

## Sikh current issues-historical perspective

chapter 4-14

Sikh politics is now more selfish vested interests and power hungry oriented than committed to Sikh interests and Sikh values- needs the right direction and Sikh unity-

Sikh political leaders have made the Sikh politics now to be more selfish vested interests and power hungry oriented than committed to Sikh interests and Sikh values. It has resulted in to Sikh disunity due to party factionalism, favouritism and egoistic tendencies of some of the Sikh leaders, besides the open allegations of corrupt practices against most of these leaders, totally forbidden in Sikh religion. Even Sikh religion has been made subordinate to politics as Sikh political leaders have become the masters of religious leaders through Sgpc, being under their control, which is the appointing authority of most of the Sikh religious functionaries, though politics was made subordinate to religion, so as the political leaders may act upon the higher moral and ethical values of Sikh religion in their socio-political activities.

The Sikh history is the witness itself to the fact that Sikh leaders and even all other Sikhs followed the higher values of their religion in the long struggle against Mughals and Afghans and against Britishers as well, which were praised by those very Sikh adversaries. They kept in tact their Sikh unity in those struggles and became successful to establish their Sikh empire by ousting those mighty powers. The present day Sikhs and their leaders need guidance from their own history and to the commitment to the Sikh cause from their ancestors, which adorns the golden pages of Sikh history. The pre-blems of the constitutions of the advanced civilized countries of today provide to secure to all of its citizens- justice (political, social and economic, liberty of faith and worship, equality of status and dignity of individuality). All these fundamental rights of humanity were advocated by Sikh religion as far back as five hundred years, when there was autocratic rule of Mughals in India and autocratic rules in other countries of the world. None else of any religion and faith had to claim and protect these rights. These fundamental rights were not only put forth ceremoniously in Sikhism but their implementation was assured by the supreme sacrifices of some of the Sikh Gurus, while by the excellent heroism by some of them in the battle fields and followed by thousands of their followers according to the situation whatever needed.

Politics was made subordinate to religion and inseparable from it in Sikhism so that higher values in morals and ethics inculcated from the religion should reflect in politics. Politics was to be no more the game of scoundrels. Social responsibility to society was emphasized in Sikhism with selfless service to the mankind which was lacking in most of the previous faith and systems, which rather considered the salvation to be individualistic goal and involvement in the world affairs to be a hindrance to spiritual efforts with a negative attitude towards life to be a sort of suffering and illusion. In Sikhism the justice (religious, political, social and economic) is not to be secured for one's own self but for all others, being victims of injustice. The implementation of basic human fundamental rights are not to be assured for own self but for the entire humanity being of one race and brotherhood. The exploitation of the poor innocent masses with the power of wealth and aggression over the rights of others is forbidden. Sikhism believes in democracy, the government of the people, by the people and for the people; the administrators to be the servants of the people; to be guided by the higher values of life and equality and dignity of the individual. Sikhism surpasses the modern socialism as it makes obligatory for every one to earn with his hard labor by honest means according to his capability and share with the needy out of his earnings. Rightly commented, Prof Arnold Toynbee eminent scholar of world history of USA-

"The Sikh movement was forerunner of Lenin's socialism by about 200 years on ethical grounds."

J.D. Cunningham also supports such a view:

"It was reserved for Guru Nanak to perceive the true principles of reforms and to lay those broad foundations, which

enabled his successor Guru Gobind Singh to fire the minds of his country with a new nationality to give practical effect to the doctrine, that the lowest is equal to the highest in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes." Aurobindo Ghosh, an Indian scholar points out, "The Sikh Khalsa was an astonishingly original and novel creation, a democratic institution."

