An Anarcha-Sikhī Manifesto

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Anarcha-Sikhī is anti-authoritarian. While the Gurū is the master of all Sikhs, the nature of the Gurū in a post-1699 and 1708 world means that there neither is—nor should there be—any one authoritative figure in the Sikh community when it comes to social and political matters (Singh, J., 2006, pp. 111–113). Instead, the *Bāṇī* is Gurū, and the Ḵẖālsā are Gurū. Both of these are abstract concepts and do not signify a specific individual. The *Bāṇī* refers to *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, a text that maintains its authority over Sikhs by building a loving and devotional connection with the poetry contained within. The Ḵẖālsā, or the Sikhs who have pledged allegiance to the Panth and have been born again into the House of Nānak, is a force that is greater than the sum of its parts.

If the Ḵẖālsā is anti-authoritarian, how does it make decisions? Sikh history and tradition point to two different models of decision-making in the Sikh tradition. The first is the Pañj Piāra system and the second is the *Sarbat Ḵẖālsā* methodology (Singh, J., 2006, pp. 163–166).

Anarcha-Sikhī is feminist. Women are not just a fundamental part of the Ḵẖālsā Panth, but as Mātā Jīto (Sundarī)'s role in the first Vaisākhī demonstrates, the Ḵẖālsā Panth would not

exist without women. Creating space and acknowledging the presence of Sikh women is but an anemic first step. Instead, Sikh history and ideology must be reclaimed and the feminist principles of Sikhī need to be highlighted (Singh, N., 1993). Stories of Sikh women have often been erased from Sikh history, as in Bhangu's text, even prominent Sikh women disappear from historical events. For example, the seventh Gurū, Gurū Har Rai Sāhib, had an adopted daughter named Rūp Kaur (sometimes written as Sarūp Kaur or Harrūp Kaur). Gurū Har Rai Sāhib ensured that his daughter was well educated, and she became a scholar. Sikh history tells us that she became a historian and wrote down early Sikh history. While we know she wrote history, none of her texts have survived.[1] She is but one instance of the stories of Sikh women who are erased.

This historic erasure of Sikh women continues into the present day, where far too many Sikh spaces are still monopolized by men. Traditional power structures are almost all male, and leadership from the community level to the Panthik level are usually always male. The recent Farmer's Protest has demonstrated the power, vitality and force of Sikh women (Shergill, 2020; Bhowmick, 2021; Kaur & Sekhon, 2021). Anarcha-Sikhī seeks a Panth where feminism ensures that women have the space and opportunity to fulfill all roles in the community.

Anarcha-Sikhī is anti-casteist and anti-racist. Too much of Sikh history, and of current Sikhī, is dominated by a few powerful castes, with other groups marginalized in the community (Judge, 2015, pp. 63–64). This is counter to the basic principles of the Ḵẖālsā, and of Gurū Nānak Sāhib's ideology (Dhamoon & Sian, 2020, p. 52). Anarcha-Sikhī is built on anti-casteism and anti-racism, but at the same time, the reality of caste and race and historical marginalization is not ignored.

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[1] A small *gutka*, or prayer book, written in her hand is preserved at Kīratpur Sāhib.

Anarcha-Sikhī is queer positive. LGBTQ Sikhs have been erased from Sikh history, and are also severely marginalized in contemporary Sikhī (Dhamoon & Sian, 2020, p. 49). Anarcha-Sikhī seeks to build space with LGBTQ Sikhs to take their place within the community, and share their much needed perspective and opinions.

Anarcha-Sikhī is anti-colonial. It confronts the question of how to practice a sovereign tradition on sovereign land stolen from other nations (Dhamoon & Sian, 2020, pp. 54–55). It commits to being an ally and supporting respectful space for Indigenous folks to undergo resurgence on their own terms (Simpson, 2011, p. 86). It endeavours to practice anti-colonialism on a day to day basis. It works "towards a new vision and way of being a good guest" on sovereign land (Mucina, 2019, p. 41).

Anarcha-Sikhī, like most, if not all forms of anarchism, is anti-state. Anarcha-Sikhī believes that the only legitimate state is the state created by the Gurū (Singh, J., 2006, pp. 212–213). Anarcha-Sikhī believes that this state is fundamentally non-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian and egalitarian in its practice. This is not a real physical state, but a state of mind, carried within the mind and heart of every member of the Ḵẖālsā. If any physical state runs counter to the divine order of the Gurū it becomes a Sikh's obligation to resist it.

However, historically, the Ḵẖālsā did create a state; the Sarkār-ī-Ḵẖālsā (government of the Ḵẖālsā) commonly known as the Sikh Kingdom, Sikh Empire or the Lahore Darbār. The Sarkār-ī-Ḵẖālsā was led by a monarch.[2] So then, how can Sikhī claim to be anti-statist and anti-authoritarian? Anarcha-Sikhī would argue that Ranjīt Singh's capture of power and consolidation of the *Misls* in the late 18th century was an act

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[2] From 1801, the start of the Sarkār-ī-Ḵẖālsā to its annexation into the British crown in 1849, there were five kings and two queens who ruled the Sikh Kingdom. For the vast majority of its existence however, from 1801 to 1839 it was ruled by Māharāja Ranjīt Singh, commonly known as Sher-ai-Punjāb, the Lion of Punjāb.

that ran counter to Sikh ethics and ideology (Singh, B., 1993, p. 190–196).

The Sikh Empire was not the ideal Sikh state, instead it was the early Misl period (from the 1730's to the 1760's) that best exemplified Anarcha-Sikhī principles. This was an era of no formal governance systems where an anti-elitist method of decision making through the principle of consensus was utilized. Governance was not a structured affair, but instead involved a periodic gathering of the people for community-based decision making. Such a system of governance needed a strong foundation of anti-authoritarian and egalitarian principles on which to develop from. The 240 year history of the Sikhs, from Gurū Nanak Sāhib to the K̲h̲ālsā, provided these principles.

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