

MARYADA

There is no special spiritual sanctity attached to *maryada* in Sikhism. But it is like a Constitution of a civilised and organised government of a country, to which loyalty is sworn. It has been formed and has been evolved from time to time by the Sikhs as a whole called '*Panth*'. It is the centre around which the whole organisation revolves and keeps together. Without a Constitution or rules and regulations no society, or individual can properly function. Without this regulation everything becomes a total chaos. It is a matter of strategy for protection and advancement of the Sikhs, to co-ordinate and integrate and keep them on the path. *Maryada* has evolved and changed according to the requirements, needs and conditions through which the *Panth* has been passing. It will have to adapt itself and change in future also when necessity and urgency of a situation calls. A static constitution is always fatal to the cause. Our *maryada*, therefore, has to be dynamic and a living pulsating and functioning Constitution. But it has to conform to and be sub-servient to the spirits and tenets laid down in the Satguru's *Shabd* incorporated in Guru Granth Sahib.

If everybody begins to have a free hand at the *maryada* and starts ritualising and corrupting it according to one's individual whims and caprices, it will be very dangerous for the integrity of the *Panth*. Such a liberty may bring about disruption and disintegration. Strict enforcement of the current *maryada* is, therefore, very necessary.

Questions sometimes are posed that the Satguru directed his tirade mainly against ritualism, formalism, institutionalised

religion, regimented society, and exhibitionary symbols and forms. Then how can the imposition of strict *maryada* be justified amongst the Sikhs. The question is valid and requires proper understanding. If Sikhism were an individualistic and isolationist concern, it would have been quite different. There would then be no need for any forms or symbols or any strict *maryada*. But Sikhism as envisaged and taught by the Guru is to be an organised force of individuals having un-swerving faith and anchor in God and Guru and dedicated to upholding and advancing righteousness, to extirpate evil, and evil-doers, and to work for nobility in the world. For enlarging the scope and effectiveness of such a work, organised effort is of foremost importance. It is beyond any individual to take up and carry such a work to the desired end. It must be a conjoint and co-operative effort of the whole body if success is to be achieved. To bring people together and to keep them in an integrated unit to enable them to march forward and progress with enthusiasm and in spirit of joyful attachment to the cause and themselves, organised discipline is valuable and a pre-requisite. To keep up such a zealous enthusiasm, imagination and sentiments have to be kept worked up. To keep up the ideas and beliefs in an operative mood, some forms and external symbols are helpful necessities. They must not be dead and obsolete. To be a living index of his mission and idea, they should be vivid reminders of the personality that governs his faith and actions. They should be reflections of his inner belief and convictions as tears are related to grief and smiles to happiness. We have to guard against tears and smiles becoming camouflages for hypocrisy. As long as their inner meaning and spirit is real and alive, they always serve a very useful purpose and make the ideal real and workable. If such forms are imposed not for requirement of uniformity and integration, but by local and racial influences and pressure, they tend to narrow down the ideal and create divisions. If the spirit within is lost, such outside forms become sheer obstacles and should better be abandoned. It was this conception which exposed the outmodedness of customs and forms then prevailing in the Hindu society. Taking food in “cooking squares”, the caste system, the distinctive features of the

sacred thread, and the differentiation between high and low castes, all led to exclusiveness and became hindrances to the spiritual advancement of individuals and alienated the people from God. The Satguru's mission was, therefore, to remove such obstacles. The Sikh forms were not meant as an essential aid to the spiritual advancement of the soul. They were conceived and determined for preservation of the corporate life of the community. There is no bar on an individual soul to be inspired by and to love God without adopting these forms but they become a must if the individual has to advance not only for his ownself but also for the good of others as well as progress in the company of the Guru and the *sangat*. For such joint action, the Sikhs who are the embodiment of the Guru and are thus surcharged with his personality, get inspired by the uniform worn and ordained by him. This creates an everlasting association with an ever-living Personality that is itself a symbol of the Highest Personality. As is God, so is the Guru, and as is the Guru so must be the Sikh.

Besides keeping up the *esprit de corps*, *maryada* has to play another important role. It is like a moat and ramparts of a fort to safeguard and protect the spirit within. This has been of special utility and importance to the Sikhs and Sikhism. They had to face struggle and opposition from two fronts. Semitic and Aryan systems were both to be contended with. Semitic attack was straight and frontal. Their bigoted fanaticism and brute tyranny had to be faced. Though it was a long drawn and bloody conflict, yet the Sikhs were able to stand against it and ultimately were victorious in the struggle. But the Aryan or the Hindu onslaught is surreptitious, veiled, and orchestrated both from within and outside. The Sikhs had to contend with Hindu fifth columnists and traitors in their own ranks. The Mohammedans wanted openly to convert the Sikhs to Islam. This the Sikhs resisted very successfully and valiantly. But there is a section of the Hindus who want to assimilate the Sikhs and wipe out their image and identity. This point is dealt with in detail elsewhere. If the Sikhs were saved, it was due to their *maryada* which enjoined upon them to keep their hair intact.

Kes and beard are a spiritual and mystical link between a

Sikh and the Guru. If the uncut hair and beard were not there to protect us, the Hindu intolerant communalist majority would have devoured us long ago. One is astonished to see sometimes seemingly sensible people in Sikh form who are impatient and dying to see this protecting hand removed so that they are free to get rid of their beard and *kes*. But they fail to advance any cogent reason as to what will they gain by doing so, except that they will be free to go about unnoticed with their girl friends. I have discussed this point with youngsters who have lived abroad for considerable periods. My own son Sikandar Singh has been in Canada for almost nine years. He was first in the University of Western Ontario and after getting his Master's degree he has been doing a job in Montreal. So he has experienced different lives there, of a student and of a worker. He tells me that there is no difficulty that one comes across abroad at all on account of long *kes* and beard. He has moved even in the highest society there and has been visiting the Government House at Ottawa to call on the Governor-General who is a friend of our family, but he had never felt any awkwardness or sense of inferiority nor was he ever treated differently or with discrimination anywhere on account of his beard and uncut *kes*. So if they stand as a check on our going wrong, they deserve to be thanked and cherished as our saviours.

It is on these bases that the Sikh *maryada* has been formed, evolved, and enforced.