The principle of Sikhism to secure justice (religious, political, social and economic) not only for one's own self but for all others, being victims of injustice, to assure the basic human rights, particularly the

right of the freedom of religion for everyone; to uphold the dignity and equality of every individual, kept the Sikhs in conflict with the Mughal rulers who were determined to violate

these human rights by force of gun. In fact Sikhs remained in conflict with every unjust power and authority as they can never tolerate injustice. In Sept 1708, the Bairagi turned Singh, Gurbakhash Singh generally known as Banda Singh Bahadur, along with five Sikhs came from Nander to Punjab under the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh to settle the score with the tyrant Mughal governor of Sirhind and other guilty officials who had bricked alive the minor two sons of Guru Gobind Singh and to wipe out the cruel and tyrant Mughal rule in Punjab. They stayed for a few months at Village Saheri near Delhi and organized the Sikh army there. The Sikhs then left for Sirhind, occupying the territories on the way ousting the Mughal officials. In 1710, a fierce battle took place between the Sikhs and Mughals outside Sirhind. The Sikhs defeated the Mughal army and occupied Sirhind. The Governor of Sirhind Wazir Khan was arrested and mercilessly killed. Other guilty were also punished. One was Sucha Nand, a Hindu Minister who instigated the governor that sons of a cobra should not be left alive, was also punished and killed. Sikh flag was flown over Sirhind. Bhai Vinod Singh was appointed governor of Sirhind. Sikhs occupied the territories up to Lahore in Punjab and established the Sikh rule. Mughal currency was replaced by Sikh currency in the name of Guru Nanak. In December 1715 Banda Singh bahadur along with the Sikh warriors were arrested and were executed at Delhi. None of them agreed to change his religion. Such ups and downs came in Sikh struggle which was prolonged for about a century; ultimately the Sikhs uprooted the Mughals and Afghans invaders and established their own rule. By 1768 the Sikhs occupied Punjab under their confederacies rule which had been set up under the supervision of Akal Takhat. Mughals and Pathan did not dare to enter their areas. In 1799 Sikhs established their own independent sovereign state by unifying the confederacies under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and then occupied the entire Punjab by ousting the principalities which were under the Muslim rulers with allegiance to Afghanistan. The Sikh empire consisted of a very vast area of entire North India, spread over from one side and to the boundary of China on the other side. Sikh empire was exemplary secular. All the basic human rights were restored with full freedom of religion. Justice (religious, political, social and economic) was assured for everyone. Such powerful was the Sikh state that British who had established their rule in the rest of India, could not dare to enter it to come in conflict with the Sikh state and rather entered in to a treaty with it, not to interfere in each others' area. Ranjit Singh, who became Maharaja of the Sikh state in 1799 died in 1839. After his death his dynasty was finished under the conspiracies of the British with Brahman and Dogras brothers, whom Ranjit Singh had brought at the helm of civil administration and who were not committed to Sikh rule. In 1849-1947, British dealt with Sikhs shrewdly employing them in the Army to the extent of about 30% of the entire Indian army, giving them the fertile lands now located in Pakistan, as they had already their land to the eastern side and constructing the canals for the river waters for the irrigation purpose, not interfering in their religious affairs. The Sikhs started Singh Sabha movement to educate the Sikhs to make them adhering to the strict Sikh code of conduct and to follow the true tradition of their religion and to negate the conspiracies of the Brahmanical agents and Christian missionaries against their religion. This movement remained active from 1873-1920 and the Sikhs were awakened of the outside dangers to their religion. Sikh Gurdwaras, Sikh educational institutions =96 Khalsa schools and colleges were set up through out Punjab. Sikh journals and newspapers were started to advocate the cause of Sikhism. In 1920-1925 Akali movement came into existence in which the Sikh Mahants were managing Sikh Gurdwaras and had made their posts hereditary and indulging in anti Sikh practices, having been exploited by the Brahmanical and British agents. The Sikh gurdwara Act 1925 was framed at the instance of the British government which did not afford to remain in conflict with Sikhs, for the management of Sikh Gurdwaras by the elected representatives of Sikhs. Since then SGPC (Sharomni Gurdwara Prabandhak committee) is to be elected by the Sikhs.

