

# 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WESTERN PERSPECTIVE OF SIKHS AND THEIR SCRIPTURE

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## **INTRODUCTION**

19<sup>th</sup> century western writings on the Sikhs and their past synchronise with the politics of British imperialists in the Indian sub-continent. This is obvious from the synchronization of a large number of important publications with important events. For instance, E. Samuel's *Tour to Lahore* appeared in 1809, the year in which The Treaty of Amritsar between the East India company and Maharaja Ranjit Singh was concluded. John Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* appeared soon after the conclusion of this Treaty. H.T. Prinsep and Alexander Burnes' works appeared after the conclusion of the Indus Navigation Treaty of 1832, in 1834 and 1835 respectively. Charles Masson's Travelogue appeared in 1842. Hugel's Travelogue was published in 1846. M.L. M'Gregor's *The History of The Sikhs* (1846) was meant to glorify the deeds of the British officers and justify the first Anglo-Sikh war. J.D. Cunningham wrote *History of the Sikh* (1849), to awaken the British Nation with the hope to influence the British policy towards the Sikhs. Travelogue of Baron Erich Von Schonberg was published in 1853. Emily Eden got her letters published in 1866. However, the nature of Western interest in the Sikhs changed after the annexation of the Punjab. Now their main concern was, how to handle them as subject people and to use their support and services for the extension and perpetuation of British Raj. Since, religion was considered as the only source of inspiration and strength of the Sikh nation; the imperialists turned to know their beliefs and practices which eventually led them to the study of their scripture.

Resultantly, Ernest Trumpp a trained Christian theologian was commissioned in 1869 by the Punjab Government to translate the Guru Granth, the fountain head of the Sikh beliefs and practices. Thus, the first major work which appeared after 1850s, was Dr. Ernest Trumpp's *Adi Granth*. Obviously, the Sikhs as an enemy and as a subject people remained important to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western Scholars.

### **NATURE OF EUROPEAN WRITINGS**

Dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed two major developments in the Indian sub-continent : sudden and rapid rise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh on the political scene of the land of the Five Rivers and British occupation of Delhi in 1803 which ended Maratha influence in northern India. The latter development pushed the British frontier to the Jamuna and made the East India company an immediate neighbour of the Sikhs, a 'singular nation' that inhabited the territories between the river Jamuna and the Indus. However, the Sikhs had already attracted attention of the British in the last quarter of the eighteenth century because of their incursions into the Doab. The changed situation made knowledge about the Sikhs still more imperative. The Director of the East India Company by their Despatch of the 5 June 1805, desired that all available information on the geography and history of India should be collected.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently a number of British civil and military servants in the garb of travelers, diplomats etc. were deputed to secure as much information as they could extract from various means about the Sikhs. Besides, several individual wrote at their own on the Sikhs, though not without specific purpose. They used the available information in the form of manuscripts, published works besides supplementing with their own observations on the Sikhs. However, to determine the nature of 19<sup>th</sup> century Western writing on the Sikhs we may place, though roughly, into four categories : (i) Travel literature, is an important gener of this phase. For,

being brought up in a particular socio-cultural set up, the travelers observed those social institutions and religious practices which appeared to them peculiar and which were generally overlooked by the native chronicles. These accounts provide information on almost every aspect of the Sikhs life : social customs, beliefs and practices, fairs and festivals as well as social institutions like *Sati* amongst them. Though these accounts are sketchy and lack systematic presentation of the Sikhs, and their religion, yet, the significance of the evidence is due to the fact that it is based on personal observations and not on hearsay. Also, these accounts were written away from the scene without fear or pressure of any kind; (ii) John Malcolm, H.T. Prinsep, Steinbach, M'Gregor and Cunningham's works falls in the category of those works which make general survey of the Sikh history and treat Sikh beliefs and practices as a part of the Sikh history; (iii) accounts of William Ward, H.H. Wilson, Robert Needham Cust falls in the category of those works which were primarily concerned with Indian religions and treat Sikhism in a brief and sketchy manners; (iv) work of Ernest Trumpp falls in the category of those works which primarily deals with Sikh theology, for he was the only 19<sup>th</sup> century Western scholar who was commissioned primarily to the study of the Sikh theology on the pattern of Christian theology.

