

An abstract painting with a central sun-like motif in shades of orange and yellow, surrounded by swirling colors of blue, green, and brown. The texture is visible, suggesting a thick application of paint.

Haumai

By Gurdeep Singh Randhawa

Ha-umai deeragh rog hai Daaroo bhee is maahi.
(Ego is a chronic disease, but it contains its own cure as well.)

Haumai, i.e., ego lends itself to a very interesting study in Sikhism. It is a firm belief with all the major faiths in the world that Man's segregation from the Universal Soul resulted in giving him a distinct individuation. The *Sufis* hold this individuation, which is but another name for man's very existence (*Hasti*), as being responsible for all his woes on earth. They, therefore, decry life and claim that, but for this existence, man would have been part and parcel of the Universal Soul, i.e., the Divine Spirit.



The renowned Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib has expressed this thought very beautifully in the following couplet:

**Na tha kuchh to khuda tha, kuchh na hota to khuda hota
Duboya mujh ko hone ne, Na hota main to kya hota?**

(When nothing existed, God did exist. If nothing had come into being, God's Being would still have been there; My very being has damned me, Though it could have mattered little, Had I not come into being.)

The *Sufis* denounced life (*Hasti*) to such an extent that at one point Sheikh Farid, one of the foremost of them, bemoans:

**Farida jih dihi naala kapia Je gal[u] kapah[i] chukh
Pawan na iti mamle, Sahan na iti dukh. (1381)**

(O Farid, the day my naval-cord was cut, had, but my throat too been slashed, I would then not have had so many trials and would have been spared so much agony.)

The Sikh Gurus, however, do not subscribe to such a view of life as this. The Fifth Nanak, the compiler of the Sikh Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*, far from subscribing to such a view, rebuts it when he says:

**Farida bhum[i] rangawali, manjh[i] visula bagh[u]
Jo nar pir[i] niwajia, tinha(n) anch na lag. (966)**

*(O Farid, this world is a beautiful garden, Though it has some prickly briars too.
Yet, one blessed by an enlightened guide, Shall steer clear of these.)*

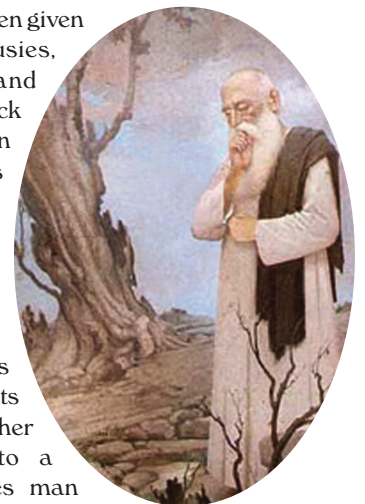
The Sikh thought, thus, does not decry life. Instead, it pleads for a fuller involvement in it; and at the same time cautions Man against losing his balance and sight of a higher purpose in life rather than indulge in baser animal pleasures. It takes note of two facets of the concept of ego (*Haumai*) - the life-promoting and the life-debasing. The first facet manifests itself in Man asserting his individuality towards a nobler cause; and

the other in succumbing to his morbid passions and thus, falling a prey to all that is demeaning and degenerating. Sikhism has all the use for the former, but altogether decries the latter.

Yet, it does not require much probing to discover that much of the progress in human thought and action in world-history has been on account of individuals who, in response to an irresistible call from within, took it upon themselves to influence, shape and channelize human energy and thought. Certainly, this could not have been possible unless these leaders of human thought and action had not had the potential and will to project themselves and impose their will on others by carrying conviction with their thoughts. What could it be if not a highly assertive projection of their selves with a very live, healthy and vigorous ego? This sort of an ego is life-promoting. It does not render its holder a 'pariah'. If anything, society is richer for the assertion of the irrepressible ego of such people.

On the other hand, total suppression of ego or 'self' in man would mean a negation of all that is assertive, innovative and dynamic in the human spirit. An individual with such a suppressed ego would lack the will and confidence for self-assertion. He would be in no position to contribute anything worth-while towards his personal or social good; and would, at best, be something in the nature of a 'living vegetable'.

