

VARANASHRAM

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Varanashram is the mainstay of Hinduism. Under this principle, Indians were divided into four classes, viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The Brahmins monopolized all the intellect and were regarded as the “Head” of the Hindus. The Kshatriyas were the “sword arm” of the Hindus. The Vaishyas were artisans and farmers and technicians. While the Shudras were meant for service and menial work. Whatever may have been the origin of this principle, it put the masses into four watertight insulated compartments. The power and pelf were all monopolized and concentrated in the hands of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Even amongst them, the Brahmin was the supreme director, wire-puller and king-maker; while Kshatriyas were functioning as their instruments. All the learning and consequent wisdom, as well as political wire-pulling and ultimate effective political influence was conserved in the hands of the Brahmins along with their religious (*Dharmik*) monopoly. All the three classes were so suppressed and oppressed by the Brahmin class with their threats of disaster, and ritual beliefs, and with the fear of suffering hereafter that they looked up to them for their relief in this world as well as the next. The best of everything they earned and produced was first presented and offered to the Brahmins. This pampered class having the powerful strong arm of the Kshatriyas at their service, treated the other two lower classes with such harsh and humiliating behaviour that it created hell for them. The Kashatriya rulers were popped up and made to appear to the helpless people as representatives of the Divinity, above suspicion and criticism, as if they could do no

wrong. The people were so obsessed and depressed that they accepted all this high-handedness, cruelty, and exploitation with abject surrender. In short, the result of all this was that all the four classes were so permanently set apart that they lost all sympathy or co-operation or any sense of neighbourliness with each other. The schism created by these class divisions was ultimately responsible for the slavery of the country. A divided house could not stand up against the onslaught of any invader. A greater tragedy was that people were branded and condemned to their class compartment not by any merit or their calling or profession, but merely by chance or fluke of their birth. Guru Nanak Dev in the very beginning struck at the very root of this principle, when he took along with him as his companion, Mardana, who came from the low caste of *Mirasis* and Bala, a farmer (*Jat*), and preferred the food of Bhai Lalo, a poor carpenter to that of a sumptuous repast of the wealthy Malik Bhago. The third Guru got a *Baoli*, a deep well approachable by 84 steps, constructed at Goindwal in 1559. Every visitor bathed in it and rubbed shoulders with all without consideration of caste, class, creed, or colour.

We find that the institution of *langar* in the third Guru's time attained a special greatness and fame. About this *langar*, there is a reference in *Var Ramkali* by Balwand and Satta as follows :

In the *langar* along with the wealth of *Gurshabd*, was distributed freely the nectar-sweet rice-food mixed with pure *ghee* and milk.

ਲੰਗਰਿ ਦਉਲਤਿ ਵੰਡੀਐ ਰਸੁ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਖੀਰਿ ਘਿਆਲੀ ॥

Every visitor, whether Hindu or Muslim, was asked to partake of food in the same mess, in the same *pangat*, before he could see the Guru. When Emperor Akbar came to see the Satguru, on hearing about this protocol (ਮਰਿਆਦਾ), he and the Raja of Haripur also sat in line in the *langar* and took food before he met the Guru.

During the fourth and fifth Satgurus' time, pools (ਸਰੋਵਰ) were dug and filled with clean water for everybody to bathe. It should be noted that one of these *Sarovars* (Kaulsar) is named after one of the sixth Guru's Muslim lady disciples, Bibi Kaulan.

Finally, this principle of Varanashram was obliterated by the tenth Satguru when he administered *amrit* from the same iron bowl (ਬਾਟਾ) to everyone high or low, rich or poor, the high caste or the so-called untouchable; and made them eat *Karah Parshad* out of the same dish.

Satguru has blended the four *Varanas* into one individual Sikh, who is an integral, integrated, perfect whole. When he reads the Scriptures, recites *Gurbani*, leads in prayer, delivers a sermon, preaches in *sangat*, performs religious rights and social ceremonies, he is a Brahmin; when he wields the sword, fights battles, jumps to the help of the helpless, and defends his family, hearth and home, *dharam* and country, he is a Kshatriya; when he tills the land, does a draftman's job, and runs a mechanic's garage, or rides a tractor, he is a Vaishya; and when he cleans the dirty utensils of the *langar*, dusts off the shoes of the *sangat*, sweeps the house and the gurdwara compound, takes the farmyard manure on his head to the field, and does other service wherever needed, that very Sikh is a Shudra too. And when he emits fragrance of his 'Sikh Life' and provides light and guidance to the others, he becomes a missionary. Bhai Gurdas says :

All the four *varanas* were blended into one.

ਚਾਰਿ ਵਰਣ ਇਕ ਵਰਣ ਕਰਾਇਆ ।

The principle of Varanashram could not possibly stand against the two main principles of Sikhism given by the Satguru, of Fatherhood of One God and resultant brotherhood of man as sons and daughters of the same Father. In our scripture, it is clearly laid down in *Rag Parbhaati* :

The whole universe is the manifestation of the One Sole Light; then whom to call good and whom bad.

ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ ॥

In *Rag Sarang*, the Satguru has said :

Reflecting on the Guru's Word, I am rid of the sense of any colour, caste, and tribe.

ਜਾਤਿ ਬਰਨ ਕੁਲ ਸਹਸਾ ਚੂਕਾ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਬੀਚਾਰੀ ॥ (ਸਾਰੰਗ ਮ : ੧)