Since these scholars belonged to different cultural and religious traditions and could not grasp Sikh movement and Sikhism in its proper form; their inadequate understanding of Sikhism led to misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the Sikh tradition. For instance, majority of these writers have presented Sikhism as a response to the prevailing disorderly and chaotic religious condition in India : they emphasized the reformatory character of Sikhism. In their assessment, Sikhism aimed at synthesizing the positive elements from both Hindu and the Islamic traditions, having universal appeal and validity. Beyond this point they failed to perceive the originality of the vision and mission of Guru Nanak. However in their

endeavor to elucidate the historical role of Sikhism, they have striven to determine the place and role of Sikhism among the Indian religions. The main issue which came to be discussed and elaborated in this context are the historical origin of the Sikh tradition, life history of the founder of the faith, relation of Sikhism to its historical background, development of Sikh religion, place of Sikhism among the religion of the world and analysis of the Sikh beliefs and practices in relation to the doctrines and practices of the preceding religious traditions. Sikh beliefs and practices which have been discussed and deliberated in these writings are : the recitation of the name of the God, reverence to Guru Granth Sahib, emphasis on the active social life, service of the humanity, equality of the status of women, absence of untouchability, mode of initiation, dress and symbols of the community etc. The Sikh rejection of the doctrine of avtar, caste system, the practice of idolatry, practice of sati, sacrificial rituals, priest craft, ritualistic bathing at places of pilgrimages, have also been noticed by these scholars. Above all, the status, role message and use of the Sikh scripture has also found mention in these writings.

### **EUROPEAN'S PERCEPTION OF SIKHISM**

A close study of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century European writings on the Sikhs reveals that almost all are unanimous in attributing the origin of Sikhism to Guru Nanak. Doctrines preached by Guru Nanak proved to be a foundation of Sikhism and these are unquestionable.<sup>2</sup> In this context, Ernest Trumpp maintains that, "The doctrines once uttered by Baba Nanak were taken up by the following Sikh Gurus without any perceptible deviation; and after the volume of the Granth (Guru Granth) had been collected by (Guru) Arjan, they were never called into question, the Granth being held sacred as an immediate divine revelation.<sup>3</sup> Commenting upon the idea of God in Sikhism, Cunningham asserts that Guru Nanak invoked 'the Lord as one, the sole, the timeless Being; the Creator, the self existent, the incomprehensible and

everlasting. He likens the Deity to Truth, which was before world began, which is, and which shall endure for even as the ultimate idea or cause of all we know and behold". Further he remarks that Guru Nanak, 'extricated his followers from the accumulated errors of ages, and enjoined upon them devotion of thought and excellence of conduct as the first duties. He left them, erect and free, unbiased in mind and unfettered by rules, to become an increasing body of truthful worshipper'.<sup>4</sup> Malcolm too describes Sikhism as a 'divine religion'.<sup>5</sup> To William Ward, God of Sikhism 'is an invisible spirit, and is to be conceived of as being active and passive with and without qualities'.<sup>6</sup> H.H. Wilson have seen Divine unity as the basic tenets of the Sikh Gurus.<sup>7</sup> In short Sikhism is a revealed religion and the Sikhs believe in the unity of Divine Being. They worshiped God alone through the medium of Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>8</sup> They do not adore any idol or image. Their only form of worship is the repetition of the name of God, supreme-Being, eternal Truth, the creator of everything.<sup>9</sup> Malcolm observes that 'their Dharamsala, or temple of worship, are in general, plain buildings. Images are, of course banished. Their prescribed forms of prayer are, I believe, few and simple. Part of the writings of Nanac, which have since been incorporated with those of his successors, in the *Adi Granth* are read, or rather recited, upon every solemn occasion'.<sup>10</sup>

### **SIKH INSTITUTIONS**

Most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writers have enumerated Sikhs institution like *Sarbat Khalsa*, *Gurmatta* and *Dal Khalsh*. *Sarbat Khalsa* was generally held twice a year: on the occasion of *Basakhi* (April) and *Diwali* (October), festivals, to decide the line of action to be followed against the common enemy, to pool the resources of the Sikh nation and to choose the common leader to lead the Sikh forces.<sup>11</sup> H.T. Prinsep have defined *Sarbat Khalsa* as 'an assembly of the chiefs' and *Gurmatta* as a 'special council' , 'where expeditions of importance, or any matter of more than ordinary moment

