

Community Week 2014 – Inclusive Society, its rights and duties

Introduction

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Inclusive society is an important and relevant discussion in Punjab, India, and the world at large because it will lead to peace, happiness and wellbeing. If all the people of a community, nation and our global community feel they can live a fulfilling life, they will have more reasons to enjoying living than fighting. So an inclusive society is basic to peace. If a person feels by working honestly he can live a fulfilling life, he will work as a team member of the community and not put all his energy to cheat the system. Thus we must work to design strong governance policies that have a clear and transparent balance of individual rights and duties versus the rights and duties of the society as a unit. People need to be educated and reminded all the time how to co-exist as a society in balance with our needs and the resources and how to share them in a sustainable and fair manner. Just as any sports team cannot win without unity, no matter how many great players it has, a society and its people cannot live a happy and fulfilling life without having a balance between the self and others. This idea is not against our individual self, we just have to be educated that there is a diminishing marginal return for every want, and that is not any more a good return for the self. Once an Indian relative explained the competitive Indian nature to me, saying “when God told a man that he would grant whatever he wished for, but that whatever he wished would be doubled and given to his neighbor as well, the person asked the God to get rid of one of his eyes”. I was taken aback to hear such a thought coming from a mature person from the same Punjab known for Guru Nanak, who would measure all the goods as 13 which has the same sound as your and give to the poor without taking any money. It is the same land where there was no difference between Hindu and Sikh. Banda Bahadar, who established the first Sikh rule was a Hindu, and under his rule and the Sikh kingdom of Ranjit Singh all religions had equal freedom. This is the same region where caste system was abolished by the Gurus, and langar (Free Communal Kitchen) is to be shared with everybody sitting together at the same level. It is the same region where women were equal in battle fields like Mai Bhago and Rani Sada Kaur. It is the same region, where the name Kaur, which means the crown prince, is given to a woman, thus establishing equality for women. If a woman is not economically independent, she is always at the mercy of someone else. She would be lucky if she is born in a family which values her as an equal and lucky if she is married off in a family where she will not be abused. However, today’s Punjab has the highest rate of sex selection related abortions. This can only be overcome if genders have equal rights and duties. If there is dowry, a poor parent feels cursed to have a daughter. Inclusive society, a healthy society, needs to provide both genders equal access to education, choice of profession, choice of marital partner, but that also brings equal level of duties; so no dowries, no list of gifts for the girl’s in-laws and equal responsibility to help elderly parents or siblings in need. So why hold this discussion in Punjab? Because in the 15th century, Guru Nanak introduced the type of inclusive society we talk about in the western world today. It is extremely relevant for today’s Punjabis to live without religious divides, and to join India in leading the world to adopt and share the message of Guru Nanak on the importance of cultivating an inclusive society.