It is also interesting to observe that all human action is goaded by two animal instincts inherent in man's very being: sex and pugnacity. Pugnacity is fighting or combative instinct, which goads man to strive to excel over others as also face situations and accept challenges around him. Now, one is too well aware that most of world's conflicts on individual, communal or international plane have been there because of these two driving forces which, when given free-play, have lead to jealousies, conflicts, wars, destruction and bloodshed. Yet, when held in check and sublimated, these have given birth to man's finest achievements in art, painting, sculpture, scientific discovery and even in the emergence and propagation of new faiths and ideologies.



However, when *Haumai*, which is an expression of these two instincts is not channelized into a higher purpose, it tends to sink into a degenerative process and makes man self-loving, conceited, unduly ambitious, exploitative and even aggressive. This is the life-debasing or

morbid ego. It is somewhat of this state that the two dicta in the New Testament remind:

a) God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

b) Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abashed; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (St. Luke, 14:11)

The above-mentioned two facets of Man's ego - a healthy one or life-promoting one and the debasing one or the morbid sort - help us to understand a paradoxical dictum of the second Nanak, Guru Angad. This states that *Haumai* is a chronic malady; and yet its cure too lies within itself:

Ha-umai deeragh rog hai Daaroo bhee is maahi. (466)

(Ego is a chronic disease, but it contains its own cure as well.)

What the *Guru* seems to stress is that unhealthy *Haumai* or self-love or self-centeredness leads to denial of God, of His Will and of all that flows from His boundless love and benevolence. This causes Man's further alienation from his Creator. Such an ego-centric person (*Manmukh*) lives in a world of his own. He thinks of his own self only and of his own advancement in a ruthless race for personal gains in every sphere. He raises a wall between himself and others and even between himself and his Creator; and therefore turns oblivious of the feelings and interests of others. He, thus, not only distances himself from his fellow-beings but also from his Supreme Master.

Such a person has no inhibitions in his dealings with others and is prone to unbridled indulgence in the five traditional vices, which flow from his aforesaid two basic instincts 'sex and pugnacity'. These vices are traditionally believed to be: lust (*Kaam*), anger (*Krodh*), greed (*Lobh*), infatuation (*Moh*) and arrogance (*Abankaar*). The *Manmukh* or ego-centric individual mars his own peace and spiritual health as also the peace and harmony of others. Rather than promote the peace and moral well-being of the society such an individual becomes a malignant element. Like a lower animal, he unhesitatingly obeys his baser corporeal instincts and remains oblivious of the calls and questionings of reason. In fact, he remains un-evolved mentally and spiritually. This is how the materialistic and animalistic ego, if not channelized properly, becomes a malignant affliction.

The cure, however, is in *Haumai* itself, i.e., in its sublimation or in subduing the life debasing ego. Once the morbid ego is curbed and harnessed, its healthier counter-part automatically receives an impetus and improves the very quality of man's moral and spiritual life. This can, however, be brought about by man becoming God-conscious. As one sheds

one's baser self, the higher traits find environment conducive to the evolution of a nobler life.

Man, thus, has to be God-centered (*Gurmukh*) rather than be self-centered (*Manmukh*). The need is for an individual to consciously surrender himself to the Divine Will and seek in the Lord's Will a nobler purpose in life. This would ensure a 'sublimation' of the self-same ego and its diversion and harnessing for individual as well as social good. It is, no doubt, likely to prove to be a prelude to experiencing once again that bliss, which Man stands bereft of, because of his segregation from his Real Self - from a life in close communion with the Supreme Master, our Sole Creator. To recall a savant, Samuel Rutherford, "We are as near to Heaven (that man has lost) as we are from self and far from the love of sinful world." Confucius makes it even more explicit when he says, "Heaven means to be one with God". Yet another statement reads "Heaven is (nothing) but the presence of God."

