

Kee Lohraa Aa Gya

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My *WhatsApp* traffic this morning has brought me to write this.

Out of nowhere I got a couple of invitations to attend *Lohree* celebration at local gurdwaras.

One particular one deserves comment. It read “...a bonfire will be lit. Please come and join in the *Lohri* celebrations at Gurdwara Sahib Tuesday night and be blessed by Guruji. An excellent opportunity to Darshankar Guru Maharaj ji and listen to wonderful Kirtan. Be blessed.”

It seems that that are lots of things I don't really know about *Sikhi*.

I didn't know that *Lohree* (also known as *Sankrant*, *Pongal*, *Bihu*, *Bhogali*, *Magh*, *Pohi*, *Bhogi* and *Loi Loi* amongst the Hindi, Tamil, Bihari, Marhati, Malyalam, Bengali, Telugu and Sindhi adherents of the Hindu faith) was a Sikh celebration meant to be celebrated in our Gurdwaras.

I did not know that bonfires were part of *Sikhi* or even Gurdwara activities. Surely the author of the *WhatsApp* was not referring to the fire that cooked our *langgar* or made our *karah parshaad*.

I also did not know that our Guruji blessed those who attended such bonfires. The only bonfire story relating to *Sikhi* I had heard once was of some *masands* (spiritual mafia) being pushed into it for their crimes towards humanity. Even so, that bonfire was not lit in a Gurdwara, and the *masands* were not celebrating *Lohree*.

I further did not know that going to Gurdwara on *Lohree* to witness a bonfire was an excellent opportunity to “Darshankar Guru Maharaj ji” unless of course the author of the *WhatsApp* meant to say it was a wonderful opportunity to “darshankar the bonfire”, and / or that “the bonfire itself was the guru maharaj ji” for the occasion.

Finally, I did not know and could not figure out which *shabads* from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) would be sung in this “wonderful Kirtan” that would be performed in this *Lohree* celebration in the Gurdwara.

THE THINGS I DO KNOW

But surely after some 40 years of trying to be a Sikh, studying *Gurbani*, learning *Gurmat* and attending *Katha*, *Kirtan* and *satsang* in our Gurdwaras, there must be some things about *Sikhi* that I do know.

I do know for instance that the *Panth* Accepted and Akaal Takhat sanctioned *Sikh Rehat Maryada* (SRM) in Article 4(h) says in very simple Punjabi that “In a Gurdwara, there should be no anti-Gurmat activity...and that no celebrations belonging to other faiths be celebrated.”

I also do know that the SGGS does not contain a single verse that calls upon Sikhs to worship the elements or planets – fire, water, Sun, moon, stars etc. But there are numerous verses that tell the

Sikh to connect to the Creator instead of His creation – no matter how mighty the forces or objects of this creation.

The SGGS further critiques concepts such as “auspicious” and “non-auspicious” moments and acts. *Gurbani* exhorts the Sikh to not fear the planets and elements and give up “activities meant to please them” but do all one can to please the Creator instead.

Further I do know that the Preamble of the SRM defines the Sikh as a human being who deposits his spiritual faith entirely and only in the SGGS.

Of course I do know that there are countless Sikhs out there who also know all the above, and more.

Finally, I also know that one does not have to have spent some 40 years of trying to be a Sikh, studying *Gurbani*, learning *Gurmat* and attending *Katha*, *Kirtan* and *satsang* in our *Gurdwaras* to know the following additional things.

THE ADDITIONAL THINGS THAT WE DO KNOW

We know that *Lohri* is a Hindu celebration that marks the movement of the sun towards the north (Uttaryan) from the south. (Dakshinayan). Our Hindu friends consider the moment to be extremely auspicious given that the sun enters the tropic of capricorn from the tropic of cancer.

The celebration date is set to coincide with solstice – the day of the year when the sun remains risen for the longest period.

We thus know that *Lohree* is a festival dedicated to the sun god and god of fire, hence the bonfire ritual on solstice day. On this day, devotees light a bonfire and gather around it. People put *rewaries*, sugar-candy, popcorn, sesame seeds, *gur* (raw sugar), *moongphali* (peanuts) and *phuliya* or popcorn into the fire as offerings to the two gods and sing till the fire dies out.

They also perform prayers as they go around the fire. This is to show respect to the natural element of fire. Milk and water is also poured around the bonfire for thanking the sun god and seeking his continued protection.

Given the fact that more than one billion Hindu brethren across India celebrate *Lohree*, they have given a variety of names in their variety of languages and have a variety of versions to fulfil their spiritual requirements.

But the Sikhs don't have any spiritual name for it. And that is because it is not a Sikh festival.

But we do have an idiom “*Kee Lohraa Aa Gyaa.*” Idioms are difficult to translate, but the closest would be “what nonsense has come my way”

And my *Kee Lohraa Aa Gyaa* moment came when I read the final line of the *WhatsApp* message above that suggested that I would be “blessed” if I chose to attend the bonfire in the *Gurdwara*. The result has been this piece and my decision to “celebrate” my *Lohree* as follows:

I intend to stay home, do my *Rehras*, listen to some “wonderful kirtan” CDs I purchased last week, play some computer games with my kids, and watch a movie. I know I will be blessed even if only for choosing to stay away from yet another un-*Gurmat* activity.

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