From 1926-1947 Sikhs remained active in political affairs through their representative body, Shiromni Akali Dal and took part in the Indian freedom movement, sacrificed much more than the entire Indian population. The Indian congress leaders of freedom movement Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru and others made the political promises with Sikhs in this period to give them their homeland in Punjab area with autonomous powers and constitutional guarantees. The Sikh leaders relying upon those promises and assurances rejected the offers of the British government and Muslim league for their separate Sikh state and political power insisting upon the freedom of India without partition and not to create Pakistan. In 1947, British created Pakistan a separate country for Muslim on the basis of their being in majority and granted freedom to India. After the achievement of freedom of India on August 15, 1947, the story of

Sikhs in their own Indian Republic is woeful and beneath expectations. The Indian leaders betrayed the Sikhs and refused to implement the promises and assurances given to them to set up autonomous Sikh state in India and the constitutional safeguards. The Sikhs were rather mistrusted and discriminated against. Punjab state was excluded even from the reorganization of Indian states on linguistic basis fearing that Sikhs would form the majority in that state. The Sikhs carried in their peaceful agitation for over 16 years for the creation of that reorganized state from 1950-1966 courting the arrest of hundred thousands of Sikhs which was ultimately conceded in 1966. In the reorganization process grave discriminations were committed against Sikhs and Punjab usurping their rights. Even Capital of Punjab was made union territory under Indian government. River waters and dams were taken out from the management of Punjab. Later on River waters of Punjab were distributed amongst other states of Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi and J&K who had no right over those waters in accordance with Riparian laws. The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made awards unilaterally in that regard without any authority as if to worsen the economic condition of Sikhs who are mainly agriculturists and owners of land of Punjab. Sikhs were again forced to carry on the peaceful agitation from 1966 to remove these injustices until now but their just demands and that of Punjab had not been conceded to as if the Indian government wants them to continually remain in conflict. Sikhs continued the Dharm Yudh Morcha from 1982- May 1984, in which about 300,000 Sikhs courted their arrests and several hundred were killed. In June 1984 the first week of Indian government with Indira Gandhi as prime Minister, attacked the Sikhs and their holy shrines by Indian Army and its war tanks, demolished the Akal Takhat and killing thousands of Sikhs in the so called Operation Blue Star without any instigation. Sikh youth were made special targets to torture and murder them arbitrarily throughout Punjab. In Oct. 31, Indira Gandhi was murdered by her two Sikh bodyguards. Her son became the Prime Minister. Thousands of Sikhs were massacred throughout India from October 31- Nov 4, burning alive most of them and their houses and businesses establishments and even several Sikh Gurdwaras were brought to ashes without any instigation whatsoever. Action against the offenders of such heinous crimes was to be hoping against hope. Persecution of Sikhs and particularly Sikh youth continued till 1996. Sikh militants also tried to take the revenge against the guilty police officials. They carried on the demand for Khalistan, a separate Sikh state as Sikhs felt the real danger to their security in the Indian republic. The demands contained in 1973 Anand Pur Sahib resolution of Akali Dal for more powers, only defense, foreign affairs, communication and currency was to remain with the central government and to remove the injustices of the reorganization of states were not even given the due considerations by Indian government. In 1997, Akali Dal formed the government in Punjab defeating congress. It restored peace in Punjab and stopped the practice of excesses on Sikh faith and brought the police under civil administration. In the previous government of congress party and the president rule, Punjab had been made the police state to commit excesses especially on Sikh youths. However, the political demands of Akali Dal were not conceded though at the Center Akali Dal was a partner with B.J. P. The struggle of Sikhs for their political rights is still continuing.

The hostile attitude of Indian government and its leaders in the last half a century against Sikhs reflects the Machiavellian and Chankyan politics in the garb of pluralism, which sanctions deceitful and fraudulent planning in the name of state unity. It permits the deceptive politics to deal with minorities. The main political and religious events of Sikhs relate to their homeland Punjab as Sikhism was founded and developed under the direct divine guidance of Sikh Gurus; initiation with Amrit of double edged sword to enter Sikh religion, to turn them to Singhs was provided there, and the Sikh struggle to wipe out the Mughals and Afghan invaders was carried on there, leading to the formation of their independent sovereign Sikh state. The fights with the British were held there. The Singh Sabha movements and Akali movements were started to awaken the Sikhs to understand and follow the real tenets of Sikhism. Besides ousting Mughals and Afghans, Sikhs fought the battles to take control of Sikh Gurdwaras that were successful. All the historical Sikh places are situated mostly there including the two prominent centers of Sikhism at Amritsar (Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht) and at Anandpur Sahib. The struggles of Sikhs in the republic of India against the government to achieve their political power and against unjust excesses on Sikhs took place there and still continuing up till now, where Sikhs despite being in majority were not allowed to smoothly exercise their democratic rights for long. However in the last century, Sikhs are now spread over throughout the world by means of migration. There would hardly be any big town in the world, where Sikhs are not residing and where there are no Sikh Gurdwaras. About three-million Sikhs are now living in foreign lands and in all the states of India outside Punjab. They have political dominance at those places, being in minority but they have got their presence felt almost everywhere. . In India, two Sikh Takhts (prominent historical places) are situated at Patna in Bihar state