were submitted to their united wisdom'. If the joint forces of several Misals took the field to collect *Rakhi*, the Sikh army assumed the denomination of *Dal of the Khalsa ji*.<sup>12</sup> These two institutions proved to be an important instruments for preserving the Sikh faith and enhancing political power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, It also becomes clear how *Guru Granth Sahib* through the institution of Gurmatta played a significant role in providing cohesion to the Sikhs and enabled them to wade through the pools of blood. John Malcolm says that the Gurmatta was convened by the Akalis who were in control of Sri Harmandar Sahib. He has described in detail the proceedings of the Gurmatta and its significance for the Sikhs. He maintains that, 'when the chiefs and principal leaders are seated, the *Adi Granth* and *Dasama Padshah Ka Granth* are placed before them. They all bend their heads before these scriptures and exclaim, Wai Guru'ji ka Khalsa! Wa Guruji Ki Fathe! A great quantity of cakes, made of wheat, butter and sugars, are then placed before the volumes of the sacred writings and covered with a cloth. These holy cakes, which are in commemoration of the injunction of Nanak, to eat and to give to other to eat, next receive the salutation of the assembly, who then rise, and the Acali's pray aloud, while the musician play. The Acalis, when the prayers are finished, desired the council to be seated. They sit down, and the cakes being uncovered are eaten of by all classes of Sikhs : those distinctions of original tribes, which are, on other occasions, kept up, being on this occasion laid aside, in token of their general and complete union in one cause. The Acalis then exclaim: "Sirdars (Chiefs) this is the Guru-mata" on which prayers are again said aloud. The chiefs, after this, sit closer, and say to each other : "The sacred Grant'h is betwixt us, let us swear by our scripture to forget all internal disputes and to be united."<sup>13</sup> Malcolm also assert that the first Gurmatta was assembled by Guru Gobind Singh himself.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Malcolm is the first and only Western Scholar who has given an elaborate procedure of performing

*Gurmatta*, but his presentation contain contradictions so far as the presence of *Dasam Granth* along with *Guru Granth Sahib* is concerned. It is obvious from his above statement. For example, when the deliberation of the assembly starts Malcolm mentions the presence of two scripture, but when the Sikh chiefs resolve to act upon the *Gurmatta*, they swear by one scripture. Also, almost all the 19<sup>th</sup> century writers have mentioned the institution of *Gurmatta* and its role in the advancement of political power of the Sikhs but none has mentioned the presence of *Dasam Granth* in this context. However, collective decision taken in the presence of *Guru Granth Sahib* was considered as an order from the Guru which morally bound the Sikh chief to carry it out with all sincerity and diligence.

### **INITIATION INTO SIKHISM**

Almost all the 19<sup>th</sup> century writers under review are unanimous in describing *Khande-di-Pahul* as the only means to enter into the fold of Sikhism.<sup>15</sup> E. Samuel and Baron Charles Hugel refers to *Akal Takhat* as a Baptistery of the Sikhs.<sup>16</sup> All of them delves on the initiatory rites in one way or the other. But few of them have described the mode of initiation, preparation of *Pahul*, injunctions to the neophyte and the *rehit* (code of conduct) of the Khalsa in detail. Malcolm describes the mode of initiation as follows: ‘some sugar and water is put into a cup, and stirred round with a steel knife, or dagger.’<sup>17</sup> About the *Banis* which were recited while preparing *Amrit* Malcolm say ‘some of the first chapters of the *Adi Granth* and the first chapter of the *Dasama Padshah Ka Grant*’h are read’.<sup>18</sup> But Hugel’s observation suggests that Five Bani’s were recited which also included sawayees authored by *Guru Gobind Singh*.<sup>19</sup> Prinsep also appears to be subscribing to the views of Hugel.<sup>20</sup> Those ‘who perform the initiation exclaim, *Wa! Guru Ji Ka Khalsa ! Wa! Guru ji ke Fateh* (success to the state of the Guru! Victory attended the Gúrú). After this exclamation has been repeated five times, they say, ‘This Sherbet is nectar. It is the water of life,

drink it". The disciples obey; and some Sherbet prepared in a similar manner, is sprinkled over his head and beard'.<sup>21</sup> Both Cunningham and Trumpp maintains that after Guru Gobind Singh had administered the *Pahul* to these five in this manner he took it likewise from them and became Gobind Singh.<sup>22</sup> In this way all the rest of his disciples were initiated to whom he gave the name of the Khalsa, adding to the name of each of them the epithet of Singh (lion)<sup>23</sup> M'Gregor says that Guru Gobind Singh initiated ten men on the day of Basaikhi of 1699. Obviously, he is referring to the Five beloved and the Five *muktas* who were initiated by Guru Gobind Singh himself immediately after the Five beloved.<sup>24</sup> Schonberg has referred to the distribution of *Karah Parsad* after the completion of the ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

