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Posted at: Oct 16, 2016, 1:28 AM; last updated: Oct 16, 2016, 1:28 AM (IST)

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A bereavement in the family found me making a sorrowful journey to Dera Baba Jaimal Singh in Beas. This was my first visit to the place which is a well-known site of spiritual pilgrimage to the millions of Radha Soamis.

It was easy to be impressed, indeed overwhelmed, by the sheer energy and devotion at work in the Dera. Organisationally, it is nothing short of a wonder. Though in India, we are pretty good at handling congregations of vast numbers of devotees — especially at the Kumbh occasions — the Beas arrangement appears to be a class of its own. The very idea of arranging and cooking food for gathering of half-a-million defies comprehension and should be worthy of a semester course in a business school.

It is a classic case of civil society at its best.

For over a hundred years, this 'satsang' has been looking after its flock, without any favour from the governing authority of the day. It sustains itself entirely from voluntary labour, funds and commitment of its congregation. It seeks no political alignments or favours from any quarters. Its remarkably presentable publication, the *Equilibrium in Love*, carries on the opening page Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy: "The best way to find your self is to lose self in the service of others."

What little I can understand, the Beas philosophy is a simple regimen of simple living and desirable restraints. What is called the Sant Mat programme boils down to: no animal food, no alcoholic drinks, an endeavour to have a pure and chaste life and, two-and-a-half hours devoted daily to meditation.

No one can have any quarrel with that.

It appears to me that the Beas order seeks to induce in its devotees some sense of karmic discipline in these times of excessive consumerism and rampant moral confusion. Again, no quarrel with that.

What is more, the order recognises no divisions or distinctions of caste or colour or creed. The order not only generates spiritual energy in each of the devotees, it also obviously inculcates some kind of healthy, happy solidarity among the followers. This is valuable social capital anytime, anywhere.

I was struck by the fact that the Dera was set up in 1891, ten years after Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia had set up The Tribune. Some very, very wholesomeness must be in the air in those days. There is a remarkable convergence in the idea of trusteeship at work in both these institutions. Though it was only in 1957 that the Radha Soami Satsang Beas was registered as a society, Maharaj Charan Singh (who was the master from 1951 to 1990) was quoted to have stated the working philosophy of the trusteeship thus: "trust (is) for the sangat, never using it for personal needs but always for the benefit and development of the sangat."