

CAUSES OF INDIAN DEGRADATION

Guru Nanak Dev before launching 'Operation Salvage' and starting his mission of uplift and enlightenment, first thought over, observed, studied and gauged the causes which had led to India's downfall and degradation. This took him the early years of his life till he was almost 37 years of age. The assessment he made can be briefly summarised as follows.

During the Ramayan and Mahabharat periods, people were in high spirits and in trends of glory, ever ready, welcoming opportunities to face and overcome conflicts with clean hands, courage, and bravery. To quote an instance from the Ramayan, when Hanuman met Sita in Ravan's captivity, he offered to take her away, but she refused the offer saying it was not right to escape stealthily like that let Ram come, fight out, and take her back. We have an example in the Mahabharat also that Draupadi, after her humiliation in the Royal Court, refused to do up her hair until she had washed them with the blood of Dushasan. But this spirit and mentality changed, when after the battle of Kalinga, Ashoka embraced Buddhism and abjured the 'Sword'. For Ashoka personally, it may have been a great day. Some people even glorify it as the day of realisation and transformation. In fact, it turned out to be the beginning of the downfall of Hindu supremacy in India. Ashoka's embracing of Buddhism may well have been a noble personal achievement, but politically, renunciation of Sword undid the glories of India that were. Renunciation and self-defence or governance do not go together. They are opposed to each other. Since this abjuration of the sword by Ashoka and emergence of the

cult of renunciation and non-violence, these brave and manly qualities and high spirits began to disappear in India.

Another factor which contributed to the downfall was affluence, love of riches and worship of *maya*, *Lakshmi*. The alluvial and fertile soil of the Indo-Gangetic plains and the other rich productive lands of the country provided the Indians plenty with comparatively little effort. This made them easy-going and calculative. Goethe also had once said that everything in the world may be endured except continual prosperity. Weather was another cause which made Indians further indolent.

There was yet another factor which weighed heavily. This was individualism amongst the Hindus. Their worship and everyday life is all individualistic. That is why their religion and interests are strictly personal and revolve only around self-loyalty and has, therefore, remained confined to family or caste or have been at the most, tribal or regional. There being no opportunity for community assemblage, there was little neighbourly love or sympathy. It is a hard fact of history that there has never been what may be called an Indian nation or any such idea, much less any feeling or sentiment, of what is called nationalism. The presentday India was the formulation brought about for the convenience of British administration.

The division of Hindu society into four watertight and insulated compartments by the principle of Varanashram was another important factor to keep people always in mutually strained and bitter relations. This bitterness has resulted in inhuman treatment meted out to the *Harijans*, the lower castes, by those who belonged to higher castes by just a fluke of birth. This continues even today as is evident from a news item in the daily *Tribune* of Chandigarh dated 6th September, 1971, flashed from Madras dated 5th September :

“A new road for the exclusive use of *Harijans* has been laid out in Sevalapuri Village of Ginjee Taluk in South Arcot District.

“Mr. Elayaperumal, former Chairman of the Backward Classes Commission, told PTI that the new road had been constructed since some sections of the caste Hindus had been

objecting to *Harijans* using a stretch of two and half furlongs in the village.

“Of late the *Harijans* started asserting their right but caste Hindus brought pressure on the authorities to open a new road parallel to the existing one for *Harijans*.”

On the top of all these factors was the fact that the people had become cut off from the Source of Life and the Omnipotent. This had been usurped and monopolized by the priest class. The lower castes were not even allowed to read the *Vedas*, the Scriptures, so much so that they had been denied the right of even hearing the Scriptures. This commercialization of spirituality and religion had made the masses anchorless and without any haven. Thus being adrift, they had lost faith in the All-Powerful Being and had also lost confidence in themselves. Generation of this oppression, depression and subjection had come to stay. The Hindus had developed the mentality and an approach which always tried to avoid conflict by even surrender, prostration, submission, and appeasement or compromise. They could only harass and become aggressive towards those who happened to be weaker, but quailed and quivered when confronted by those who were stronger.

This mentality, therefore, resulted in opening the floodgates to foreign invaders to whom the whole country was offered as if on a platter for plunder, massacre, and taking away wealth and driving away men and women as slaves. And it remained a one-way traffic. India was always attacked and plundered, as it lay helplessly prostrate before any one who liked to invade it.

Great Shankracharya had also once noticed this depraved degradation brought about in the country by this mentality of self-humiliation and avoidance of conflict. From south to north and east to west, he untiringly worked to reawaken the people back to manliness. As a consequence of his laudable efforts the pre-Buddhist Brahminism was revived and self-humiliating non-violent Buddhism kicked out of the country lock, stock, and barrel. But the virus had gone so deep into the minds and brains of the people that one human span of life was not long enough to complete the task. Although Buddhism was banished, it left behind its mark

and effect on the thinking and living of the people. In one form or the other they still continue and persist. Jainism, a sister school of thought of Buddhism, managed to escape the onslaught of the great Shankracharya and stayed on in the country. And so the mentality lurked and revived, though sometimes it changed form.