These writers also delve on the question that at what age the neophyte could be initiated into Sikhism. For instance, Malcolm says that the *Pahul* may be taken at any time and at any age but, 'The children of the Singh's all go through this rite at a very early age'.<sup>26</sup> Whereas, Cunningham asserts that there is no authoritative rule regarding the age but the presence of the Five baptised Sikh is the basic requirement to perform initiatory rites.<sup>27</sup> Trumpp maintains that, 'The initiatory rites into the Khalsa is the *Pahul*. It is generally administered by five Sikhs and not before the attainment of years of direction; its administration is considered very meritorious and by instructing a disciple in the doctrine of the Guru, one will get final emancipation even while living'.<sup>28</sup> Both Cunningham and William Ward refers to the administering of *Pahul* to the women in the same manner as men.<sup>29</sup>

Next question relating to the initiation is the injunctions given to the Khalsa. Everyone of them has taken up this aspect of the *Pahul* ceremony in one form or the others. Some have described the DOS and Dons in detail while some has given only hint. In this context Malcolm says, 'After the ceremonies, the disciple is asked if he consents to be of the faith of Gúrú

Góvind. He answers. "I do consent". He is then told, if you do, you must abandon all intercourse with the Minas, Dhirmalias, Masandias, Ramrayias, Kurimar and those who perform *Bhadan*. Besides, they were instructed in some general precepts: 'He is told to be gentle and polite to all with whom he converses, to endeavour to attain wisdom, and to emulate the persuasive eloquence to Baba Nanac. He is particularly enjoined, whenever he approaches any of the Sikh temples, to do it with reverence and respect, and to go to Amritsar, to pay his devotion to the Khalsa and the State; the interests of which he is directed, on all occasion, to consider paramount to his own. He was also enjoined to read, the *Adi Granth* and 'whatever he has received from God', 'It is his duty to share with others' And after the disciple has heard and understood all these and similar precepts, he is declared to be duly initiated'.<sup>30</sup> Cunningham has put the injunction like this : 'All, he said must become one, the lowest were equal with the highest; caste must be forgotten, they must accept the *Pahul* and the four races must eat as one out of one vessel. The ways of the Hindus must be abandoned Brahman's thread must be broken, by means of Khalsa alone would salvation be attained, surrender to the faith and to him as their guide. Their words must be Kirtnash, Kulnash, Dharamnash, Karamnash'. They should worship one Invisible God and honour the memory of Nanak and his transanimate successors. They should rever none else than Guru Granth. They should keep unshorn hair and affix a epithet of 'Singh' with their names. They should wear arms and pay 'devotion to steel'. They should not have any social intercourse with Dhirmalias, Ramrais, Masandias, Bhadnias (who shave their heads), Kurimar etc. They should refrain from the use of toabcoo and nor do they smoke drugs of any kind. To wear blue dress and 'Kach' (breeches) were other important injunctions.<sup>31</sup> However, Trumpp's views appears to be more relevant. He says that after the initiation ceremony, the Guru gave the order that, 'whoever desire to be his disciple, he must always

have five things with him which all commence with the letter Kakka (i.e. K), viz *Kes* (the hair), *Kanga* (a comb), *Karad* (a knife), *Kirpan* (sword) and *Kach* (breeches reaching to the knee, otherwise he would not consider him as his disciple'.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the Khalsa was instructed that, 'Temples Shrines and burning places are not to be worshipped, nor are other religions to be praised. The Vedas, Shastras, Puranas and the Quran are not to be minded, neither the Pandit nor the Mulla. All Hindu and Musalman rites are to be discontinued; the Hindu ceremonies at the time of birth, marriage and death should not be observed. No tilak should be applied to the forehead, nor should the sacred cord nor a rosary be worn, circumcision should not be practiced'.<sup>33</sup>

Amongst other observance, Trumpp describes, 'A Sikh is never to wear a cap, nor to shave his head or beard, nor to wear red clothes. He should bath in the cold water, comb his hair twice everyday and bind his turban after adjusting the tresses; he is never to take off his turban whilst taking his food.... He should always wear breeches and have steel about his person, especially sword. The use of tobacco in any shape is prohibited. Gambling, especially the play of Chauppar and visiting prostitutes deserve severe punishment'.<sup>34</sup> These regulations were given to separate the Sikhs totally from the other communities and 'to form them into a distinct body, which as such should also be known by outward signs'.<sup>35</sup> However, like Cunningham and Trumpp, all other writers under analysis have mentioned one way or the other the observance of five Ks by the baptised Sikhs and not five arms as has been wrongly mentioned by Malcolm and later on accepted by some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century historians like W.H. Mcleod and J.S. Grewal.<sup>36</sup>