and Nander Hazursahib in Maharashtra. The Sikhs outside Punjab and abroad are very well placed in all the upper vocations of life. They are dedicated to their religion. Due to the 1984 attacks against Sikhs and Sikh shrines with the direct instigation of the Congress led governments, the failure to catch criminals involved in heinous crimes against humanity, the Sikhs felt insecure in all the states out of Punjab. There is no feeling of security in any of the countries outside. Sikhs have made a place for them in all the countries with their hard labor and sincerity of purpose, besides commitment to their religion. In the powerful countries of America, England and Canada and others Sikhs' number there have crossed over a million. All of the Sikhs have the legacy to their homeland, Punjab and show keen interest in Punjab and Sikh affairs there. The Sikhs of today and the Sikh leaders must always keep in their minds this short history of Sikhs, which is only of three centuries and not so old. It will always remind them of the commitment to Sikh values and the Sikh cause and inspire them to discharge their duty with honesty of purpose, remaining above selfish vested interests, party factions and egoistic tendencies, besides to remain united and bold to their justified political aspirations. The political power struggle of Sikhs relates to Punjab only, wherein they are in majority and can form their Govt. and take the active part in all its domains to have their effective say in their working. The outsider Sikhs can help them in whatever sphere it is needed, but they can have no political participation there. They can not even become the voters in Punjab, being the residents of other states and citizens of other countries. They should take part in the politics of the countries of their residence, so as to establish their identity and influence in the countries they reside. It is of no sense for them to become the members of the political parties of Punjab and of India and to set up their units in other countries, which may be a wastage of their time and energy. Akali Dal had been the political representative party of Sikhs in Punjab since its formation, in 1920. There are several achievements of this party and particularly in the Akali movement to get the management of Sikh Gurdawaras for Sikhs ousted the mahants, under great sacrifices. It was a party exclusive of Sikhs and its members were all practising Sikhs living in Sikh code of conduct. It had the full support of Sikhs to keep SGPC under its control even up till now. It should continue as such to be the exclusive party of Sikhs and rather all other Akali Dals should merge in it as a minority like Sikhs can not afford disunity. All the Sikhs should democratically elect its leaders regularly. It should be exclusively a Sikh representative party to ensure the rights of the Sikhs and their responsibilities as well and to preach Sikh religion in Sikhs and in the world. No person who is not a Sikh should become its member. The intention to make it a Punjab regional party should be nipped in the bud, which can never be in Sikh interests. A separate parliamentary party may be constituted by the Akali Dal, whose members may be other Punjabis as well and with the alliance of other like minded parties with a common minimum programme for the implementation of their policies at the legislative and Govt. levels, and to give it the secular outlook to meet the requirements of the election laws. For this purpose the purely Sikh party like Akali Dal can not be made a Punjab regional party as the leaders of the ruling Akali Dal are trying to make it. If it is still so done then it will lose the support of Sikhs in the near future. It is a very ticklish venture, requiring serious consideration.

The Sikhs and Sikh leaders must live in Sikh way of life and Sikh code of conduct and ensure it for their younger Sikh generation, which is drifting away from Sikh way of life, due to their own hypocracies and insincerity to Sikh way of life and to the Sikh cause. It is then only that they can contribute something in Sikh politics by practically acting upon the higher Sikh values and not compromising on Sikh issues only to remain in power. In fact truthful way of Sikh living automatically removes such short comings.