices in Punjab are booming and even farmers living close to the cities are prepared to overlook the longer term economic and environmental damage which continues to be done to the state.

A form of Hinduized Sikhism is now practiced by most Sikh Indians; so much so that at times it is difficult to tell the difference between Hindu and Sikh forms of worship. The golden *palki* religious procession (*nagar kirtan*) from Delhi to Nankana Sahib illustrated the extent to which the Indian version of politicized Sikhism has embraced Hindu ritualism. ‘Malak Bhago’ Sikhs have taken over the management of Sikh institutions and now decide the direction Indianized Sikhism is to take.

Contrary to expectation, as Indians becomes more affluent, they also practice more rituals. They consult astrologers and pundits regarding matters such as matrimonial match making and even business ventures and political decisions. Their superstitious practices have no bounds. Caste based social divisions are not breaking down. And all these anti-Sikhi practices are aped by the Indian Sikhs. In the meantime, political opportunism has taken over the highest Sikh institutions.

The question is if Sikhism should be tailored to the religio-cultural environment of the majority communities the Sikhs live in. Today’s Sikh prosperity, especially in Punjab and India has been built on huge compromises in the areas of independent Sikh ideological identity and their *miri-piri* (Sikhi spiritual and temporal) aspirations as a people.

The ritualism and many practices (including the caste system) of the majority Hindu community are now part of Hinduized Sikhism. It is also true that the most prominent TV preachers like ‘Morari Babu’ and other swamis and *acharyas*, are taking much out of Gurbani and dressing it up as part of progressive Hindu thought, albeit, always referring back to Hindu mythology of the Vedas, as if those myths and mantras were the original sources of all human wisdom. Sikhs abound

amongst the audiences of such articulate preachers, and ‘converted’ Sikh *gianis* in Sikh *bana* often oblige by sitting on stages next to the Hindu *tilakdhari* swamis. On Guru Nanak Sahib’s *Parkash Gurburb* (Birthday), ‘Morari Babu’ led his huge audience with many ‘*Bolay so nihaal*’ *jaikaras* (slogans), and while covering his own head asked the audience to do the same while some lines from Japji Sahib were being sung to melodious music. The sermons of love for all, *seva* (service), duty and humility etc delivered by these scholar entertainers, who frequently quote ancient Sanskrit Slokas from Vedic lore to the accompaniment of music, can be most enchanting. English, science and technology phrases are thrown in for good measure. More so when one contrasts these (apparently) well balanced sermons with the rather amateurish Sikh preachers and out-of-tune *raagi jathas*. Thousands sitting in the audience and millions before TV sit mesmerized. While these preachers, with a ‘Hinduized Hindustan’ agenda, have a message of love and unity, elsewhere, the threat is chilling: that all those living in India, all religions including Sikhs, Christians and Muslims, must either relate to this larger Hindu nationalism or face second class citizen treatment or worse (ref. BBC documentary “The Final Solution”).

The Sikh institutions are in political hands and most Sikh preachers talk the same language of Vedic lore, and interpret Gurbani and Sikh tradition accordingly. The unique ideology of Guru Nanak, based on the founding formula in the ‘Commencing Verse’ (commonly called Mool Mantra) of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib is no longer heard. Most Indian Sikhs see nothing wrong with practicing a form of Hinduized Sikhism. The government and the armed forces are led by Sikhs. So where is the problem, they ask. Sikhs in some other less tolerant countries often face similar pressures.

In danger is Guru Nanak’s mission, which sets the goals for a truly free human society which respects human equality, dignity and diversity before One Creator Being. The need is to counter those Brahmanical practices which continue to compromise the revolutionary originality of Sikhism. Increasingly, the burden of preserving and preaching Guru Nanak’s message in its pristine form is likely to fall on Sikhs living in truly liberal societies. The question before the Sikh Diaspora is if the price being paid for Sikh prosperity in India by sacrificing the founding principles of *Sikhi* is not too great.

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