### **Sikh Way of Worship**

Concerning the mode and object of worship all the writers under review are of the view that the Sikhs worship none else than Guru Granth

Sahib. They do not admit any idol or image in places of their worship.<sup>37</sup> Their form of prayer are few and simple. Generally their places of worship were plain buildings where Guru Granth Sahib was recited in the morning and evening and every body irrespective of caste, colour or creed was allowed to attend'.<sup>38</sup> Except historic Gurdwaras any apartment in a house, where Guru Granth Sahib can suitably be installed, would serve as a place of Sikh worship. The building is not altogether important but the presence of Guru Granth. In this context observations of Charles Masson are quite significant. He observed that there were only two retainers of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa at Dera Ismeil Khan. They had occupied a big house in the town and in one of their apartments was kept *Guru Granth Sahib* which they 'preserved with great care and approached with reverence' Further he observes that Guru Granth Sahib is the 'only object of veneration for the Sikhs, because it contain the precepts of their Gurus. It was lodged on high pedestal in a spacious apartments in most of their villages. He says that many Bantias (traders) used to visit Gurdwara and anyone qualified among them could also read Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>39</sup> Burnes observed similar situation at Multan where the Sikh population was confined only to an administrative staff.<sup>40</sup> Schonberg has very categorically revealed the advantage which the Sikhs have, as compared to other communities of India, particularly the Hindu, in regard to the form of prayer : 'Any one qualified, irrespective of caste, colour or creed could read *Guru Granth Sahib* and address his prayer to God, whereas in Hinduism, the privileged Brahmins are alone allowed to read the sacred books, they only enjoy the privilege of addressing the Almighty directly. But in Sikhism even the humblest man in society is taught to believe that his prayer is as acceptable before the throne of mercy as that of his more wealthy brethren.'<sup>41</sup> However, referring to the religious practices of the Sikhs William Ward observes : 'Seeking the company of the holy persons, loving attachment of God,

repetition of the name of God, rejection of the idols worship and ceremonies connected with it .... reverence for the sacred compositions of the Gurus are some of the practices of the Sikhs'.<sup>42</sup> Besides, recitation of the hymns of Guru Granth Sahib (Kirtan) and performing *Ardas* are the major mode of worship of the Sikhs.

### **The Sikh Scripture**

Although from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, the original sources of Sikhism became accessible to the Europeans, yet like the 18<sup>th</sup> century European scholars, their ignorance of the language kept crippling their proper understanding of the Sikh scripture. This fact has been underlined by Ernest Trumpp too.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of the fact that the language remained a main handicap yet the 19<sup>th</sup> century European scholars have commented upon the origin, status, teachings and role of the Sikh scripture in a very significant way. Almost all the writers are unanimous in attributing its origin to Guru Nanak besides commenting upon its language. In this regard Malcolm holds : 'The Granth, the whole of the first part of which is ascribed to Nanak, is written, like the rest of the books of the Sikhs in the Gurumuk'h (Gurmukhi) character'.<sup>44</sup> Commenting upon the religion of Guru Nanak and the nature of Sikh scripture Ward maintains that Guru Nanak propagated the doctrine of the Divine unity and to promote the spirit of devotion amongst his followers 'Nanukh composed a number of sacred hymns in praise of the Deity which have a place in the *Adee-Grunthu* : in which work repeating the names of God is enjoined on the Sikhs'. The God of Guru Nanak is 'an invisible spirit'. 'He is truth, the Creator and Governor of all the things, Omnipresent, free from fear and from enemies, Immortal, Everlasting, Self-existent. He is Truth; He existed in this form before the foundation of the world, and He remains the same while the world exists and after it shall be destroyed : He is to be known by means of a spiritual guide'.<sup>45</sup> Wilson also maintains 'the