History tells us that India had never had the capacity or capability to make an attack across its borders, though we try to cover this weakness and imbecility and deceive and please ourselves by calling it our greatness and peace-loving tendency. The first attack across the Indus from the Indian side, was made by the Khalsa Army during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's suzerainty over the Punjab.

Consequently, we see the Indian borders shrinking from the Hindukush to the Beas and Hussainiwala on the Sutlej, and from Duzdab-Zahidan at the Iranian border to Rajasthan in the west, and from Burma to almost the walls of Calcutta in the east. In the north too Gilgit and half of Ladakh and Kashmir had been eroded away.

We have to hang our heads low when we read in our history that to avoid conflict some Hindu rulers offered their daughters to the Delhi sovereigns to please and appease them, and Hindu men of influence and vested interests joined hands with the tyrant persecutors of their own people.

The recent division of the country and creation of Pakistan are evidence that this mentality and outlook still persist. Most of our present-day policies also are worked out under this very obsession.

Results and Achievements of the Satguru's Movement

The Satguru undertook to remove all these weaknesses and causes that had caused the people to fall so low. The movement which the Satguru started to achieve these ends took 200 years of consistent and strenuous effort, in which many hardships had to be borne and sacrifices offered. It took the Satguru four generations to change the mind-set of the people. It will be interesting to mention some of the principal steps taken, and results and achievements obtained.

The first essential thing the Satguru aimed at and brought about was to provide the anchor to stabilise and fortify the trembling mind. This was done by reviving and re-energizing the connecting link between the masses and the Master. With faith and confidence in the Supreme, Fearless Being, he said, the mind could become stable, fearless and self-confident. The Satguru laid down :

Do not terrorize any one, nor submit to domineering by anybody.

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ, ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥ (ਸਲੋਕ ਮ : ੯)

He brought home to the forlorn human mind that the Omnipotent Guru, along with all his strength, forces and power was always (ਅੰਗ ਸੰਗ) present with them as the guiding force and protecting deity. This created a sense of self-help, self-confidence, self-protection, daring bravery and invincibility and made his disciple equal to a *lakh* and a quarter. This changed the life, the outlook and the spirit altogether.

The Satguru's great achievement lay in transforming human beings into gods; turning pay-load donkeys, serfs, and slaves into *Sardars* and valiant knights; turning sparrows and cows that were there to be killed and milked, into hawks and lions and turning the low castes, oppressed, depressed, and exploited by the high castes, into indomitable and formidable fighters before whom *Rajas* and *Nawabs* quivered and trembled.

Another achievement of the Guru was to free us from rituals and superstitions and bondage of gods and goddesses, and *avtars* who take birth and die, and emancipate us from the fear of the priests, the fear of the high classes, the fear of the state, and the fear of the ruler. This was done by putting us straight and into direct contact with the Fearless Creator. He said :

With the Fearless One dwelling within thee;
where do you get the fear from ?

ਨਿਰਭਉ ਸੰਗਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੈ ਬਸਤੇ, ਇਹੁ ਡਰਨੁ ਕਹਾ ਤੇ ਆਇਆ ॥ (ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: ੫)

The Satguru's way of life being of intellectual understanding of the *Shabd* and its interpretation in actual life, the mind was to be controlled, trained, and moulded to become attuned to the Divine Will. No monopoly in this respect was claimed. Everyone was

welcome to adopt this way and reach the goal. This created hopefulness, optimism and high spirits (ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ).

The Satguru liberated us from the deadly tentacles of the Hindu priest class. This grip was so strong that the fingerprints of the deadly hands are still visible. It was also an achievement that for the first time the picture of India as an integrated whole was projected by the Satguru in 1699 at Anandpur.

In 1703, the tenth Guru laid the first brick of what is nowadays called the Red Cross, when his Sikhs led by Bhai Kanhaya attended to the wounded in battles irrespective of whether they were friends or foes. The Satguru's arrows were tipped with gold so that the survivor could be attended to or the dependents helped.

When he escaped from Chamkaur, the Satguru set a personal example for us never to give up hope and endeavour and have unflinching faith and devotion to the Master and confidence in the justness of the cause. We see that from a worldly point of view, he had lost his four sons, mother, father, and everything at Anandpur. He even had no followers with him when he actually left Chamkaur. Yet, it is awe-inspiring to note with what rapidity he recouped and reorganised and gathered around him again a formidable force of selfless God-conscious men, and in what victorious strains he wrote his epistle of victory — *Zafarnama*, to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, and how the spiritual reawakening and regeneration of "man" and resurrection of human values and restoration of consciousness of the self, and mental, moral and social, uplift was brought to perfection. The result will be worth illustrating by the following anecdote of Sikh history which is full of such events.

In December 1715, Bhai Gurbakhsh Singh, (Banda Singh Bahadur), was arrested by the Mughal Forces after the siege of Gurdas Nangal and taken to Delhi along with 740 Sikhs. They were executed in the beginning of March, 1716, in batches of one hundred a day. It is noteworthy that not a single one of them, and there were even some teenagers amongst them, abjured his faith or faltered.