

Siddh Gosht

Based on the Sakhi by Bhai Vir Singh

Translated from Punjabi by Inni Kaur

A giant in Punjabi Literature, Bhai Vir Singh (1872 - 1957) is celebrated as 'The Sixth River of Punjab'. He was a mystic, poet, novelist, essayist, exegete, historian, editor, publisher and a journalist. He was the leading figure in the Singh Sabha Movement, the dynamic Sikh renaissance in the late 19th - early 20th century Punjab. The following passage, inspired by Guru Nanak's "Siddh Gosht" (Dialogue with the Siddh Mendicants), is translated from Bhai Vir Singh's book, "Guru Nanak Chamatkar."

Mount Kailash shivers in awe.

Nanak the Master has set foot.

Its residents, the Siddhs, are shocked.

Siddhs: "Which power has brought you up to this sacred mountain? Who do you worship?"

Master: "I worship the One Eternal Creator, the source of all power."

Siddhs: "What is your name?"

Master: "Nanak is my name."

Siddhs: "You are not a siddh, nor do you look like a sadhu (renunciate). You seem to be a family man. If you are hoping to attain salvation by coming to this sacred mountain, then you have chosen a wrong path."

Master: "Salvation is only possible when one is truly humble. If one thinks highly of one's self, one remains in ego. Where there is ego, there can be no salvation."

The Siddhs realize this is no ordinary traveler. Their tone changes!

Siddhs: "Dear Nanak, tell us what is happening in the world below?"

Master: "Truth is the moon. Falsehood is darkness. Right now, the world is in darkness. The moon is not visible. Religion has vanished from earth. Evil has become the order of the day."

Siddhs: "Is there no one to stop this evil?"

Master: "The ones who call themselves siddhs ('The Knowledgeable Ones') are hiding in the mountains. Who then is left to guide the world?"

Siddhs: "Our disciples are in the world. They go from house to house spreading our teachings."

Master: "Your disciples themselves are without religion. They only know how to rub ash on their bodies and beg for food. There is no one capable to show the true path to the people. There is no consideration for right or wrong. No one is following their religion faithfully. Everyone is running after greed."

Siddhs: "Are the rulers not looking after the welfare and rights of their people?"

Master: "The rulers have become the source of suffering. Fear has made the people weak and hypocritical. They have become powerless. Their mindset has become that of slaves."

Siddhs: "What about the priests? Are they not helping the people?"

Master: "The priests enact theatrical performances from mythology. Their disciples play music and the priests dance. It has become quite a show. They go from house to house collecting money and distributing good luck charms for people to wear. Such has become the condition of the priests."

Siddhs: "What about the Mughal rulers? Are the mullahs not dispensing justice?"

Master: "The mullahs have become corrupt. They take bribes and deny the people their rights. There is no justice left. Love for money has become paramount."

Siddhs: "Nanak, are you a householder or are you 'in renunciation'?"

Master: "Define a householder and someone 'in renunciation'?"

Siddhs: "We consider a family man absorbed in worldly affairs and desires as a householder. 'In renunciation' is one who has left his home and family and is detached from worldly matters and longings."

Master: "In your path, can a family man remain detached from worldly desires?"

Siddhs: "Absolutely not! It's impossible."

Master: "Your interpretation of householder and a person 'in renunciation' is incorrect."

Siddhs: "Why don't you tell us the correct meaning?"

Master: "A householder is one who lives in this world with his mind detached from worldly desires. He earns honestly and shares his wealth. A person 'in renunciation' is one who is immersed in the love of the Divine and desires nothing else. So, whether a person lives with his family or leaves his family, it is of no consequence. Renunciation is detaching the mind from worldly desires and not renouncing family. Therefore, there is no difference between a householder and a person 'in renunciation?' Both can remain detached from worldly desires."

Siddhs: "It seems you have not completely understood what I meant. Can a person be a householder and be 'in renunciation' at the same time?"

Master: "Detachment from worldly desires has to be of the mind. It is not necessary for the body to renounce home and family. A householder is considered 'in renunciation' while living with his family if his mind is detached from worldly desires."

Siddhs: "Are you saying that the scriptures are untrue and all those who have renounced the world are wrong?"