divine unity as the basic tenets of Sikh Gurus' enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>46</sup> However, the Sikh scripture is a revealed literature having Divine origin and status. Its compilation provided 'consistent form and order to Sikh religion. It gives 'fixed rules of religious and moral conduct'. Above all, it is the very fountain of Sikh beliefs and practices.<sup>47</sup> Cunningham is very categorical in observing the significance of the canonization of the Sikh scripture by Guru Arjan Dev : Guru Arjan was the first who clearly understood the wide import of Guru Nanak's teachings or who perceived how application to every state of life and to every condition of society'. Further he say 'he (Guru) declared the '*Granth*' or book; and gave to his followers their fixed rules of religious and moral conduct, with an assurance that multitudes even of divine Brahmans had wearied themselves with reading the *Vedas* and had found not the value of an oil-seed.<sup>48</sup> Commenting upon the purpose of compiling the Adi Granth, Trump remarks : 'Purpose of Guru Arjan was to give a sacred code to the Sikhs, in order to unite them more closely by one common religious tie and to separate them from the mass of Hindus'. Also, he wanted to provide an authenticated text to the Sikhs, which supplanted the authorities of Vedas by enabling a common man to read it in his own mother tongue.<sup>49</sup> However, it is fully installed in all the Sikh places of worship with due reverence and ceremonies. It is the only object of worship.

Most of the writers agrees that personal Guruship ended with Guru Gobind Singh. They also agree that Guru Gobind Singh appointed Guru Granth as the 'Guru' of the Sikhs before his demise at Nander.<sup>50</sup> For example Cunningham says that when the Sikhs assembled around the Guru, whose end was approaching 'asked in sarrow who should inspire them with truth and lead them to victory when he was no more. Gobind bade them be of good cheer; the appointed Ten had indeed fulfilled their mission, but he was about to deliver the Khalsa to God, the never dying. 'He

who wishes to behold the Guru let him search in the *Granth* of Nanak. The guru will dwell with the Khalsa; be firm and be faithful : wherever five Sikhs are gathered together there will I also be present'.<sup>51</sup> Trumpp appears to be more apt when he says that the Guru Sahib instructed the Khalsa as, 'After me you shall everywhere mind the book of the *Granth Sahib* as your Guru : what ever you will ask it, it will show to you. Whoever be my disciple, he shall consider the *Granth* as the form of the Guru, and whichever disciple wishes to have an interview with me, he shall make for one Rupee and quarter, or for as much as he is able, *Karah Parsad*, then opening the book (Guru Granth) and bowing his head he will obtain a reward equal to an interview with me'.<sup>52</sup> Thus it is obvious from these observations that the doctrine of *Guru Granth* and *Guru Panth* was widely prevalent during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Sikhs regarded Guru Granth Sahib as an embodiment of Sikh Gurus for it contains their precepts. They respected and venerated it as they used to venerate the Sikh Gurus while they were living in this world. However, according to E. Samuel it is 'a book of laws' for the Sikh code of conduct. It was lodged with great care under 'a silken canopy' in Sri Harmandar Sahib, the 'House of God'.<sup>53</sup> To Malcolm it (Guru Granth) became the sole object of veneration after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikhs do not allow any other object than *Guru Granth Sahib* in their places of worship.<sup>54</sup> About the status of the Sikh scripture Alexander Burnes remarks are very apt. During his visit to Multan, he observed that 'we found him (the priest) seated on the ground, with a huge volume in front of him, and a place covered with cloth, like an altar, at one end of the apartment. He opened the book at my request and repeating the words '*Wa gooroo jee ka fattee*' touched the volume with his forehead, and all the Sikhs in attendance immediately bowed to the ground'. Furthermore he says that I need hardly mention, that the volume was the *Granth* or the holy book of

the seiks the reverence for it amounts to veneration, and the priest wave a *Chury* or Tibet cows tail, over it, as if he were fanning an emperor'.<sup>55</sup> Hugel's observation about the veneration and the status of the Sikh scripture are quite appropriate. While visiting Sri Harmandar Sahib he recorded that right in center of the temple 'Sat the first Guru of the Sikh faith on the masnad, or throne of cushions, the walls of the building being ornamented with a handsome carpet worked out in gold, while before him lay another of Kashmir Shawl stuff. A circle of devotees and followers has formed around him, leaving an open space which is never encroached upon, it being customary that the Guru should be viewed from a certain distance with due reverence'.<sup>56</sup>

Guru Granth Sahib is the only guide in spiritual as well as temporal matters. Not only an ordinary Sikh but Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself used to seek guidance from Guru Granth Sahib before making vital political decisions. Prinsep has very aptly described the method through which the Maharaja used to seek guidance from Guru Granth Sahib before taking vital political decisions. He states that, 'It is no uncommon practice of Ranjit Singh, when he contemplates any serious undertaking, to direct two slips of paper to be placed on the *Granth Sahib* or sacred volume of the Sikhs. On the one is written his wish, and on the other the reverse. A little boy is often brought in, and told to bring one of the slips, and whichever it may happen to be, His highness is satisfied as it were a voice from heaven'.<sup>57</sup> Emily Eden too have recorded a deep faith of the Maharaja in the Oracle of *Guru Granth Sahib*.<sup>58</sup> Similarly Burnes have also noticed a deep faith of the Sikhs masses in an Oracle of their scripture. He refers to an oration of a priest in which he acknowledged before Guru Granth Sahib that what ever the Sikhs enjoyed on this earth was the bountry of the Guru. When he enquired about the secret of their increasing power from a venerable Sikh chief, the old man replied : ' it had been predicted in their Granth....'.<sup>59</sup> Similar views have

been expressed by Charles Masson, when he says : The *ardas* was 'concluded with a vociferous invocation to the Guru Granth for victory and extension of the faith.<sup>60</sup> However, regarding the status of the Sikh scripture all the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western scholars under review, except Malcolm, agree that *Guru Granth* is the only scripture to which Sikh accord the status of the Guru. These writers do not observe any preference to *Dasam Granth* over *Guru Granth* as has been done by Malcolm. In fact Malcolm through his *Sketch of the Sikhs* wanted to promote Imperial interests which he did by creating a dichotomy between the followers of Guru Nanak and the followers of Guru Gobind Singh by introducing *Dasam Granth* to provide justification to the mission of Guru Gobind. Any way a recent study reveals that *Dasam Granth* did not exist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>61</sup> Neither E. Samuel, who published his work a year before the *Sketch of the Sikhs* nor the subsequent visitors like Burnes, Hugel, Schonberg, Emily Eden etc. mention about the existence of this Granth at Harmandar Sahib. Cunningham too has found Malcolm as contradictory and does not attribute the entire *Dasam Granth* to Guru Gobind Singh. According to him only the first five chapter and a part of the sixth was written by Guru Gobind Singh and the rest is the work of the four scribes.<sup>62</sup> Trumpp also asserts that Guru Gobind Singh did not write the entire Granth.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Malcolm, who is otherwise regarded as the founder of Sikh historiography have misinterpreted and misrepresented the facts regarding the Sikh history and faith. For instance, his claim that John Lyden translated for him the Punjabi manuscript is also false. John Lyden translated only *Bachiter Natak* for him and not the so called *Dasam Granth*. Similarly he translated only 11 pauris of 41 var attributed to Bhai Gurdas; Bhagat-Ratnavali, biographies of mythical and historical Bhagats and Gian Ratnavali (1<sup>st</sup> var of Bhai Gurdas) and a *Kurkha* of Guru Gobind Singh in Duggar dialect.<sup>64</sup> Thus many of the misconception having their origin with Malcolm have been taken as established facts by many historians.

Commenting on the message of the Sikh scripture Malcolm holds Guru Nanaks' mission was 'divine' which, according to Ward, teaches 'devout attachment to God and the harmless behaviour towards all creatures'.<sup>65</sup> Cunningham have very aptly summed up the message of Guru Nanak embodied in Guru Granth Sahib : He maintains that inventive genius of Guru Nanak retained all positive elements of earlier efforts and rendered them more definite and practicable. Thus he rendered his mission applicable to all time and places.<sup>66</sup> Basic principles enunciated by the founder of Sikhism was that God is above every human creature, be he a Pandit, a Dervish, a Saniyasi or a Mulla. He tells plainly 'that virtues and Charities, heroic acts and gathered wisdom are not of themselves, that the only knowledge which availeth is the knowledge of God'.<sup>67</sup> Favour of God and salvation can be sought "in good works and uprightness of conduct."<sup>68</sup> According to Cunningham, the core message of Guru Granth Sahib is : 'God is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, with little reference to particular form, and that salvation is unattainable without grace, faith and good works.' On the basis of the ideas presented in Guru Granth Sahib, Cunningham, has tried his best to elucidate the Sikh ideas about God, avatars, saints, image worship, miracles, transmigration, grace, predestination, asceticism, caste, food, infanticide etc.<sup>69</sup> Referring to the philosophy of Guru Granth Sahib, Hugel assert that, it contains the maxims of the Sikh faith, the faith which made no discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or colour and did not allow any sort of image worship'.<sup>70</sup>

E. Samuel has striven hard to show the influence of the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib which changed their way of life and distinguished them from the rest of the communities of the world. He asserts that the Sikhs are more hospitable and kind to stranger than other communities. They 'disclaims to distinctions of religion or complexion'. They generally marry one wife and the practice of *sati* is rarely practised. Unlike the other

communities the Sikh ladies were not confined to their houses and they bore the general reputation of chastity. Perhaps for this reason, he noticed that the syphilistic complaints were very few as compared to the inhabitants of other regions or communities. Summing up the Sikh character, he maintains that, 'they are just and amicable in their social intercourse, and affectionate in their domestic relations. One quality particularly raises the character of the Sikhs above all other Asiatics and that 'is their higher veneration for truth'. Both as a people and as individuals, they may be considered as much less addicted to the low artifices of evasion, lying, or dissimulation, than any other race of Asiatics. Implicit dependence may be placed upon their promise, in all matters either of public or private concern, and if a Sikh declares himself your friend, he will not disappoint your confidence : if, on the other hand, he bear enmity to any one, he declares it without reserve-upon the whole, they are a plain, manly, hospitable, and industrious people, and by far the best race I have ever met in India' .<sup>71</sup> Similar views have been expressed by Burnes, Masson, Hugel etc. In short the Sikh way of life, their dress, food habits and general conduct too find mention in these writings. For instance. *Pagri* (turban) was an integral part of the Sikh apparel."<sup>72</sup> Maharaja Ranjits Singh used to reward those soldiers who kept long beard.<sup>73</sup> Masson has mentioned the wearing of 'bulky trousers terminating at the knee, the legs from the knee being naked'. Further he says, ' they allow the hair of their heads to attain its full growth and gathered up into a knot at the crown'.<sup>74</sup> According to Burnes, 'these seiks are tall and bony men, with every martial carriage : the most peculiar part of the dress is a small flat turban which becomes them well; they wear long hair and from the knee downward do not coverlegs'. Undoubtedly, Burnes describes the Sikhs as 'the most rising people of India'.<sup>75</sup> Their form of salutation is *wahе guru ji ka khalsa* and those who respectfully address them salute them as *Khalsa ji*.<sup>76</sup> However, Schonbergs description of the

Sikh priest is an enunciation of the true Sikh character or Sikh identity in the 1850s. For instance, he observed that the 'appearance of Sikh priest is exactly what one might expect in the minister of war like people. The tall blue turban, bound with an iron head piece, the sabre always close girded to his side, his shield slung upon his back, and the long beard descending to his breast, gives to this warrior-priest a highly picturesque aspect.'<sup>77</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

An analysis of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Western writings reveals that almost all the important aspects of 19<sup>th</sup> century Sikhs Panth have been touched upon in one way or the other. One can easily surmise the origin and development of Sikh faith, beliefs and practices; social and religious, mode and object of worship besides, the origin, status, philosophy and role of Guru Granth Sahib both in the acquisition of political power and in transforming the Sikh society.

However what emerges from their observations is that Guru Granth Sahib is the only object of veneration for the Sikhs. These writes do not observe any preference to *Dasam Granth* over *Guru Granth* as has been purposely done by Malcolm and later on accepted by Mcleod and Grewal. The Sikh admit none else than Guru Granth Sahib into their places of worship (Gurdawaras). They venerate it as an Emperor, for it embodies the precepts of their Gurus. Each word of it is considered as an order from the Guru. It is the only guide in spiritual as well as temporal matters. The Sikhs firmly believe in its teaching, for their application can transform human lives and thereby can create a better social order. Its role in the transformation of the Sikh Social world and perpetuation of Sikh identity has been amply noted by these writers. For instance higher veneration for truth universal philanthropy, equality amongst human beings, toleration towards other religion, non-existence of forceful conversion, conspicuous absence of the practice of Sati, encouragement to widow re-marriage

observance of chastity etc., have been described as the major traits of the ideology of Guru Granth Sahib. However, it also becomes clear from their observations that five *banis* were recited while preparing *Khande-di-Pahul*. Also, we find mention of five Ks in one way or the other rather than the five weapons and initiation of women in the same manner as men. Come what may, these writings shed much light on the status and role of the Sikh scripture in the advancement and transformation of Sikh society. For example, observations of Prinsep, Burnes Hygel, Emily Eden etc. suggest that the authority of Guru Granth Sahib was recognised by the Sikhs in every sphere of life. Also, general character of Sikhs and Sikh priests as described in these writings speaks of the higher spiritual advancement of the Sikhs. Above all, Schonberg's description of the Sikh priest gives us to understand that the Sikh identity was not created and established during the Singh Sabha but it was very much intact prior to the annexation of the Land of the Five Rivers.

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